

TOWARD AN INTEGRATED AND INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO WORKER WELL-BEING

John W. Budd

Center for Human Resources and Labor Studies
3-300 Carlson School of Management
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN 55455-0438 USA

jbudd@umn.edu

David A. Spencer

Economics Division
Leeds University Business School
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT, United Kingdom

D.A.Spencer@lubs.leeds.ac.uk

Version Date: December 11, 2011

Abstract

The importance of worker well-being is widely-embraced, but there are numerous perspectives on what it is, how to measure it, whether it needs improving, and, if needed, how to improve it. This paper uses ten conceptualizations of work to make two important contributions. First, the importance of views of work for perspectives on worker well-being is revealed. Second, an integrative and interdisciplinary approach to worker well-being that reflects the breadth of work's importance is developed.

There is longstanding concern with the well-being of workers. Early observational analyses by Friedrich Engels (1845) and Henry Mayhew (1861), novels by Charles Dickens and Émile Zola, the photography of Lewis Hines (Sampsell-Willmann 2009), and diverse secular and religious reform movements focused attention on poverty wages and dangerous working conditions as industrialization became widespread in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere. The academic field of industrial relations was born in the early 20th century out of a deep unease with imbalances in the employment relationship that led to exploitative wages and working hours, arbitrary supervisory methods, and frequent industrial accidents (Kaufman 2004). Concerns with worker well-being similarly underlie the early theorizing of Karl Marx (1844), Georg Simmel (1907), and others regarding the alienation of workers from their work, Max Weber's (1922) work on the repressive nature of bureaucracies, and Henri de Man's (1927) search for factors that enabled or prevented workers from fulfilling a variety of human needs such as activity, creation, and self-worth.

Today, many scholars, policymakers, advocates, and business leaders continue to embrace the importance of worker well-being (Guest 2008). Modern exposés again illustrate the low pay, long working hours, and hazardous working conditions endured by some workers (e.g., Ehrenreich 2001; Harney 2008) while statistical portraits quantitatively analyze job quality (Green 2006) and wage trends (Mishel, Bernstein, and Shierholz 2009). The International Labor Organization (1999) champions “Decent Work” while labor organizations and myriad community organizations push for improved wages and working conditions. Related theorizing in industrial relations highlights the need for balanced employment relationships that provide equity and voice to workers (Budd 2004). Scholarship in psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management identifies standards for higher job quality, and frequently

attempts to translate these standards into “high-commitment” management practices that are believed to achieve both higher worker well-being and higher worker productivity (Beer 2009; Ulrich and Ulrich 2010). Other important research examines job satisfaction (Green 2006), mental health (Warr 1987), psychological well-being (Wright 2010), and job insecurity (Heery and Salmon 2000).

These and other perspectives on worker well-being, however, frequently differ in how to define and measure worker well-being, why worker well-being is important, whether it needs improving, and, if needed, how to improve it. For some, worker well-being is a subjective construct based on workers’ attitudinal evaluations of their work; for others, worker well-being is an objective construct evaluated against specific criteria. In either approach, varied aspects of well-being might be the focal point of a specific analysis, such as physical health, psychological health, job characteristics, employee voice, pay and benefits, or economic insecurity. Some authors take a broader approach (e.g., Green 2006), but much of the research related to worker well-being is narrowly focused and tied to particular disciplines. Attempts to integrate perspectives on worker well-being from different disciplines remain relatively thin on the ground.

Against this backdrop, this paper uses Budd’s (2011) framework of ten conceptualizations of work to pursue two objectives. The first objective is to use these conceptualizations of work to reveal the importance of implicit views of work for explicit perspectives on worker well-being. The second objective is to outline a broad integrative and interdisciplinary approach to worker well-being that reflects the breadth of work’s importance for the human experience.

DEFINING AND CONCEPTUALIZING WORK

Though not frequently recognized, any examination of worker well-being is ultimately rooted in how one defines and conceptualizes work. Particular conceptualizations of work not only focus attention on certain aspects of work and away from other dimensions, but also define who is and is not a worker. For example, using the term “employee well-being” instead of “worker well-being” implicitly equates work to paid employment and thus limits the analysis of worker well-being to paid employees. This would then exclude the well-being of other types of workers such as independent contractors, the self-employed, volunteers, or care-givers, and might also exclude temporary workers, day laborers and other workers who do not fit within accepted norms of stable paid employment worthy of social approval.

