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“Work, as we usually think of it, is energy expended for a further end in view; play is energy expended for its own sake, as with children’s play, or as manifestation of the end or goal of work, as in “playing” chess or the piano. Play in this sense, then, is the fulfilment of work, the exhibition of what the work has been done for.”

**(Northrop Frye (1912–1991), Canadian critic. *The Great Code: The Bible in Literature*)**

There are, literally, tens if not hundreds of definitions for work that mostly relate to the concept that it is something we expend effort on, individually and often as part of a team, a group, a company or an organization, to enable the whole to complete tasks in order to achieve plans or objectives. If you read the Bible you might note that Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden of Eden and made to work, as a punishment for a misdemeanour, in order to eat and to exist. Therefore, it could be suggested that many forms of work are not pleasurable but almost a form of punishment, indeed work can be a drudge, it can be stressful, difficult and sometimes dangerous, but, it can, occasionally, be well paid, stimulating, enjoyable even fulfilling. However, if we wish to maintain a moderate standard of living then we have to work and how much we enjoy what we do will depend on the relationship between the owner of a company or the managers of an organization and the employees.

I believe that Northrop Frye is suggesting that we carry out forms of work at a pace in order to achieve a goal or an objective but we expend energy at play because we enjoy doing it then may be we need to re-think our priorities and learn to expend more energy at play than at work? Or, should we subscribe, perhaps, to the view of Kay Stepkin, the director of a bread bakery in the United States of America who suggested,

“Work is an essential part of being alive. Your work is your identity. It tells you who you are. It’s gotten so abstract. People don’t work for the sake of working. They’re working for a car, a new house, or a vacation. It’s not the work itself that’s important to them.”

**(Kay Stepkin, U.S. baker. As quoted in *Working* by Studs Terkel (1973))**

The questions are, surely, is work really our identity and does it really shout to others what we are? That might be the case for those who are easily identifiable such as policemen, firemen, nurses, airline pilots or naval and military officers but does it really apply to the vast majority of people who go to work in similar grey clothes and work in similar grey buildings and do similar grey tasks? Do we all enjoy what we do in the world of work or are we all really only working for yet more visible signs of affluence and influence, houses, cars, clothes and the latest gadgets and do we have enough time for play after work and how much time do we have for our children?

The Latin phrase in the title means, I understand, that ‘a dog must be bad indeed not to be worthy of a bone’; and, nowadays the phrase is taken to mean that ‘the labourer is worthy of his hire’, in other words a man must be paid at least the going rate for his efforts.

But, is that really the case and are our efforts and actions not only rewarding, in the financial sense, but also rewarding mentally, emotionally and spiritually? Or, has work at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries become something that, having been promised some decades ago that we would enjoy more and better leisure time, we do grudgingly; and, increasingly, is there something missing from the way we conduct our lives and business? Has the urge, the desire for bigger, better, faster and more expensive houses and cars and holidays and forms of travel meant that we have lost all notion of community, society and obligation?

And, when we talk about religious beliefs, and much of the world has some form of religion and most of them appear to espouse the concepts of pursuing ethical, social and moral as well as spiritual values and beliefs, how many actually make the effort to be a good neighbour?

For example, 5000 years ago the Egyptians had a civilisation that understood mathematics and construction, how else could they have built one of the wonders of the world their pyramids and temples, and they managed to cultivate the earth from the Nile waters as well as produce pottery, jewellery and paintings, had medical or medicinal knowledge and involved themselves in other social activities. They were a civilised nation, well in advance of other civilisations, and everyone had a job of work to do in the overall scheme of Egyptian society.

At that time the primary objective of all Egyptians, from the lowest to the highest, was to achieve equilibrium in everything they did with their life so that when they died the god Horus would note that they had achieved a balance and would approve their existence in the after-life. Hence the wall paintings showing the god weighing and balancing hearts. If they had not achieved a balance, checked by weighing their heart against their body, then dogs would eat them. I wonder how, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one balances personal effort, progress, the creation of wealth and the trappings of success and excess against having a moral, ethical and social conscience and doing good deeds? And, I wonder how many of us would fail the Horus scale test?

Consumerism and images of the perfect model, the perfect family, the perfect house and the perfect existence are fuelled by the media and this does little more than encourage, exhort and fill ordinary people with the desire to earn and spend more and more. This relentless drive to not only climb whatever corporate ladder exists in order to earn more, to spend and consume more and maybe even to pursue the concept of happiness at whatever cost is what is driving people to insanity via stress. It is further fuelled by the concept of competition, part of the bedrock of capitalism, and it is gradually pushing people to the depths of frustration and exhaustion. In so doing they are losing the ability to best manage their time. By that I mean time with their spouses and family, time to enjoy doing what they might choose to do if they had the wherewithal, financial acumen, to spend more of their personal time. So, we have a veritable 'Catch 22' scenario.

