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## WORK

Work is commonly defined as an activity that involves effort and sometimes reward. The result of work could be the achievement of a goal, the meeting of a demand, the completion of a task or the generation of income. This variety of results of work reflects the

different meanings that have been and continue to be attached to the activity of work. These differing results of work are associated with a range of psychological and development factors. Work can be considered from an historical perspective but also in terms of its developmental and psychological consequences. The sorts of activities that many in the western world call work are very different to those pursued by our ancestors. However, some of our current approaches and attitudes towards work may be over two million years old.

Evidence of work as a fundamental activity of human development is often inferred from discoveries of fossilized tools. Using this approach work has been documented occurring at least two million years ago in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. The extinct species of the genus *Homo habilis* apparently used stone chopping tools to butcher dead animals. Around 700,000 years ago, hand axes were in use and thereafter there is evidence of specialized industries

being established based on crafting stone or flint into a variety of different tools.

A debate exists about the degree of organization that existed in production of these crude tools, and the degree of organization in the trade and deployment of such tools. The traditional view is that work was no more than an attempt to meet direct survival demands. Indeed many accounts of early humans portray them as working as scavengers and behaving like savages. However, there are intriguing examples from relatively modern times that may point to a more sophisticated role of work in the earliest human groups. Aboriginal tribes in the Northern Territory of Australia did not develop tools beyond stone axes at the time of their first contact with white settlers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, they had developed advanced trade and distribution networks for their tools.

It appears that even primitive forms of work were focused on more than just survival demands. Trade and distribution of tools

requires planning, logistics and demarcation of roles. Passing on skills to the next generation requires training and development. Furthermore, it appears that survival demands were not as unrelenting and fraught as some have supposed. Studies of modern hunter-gatherer societies reveal that they often have time for activities other than those associated with the immediate survival of the group such as hunting, gathering and fighting rival groups. These other activities included social interactions within and beyond the group , ceremonies, rituals, religious and aesthetic pursuits. All these activities tended to blend into a kind of “group or tribal life” and were not divided up as in modern developed societies. For example, such tribespeople paint the animals they hunt, they marry and procreate for the survival of the group and engage in religious activities often to enlist the favor of the Spirit(s) for ongoing personal health and community well-being.

### **Work and Slavery**

In agrarian societies as they developed, work along with all other aspects of farming life, was determined by the seasons. Life and work in particular was cyclical – sow, tend harvest, store. Amid the vicissitudes of climate (good and bad seasons; floods and droughts), there was a rhythm to existence. Agrarian societies initiated the establishment of private ownership of land. Agriculture also was more specialized and required markets for commodities. With a scarcity of labor and advances in technology, slavery supplied through either conquest or purchase, as a life of work developed in various parts of the world.

Slavery underpinned some of the greatest civilizations in history. While predominantly directed to do laboring work – particularly agricultural laboring, some slaves worked as tradespeople, teachers, domestics and doctors. Slavery is one of the most powerful examples of the stratification of society through the division of labor. Slaves were often seen by the ruling class as an unruly rabble that were temperamentally work-shy and

untrustworthy. This “rabble mentality” was echoed in management theories of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and is still evident in some current confrontational management practices. The dependency upon slave labor has been associated with the decline of the Roman Empire due to the loss of a work ethic among the citizens.

Slavery reminds us of the central role of freedom and discretion in work. Slaves did not have freedom of expression, congregation, worship, representation, decision-making, fear or want. The distinction between slavery and freedom is not as clear cut as it might seem and it is an interesting question as to whether the slave of Roman times would identify with a modern executive living in a company-paid for house, driving a company car, working 85 hours a week, espousing the company values and vision statement and being at the beck and call of their employer by mobile telephone and email.

## **Work and Religion**

In less developed societies religion served to foster the success of survival activities such as cultivation, gathering, hunting, harvesting and gathering. However, in European Civilization for about one thousand years, the organizational prowess of the Christian Church resulted in large landholdings and massive building projects which in turn afforded a range of work opportunities. These created significant wealth for the Church and with it material and mercantile temptations.

Protestantism provided a potent doctrine that combined religious devotion with the extolling of hard work. The Protestant Work Ethic emphasized thrift, industry, wealth and discipline as fundamental virtues. Whereas in the past Roman Catholic orthodoxy had interpreted the Bible as presenting work as a curse, Protestants reinterpreted work as a blessing. For example, in the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament, God is presented as a

worker who creates the world in six days and ceases from his labors to rest on the seventh day. Moreover, Adam in his unfallen state, is commanded to work, tending and ruling creation as God's steward. It is a naïve misreading of the text (still prevalent in textbooks today) to interpret work as a curse after The Fall. Work was originally viewed as good as part of what we were made for but like every good thing after the introduction of sin, its blessing has also become its curse. That is, work in Biblical terms, is not a curse in itself, instead work has become cursed in that in doing it now we encounter frustration, toil and obstruction. Protestantism, especially Puritanism and Quakerism, was exported to and flourished in America. The emphasis on hard work, as well as community led to an unprecedented organization of labor into jobs and workshifts. As well as manufacturing endeavors such as Cadburys in England and Hershey in America, Quakers also opened banks and established lines of credit outside of the normal confines of the city.