To avoid marginalizing various forms of work it is important to define work more broadly than employment. Specifically, work is defined here as purposeful human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that has economic or symbolic value (Budd 2011). This broad definition separates work from leisure (“not undertaken solely for pleasure”), but also allows work to be pleasurable and recognizes that there can be a fuzzy boundary between work and leisure. This definition also encompasses forms of paid work such as self-employment that do not fall under the standard employer-employee relationship. In addition, it includes activities such as caring for others, volunteering, and subsistence farming that are commonly viewed as work but are not remunerated, and also recognizes that work need not be a direct source of economic value and can be a route to the attainment of non-economic ends such as the creation and reproduction of identity.

The purpose of this broad definition of work is to encompass diverse conceptualizations of work that provide a robust foundation for conceptualizing worker well-being, not to precisely

delimit what is and is not considered work (Glucksmann 1995). Using this broad definition of work, Budd (2011) identifies ten conceptualizations of work that are found in the literature on work across the humanities and the social and behavioral sciences: work as a curse, freedom, a commodity, occupational citizenship, disutility, personal fulfillment, a social relation, identity, caring for others, and service. The definition and intellectual roots of each conceptualization is summarized in Table 1. There is a rich body of scholarship and theorizing that lies behind each conceptualization that is discussed in detail in Budd (2011). However, Budd (2011) does not draw out the implications of the ten conceptualizations for the understanding of worker well-being. This task is taken up in the following section.

CONCEPTUALIZING WORKER WELL-BEING

Each of Budd's (2011) ten conceptualizations of work has important implications for how we think about worker well-being—what it is, whether or not it is important for society, how to measure it, and how it is determined (see Table 2). They also have overlapping aspects that are important in the context of examining issues of worker well-being. The main implications of each conceptualization for worker well-being are outlined below. The next section rejects the deficient implications for worker well-being from some of the conceptualizations and identifies the overlaps between the various conceptualizations to create an integrated approach to worker well-being.

One can begin with the conceptualization of work as a curse. The implication of this conceptualization for worker well-being is that we should accept rather than question our fate of painful toil, and that we should give up on thinking about worker well-being. Work is expected to be burdensome, so there is little reason to consider measuring worker well-being. Moreover, to see work as a curse is to see the nature of work as beyond our control, so there is no basis for

trying to improve it. Worker well-being, in other words, is pre-ordained by nature or God. Policy options, to the extent that they exist, are limited to the curtailment of the volume of work placed on society. For example, technology could be used to shorten work hours. But crucially, when work is seen as a pre-determined curse, there are no policy interventions available to turn work from a curse into a virtue.

Conceptualizing work as freedom provides perspectives on worker well-being that contrast with those from seeing work as a curse. First, when work is seen as a source of freedom from nature's constraints, worker well-being should include the opportunity for creative endeavor and fulfillment. Specifically, the ability to create as part of one's work will increase well-being, and the lack of such opportunities will reduce it. In situations where work lacks creative content—say due to the stifling nature of employer control and supervision—this perspective argues for measures to increase the opportunities for workers to undertake creative forms of work (e.g., via improved autonomy over work). Second, when work is viewed as a source of political and economic freedom, worker well-being should include a dimension of political and economic independence and autonomy. From this perspective, worker well-being should not be evaluated highly if workers are excessively dependent on their employers and therefore afraid to engage in political or other activities. Free speech protections for workers, in contrast, would be seen as enhancing worker well-being. Seeing work as freedom also means that workers should be given the freedom to move between jobs, and argues against restrictions on the ability of workers to choose what jobs they wish to do.

When work is conceptualized as a commodity, there are different and contrasting implications for worker well-being. On the one hand, critics would argue that the treatment of work as a commodity is a reflection of the way it is organized under capitalism and would see

such a treatment as coming at the expense of a more human centered view of work. For such critics, there would be an emphasis on finding ways to bring a human face to work, for example, by the promotion of forms of worker voice and democracy (Budd 2004). On the other hand, rival proponents of the commodity view would argue that market forces can be relied upon to match workers to jobs they wish to do. Mainstream economic theory shows that work is compensated by an amount equal to its economic value when labor markets are perfectly competitive, and gives support to neoliberal and other pro-market ideologies that represent market-determined outcomes as “fair” (McClelland 1990). From this perspective and in line with the second aspect of the work as freedom conceptualization presented in Table 1, worker well-being is mostly equated to the ability of workers to freely quit their jobs and to seek whatever employment opportunities they desire. Where labor markets are competitive, employment conditions are seen as reflecting free consent. This particular perspective, then, does not encourage serious examination of worker well-being; rather, workers are assumed to find their situations acceptable because they would otherwise seek better situations. The commodity conceptualization of work also privileges paid employment, so unpaid work and other forms of non-commoditized work are devalued, if not ignored.