But, the fact remains, as Francois Noel-Babeuf, a French journalist and commentator on social values wrote in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the greater wealth one individual obtains is at the expense of some other human beings.

"Nothing has been better proven than this maxim: that one succeeds in having too much only by causing others not to have enough."

**(Francois-Noel Babeuf (Gracchus) 1760 – 1797)**

In today's capitalist economies those human beings might be in the immediate vicinity, in the same state or county or in another country churning out the products that increase the wealth of a few and exacerbate the economic, social and political divide. The facts are that the UK and the USA remain very unequal societies and that is unlikely to change. In the USA it is estimated that 1 per cent of the population owns a third of their nation's wealth and some 33 million Americans live in poverty. Wealth in that supposed democratic capitalist society is concentrated among the elite who include chief executives of large organizations and media barons who are all paid excessive annual salaries. This trend is continuing upwards driven by the demand for consumer products and fuelled by marketing media hype.

Unfortunately, and like other American ideas, fads and social excesses, the process of US-style capitalism, has gradually crossing the pond and crept into UK Plc. In the UK the wealthiest 1 per cent own a fifth of the nation's wealth, the bottom 50 per cent own about 5 percent and twenty per cent of the population live in poverty. Thus, we have the spectre of greedy bosses, uncontrolled or perhaps uncontrollable pay rises and share options driven by a social elite who, possibly, belong to the same clubs, societies and institutions and maybe attended the same public schools and universities and it is leading to corruption where already wealthy people are sometimes known to lie, cheat and steal to get even more money.

This economic and socially divisive programme confirms the maxim that power corrupts but that absolute power corrupts absolutely and it can be applied to politics and business because the two have become increasingly intertwined in the last few decades.

Uncontrolled capitalism does not have much in common with democracy; rather the accumulation of wealth and influence tends to undermine the very concept of democracy in that those with real economic power can, allegedly, influence those with political power if they so choose. In other words the system can be manipulated through whatever lobbying activities are available and this process can only lead to increased misery through maintaining the 'status quo' and maybe even conflict.

The rapid growth in affluence, some might suggest mainly among the top 10 or 20 per cent of people in advanced industrialised and mainly western economies, over, say, the last 5 decades, reminds me of Harold Macmillan's phrase of the late 1950's "You've never had it so good"; but, the increase in wealth for some has not necessarily led to a relative increase in happiness and this is born out by an increasingly unhappy generations of children and teenagers. Indeed, if you listen to many people commuting on trains and other public transport systems to and from work or going about their shopping you might realise that unhappiness with their lot is an increasing commodity.

And, if you listen even more closely, sometimes you cannot help but overhear conversations on trains when people are using mobiles; it has everything to do with 'keeping up with the Joneses'. This tends to translate into the fact that they are not paid as much as someone else in the same or a similar job, or that they work as hard as someone else in another profession but are not paid as much, or that a friend or colleague is going on a second holiday abroad this year and they cannot afford one.

Many not only dislike their job, and by that I mean not only a lack of incentive but also a lack of opportunity or promotion prospects, but they also dislike commuting and the associated stress of travelling long distances to and from their place of work. When asked what they might do if they won the lottery the immediate response in many cases is "to pack in the job". I wonder if any companies have made any effort to find out what really makes their employees' tick, what they do not like about their jobs, what causes stress and frustration and why they leave?

People are motivated to do what is required of them for a variety of reasons and few of them are altruistic. Some are driven by the desire to succeed, the ambition to climb the corporate ladder and yet many others work in order to survive. Some people work in order to establish and maintain a lifestyle and to provide their family with opportunities that they might not have had and yet others work simply as a means of making money for whatever purpose. And, yet others, because of choice or perhaps circumstance, are able to carry out voluntary work and put something back into their communities and sometimes for little or no remuneration.

But not everyone is paid a salary that allows for more than basic needs; indeed some organizations go to great lengths not to pay more than the national minimum wage, which, after income taxation and other contributions, does not leave much for people to live on.