## **The Specialization of Work**

As settled societies developed towns and new technologies, further specialization of work functions occurred. In particular, a stratum of society sat between the slaves, peasants and laborers, serfs and the ruling classes of Soldiers, Lords, Knights and Kings. These were the craftsmen who organized themselves along functional lines into part trade unions and part trade associations. In medieval Britain, they were called guilds, but similar organizations developed around the world. Hierarchies existed within these guilds with long apprenticeships to reach the level of a journeyman. The highest level, Master, was achieved after many years of work, and the production of a “Masterpiece” accepted by the Guild.

Guilds provided a powerful mechanism for the control of skilled labor. Guilds in some towns had significant political power as a result of their control of skilled labor. As guilds became more

sophisticated, the emphasis moved towards trading the skills and away from the development of the skills. Masters of Guilds restricted the number entering and progressing through the guilds to maintain control over supply of skilled labor. As a result of this, many workers were employed as Wagemen as opposed to apprentices or journeymen. This created a new class of employer-employee relationship.

The industrialization of western societies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries dramatically severed the necessary nexus of work and the natural world. Increasingly work became linked to technology usually centralized in factories and mills, necessitating massive and unparalleled urbanization around the new sources of employment. Economic power determined the nature and conditions of the work available and as a consequence, the life circumstances of millions of employees. As a result, employees eventually organized into unions to bargain over the pay and conditions of work. In the process the field of industrial

relations emerged and has remained one of the central characteristics of contemporary working life in developed economies. The change from an agrarian to an industrial era was difficult for many with which to be able to cope. Many resented the loss of autonomy of having a farm of their own, of being forced to move to the city often to live in squalor, to be underpaid and forced to work in dangerous conditions and to have not control over the work process and he consigned to bring repetitive and seemingly useless sets of duties. Work became associated with mass production and mass production with worker alienation which sometimes found expression in industrial sabotage. As industrialism developed work became increasingly fragmented, simplified and made repetitive.

### **Work and Technology**

Technology has profoundly influenced work practices throughout history. Two inventions in the past century which have generated

dramatic change are the internal combustion engine and the microcomputer. The internal combustion engine greatly enhanced the mechanization of work. For the first time workers were not necessarily undertaking the primary work tasks, but were instead tending, operating or maintaining machines that did. This created an explosion in productivity as production was no longer directly related to worker effort or skill. The Ford motor company is often credited with the introduction of the production line method of working, however Ford management had observed a Chicago meatpacking business where carcasses were hung from moving hooks and were butchered as they moved along.. Until 1909 cars were assembled in teams, with all the workers being involved in the process of construction from start to finish. When production lines were introduced, productivity jumped and the cost of a Model T Ford halved in 3 years. Workers were reduced to doing one or two activities on a product as it moved along a conveyor belt. These same activities were repeated thousands of times per day and yet still at the end of the day there was still an apparently

endless stream of further products to be processed the same way. People often reported being treated either as part of one of the machines or like a monkey. Such work robbed the workers in many cases of a sense of achievement, a sense of ownership, a sense of skill and personal development and a sense of meaning through work

As the quality of working life declined in industrial societies the value of nonwork time increased. The demarcation of work to a specific location and a number of hours per week, delimited work and how it was understood by many in industrialized societies. The problem that increased production created for Ford was that supply outstripped demand because the working hours at the time were so long, individuals did not have time to devote to other activities for which a motor vehicle might be required. Henry Ford's solution was to cut the hours of work so that workers would be able to use the cars that he was producing. The widespread availability of motor vehicles to large portions of society further

fueled the pace of change. Workers were able to live further from their place of work, creating suburbs and commuters. Furthermore, there was a large increase in tourism as ordinary folk were now able to access distant parts of the country rapidly. This stimulated a nascent Tourism and Service industry, that was already benefiting from enhanced rail infrastructure. The relationship between work and nonwork and leisure has become a major field of theory and research.

Communications technology also had a dramatic impact upon work in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The telegraph, and then the telephone made the world a smaller place and enabled information to be exchanged at an hitherto unheard of pace. By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century the computer was developed and it started to be used by governments and large organizations in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the development of the microprocessor chip led to the first personal computers being widely available for business and home use. The IBM Personal Computer was launched with

Microsoft software in 1981. The Apple Corporation had already released the Apple II computer. The impact of the introduction of the personal computer was almost instant. These machines were capable of doing many of the routine clerical tasks in offices faster and more accurately than human clerks. In the same way that machinery had led rapidly to redundancies in manufacturing jobs, computers cut a swathe through clerical jobs. Computers were also employed to control machines, creating robots for a range of tasks including motor vehicle manufacture.