The occupational citizenship conceptualization of work provides an important foil for the perspectives on worker well-being that are derived from the economic liberalism version of the commodity conceptualization. Specifically, this perspective emphasizes citizenship rights that include minimum labor standards consistent with safe and dignified living and working conditions, and opportunities for employee voice and self-determination that are viewed as entitlements of autonomous human beings. The occupational citizenship conceptualization is then concerned to set down certain objective standards that must be met for workers to achieve

well-being. Workers with low wages, dangerous working conditions, and a lack of opportunities for voice are seen as having low levels of well-being, irrespective of their self-reported job satisfaction. Moreover, this conceptualization rejects the ability of markets to deliver high quality work and instead supports employment regulation and other institutions such as labor union representation and labor laws to improve worker well-being (Budd 2004; Kaufman 2005).

The conceptualization of work as a disutility embraced by mainstream economic theory reinforces the idea that work is painful and toilsome which is supplied by the work as curse conceptualization. When work is seen as a disutility, well-being is assumed to derive from consumption and leisure, not work itself (Spencer 2009). So worker well-being rests on the extent to which work supports consumption and leisure through the access it provides to income. Moreover, mainstream economic theorizing assumes that workers can rationally determine their optimal level of work hours and effort. In this case, workers are seen as achieving their highest levels of well-being possible given whatever budget constraints they face. Worker well-being is therefore not a rich construct when work is conceptualized as disutility, and considerations of how to improve worker well-being generally point toward increasing workers' choice sets, especially by recommending additional human capital accumulation. But even this is with an eye toward increasing income rather than improving the nature of one's work because when work is conceptualized as a disutility (or a curse) there is nothing special about work beyond providing the income necessary to enjoy the benefits of consumption and leisure.

In sharp contrast, if work is seen as a source of personal fulfillment, then worker well-being is an important construct. Specifically, worker well-being depends on the extent to which work activities are fulfilling or not. Much of the literature in this vein focuses on the fulfillment of workers' psychological needs. Consequently, worker well-being is seen as a subjective self-

appraisal of one's job satisfaction, self-esteem gained from work, and other work-related attitudes (Locke 1976), and is assumed to depend on the individual psychological dispositions of workers (Judge and Larsen 2001) as well as on various job characteristics such as the opportunity for personal control and skill use that influence opportunities for personal fulfillment in work (Hackman and Oldham 1980; Warr 1999). Because conceptualizing work as personal fulfillment frequently goes hand-in-hand with a unitarist perspective on the employment relationship, enlightened managers are seen as the preferred mechanism for designing employment practices that promote job satisfaction and personal fulfillment because job satisfaction and personal fulfillment are assumed to be beneficial for individual and organizational performance (Beer 2009; Ulrich and Ulrich 2010).

The conceptualization of work as identity takes the personal fulfillment approach a step further by revealing the deep importance of work for self-understanding. From this perspective, then, worker well-being is a function of the extent to which work contributes toward a positive self-identity and ultimately self-realization. A key issue here is whether work, in practice, has meaning and purpose to workers. One way work can be seen as meaningful and purposeful is if it enables workers to exercise autonomy and to develop and realize their competences. On this view, change in the organization of work to promote autonomous kinds of work and hence self-realization remains a necessary and desirable route to higher worker well-being (Schwartz 1982).

Conceptualizing work as a social relation highlights the human interaction elements of work. This way of theorizing work therefore reinforces the perspectives on worker well-being emanating from some of the previous conceptualizations that emphasize the deeply human aspects of work, such as creativity, fulfillment, and identity. The theoretical perspective of work as a social relation further emphasizes that work and its related institutions are human creations

rather than immutable facts of life or a natural state of affairs. This provides legitimacy to the question of worker well-being and to considerations over how to structure work and work-related institutions so as to promote the achievement of high levels of worker well-being. Some theorizing within the social relations approach further emphasizes the importance of the power structures that are created through social institutions. Consequently, this conceptualization sees worker well-being as explicitly determined by the relative power of the parties to the employment relationship, and additionally highlights the need to change the balance of power at work if improvements in worker well-being are to be achieved (Thompson and Newsome 2004).