Therefore, employment is not necessarily the antidote to poverty that some, politicians, would have us believe, indeed many people struggle to pay not just for their daily bread but also for shelter over their heads. Many part-time and seasonal jobs do not pay a living wage. Of course remuneration, for those at the higher levels and in the higher-paying professions, enables people to purchase what they wish and when they want to. And, whilst it is suggested that money cannot buy you happiness at least one can be comfortably miserable. But, is that really an ambition to pursue?

It appears that in those nations in which the pursuit of wealth and self-aggrandizement has gradually overridden all other considerations, such as social tolerance and moving towards achieving a degree of equality, that indifference is rife. The most senior management adopt the attitude that it is easier to brazen out the failure of social, organizational and strategic policies rather than resign even to the extent of taking large payouts on joining and even larger payouts on leaving that failure behind them. And, politicians appear to adopt a similar attitude.

Frustratingly business leaders conveniently eschew the principle that the creation of wealth, through the managed and controlled efforts of a workforce, includes ethical, moral and social responsibilities. For example, industry, farming and manufacturing in particular, should increasingly ensure that the environment is safeguarded for future generations. Politicians should accept that communities need health, education and training facilities to enable them to progress, and efficient and reliable transport infrastructures to enable them to go about their business.

Nonetheless, what should be of greater concern and must be addressed by such bodies as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (surely a misnomer), the politicians who come together in the Group of G7 - the world's richest nations, and multi-nationals with incomes greater than some undeveloped nations, is the continuing growth of poverty together with unhappiness. Whilst globalisation has helped to swell the coffers of the wealthiest levels in society it has not improved the lot of many through, for example, improved healthcare, including hospitals, doctors and medicines, and the provision of education and training facilities to provide opportunities and enable all people to grow.

Indeed, as I have suggested in a previous article entitled 'Can we really achieve a life/work balance' there has been no real improvement in social mobility, allowing people to climb the social ladder, despite political rhetoric insisting that more children from poorer families are gaining access to university education. Why are there increasing numbers of billionaires and multi-millionaires when there are so many living in poverty and want, when there is a shortage of hospitals and medical staff and when millions go hungry?

It is just possible that, without a turnaround of fortunes and the provision of services and facilities that can be accessed by all people and at every level, in developed as well as developing nations, people will become increasingly reluctant to spend the greater part of their individual lives working for companies to make shareholders and owners even richer. Few, if any in future, would seriously suggest that we should spend something like 70 per cent of our life striving not just for ourselves but more for the benefit of those who already have more than they might reasonably need to maintain a comfortable life-style.

During the Victorian era, which some still speak of as being the ultimate in the concept of work, such work usually meant long, long hours for those in service or in the cotton and woollen factories, mills and the steel blast furnaces that rose up during the expansion of the industrial revolution. People who 'worked' for a living had to do so because they knew that it was necessary to enable them and their families to exist even at a pitiful level, the alternative being the workhouse or poorhouse or even jail and sometimes transportation to the colonies. I have often wondered whether or not those people who were transported to the colonies, and survived the hazardous journey, actually ended up with a better way of life than had they remained.

For the titled and landed gentry, for bankers and for the mill and factory owners work was, perhaps, more a case of bartering and negotiating prices for imports and finished products and paperwork to maintain income and status. This was achieved by making sure that they had a plentiful supply of raw material, and that included workers, and through contact and liaison ensuring a ready supply of customers for their finished products. Management, under those conditions and in that era, meant having a representative presence in the factory or mill and issuing orders and instructions. In some strata this attitude has barely changed.

But it was the introduction of the automated assembly line in factories during the 1920's and 1930's that actually re-enforced the association of work being a commitment to time and schedules and to the concept of time and motion studies in order to determine and set pay levels. This is how Frederick Taylor, employed in a steelworks in the US, used a stopwatch to measure time versus output and to standardise tasks through time and motion studies. Charlie Chaplin, as I have mentioned previously, ridiculed the idea that people, individuals, should be employed on assembly lines with their whole lives controlled by time on repetitive and soul-destroying jobs in the film 'Modern Times'.

However, as I tried to suggest in a previous article, entitled "What is a job – Work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", organizations now want employees who are not only trained to do the tasks required of them immediately but who are also flexible over working hours and are prepared to accept constant change in the workplace. In return many of those same organizations are still inflexible over working hours, still do not allow teleworking or telecommuting, still do not provide relevant and appropriate training programmes and are not proactive in their system of recruitment. In other words there are still some, backward in my view, companies who choose to exercise command and control rather than learn to manage people.

There are some, management consultants, management writers and business schools at the forefront, who would have us believe that management is simply all about change and that change is about management and that includes new ideas of running corporate organizations in a much more efficient and effective manner in order to increase the 'bottom-line'..

