

PHI334 : Employment Ethics & Implications - Oct 13

In today's lecture, we'll deeply engage with the multifaceted relationship between employment and ethical considerations in a neoliberal world. As members of this economic system, we all, in some way, contribute to and are impacted by the work landscape. Thus, understanding the dynamics of employment is not just beneficial, but crucial.

Reimagining the Wage Paradigm

Understanding Wage in Today's World

Wage is traditionally the compensation we receive for our labor, often negotiated based on time. This can be an hourly wage or a salaried wage.

- **Hourly Wage:** Think of a therapist or a craftsman where the duration and quality of a single session or item matter. Here, the compensation is directly tied to the time invested.
- **Salaried Wage:** Consider roles like a project manager or researcher, where the work is continuous, with varied intensity over time. Here, a consistent payment over a set period, like a year, ensures stability for both the employee and employer.

However, this traditional view is somewhat restrictive. In our present economy, where individuals often have multiple roles and skills, it's more apt to consider our wage as a “**personal revenue stream**”. Just as businesses have various revenue channels, individuals provide diverse services, talents, or products that bring in income.

Education & Its Role in Employment

In this context, education can be seen as an investment, enhancing one's 'portfolio' of services. By acquiring more skills and knowledge, you're essentially amplifying your market value, making you a more attractive 'business' proposition for potential 'clients' or employers.

Ethical Dilemmas in the Wage System

a) The Disconnect Between Productivity and Wages

Historically, a worker's productivity and the wage they earned were intertwined. The logic was simple: more productivity leads to increased profits, and these profits would be shared with the workforce.

Current Reality: Despite technological and managerial advancements that have surged productivity levels, wages have remained disappointingly stagnant in many Western economies since the 1970s. This disparity means that while workers are adding more value than ever before, their financial compensation does not reflect this.

Implications for Quality of Life: Stagnant wages, coupled with inflation and increasing living costs, make financial security elusive for many. This not only affects immediate needs but also future planning, retirement, and even mental well-being.

b) The Taboo Around Wage Discussions

Traditionally, discussing wages with peers has been frowned upon. Employers often perpetuate this to maintain control and, at times, hide disparities.

Current Reality: This culture of silence prevents wage transparency, potentially leading to unjust pay scales, where some are paid less due to reasons unrelated to their performance, such as gender or race.

Implications for Employee Well-being: Without open discussions, it's challenging for employees to ascertain if they are paid fairly. This perpetuates systemic inequalities and creates an environment of mistrust and dissatisfaction.

c) The Generational Hesitation in Wage Negotiation

Wage negotiation is crucial, yet newer generations, particularly millennials and Gen Z, exhibit hesitation in this realm.

Current Reality: Several factors contribute to this, such as the fear of being perceived negatively, imposter syndrome, or simply lacking the tools and know-how for effective negotiation.

Implications for Personal Growth and Economy: Accepting a wage without negotiation can lead to a devaluation of one's skills and expertise. In the long run, this can not only affect individual finances but also potentially depress the overall wage levels in an economy.

d) The Gig Economy and Its Ethical Implications

Understanding the Gig Economy

The Gig Economy refers to a labor market characterized by short-term contracts or freelance work, rather than permanent jobs. Examples include ride-sharing drivers, freelancers in various fields, and many online platform-based jobs.

Current Reality: With the rise of platforms like Uber, Airbnb, and freelance websites, more people are participating in the gig economy than ever before. While it offers flexibility and the ability to choose various 'gigs,' it often comes without the traditional benefits associated with permanent employment, such as health insurance, retirement benefits, and job security.

Implications for Workers and Society

- 1. Lack of Benefits and Protections:** Gig workers often miss out on crucial benefits. Without health insurance, for example, they may avoid necessary medical treatments due to cost, leading to long-term health implications. Similarly, without retirement benefits, they might face financial insecurity in their later years.

2. **Inconsistent Income:** Income can be unpredictable in the gig economy, making it challenging for workers to manage their finances, secure loans, or even rent properties.
3. **Emotional and Social Impacts:** The transient nature of ‘gigs’ can lead to feelings of job insecurity, stress, and a lack of belonging or connection to a larger team or purpose.
4. **Societal Impacts:** On a larger scale, as more people move into the gig economy, there could be potential challenges for governments in terms of taxation, social security provisions, and even infrastructure planning (consider how ride-sharing has impacted city transportation dynamics).

Moving Forward

In upcoming sessions, we will focus on strategies to address these issues, from enhancing wage transparency to empowering the workforce with negotiation skills. The aim is to create a balanced work environment where ethics and individual worth are at the forefront.