The combination of communication technology with computer technology has led to further rapid changes in how we work. Telecommuting is now a fact of life for many workers. Employees do not need to be physically present in the workplace, indeed the notion of the workplace is changing. The mobile phone, laptop computer and the Internet have brought the workplace back into the home for the first time in hundreds of years for some sections

of the workforce. This has further complicated the separation of work and nonwork.

With rapid growth in the use of technology, efficiency of production and process has very often come at the expense of employment opportunities, and at the cost of non-work time.

Technological advancement has significantly lengthened the hours of work for some well educated people in the workforce while at the same time presented long term unemployment for less skilled workers. Furthermore the employer-employee relationship is no longer as intimate as it once was due to globalization. Employees can no longer rely upon the quality of their work, or their personal qualities to ensure continuing employment, but are subject to the fluctuations of the international money markets. The complexity and rapidly changing nature of work has spawned at least two specializations within the field of psychology – industrial and organizational psychology and vocational psychology. Central to



these endeavors has been the notion of work adjustment and well being of the worker and organization.

Improvements in manufacturing efficiency continued apace throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and which also saw the development of jet propulsion and affordable air travel and transport as well as large and reliable motorized shipping. This has greatly increased world trade opportunities and development of global organizations.

### **Formal and Informal Work**

Approximately one third of our time available for living is taken up with work and 20% with leisure. Despite the central role work plays in most of our lives, its purpose, meaning and psychological influence remain vexed questions. For instance there is a plethora of research from social and organizational psychology that suggests that work is injurious, A recent study found that most

people replied that they “wished they were doing something else” when asked while they were at work. In another study, 19% of women and 14% of men reported having unpleasant emotional strain for over half of the previous working day. This suggests that many people do not enjoy the experience of work and that they may experience significant deleterious effects from work. However, other studies point to the benefits of work and our reluctance to forego work. A survey of over 500 lottery winners concluded that people with psychologically and financially rewarding jobs continued working regardless of the amount they won, while those who worked in low paying semi-skilled and unskilled jobs were far more likely to quit the labor force. In another study, 80% of Americans said they would not retire from working even if they had enough money to live off comfortably. So we end up with the paradox that work is a source of frustration, yet one we are reluctant to forego. However what constitutes work and leisure is increasingly difficult to define. For instance while working as a mechanic would be seen as work to most people, is

working at home tuning your car's engine work or leisure? The difference perhaps is between formal and informal work.

Formal work tends to be associated with income and most commonly with monetary reward defined by some legal arrangement such as Employee – Employer, Self-Employed, Business partners, sub-contractor, agent or representative. Generally in such arrangements there is a financial exchange between the worker and some other party such as an employer or a customer/client. These forms of work have been studied extensively from many different perspectives including industrial relations, sociology, psychology, philosophy, economics and business studies.

Informal work constitutes activities that fall outside the definition of formal work, but still possesses at least one of the characteristics set out in the definition of work. Domestic chores around the house and garden would fall into this informal

category, along with charity and voluntary work. In many societies this work has been traditionally performed by women.

### **Work and Demography**

In 1997, married women in Australia spent an average of 1hr:47mins per day more on domestic work than men.. Women spent an average 3 hours and 46 minutes on household work, compared to 2 hours and 30 minutes for men. There was evidence of clear demarcation in the type of household work done by men and women. Women did an hours more food preparation and clean up than men, 30 minutes more laundry work and 30 minutes more general housework. Men did 25 minutes more grounds and animal care, and 25 minutes more home maintenance. Large discrepancies between the amount of informal work done by men and women has been linked to divorce rates. The requirement to do domestic informal work is common for the majority of people

with the exception of the very wealthy who have continued to employ domestic staff and thereby formalizing this form of work.

The number of women engaged in paid domestic work was reported as 52 percent of employed women in 1870. At the end of the nineteenth century the figure was 1.5 million. By 1920 this had reduced to 28 percent of employed women and 18 percent in 1940 which was the last time the job was top of the list of women's occupations. By 1970, the percentage declined rapidly to 5.1 percent and 2.5 percent in 1980. The decline in domestic jobs for women was in part due to the widespread availability of clerical roles. At the same time, some of this work was outsourced to restaurants and child care centers.

In American Colonial homes that produced goods; neighborhood girls helped the housewife with cooking, clothes-making, and making bread and dairy products in return for room and board and an apprenticeship in these skills. This changed from a helping

arrangement to a formalized live in servant who was expected to do the household chores employing all of the new facilities such as gas, electricity and their attendant appliances. Typically these were rural workers attracted to the higher wages in the city.

