

# RSA RWN Meeting – 12<sup>th</sup> February 2019

## Group discussion notes on 5 themes

### 1. “Stretching the envelope – redefining work/extending our definitions”

We all agreed that “work” is too often equated with “paid employment” and they are very different. If we are to consider the impact of work on people’s lives we need a wider definition.

In a purist sense, work is effort that produces a result. So it will include

- Performing a paid job for an employer
- Carrying out an activity that generates income ( eg self-employment)
- Carrying out unpaid activities for someone else (eg helping a charity)
- Carrying out an unpaid activity for oneself or family (eg child care)

A very broad definition would include activities such as sports and hobbies, ie effort put in by an individual in return for a reward.

With the growth of the gig economy we will see more examples of unconventional work patterns (self-employment, platforms providing work, internet based tasks). Crowdsourcing and free effort are blurring the boundaries. (Is someone working when they update an entry in Wikipedia for free?)

If people didn’t need to work for money, but carried out activities for the good of society would that be work? We touched on Universal Basic Income as an idea to make paid work unnecessary as a way of surviving.

Rewards from work include satisfaction, sense of achievement, status, recognition, pride, belonging, friendship, and in some cases money.

We tried (with help from Rich) to see if there were different definitions of work under his four scenarios. This was inconclusive, but we did note:

- Under the ‘Big Tech’ scenario there would be a push towards meaning and purpose
- Under ‘Exodus’ people would opt out of paid work and would be searching for meaning
- And under ‘Precision’ we would see work becoming more flexible.

Work is a source of identity. The place people have in society is dependent on their occupation. People belong to ‘tribes’ and their role in their community is often dictated by their work/job/profession. Traditional lifetime careers are breaking down with the rapid changes in the work that needs to be done (often driven by technology). In future will people be recognised/respected/rewarded based on their contribution to society rather than the job they have chosen to do or the career they are following?

## **2. 'Work as an enabler/engine of society – new social and political constructs around work'**

### **1. Context**

In the late Middle Ages (following the Black Death), worker shortages meant that labour was seen as an valuable asset worth paying for and wealth owners counted themselves lucky to be able to get it. However, since pre-industrialisation, the rise of capitalism and mass production/consumption , labour has come to be viewed as a business 'cost' and therefore something to be reduced and substituted for by machinery and digitalisation.

Does this view still hold and is it still promulgated e.g. 'machines will take our jobs'? Should it now be challenged and, if so, how? Is there some way of re-setting this view?

### **2. Working to Live**

Starting from the proposition that the majority of working adults are not engaged intellectually or emotionally in their work and just going through the motions for cash, there are clearly hurdles to be overcome if notions of, and rewards (not just financial) for, work are to change and work is to offer more opportunities for engagement, self-actualisation and the generation of social value.

Is one of the challenges that too many people still consider/have to consider work as a necessary evil to survive (through poverty /exploitation)?

Could social levers such as the living wage or 'universal basic income' affect this 'grudge' mindset and help change our psychological engagement and well-being?

Would ensuring - through whatever means - that people's basic needs were met, incentivise/liberate workers and employers to reassess the value of work and reach a better arrangement for exchanging that value?

Would empowering workers in this way potentially prevent current levels of worker exploitation?

Is work simply a wealth generator and labour exchange system? Are there other currencies in which labour is exchanged such as esteem, status, mental and physical wellbeing, virtue, once basic needs/core ambitions are met?

### **3. Redistribution**

Does all reinvention of work depend upon some form of fairer asset [wealth] redistribution?

If since WWII the UK has sought to achieve 'fairness's by eliminating Beveridge's five 'great evils': squalor, ignorance, want, idleness, and disease, through a welfare state, how far have we got and why not further? How is it that 70 years on through levels of unprecedented growth, the UK is still

far from achieving fairness and the liberty of the majority is still constrained through the 'daily grind' of paid employment?

Have previous experiments - for example, Soviet Union, China, Zimbabwe, Venezuela - and more recently failed and, if so, why?.

What will be the likely results of current Universal Basic Income (UBI) experiments (notwithstanding (funding, scope and timescales distortions)?

<https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2019/02/14/finlands-basic-income-trial-did-not-much-affect-work-incentives>

Can we define what UBI or 'fair shares' of national wealth might look like and how these might be achieved in our post-modern world?

#### **4. Tax**

Could more transparent and fairer tax systems help?