Conceptualizing work as caring for others also has important yet unique implications for worker well-being. This perspective broadens the scope of worker well-being to also include the extent to which work provides opportunities for caring for others, either directly through the work itself, or indirectly by reducing conflicts that prevent workers from fulfilling their caring responsibilities. Seeing work as caring also implies that non-commoditized forms of work should not be overlooked when conceptualizing and analyzing worker well-being. A true picture of the well-being of a nation's working population should include not only the well-being of paid employees in stable jobs, but also workers frequently considered "marginal", whether paid or unpaid, who frequently have caring duties. Finally, feminist perspectives on work reject deep-seated dualities such as production/reproduction, work/family, and labor/leisure (Glucksmann 1995). According to these perspectives, worker well-being should take a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnected nature of a society's full breadth of work activities and does not divorce worker well-being from other aspects of well-being.

Just as seeing work as caring for others broadens the scope of worker well-being, so, too, does seeing work as service. Specifically, the conceptualization of work as service implies that

worker well-being is derived from the extent to which work provides opportunities for serving others, either directly through the actual work done, or indirectly by reducing conflicts that disallow workers from engaging in service activities outside of work. This can be measured both subjectively—e.g., through self-appraisals of the extent to which workers believe they are serving others—and objectively—e.g., by analyzing the extent to which policies that promote activities that serve God, the community, or others are present. On the negative side, if elite interests justify work as serving others, then it may be the case that workers are asked to accept work’s intrinsic and extrinsic costs as a necessary evil. The interests of “others” may then be elevated above those of individual workers. In such a situation, the promotion of the idea of work as service may limit and debar progress in the quality of work.

CRAFTING A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO WORKER WELL-BEING

The previous section demonstrated how conceptualizations of work matter for how one thinks about and measures worker well-being. The specific perspectives on worker well-being embraced by different groups of academics, policymakers, advocates, and others are typically (implicitly) rooted in narrow (and often unstated) conceptualizations of work. Debates over which perspective on worker well-being is “best” or “correct” are therefore ultimately debates over which conceptualizations of work are “best” or “correct.”

But unlike Frederick Winslow Taylor who believed that there is one best way to accomplish work (Kanigel 1997), we assert that work is too complex to be reduced to narrow discipline-specific conceptualizations and instead we argue for an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to worker well-being. Work is a disutility for the fictitious *Homo economicus* who features in economic theorizing, or is personal fulfillment for the fictitious *Homo psychologicus* that underlies psychological scholarship, but when real people work, their

work consists of multiple aspects. Individuals in paid jobs likely experience elements of disutility when their work is stressful and conflicts with desires for more leisured pursuits, of fulfillment when their work brings psychological rewards or pain when their work is experienced as arduous and unfulfilling, of identity creation and affirmation (either positive or negative), and perhaps sometimes elements of caring or serving others. Unpaid homemakers whose work involves a lot of caring responsibilities also experience disutility as some features of caring are stressful and take time away from valued leisured pursuits, fulfillment from the intrinsic rewards of caring for others, and aspects of identity development (homemakers can achieve self-esteem from looking after their families but equally can be undervalued and underappreciated for their contributions). Professorial jobs allow for tremendous creativity and autonomy and confer high social status, but also require the drudgery of grading exams and compliance with social norms of academic scholarship.

Granted, not every worker will experience all the dimensions of work outlined earlier in this paper, and some jobs might be dominated by certain dimensions more than others. But in our view, the complexities of work mean that there is a pressing need to move beyond particular conceptualizations of work and the corresponding narrow perspectives on worker well-being; instead there is a need for a more comprehensive approach to worker well-being. Work is not disutility or personal fulfillment, work is disutility and personal fulfillment. Work is not organizational citizenship or identity, it is occupational citizenship and identity. So an integrative approach to worker well-being should draw from multiple rather than individual conceptualizations of work.

The conceptualizations outlined above provide a useful foundation for crafting an approach to worker well-being that bridges different disciplines. We start by rejecting the

conceptualization of work as a curse because from this perspective, worker well-being is a non-issue. If work is inevitably distasteful, then the search for well-being should be located in other aspects of the human experience. We reject this perspective. Humans must work to survive, but society can determine how that work is structured. Work is only a curse where it is organized and designed by society, not nature, in ways that prevent workers from meeting their multiple needs. Indeed, like many before us, we argue that work is vital to human development and happiness and ought to contribute positively to human well-being.