That is why we have such short-term management fads as downsizing, delayering, business process re-engineering, resource re-alignment, upward assessments and maybe even knowledge management. It is why one management fad or idea after another is trotted out and seized upon by senior and middle managers if there is the slightest chance that the implementation of such a plan would increase profitability and thereby boost the value of the company share and therefore increase the value of shareholdings not just of the shareholders but also the directors. However, most of these fads have proved to be short-term measures that eventually destroy value.

I suggest that the fundamental principle of management is about learning how to communicate, motivate, support, encourage and advance people so that they can fulfil their ambition and you cannot do that with flat management structures. Basically, a company or an organization consists of people; those people, at whatever level, communicate and negotiate with people, internally and externally, and are managed by people within some pre-determined economic straightjacket, that is budgets set at a higher level; and, the number of people employed to cover specific tasks is usually determined at a higher level more often than not based on profit margins.

It is unfortunate that too many companies concentrate on policy, processes and procedures and products rather than on personnel. As a result, too much time and effort is concentrated on the 'bottom line' rather than on managing people as individuals. And, it is time to put people, maybe even social values and the environment, before profits. Again, it is only my view, but if companies want to be successful, in the coming decade at least, then they will need to change perspective and learn to meet the requirements of their employees without whom their organizations will fail. As the ISO 9000 series of quality standards suggest, "People at all levels are the essence of an organization and their full involvement enables their abilities to be used for the organization's benefit."

The rapid move from manufacturing, light as well as heavy electrical and mechanical engineering, to the service sectors beginning in the 1980's also saw the rise of the, supposed, knowledge worker with enhanced academic qualifications and an understanding of computer systems and programmes and able to take on various tasks. This concept, of teams of people with similar knowledge and ability, can clearly be seen in the information technology sectors where there is an apparent equality of knowledge but not necessarily an equality of ability and managerial skills.

However, the idea that all these people are subordinates is ludicrous and if managers, mainly at middle levels, try to exercise too rigid control over their output they are likely to move to a company that will value their knowledge, ability and effort without managerial control. In knowledge-based organizations, and increasingly business in UK and the developed world is primarily that, it is paramount to trust individuals to get on with and accept responsibility for doing what is required of them without the need for micro-management, otherwise employees will object and then leave.

Managers, at all levels, must realise that their success no longer hinges on the way that they control their staff and their budget but how they interrelate and interact with their staff and other managers in other sections, other groups and other companies. Organizations should move from the idea that a manager of a section is paid more than the people in the section for the simple reason that management and administration is not the same as carrying out the actual tasks that provide the services or products that provide the profit. Indeed, there needs to be greater flattening of pay structures, not management structures, rather than the present system that achieves a very sharp increase as one reaches a level a few rungs from the top. If not then the level of dissatisfaction already apparent is likely to increase.

In the same vein, the flattening of management structures has led to a situation whereby people joining organizations are no longer selected, trained and groomed for succession. Indeed the rapid rate of turnover of managers, at every level and for a variety of reasons, makes the task considerably more difficult. Even in those companies that make an effort to identify those with ability in order to prepare them for greater responsibility and accountability are often thwarted when one of their possible proteges moves to another company, even a competitor.

This tends to happen because people are lured either by a bigger pay packet or more perks, or the chance of earlier promotion or, increasingly, because they are disenchanted with their work, status and position in their present organization; which brings me back to the original theme of the subject matter of work and remuneration and achieving a better life/work balance and happiness. Whether you accept it or not it appears to be a fact that increasing numbers of people operating at lower levels within companies and organizations either dislike or hate their job.

Research, in the US, for example, suggests this is either because of the relationship with their immediate line manager or the most senior management, the pay structure, promotion opportunities or because they are not kept informed of changes in working practices or procedures, pay levels and company pension schemes or manpower levels that affect them. But they often stick with the job because of a lack of real opportunities but are often prepared to jump ship if something slightly better comes along. As a result motivation, commitment and effort are curtailed not only because delayering programmes have removed the opportunity to progress because they are seen and treated as being unequal.

This system is exacerbated by pay structures based on perceived performance that distort the level of pay between people of the same or a similar level within a company. And, where such a pay structure persists, other than a connection to length of service, the level of co-operation, communication and cohesiveness is reduced yet further. Ways around this particular difficulty is to ensure that a basic annual pay award is given to everyone within a division plus there is an overall group or team bonus and then those who might have performed extra receive additional increases.

