

## **Work Value and Human Value.**

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In my work as a psychotherapist, I have come upon many clients of mine who brought up the issue of work in their lives. The problems vary from how unemployment and poverty impact their coping resources to identity crises around their career choices. The not-so-overt concerns also arose, such as work-life balance and work roles outside of paid employment. As I counsel clients from Employment Assistance Programs and working mothers, I realize how organizational cultures also impacted my clients, particularly those who came from marginalized groups. My own transitions in my vocational path have provided me with lived experience of such issues. One of the conclusions I come to is that human value is a work value and work value is a human value. I will clarify this concept in this article.

What is the definition of work? It is a series of tasks performed that is purposeful with an intention to accomplish a certain outcome. With this definition, any action performed that leads to an outcome, i.e. any productive or operative activity, can be considered work. So we can say cooking a meal for the family can be considered work, just as equally as writing a computer code to produce a software for a multi-billion dollar corporation is work. The only major difference between the two is that the latter earns income while the former doesn't. There is confusion between the two forms of work - paid and unpaid, or formal and informal - in society. Work that is unpaid is often considered not true work, and thus of no work *value*. However, this is contrary to the actual order of functions in the society. In truth, there is a symbiosis between the various forms of work. Each role supports one another in an intricate and interdependent input and output system.

In the most basic and domestic form of work, the mother of an infant is a very important and valuable worker in society. Her work is not paid at all, and even her intention is valued to be contained by human emotion of love and a personal fulfillment. However, in a sociological and ecological perspective, her work is very much a building block of global economics because she produces and nurtures a potential worker and consumer in society. How well the child grows up, both physically and mentally, will influence how well the child can function as a productive adult in the world. Of course, as the child grows up and is exposed to the larger world, other variables influence the child's capabilities and thus his or her human capital as well. How economically secure the adult child is will determine how much he or she can spend and contribute to the global economy.

In a more financially driven form of work, an entry level worker is also of significant value in the organization. In its most essence, the entry level worker is the seed who will grow to take on more responsibilities and decision-making tasks later on. Using the metaphor of a seed, if this seed is not nurtured appropriately, nothing will grow, not just for the seed itself but also for the plantation that it is planted in. The corporation is like a plantation - its growth comes from its human resources, i.e. its seeds, sprouts and mature plants alike. This can be seen especially so in the hospitality business, where customer service is crucial. It is often times the direct services staff that will have the highest impact on the experience of the customer. Though low on the hierarchy of the organizational structure, the floor staff's capabilities have one of the largest impact on the business' ability to grow and prosper. Such an impact can also be seen in the manufacturing industry where those who work on the assembly lines can ultimately determine the quality of the products, and in the technology industry, where the programmers and quality assurance technicians directly influence the delivery of the products.

It is not a comfortable feeling to acknowledge that those lowest on the organizational structure may actually influence the growth of the organization in such powerful ways, especially when the product development team, management and executive have contributed so much thought and effort into creating the products and planning its execution into the world. It is a labor of passion for these higher level workers. However, if one sees the whole organization as a team or a complete system, then it makes sense how everybody in the corporation shares in the power of influence on the growth of the organization. This means that each and every worker has a role to play, and that each and every worker has a value.

With this idea that everybody has a role and a value, and since everybody is human, there is a logical assertion that every human has a work value. What each person's work value is has to be explored and determined, and this can be done by appropriate assessment and education. Here, I define education in a broad term that includes not just formal academic learning or specific vocational training, but also social and vicarious learning, which I believe is the most significant type of learning. There is also the experiential learning that is impactful. Often times, memory that is encoded with emotions - the essence of human experience - is the most powerful. In short, the humanity of the person, with his or her life experiences, personal values and motivations, become of value to the world of work. As such, human value is a work value.

Returning to the notion of the interdependent input and output system of a functional society mentioned earlier in this article, while work and human values input into the economy, the economy outputs value for humans through the medium of work. In other words, work does not only provide financial and economic stability for humans, but also an intrinsic value for the self as a human. Since work is purposeful and produces an outcome, it inherently provides a sense of meaning for the person engaged in work. A sense of meaning in life is an important indicator of wellness and happiness for a person, because a life without purpose lacks drive and motivation, which translates to a depressive position.

Existentialist thought perceives meaninglessness, alienation, freedom and its responsibilities, and death as sources of angst and anxiety for humans. I often see in my psychotherapy clients who have depression the tell-tale signs of meaninglessness and helplessness in their lives. Work that provides purpose then becomes a remedy to a person suffering from depression. A sense of alienation or social isolation is another symptom of depression. Work often provides a place of social connection as most work is done within and between groups of people. Even an assembly line at a manufacturing factory provides an environment where other people are around, despite the separate and compartmentalized nature of their job tasks. In the context of civic life, volunteerism gives the person a sense of efficacy as an agent of change and a sense of purpose as a contributing member of his or her community. It also surrounds the person with social interactions with others in the community, thus instilling a feeling of belonging. In such that work provides meaning and sense of humanity to the person, work value is a human value.

As we bring together the two parts to the concept of work value is a human value and human value is a work value, I would, once again, remind you to keep in mind that work as mentioned here is defined broadly as any activity that produces an outcome. So work can manifest itself as a job with an income, volunteer community involvement, family role responsibilities, creative and artistic projects, and even recreational activities that are purposeful, such as hobbies and leisurely endeavors. The last type of work is particularly applicable when considering how work gives a sense of personal meaning and existential connection for persons who seem to have other sources of work and yet are experiencing

depressive positions. We may think of this leisurely work as play. In general terms, it is play. But play is also a form of work. This is a topic to be discussed in my next article.

If you observe young children, you will notice they play a lot. Indeed, it would be quite concerning if a child is *not* playing, because a child's work *is* play. Play is how a child uses his or her mind through imagination, and through which he or she practices functional behaviors. In order for the child to grow in his or her developmental stages and gain mastery in life skills, the child has to play. There have been many new findings in recent research in neuroscience to support this understanding. It is my opinion, and of many colleagues of mine who share similar theoretical orientation towards psychoanalytic thought, that play is also an important task for an adult. Human development does not stop after childhood. It is a fallacy to assume so. Adults still go through different life stages and learn new skills as they grow older. In such, play then has a role in adult life development, just as it does for childhood development. However, our society fails to recognize this crucial link between play and work.

An idea that work is meant to be laborious and cannot be fun or leisurely is a concept I will like to take a closer look at. I do not believe it necessarily has to be true. I recognize that some jobs do consist of work that is not leisurely for any one, such as picking up garbage. However, it could be argued that there are probably people out there who either are concerned about cleanliness and order or do find solace in predictable and sequential work such jobs might entail, and thus find joy or at least satisfaction in doing these tasks. However, many other jobs can and are a labor of love and passion for many folks as well, such as artists, teachers, scientists, entrepreneurs, and so forth. The subject of how one can find jobs or be allocated to such jobs that best provide personal gratification outside of financial rewards, given the various economic and cultural limitations that may exist, will be explored further in my other article.