#### **5. Worker Participation/Empowerment**

Why have systems such as profit-sharing, workers' councils not been widely taken up in the UK? UIs there a legacy mind-set issue? Could such reforms lead to better engagement between workers and employers and more positive/enjoyable engagement in the workplace?

One experiment, in aerospace but also automotive industries, has shown that liberating front-line workers to plan and manage their work (self-directed teams) led to significantly raised productivity and significantly higher remuneration, but for fewer workers. Less productive workers and support workers such as administrators were forced out.

#### **6. Hierarchies**

Is it the case that

- human social structures are necessary for survival and to organise tasks which need to be done collectively
- do these have to involve some form hierarchy as the basic structure of engagement, task and reward distribution?

If this is the case, would hierarchies would always emerge under whatever inclusive and egalitarian systems are attempted?

#### **7. Elites/Meritocracies**

Does this mean that meritocracies, elites and 'unfair shares' systems - where the weak/vulnerable get less/are exploited - are always bound to emerge?

If so, how can this be offset? (Theft, war and revolution – whilst effective engines for redistribution/change - can also destroy social value and damage the wellbeing of those caught up in conflict.)

## **8. Freeloaders/ Wool Gatherers**

Will there always be people (freeloaders) who take advantage and seek a free ride e.g. orange monkeys and others who 'toil not, neither do they spin' Is it possible that this might be a natural by-product/ feature of humanity.

If so, is society generally capable of supporting the (perhaps small) number of people who wish to spend their lives (self-actualizing) in this way?

If these are innate features, do societies inevitably tend towards the following model

- profiteers/accumulators/super rich
- coasters/freeloaders
- worker elites
- exploited workers
- even more exploited workers
- excluded workers
- unvalued/oppressed workers ?

If so, do human societies need a constant, periodic reset and re-balancing?

If traditionally these have been caused by wars (internal/ civil/ revolution) or external (World Wars, invasion, plague, industrial revolution, welfare state, human rights) what will/should the catalysts be for our age (wealth, globalisation, digitisation, others?)?

## **9. Potential Conclusions**

- Work needs to be re-defined in its social context for 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Societies usually seek to reorganise on a fairer, more inclusive basis
- Wealth holders and freeloaders emerge
- Change is resisted by wealth holders
- Have-nots emerge
- Periodic re-sets and re-balances are inevitable
- These can be accidental (or now possibly planned?)
- Tax systems may help but are subject to manipulation
- Does 21<sup>st</sup> Century re-set and re-balance depend on surplus/shared affluence?
- If resources were more fairly distributed and work were re-defined and revalued could that lead to happier lives/more rewarding self-actualisation for all in our times?

- Can we use globalisation/health/wealth/digitisation to achieve the necessary reset for our times?
- This will not be an end point but simply an arc on the cycle
- Threats to success may include climate change/water distribution/ disease

### 3. Reinventing the worker - 'the importance of lifelong learning, reskilling, reinvention'

#### General

- Group challenged by the term 'worker', sense of it being diminishing, impersonal. Who is doing the reinventing?

#### Education

- Different approach to education needed. Currently formal education is too linear. People coming out of formal education then need to be trained for work – not effective straightaway.
- Need a focus on lifelong learning but at pace and with agility to be immediately effective in the roles that are available
- Focus on making best use of lived experience rather than formal learning
- Opportunity to reskill people – learning in different ways and contexts
- Need to take opportunities for matching people to roles that use their talents
- All aspects of work changing all the time so a fixed mind-set is a real challenge...need to focus on empowering people to want to find/develop the skills so they can find their place
- Need to help people be able to apply who they are/what they bring to the world around them

#### Choice

- Need a change in power dynamics so that workers have a voice and opportunity to bring their whole selves to work
- Reinvention is all about choice – a question of are we expected to reinvent ourselves vs a mind-set that wants to reinvent/open to reinvention (growth mind-set). For some having to reinvent may feel threatening.
- Perhaps need to put more focus on reinvention of society
- Often choice is driven by social circumstances -more privileged/better educated/higher skilled likely to have more choice or feel they have more choice
- People lacking choice will feel the need to reinvent as a threat
- Likely that many will need to have a number of different careers – not everyone comfortable or equipped for multiple careers
- Flexible working and ability to switch careers can be a positive if we have the right mind-set, skills, ability to reskill. Where we don't there will be major discomfort/threat

#### Self-managing/self-organising models

- Self-managing capability dependent on the level of people's consciousness – need to be more conscious to embrace/work with/in self-managing model