However, a society, any society, that is based on the concept that we are all, simply, individuals who pursue individual ends and who are consumers of products or services is founded on shifting sands. Whilst we all have a strong incentive to work to achieve personal objectives or goals we are all, nonetheless, members of a society with wider political, economic and social responsibilities.

Again, I am reminded of the Victorians some of whom, whilst working to maintain their own family prosperity and position, also adopted an altruistic approach to the people who worked with and for them, for example, the Cadbury-Bourneville factories in the Midlands of the UK and the Port Sunlight factories and housing in Lancashire. Many of these entrepreneurs belonged to the Society of Brethren, the Quakers, and other forms of Christian religion that were persecuted, to some extent, and many of whom emigrated to the United States.

All these businessmen had the ability, and the willingness, to combine the principle of producing profits whilst sharing their good fortune with their employees and their immediate community and are held in much higher regard than those who work on the principle that the only business of business is business. They understood the basic principle that "the labourer is worthy of his hire".

At some stage the whole organization of companies, I believe, will have to be re-assessed not just in terms of structure and levels of management but in terms of establishing better working relationships and that means understanding the needs of individuals as well as the overall needs of a section, a group or a division. Managers, at every level, will have to learn to change tack from controlling, directing and chasing to supporting, protecting and teaching people, individuals, to succeed and to progress.

There needs to be a fundamental re-assessment of working hours, conditions and lifestyles from the ingrained 0900 – 1700 time-keeping with time off for lunch, to one that allows more people more time, when necessary or when required, to spend with their family and not chained to their desk. It is only when people feel that they have a share in their organization, through participatory management and decision-making as well as financial involvement that productivity might increase, competitiveness might improve and profitability might follow. As Professor Lord Wedderburn of Charlton QC, honorary President of the Industrial Law Society, stated in a letter to The Financial Times of 29 January 2003,

“The extraordinary idea that British companies will be incapacitated if they adopt the standards of consultation with their workforce accepted by our European partners sadly reflects, too, the medieval attitudes that infect so many of our captains (let alone the sergeant majors) of industry. If those with power over the lives of others would realise that ordinary folk respond best to those who accept that they have human rights to a share in such decisions, and that they have the need and the right to combine together (in the words of many international conventions) “for the protection of their interests”, they might – just – have the chance of creating the trust that the structures of our unequal society otherwise militate against.”

**(Lord Wedderburn of Charlton. Letter in The Financial Times 29 January 2003)**

In other words companies will not only need to recruit properly they will need to train properly, motivate, reward (that includes promotion as well as pay), and generally treat employees with respect if they want to succeed. This is not new, in fact when referring to the organization and management of slaves on their farms some 2000 years ago the Romans knew that when living and working conditions are improved and food rations increased there was an apparent increase in the willingness of slaves to work.

I seem to remember that is precisely the type of management that I was taught during my time in the Royal Navy and, contrary to popular belief, there are some lessons that the commercial world might learn from the military, not least being motivation, communication, training, administration and moral support. I might accept that I am somewhat biased but there are many lessons that UK Plc can learn from the management organization, structure and administration of naval and military organizations rather than the military learn from the commercial world.

Lessons such as how to provide the right services and logistical support to personnel and to determine the optimum rather than the minimum number of people for the tasks required. How to ensure that your team, group, section or division has the right equipment, provided that is politicians have the common sense and the wherewithal to ensure that our Armed Forces have the platforms, vehicles and weapons and in sufficient numbers, and sufficient time to complete the tasks required of them without placing them under unnecessary pressure is important.

And, just as important making the time to brief people on an objective or a plan as part of an overall strategy so they know where to go and who to deal with to provide help and assistance and how to define and communicate tactics, or short-term measures, to achieve the objectives in order to complete strategic policy and plans.

There are still some organizations that are wedded to the basic concepts of downsizing and delayering followed by re-engineering, re-allocating and re-organization, based on the desire for change, and that enter into such programmes on a regular basis. That approach creates a continual air of uncertainty and leads to even lower levels of productivity, efficiency and effectiveness.

I suggest that those companies and organizations that constantly use such programmes, that consistently fail to keep their employees informed and communicate policy, plans or objectives more clearly in future, that continually choose to ignore the needs and requirements of their staff and train them and reward them appropriately will, inexorably, disappear. That is because morale will deteriorate, employees will express their views and opinions, when asked, to friends, colleagues and acquaintances and the word will get around and, an air of neglect perhaps decay will pervade the business.

(5170 including quotations)

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