Domestic work remained a low-status job, and became identified with women of color, as white woman moved into clerical occupations. Between 1920 and 1940 the proportion of African-American women in domestic work rose from 46% to 60%. The most common form of domestic work by the 1980s was day-cleaning performed by a range of people of color. Teenage babysitters constituted the biggest white concentration of Americans who were listed as domestic service workers.

Domestic work whether formal or informal, was excluded from most legal protections, social security entitlements and even denied protection in the form of a union until the 1970s when the industry was in sharp decline. However, both formal and informal

domestic work is becoming increasingly recognized as a valid form of work that may be associated with psychological outcomes. With women's' dramatically increased participation in the workforce in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a resurgence in the formalization of domestic work to assist busy dual income couples. There has been an increase in employment of cleaners, child care assistants, cooks and butlers. This has been extended to dog walkers and "Saturday Dads" who take children to weekend sporting events. These changes in working patterns have caused a blurring between work and leisure. For instance time spent with and caring for children is classified by some as work whereas others classify this as leisure.

### **Work and Unemployment**

One way to look at the importance and role of work in human life and development is to examine what happens when people are deprived of the opportunity to work. In her classic research

investigations into the effects of unemployment Marie Jahoda delineated most of the major psychosocial benefits of work in addition to pay and conditions. She found that work performs five psychosocial functions for the individual and that those without work face the challenge of meeting these needs in some other way. First, work enables and often demands social contact. Such contact fosters the development of social skills, the establishing of social networks and opportunities for mutual support. Second, work demands activity and almost always demands at least a minimal level of physical activity. There are many studies illustrating the physical and psychological benefits of regular activity in sustaining fitness, energy levels, mental alertness and work conditioning. Third, work in most societies, gives people a social role and social identity. Knowing someone's occupation especially when meeting them for the first time, usually gives us a great of information about them – education, intelligence, personality, success, income, social status and how much they are or are not like us. Work is a major way in which



define themselves and others within the community. Fourth, work gives structure to people's time. Work usually demands that activities be undertaken at specific hours of employment. This benefit provides a pattern to people's lives allowing them to make arrangements about nonwork tasks. Fifth work links people with goals larger than themselves and their own immediate concerns. By having to direct attention away from self to another task external to our individual focus, work usually is an opportunity for external orientation to others and the work in general.

Other researchers have considered the less positive impacts of work. In particular, the concept of occupational stress has been extensively researched and is probably the most commonly researched area of work now. Although definitions of stress appear in 16<sup>th</sup> century dictionaries, it is generally agreed the term became popular after the Second World War. The term "stress" has passed into the modern idiom despite significant confusion over its meaning. Stress is classically defined as a non-specific

response of the body to any demand made upon it. In this scheme there are three stages of the stress reaction: alarm, resistance and exhaustion. Other definitions focus upon a range of negative affective and physiological responses. Some researchers most notably Robert Karasek and Roy Payne have considered the relationship between the characteristics of a person's job and their stress response. Both researchers have argued that perceived job demands and perceived control over meeting those demands will predict stress. Jobs that are high in demands and low in control are predicted to be the most stressful. The relationship between job demands, control and stress has been well documented in the literature for over 20 years. In addition, other factors such as the degree of social support enjoyed in the workplace has been shown to predict stress levels.

Work has been a central activity of all human societies which has provided significant material, societal and psychological benefits. However at the same time, it is clear that work in of itself can be

not only unsatisfying, but positively deleterious for psychological and physical well-being. Perhaps John Paul Getty, the industrialist best summed up the nature of jobs when he said “if you haven’t got a problem, you haven’t got a job”. Work is about solving problems, and employment is about delegating this task to others.

### **Some Concluding Comments**

Work is now recognized as broader than merely having a job. Much essential work is carried outside of the labor market per se. There is increasing recognition of the value of such activity for communities and nations as a whole. Moreover, as noted several times, the distinction between work and nonwork is often difficult to delineate. So much so that modern formulations of “career” typically encompass not only worker as employee, but all the multiple roles that individuals take up, shed and resume at various times in their ongoing development. Writers about the future of

work expect that work to continue to change with new occupations developing while old ones perish; that there will be an increasing emphasis in work on academic, creative and intellectual skills in comparison with manual and mechanical skills; that work training will become a lifelong learning process and will be conducted increasingly through distance education and the Internet; and that work will be conducted in increasingly globalized and multicultural contexts.

The paradox of work remains with us. Most of us get a sense of contribution and well being from work as well as an income to help us live. We are confronted by frustration, toil and boredom while working. We expose ourselves to significant risk: physical injury, stress; bullying; harassment; mockery and reputation harm through work. Yet work also provides opportunities to turn preoccupations into occupations, for growth, enlightenment, contribution, service and achievement.

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