- Organisations on this (self-managing) path attempting to attract people with higher levels of consciousness and letting people with less go – impact on diversity of thinking in the organisation?
- Is there a need to provide support to those less confident around self-management, ensuring they have a safety net (boss to go to)?
- Upskill those less confident in self-managing scenario. Funding to support this tends not to be there with development focused on top levels rather than lower down the organisation or directed at equipping higher levels to coach/support people in self-managing structures
- Is self-managing possible across the board?
- Whatever the model must have diversity and inclusion at heart. Model for the future worker needs to be 'emotional' as well as skills-based

### **Drive for personal growth**

- Can't impose the need for personal growth on others but can create an environment in which people grow if they choose and are encouraged even if they have a fixed mind-set
- In the right environment people who don't want to grow and develop will still be making progress and evolving even if they aren't consciously pursuing it
- We don't, as a society, want everyone to have a drive to grow in work – need to focus on matching people to/helping them find the perfect role for them

## **4. Reinventing institutions, organisations, organisms**

### **What are the top 3 opportunities in this area?**

1. *Diversity, inclusion and translating individual agency into group agency*
2. *Authenticity all the way down to encourage innovation and create the right environments*
3. *Unlearning and re-learning. Recognise transitions and the fact people need a growth mindset*

### **What could be done to leverage these opportunities?**

Find and pilot in high impact industries where the working model no longer works, particularly for the new generation such as professional services (banking, legal etc); public sector and construction

### **Notes from the table discussion**

- Inclusion – diversity of thought and creation of new ideas
- Proven that teams with higher levels of diversity of thought have higher performance
- Liberating structures tools to translate individual agency to group agency
- Role of the organisation as an agency
- 'People centred economy' - re-invented future – what economic models enhance work life?
- Value from making people's lives better – 'Good Work'
- Triple bottom line
- Caring to be more valued – 'the empathy economy' (what does it mean to be human in the world of the machine?)
- Organisations need to re-word purpose – harmony and care
- Reward system changing to be more equal
- Need more supporting business models that make teal organisations work (although not everybody on the table liked or agreed with the definition of teal organisations)

- Self-management – need to support staff to transition into this way of working – think about the ‘transitions’ required as a different kind of psychology
- Redefine the purpose of the organisation to include social, environmental and economic responsibility
- Organisations to become leaner with a greater degree of agility
- Support people to have the type of working experience within the organisation that they currently seek outside of the organisation ie social entrepreneurs setting up their own businesses and people having portfolio careers
- How do we encourage employers/ organisations to, in turn, encourage employees to have authentic expression
- The importance of psychological safety
- Head, heart, hands – the importance of the invocation of all of the faculties and senses – examples given of places that encourage all 3 – Taunton

## 5. ‘Activism’

Questions we uncovered:

- How do we envisage that voices get heard?
- What is the future role of Trade Unions?
- Is anyone actively seeking to access the voices? Why?
- Have people lost their ability to influence? Lost their platform, skills/how to, motivation – issue of mindset and personal responsibility – learned helplessness, also an element of what’s in it for me.
- How to educate to empower when there are diverse stakeholders?
- How can we flip the ‘done to people’ to active citizenship?
- Companies motivated to do CSR?

Social media can be noise, cause emoting and polarise rather than engage, educate and empower

No forum exists to discuss and no discussion on what sort of society we want. Is this work related? The need to define what work is.

Negative/emotive press coverage prevents what’s working well in Europe and beyond getting to wider society (e.g. no understanding of Works Councils working fine elsewhere in Europe)

We then focused in on distilling the conversation into three opportunities:

1. Different structures and a move away from profit motive only
  - Coops, social enterprises, B Corp, Community wealth building and building a democratic economy
2. Deliberative processes (e.g. RSA Citizens’ Economic Council project) – range of views heard and from experts too before deciding
3. What is happening in Europe (and globally) and working well or mainstreamed e.g. Works Councils, self-organising teams

We then thought about what could be leveraged related to these three opportunities:

Different structures

Amplify/introduce to wider audiences the good examples and the things that are working

Try and filter out the things that come in and out of fashion (fads) but focus on the things that work

Consider how to make democratic economy movement stronger

Promote peer networks and support available

Consider tax incentives

Build wider awareness of this different approach

Celebrate and showcase and connect stakeholders to this

Deliberative processes

Run some related to Reinventing work for workers, citizens and other stakeholders

What's happening in Europe (and globally) that is working well?

Seek out and publicise the successes/good news stories