We contend that the remaining nine conceptualizations of work can be used to identify the diverse ways in which work affects the well-being of workers. This requires focusing on the constructive aspects of these conceptualizations as well as locating and harnessing their complementarities and overlap. The resulting comprehensive approach to worker well-being is summarized in Table 3.

Several of the conceptualizations indicate that pay and other extrinsic benefits should be central elements of worker well-being. While it is misguided to see work only as something to be endured to earn income, as in the disutility conceptualization, it is undeniable that earning money is frequently an important aspect of work. In the disutility conceptualization, individuals work to support consumption and leisure so one aspect of well-being should be the extent to which a worker's paid work supports an adequate level of consumption and leisure. The disutility conceptualization of work misrepresents the agency of workers and also makes misleading assumptions about the "fairness" and "justice" of wages, but it at least gives primacy to the aspect of income in the determination of worker well-being: workers cannot live by leisure alone. From a different standpoint, the occupational citizenship conceptualization indicates that well-being should include measures of whether a worker receives at least some standard level of

pay and benefits, such as a “living wage”, health insurance coverage, and other elements of a social safety net that provide economic security to workers and their families. This conceptualization removes the fiction of wages as being a “just” return for the contribution made by workers in production. Instead the approach to pay and other benefits attached to work is based on need: workers are seen as entitled to a level of remuneration that allows them and their families to live at a socially acceptable level. Adequate pay and benefits from work overall can also be seen as vital to the securing of positive identity in our consumption driven society.

The personal fulfillment part of work would suggest the inclusion of standards for good physical health as well as occupational safety in any robust consideration of worker well-being. Minimum standards for health and safety at work would be seen as important in protecting workers against harm to their physical as well as psychological health and well-being. There is an overlap here with the occupational citizenship perspective which specifies that workers are entitled to at least some standard of protection against workplace hazards and risks. The gendered aspects of seeing work as caring also reveal that the human body can be intimately involved in various forms of work. Worker well-being should therefore also consider the extent to which workers must use their own bodies or make contact with others in ways that are uncomfortable and excessively intimate. More widely, all workers should be free of sexual harassment.

Psychological and mental health should also be a dimension of worker well-being. Much of the literature here emphasizes subjective self-appraisals of job satisfaction, self-esteem, and self-identity. These are important aspects of a comprehensive approach to worker well-being, but are incomplete by themselves. To see work as a source of personal fulfillment also highlights the possible stressful nature of forms of work which impose excessive demands on workers.

Research on the detrimental mental health effects of low control, high stress, high effort, and long hour jobs reinforces the importance of insuring against low levels of psychological and mental health (Siegrist 1996). In practical terms, it can be seen as important that workers are protected from stressful work, say by promoting forms of flexible working and greater levels of autonomy at work. Curbs on intensive effort and long work hours are also important to the promotion of greater worker well-being.

The pursuit of skillful and creative forms of work is also supported by some of the above conceptualizations of work. For example, the freedom conceptualization gives emphasis to the idea of work as a vent for human creativity. The opportunity to acquire, develop, hone, and utilize skills on the job thus can be viewed as an important ingredient of a comprehensive approach to worker well-being. Conversely, one can say that worker well-being will be impaired by exposure to mundane and non-creative forms of work. Such work is liable not only to undermine the mental capacities of workers but also to deny them opportunities for recognition and self-esteem. Elevating worker well-being in this case should entail moves to curtail work that lacks a strong creative content.

To see work as freedom also forces one to consider issues regarding the level of autonomy enjoyed by workers over the work they do. Autonomy over work here refers to several things. On the one hand, it encompasses the ability to determine what and how work is done: work is liable to be more personally fulfilling and identity affirming where it is carried out by workers with a high degree of discretion. On the other hand, autonomy can be seen to include some input by workers into the design and planning of their work. The motive here for extending worker autonomy over work again would be to improve their level of fulfillment in work and to

promote opportunities for self-realization: objectives in harmony with the fulfillment and identity conceptualizations of work.

Several of the conceptualizations indicate the wider significance of freedom and voice as essential elements of worker well-being. When work is seen as a commodity, for example, worker well-being equates to the ability to freely quit and seek whatever employment or occupational opportunities are desired. The social relations conceptualization of work, from a different perspective, highlights the scope for power differentials to significantly affect work and the employment relationship while seeing work as freedom means that a lack of coercion in the employment relationship is also important. Workers then should have the economic and political independence from their employers that is consistent with being fully-functioning worker-citizens. This should include legal protections against unjust dismissal. There is a similarity here with the occupational citizenship perspective on work which emphasizes the autonomy needed for citizenship, and the complementary ability to exercise voice in the workplace. The opportunity to establish independent labor unions, exercise free speech in the workplace, and pursue other forms of workplace voice should therefore also be included in an integrated approach to worker well-being.

