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Book Reviews

John W Budd, *The Thought of Work*. Ithaca, NY, and London: ILR Press, an imprint of Cornell University Press, 2011. xi + 246 pp. (pbk).

With its intriguing title, this book is, in the author's words, 'about how to think about work. Deeply and fundamentally. What really is work? And why does it matter?' (p. 1). Budd marshals facts and convincing arguments in support of this important endeavour.

A popular and superficial view of work is that it is essentially a means to earn income. However, scholars in human resource management, industrial relations and labour economics would accept that work is a many-sided concept that goes well beyond this simple view; they will find the comprehensive and coordinated treatment of the concept of work in this book most illuminating.

Drawing on a number of disciplines – psychology, sociology, industrial relations, human resource management and economics – and their complex interrelationships, the book shows their relevance for policy and practice in the management of workers. Apart from the numerous sources consulted – more than 800 are cited (although absent is R.H. Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926)) – the historical approach, going back to ancient times in some cases, provides an interesting perspective on the development and application of the concepts.

Work is given a broad definition, as 'purposeful human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that has economic or symbolic value'. This definition 'is intended to foster a broad, inclusive approach to thinking about work, not to delimit what work is and is not' (p. 2). Labour is synonymous with work.

A convenient summary of the definitions and intellectual roots of the 10 concepts identified is presented in a table early in the book (p. 14), followed

by 10 chapters discussing each concept. Part of the table is reproduced as follows:

WORK AS	DEFINITION
1 a curse	An unquestioned burden necessary for human survival and maintenance
2 freedom	A way to achieve independence from nature or other humans and to express human creativity
3 a commodity	An abstract quantity of productive effort that has tradable economic value
4 occupational citizenship	An activity pursued by human members of a community entitled to certain rights
5 disutility	A lousy activity tolerated to obtain goods and services that provide pleasure
6 personal fulfilment	Physical and psychological functioning that (ideally) satisfies individual needs
7 a social relation	Human interaction embedded in social norms, institutions, and power structures
8 caring for others	The physical, cognitive, and emotional effort required to attend to and maintain others
9 identity	A method for understanding who you are and where you stand in the social structure
10 service	The devotion of effort to others, such as God, household, community or country

Each of these, in conjunction with others rather than solely, affects the nature of employment to a greater or lesser extent. The table provides a convenient list of boxes to tick when analysing occupations and their context. No doubt there are times when, for some, work is a curse – think of underground coal miners. But, for most, work is associated with other considerations. Work as (legal) freedom is of particular relevance to industrial relations and labour economics. Freedom from the power of the master under slavery and serfdom allows workers (in theory and under common law) to pick and choose for whom and where they will work and on what terms. They have the freedom to own and to contract their labour. This was a great breakthrough for workers. However, such freedom is qualified. Thus, Master and Servant statutes have restricted this freedom. Moreover, the clash between status and freedom persists. In reality, large numbers do not have the opportunity to pick and choose where they will work and on what terms. An aspect of slavery, being under the direction of the boss, still exists for many.

Work as a commodity like other factors of production, commonly assumed in economic theory, is a convenient way of analysing market processes; but ignoring the human factor could lead to misguided industrial relations policy.

However, the development of two other concepts in conjunction with the freedom concept – namely, occupational citizenship and personal fulfilment – provide the basis for an Human Resource Management/Industrial Relations (HRM/IR) policy giving weight to the human rights concept and so balancing workers' and employer's rights. Such an approach, argues Budd, allows industrial relations to be seen more realistically as constituting the pluralist – conflicting and common interests between worker and employer, rather than the unitarist model – in which the two sides are assumed to have congruent interests. The addition of personal fulfilment to the freedom and occupational concepts – job satisfaction induces productivity – provides a further refinement to HRM/IR policy. In contrast, Taylorism, by dumbing down tasks, makes work drudgery for many and moves power in the direction of the employer.

Work also has a social dimension that, if ignored by management, can strain worker–employer relations. Conventions and norms of fairness – substantive and procedural – play an important role in such relations. These relate to pay levels (especially relativities), hierarchical status and the distribution of power within an organization. New conventions may arise as a result of fundamental technological and economic changes and, in so doing, change the balance of power between worker and employer. The industrial revolution brought workers together under one roof and provided the basis for collective bargaining, strengthened by the social acceptance of trade unions and the change in the power balance. It seems that there is a return to the earlier convention of individual bargaining in many countries. Consider the effect of opening up the economy to global competition on the acceptance by workers, however grudgingly, of the practice of relocating industries to other countries, of the use of contract labour and of significant changes in relative rewards. A culture of worker suspicion and hostility towards management may persist despite the fact that the historical elements underlying such a culture no longer exist. Conventions have also played a part in gender delineation of work and pay. This convention changed dramatically especially in wartime and, once dented, provided the basis for continuing change.

Although interesting as concepts of work, the chapters on 'work as caring for others' (e.g. household work) and work 'as service' (e.g. religious, patriotic) are less relevant for HRM/IR and labour economics. On the other hand, work as identity can reinforce or diminish the sense of social status and personal fulfilment that may have a bearing on these areas. Thus, HRM policy may seek to promote a unitarist model by encouraging workers to identify closely with the interests of the organization through sporting facilities, uniforms and company-promoted travel. But, as Budd points out, there can be conflict between work-imposed identity and the workers' authentic perception of themselves. Further, workers may have a strong working-class identity with largely conflicting interests to their employer. However, identity may not be associated only with work. Other activities – for example, sport and religion – may feature more prominently.

Underlining the fundamental importance of work, the author states that his objective is:

> to provide a foundation for a deep understanding of work through ten conceptualizations of work. These conceptualizations represent a critical synthesis of academic theories of work from across the social and behavioural sciences and important philosophical traditions. An explicit appreciation of the various conceptualizations of work can promote cross-disciplinary understanding and dialogue. (pp. 181–182)

Scholars, especially in HRM/IR and labour economics, will find this a valuable source for teaching and research.

Reference

Tawney RH (1926) *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study*. London: John Murray.

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Claire Kelliher and Julia Richardson (eds) *New Ways of Organizing Work: Developments, Perspectives and Experiences*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2011. 176 pp., US$125.00. (hbk).

The collection of chapters in this book is based on a European Group for Organization Studies conference on 'New Ways to Work' in 2009. The chapters are loosely based around this theme. The editors, Clare Kelliher and Julia Richardson, provide an introduction, which outlines the context to the development of new ways of working. They identify three structural causes of new ways of working – globalization, increased competitive pressures and the adoption of information and communications technology (ICT). Responding to these changes, they discern a shift in societal attitudes, with growing concern about the balance between work and non-work activities. Besides reference to the EU directive on working time, there is no discussion of the interaction of the structural factors with the diminished role of the state and the emphasis on the individualized nature of the employment relationship since the 1970s.

In the chapters, there is a preponderance of organizations in Anglo-capitalist countries, including the UK, Ireland, the US, Canada and Australia, although the Netherlands and France also feature. The research approach adopted is mainly qualitative, with two chapters using surveys. Most of the employees studied are professional and managerial workers, except for a study of temporary agency workers in hotels in Australia.

Insofar as the book has an underlying theme, it is about the possibilities for working away from a normal work-site through use of ICT, which is discussed in most of the chapters. The authors of the various chapters implicitly or explicitly adopt a social-constructionist approach with regard to the relation between ICT and work organization. The ability to connect to other staff