

The Tensions of Valuing Work

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Introduction

Who gets to define what work means?

Baldo by Hector D. Cantú and Carlos Castellanos

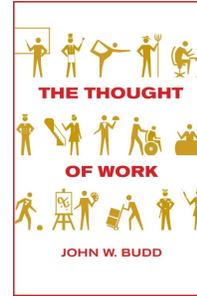


...especially when valuations clash

A multidisciplinary approach can help us see the tensions and conflicts inherent in valuing work

The Many Meanings of Work

- Using the disciplinary theorizing on work found in the humanities and social and behavioral sciences...
 - Work as
 1. a Curse
 2. Freedom
 3. a Commodity
 4. Occupational Citizenship
 5. Disutility
 6. Personal Fulfillment
 7. a Social Relation
 8. Caring for Others
 9. Identity
 10. Service



Conceptualizing Work

A Curse	An unquestioned burden necessary for human survival or maintenance of the social order.
Freedom	A way to achieve independence from nature or other humans, and to express human creativity.
A Commodity	An abstract quantity of productive effort that has tradable economic value.
Occupational Citizenship	An activity pursued by human members of a community entitled to certain rights.
Disutility	A lousy activity tolerated to obtain goods and services that provide pleasure.

Conceptualizing Work

Personal Fulfillment	Physical and psychological functioning that (ideally) satisfies individual needs.
A Social Relation	Human interaction embedded in social norms, institutions, and power structures.
Caring for Others	The physical, cognitive, and emotional effort required to attend to and maintain others.
Identity	A method for understanding who you are and where you stand in the social structure.
Service	The devotion of effort to others, such as God, household, community, or country.

5

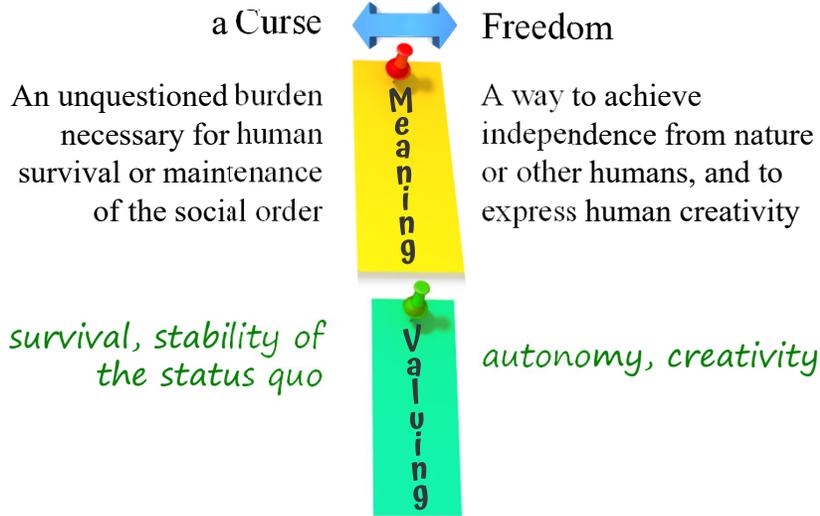
Dualities The Many Meanings of Work



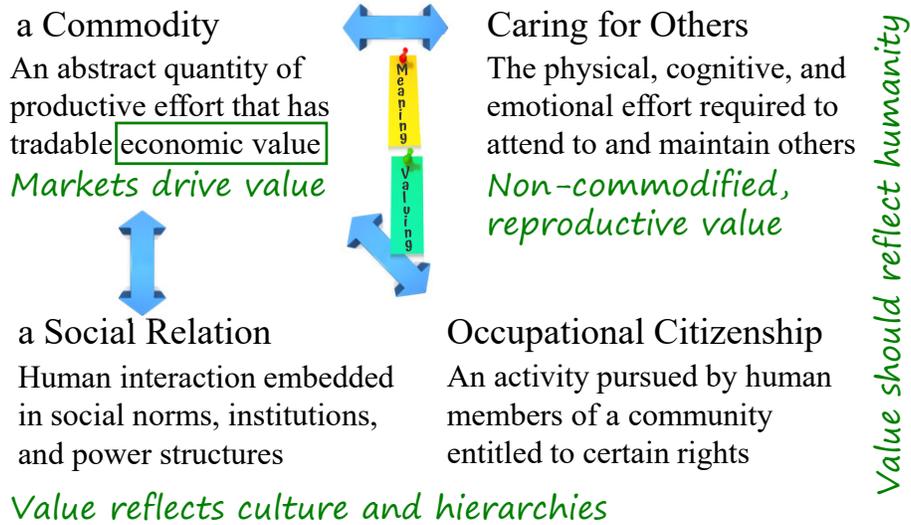
a Curse	↔	Freedom
a Commodity	↔	Occupational Citizenship
a Commodity	↔	a Social Relation
a Commodity	↔	Caring for Others
Disutility	↔	Personal Fulfillment
Identity	↔	Service