A further aspect of worker well-being relates to the governance and ownership of work. This aspect is supported by the personal fulfillment as well as social relations conceptualizations of work that both deal with governance and ownership issues. Concerns with the lack of worker input into management decision-making has led to calls for the creation of more democratic systems of governance, and various schemes to involve workers in the management of the firms in which they work have been proposed and implemented (Russell 1985). Such schemes are motivated in part by the notion that greater worker participation will add to levels of job

satisfaction as well as productivity. A more radical step would entail the transfer of ownership of productive assets to workers and the formation of worker-owned firms. Variants of the social relations conceptualization would support this step and would argue that it provides a necessary foundation for improved worker well-being.

The recognition of power differentials in the workplace highlighted by the social relations conceptualization of work also raises the specter of discrimination and other forms of abusive treatment of workers. Protections against discriminatory and abusive treatment in the workplace are therefore also important aspects of a comprehensive approach to worker well-being. The idea that workers should be treated with dignity and respect and not treated as commodities or factors of production would be central to a more human-centered conceptualization of worker well-being that draws on the different social sciences (Budd 2004; Kaufman 2005).

An integrated approach to worker well-being should also be informed by the caring and service aspects of work. Specifically, worker well-being can be seen as concerned with the extent to which work allows for caring and service activities. For some workers, caring and serving others might be a direct part of their work. For others, well-being may be promoted by reducing aspects of work that prevent carrying out necessary and valued caring duties. In this way, the contemporary emphasis on work-family balance is important, and should be broadened to work-community balance to better reflect the importance of service in addition to caring. The argument here would be that a broader, interdisciplinary conceptualization of worker well-being should include consideration of care and service aspects of work.

CONCLUSION

Many scholars, business leaders, policymakers, and advocates claim that worker well-being is important. But there are numerous perspectives on what worker well-being actually is,

how to measure it, whether it needs improving, and, if needed, how to improve it. A deeper understanding of these perspectives can be obtained by using explicit conceptualizations of work to uncover the importance of how we think about worker well-being. The divergent implications of these conceptualizations for worker well-being highlight the importance of developing an integrative framework that is capable of understanding the different ways in which work affects worker well-being.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to harness the power of a broad set of conceptualizations of work. The goal has been to move toward a much-needed comprehensive approach to worker well-being. The value of such an approach can be illustrated by reference to the often bifurcated nature of discussion of worker well-being in much academic research. Worker well-being is sometimes regarded as a merely subjective construct: it is identified and measured by the subjective responses that workers give to questions about job satisfaction. In other instances, worker well-being is defined against specific objective criteria: for example, a high quality job is viewed as one that affords workers a high level of autonomy, skill, and creativity.

The comprehensive approach we have set out in this paper helps to overcome the bifurcation in research on worker well-being. Specifically, it can be argued that worker well-being has both a subjective and an objective dimension. What responses workers give to questions about job satisfaction convey some important information about how their lives at work are going. But data on job satisfaction is clearly not the end of the story as far as worker well-being is concerned. This is in part because self-reported job satisfaction is affected by workers' expectations and aspirations about work: two workers with different expectations and aspirations about work may offer different responses about their level of job satisfaction even if

the jobs they do are identical in objective terms. So from our perspective consideration must also be given to the objective conditions and circumstances of the work that workers actually perform. Drawing together different conceptualizations on work, a high quality job is truly one that meets certain objective standards as well as provides high job satisfaction. The comprehensive approach to worker well-being developed here provides not only a way to integrate subjective and objective approaches to worker well-being, but also the basis for broadly considering the subjective and objective dimensions that should be embraced in evaluations of worker well-being.

Moreover, if we reverse the nature of our analyses we can see that the approach to worker well-being favored by a particular society reveals what that society values in terms of the relationship of work to workers. When societal norms and values emphasize the ability of workers to choose jobs they desire and neglect other aspects of worker well-being linked to say the ability of workers to gain autonomy over the work they do, they are implicitly conceptualizing work as a commodity and dismissing other conceptualizations of work. If pay and compensation are the focal points of worker well-being in society, this implies that unpaid work is not valued and that paid work is seen as the primary way for workers to achieve well-being. A focus on raising the volume of employment opportunities without regard for the quality of jobs thereby created implies that work is seen as a source of income, rather than a potential source of personal fulfillment and self-realization.

Putting all of this together, a greater appreciation of the two-way connections between work and worker well-being is not only useful for achieving a deeper understanding of both work and worker well-being, but also for developing sufficiently broad approaches to worker well-being that adequately reflect the sheer diversity of the roles of work in our lives, as well as

the tremendous importance of work for individuals and the communities in which they live. The integration of different disciplinary perspectives on work and worker well-being is therefore an important task.

REFERENCES

- Beer, Michael (2009) *High Commitment, High Performance: How to Build A Resilient Organization for Sustained Advantage* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass).
- Budd, John W. (2004) *Employment with a Human Face: Balancing Efficiency, Equity, and Voice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
- Budd, John W. (2011) *The Thought of Work* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
- de Man, Henri (1927) *Joy in Work*, trans. Eden Paul and Cedar Paul (New York: Henry Holt, 1929).
- Ehrenreich, Barbara (2001) *Nickeled and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Henry Holt).
- Engels, Friedrich (1845) *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, trans. Florence Kelley Wischnewetzky (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1892).
- Glucksmann, Miriam A. (1995) “Why ‘Work’? Gender and the ‘Total Social Organization of Labour,’” *Gender, Work, and Organization* 2 (April): 63-75.
- Green, Francis (2006) *Demanding Work: The Paradox of Job Quality in the Affluent Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Guest, David (2008) “Worker Well-Being,” in Paul Blyton et al., eds., *Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations* (London: Sage): 529-47.
- Hackman, Richard J., and Greg. R. Oldham (1980) *Work Redesign* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley).
- Harney, Alexandra (2008) *The China Price: The True Cost of Chinese Competitive Advantage* (New York: Penguin).
- Heery, Edmund, and John Salmon, eds. (2000) *The Insecure Workforce* (London: Routledge).
- International Labour Office (1999) *Decent Work* (Geneva).
- Judge, Timothy A., and Randy J. Larsen (2001) “Dispositional Affect and Job Satisfaction: A Review and Theoretical Extension,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 86 (September): 67- 98.
- Kanigel, Robert (1997) *The One Best Way: Frederick Winslow Taylor and the Enigma of Efficiency* (New York, Penguin).
- Kaufman, Bruce E. (2004) *The Global Evolution of Industrial Relations: Events, Ideas, and the*

IIRA (Geneva: International Labour Office).

Kaufman, Bruce E. (2005) “The Social Welfare Objectives and Ethical Principles of Industrial Relations,” in John W. Budd and James G. Scoville, eds., *The Ethics of Human Resources and Industrial Relations* (Champaign, IL: Labor and Employment Relations Association): 23-59.

Locke, Edwin A. (1976) “The Nature and Causes of Job Satisfaction,” in Marvin D. Dunnette, ed., *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (Chicago: Rand-McNally): 1297-349.

Marx, Karl (1844) *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988).

Mayhew, Henry (1861) *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those that Will Work, Those that Cannot Work, and Those that Will Not Work* (London: Griffin, Bohn and Co.).

McClelland, Peter D. (1990) *The American Search for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell).

Mishel, Lawrence, Jared Bernstein, and Heidi Shierholz (2009) *The State of Working America 2008/2009* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

Russell, Raymond (1985) *Sharing Ownership in the Workplace* (Albany: State University of New York Press).

Sampsell-Willmann, Kate (2009) *Lewis Hine as Social Critic* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi).

Schwartz, Adina (1982) “Meaningful Work,” *Ethics* 92 (July): 634-46.

Siegrist, Johannes (1996) “Adverse Health Effects of High-Effort/Low-Reward Conditions,” *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 1 (January): 27-41.

Simmel, Georg (1907) *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

Spencer, David A. (2009) *The Political Economy of Work* (London: Routledge).

Thompson, Paul, and Kirsty Newsome (2004) “Labor Process Theory, Work, and the Employment Relation,” in B. E. Kaufman, ed., *Theoretical Perspectives on Work and the Employment Relationship* (Champaign, IL: Industrial Relations Research Association): 133-62.

Ulrich, Dave and Wendy Ulrich (2010) *The Why of Work: How Great Leaders Build Abundant Organizations That Win* (New York: McGraw-Hill).