6

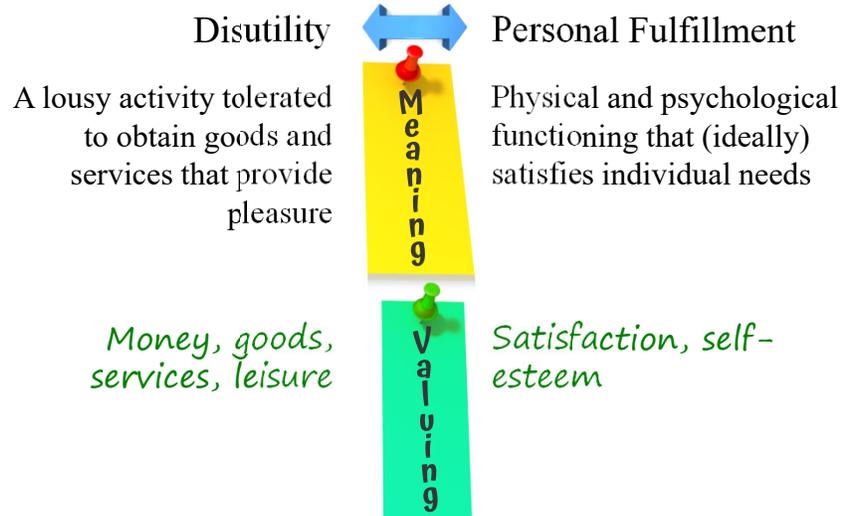
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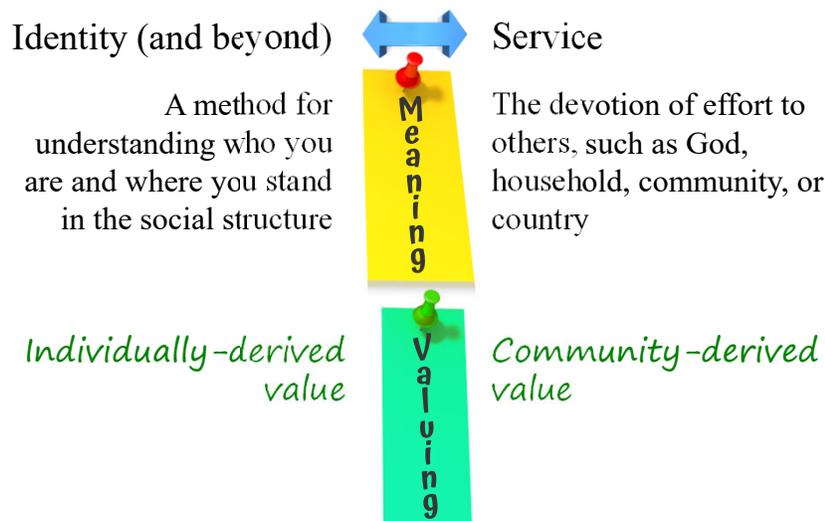
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The Many Meanings of Work



They all have relevance
for valuing work!

a Curse	↔	Freedom
a Commodity	↔	Occupational Citizenship
a Commodity	↔	a Social Relation
a Commodity	↔	Caring for Others
Disutility	↔	Personal Fulfillment
Identity	↔	Service

11

The Homogenizing Tendency

- Forum postings by students in my massive open online course (MOOC) “Preparing to Manage Human Resources”
 - “Money is key driving motivation of employee’s performance. It was and stays a primary crucial factor in choosing a job.”
 - “I think that a large majority of the population works for money. Can we blame them, our society has made it that way.”
 - “Most people work out of the personal satisfaction and the joy of doing what makes them happy and love doing it day after day.”

12

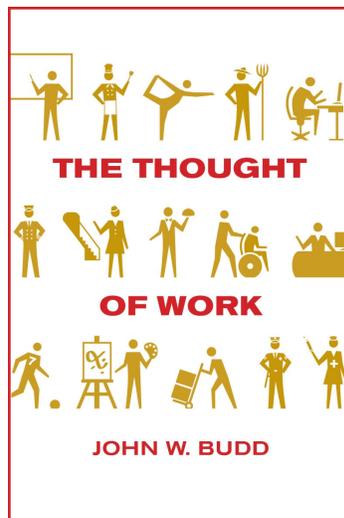
Conclusion

- Significant tensions when valuing work
 - Work has diverse meanings, hence values
 - Within society, and for an individual
 - Dualities, not strict choices
 - Tendency to homogenize work and impose our own meaning and value
 - Socially, the powerful try to push power over ideas and power through ideas
- Need a multidisciplinary foundation
 - And one that embraces complexity and diversity



The End

Further Reading



John W. Budd,
The Thought of Work
(Ithaca, NY: Cornell
University Press, 2011).

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