Warr, Peter (1987) *Work, Unemployment, and Mental Health* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

Warr, Peter (1999) “Well-Being and the Workplace,” in Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, and Norbert Schwarz, eds., *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation): 392–412.

Weber, Max (1922) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, trans. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968).

Wright, Thomas A. (2010) “More than Meets the Eye: The Role of Employee Well-Being in Organizational Research,” in P. Alex Linley, Susan Harrington, and Nicola Garcea, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology and Work* (New York: Oxford University Press): 143-154.

Table 1: Conceptualizations of Work

| Work as... | Definition | Intellectual Roots |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| A Curse | An unquestioned burden necessary for human survival or maintenance of the social order. | Western theology. Ancient Greco-Roman philosophy. |
| Freedom | (i) A way to achieve independence from nature or other humans, and to express human creativity. (ii) A way to achieve economic and political freedom | Western liberal individualism. Political theory. |
| A Commodity | An abstract quantity of productive effort that has tradable economic value. | Capitalism. Industrialization. Economics. |
| Occupational Citizenship | An activity pursued by members of a community entitled to certain basic rights. | Western citizenship ideals. Theology. Industrial relations. |
| Disutility | A painful activity tolerated to obtain goods and services that provide pleasure. | Utilitarianism. Economics. |
| Personal Fulfillment | An activity that (ideally) meets the physical and psychological needs of those performing it. | Western liberal individualism. Human resource management. Psychology. |
| Identity | An activity that helps shapes one's self-understanding. | Psychology. Sociology. Philosophy. |
| A Social Relation | Human interaction embedded in social norms, institutions, and power structures. | Industrialization. Sociology. Anthropology. |
| Caring For Others | The physical, cognitive, and emotional effort required to attend to and maintain others. | Feminism. |
| Service | The devotion of effort to others for the sake of serving some external purpose, such as God, household, community, or country. | Theology. Confucianism. Republicanism. Humanitarianism. |

Table 2: The Importance of Conceptualizations of Work for Worker Well-Being

| Work as... | Implications for Worker Well-Being |
|--------------------------|--|
| A Curse | Work is expected to be burdensome. Well-being is derived from outside work. |
| Freedom | (i) Work should provide outlets for free creative activity. (ii) Work should promote economic and political freedom |
| A Commodity | (i) Commodity status of work represents prominence of market based exchange and ought to be replaced with a human-centered view of work. (ii) Freedom to quit is paramount. Working conditions assumed to reflect free consent. |
| Occupational Citizenship | Importance of objective minimum standards and rights, including unionization and employee voice in the workplace. |
| Disutility | Well-being is derived from consumption and leisure, not from work itself. |
| Personal Fulfillment | Importance of subjective measures of job satisfaction, self-esteem gained from work, and other work-related attitudes. |
| Identity | Importance of creating opportunities for positive self-identity and self-realization in work. |
| A Social Relation | Worker well-being is neither nature determined nor immutable, it is shaped by norms, institutions, and power structures. |
| Caring For Others | Work should not interfere with caring responsibilities and where appropriate should provide opportunities for caring for others. |
| Service | Work should not interfere with serving others and where appropriate should provide opportunities for serving others. |

Table 3: Domains of Worker Well-Being: A Comprehensive Approach

Pay and Benefits

- An adequate income including a “living wage” and basic benefits coverage
- Economic security via social safety nets
- Contribution toward positive identity

Safety, Health, and Body Work

- Protection against workplace hazards and risks
- Positive indicators of a worker’s physical health
- Protection against unwanted intimacy and sexual harassment

Psychological and Mental Health

- Avoidance of undue stress associated with work
- Avoidance of excessive effort and hours of work
- Positive levels of job satisfaction, self-esteem, and self-identity

Skill and Creativity

- Opportunities for skill development and use
- Avoidance of low complex and mundane work

Autonomy over Work

- Opportunities to control how and what work is done
- Opportunities to influence design and planning of work

Freedom, and Voice

- Freedom to quit and occupational choice
- Unjust dismissal protections
- Ability to form independent labor unions
- Workplace free speech protections

Governance and Ownership

- Opportunities to participate in how work is managed
- Opportunities to own productive assets

Nondiscrimination and Respect

- Nondiscrimination protections
- Treatment with dignity and respect

Caring

- Opportunities for directly caring for others (where appropriate)
- Avoidance of conflicts that prevent the fulfillment of caring responsibilities

Serving Others

- Opportunities for directly serving others (where appropriate)
 - Avoidance of conflicts that interfere with ability to serve others
-