



Editorial

Rehumanising Work to Herald a 5th Industrial Revolution *Gideon Arulmani**

The Great Rethink

At last, the masks are off, handwashing while singing the birthday song is not mandatory, we are free to travel wherever we want to or not, we can shake each other by the hand...why, we can even hug! Pandemic related lockdowns and restrictions have been lifted and it seems we are free to return to pre-pandemic ways of living and working.

But are we returning to pre-pandemic ways of living and working?

Here is some startling data published by the Workforce Institute (2022) of its survey conducted between September 16th and October 1st 2022, covering about 2,200 employees, high-ranking C-level executives and HR professionals from the United States, Australia/New Zealand, Canada, France, Germany, India, Mexico, the Netherlands, and the U.K.:

- 46% of employees within this sample said they would not recommend their company nor their profession to their children or any young person they care about.
- 38% wouldn't wish their job even on their worst enemy!
- 57% of those in the high wage bracket (100 to 200 thousand dollars per annum) are saying: "I wish someone had warned me not to take my current job", "I don't want to work anymore", "I regret choosing my line of work."
- Barely 28% and 11% respectively felt they are in a career in which they wish to grow and feel that their job is their calling, while 61% admit they go to work to collect a pay check, 'clock out,' and go home.

Stepping twelve months further back, Arulmani and Kumar (in press) in their review of reports published over 2021 on attitudes to work indicate that large numbers of workers are expressing deep disillusionment with careers they had diligently and successfully practised for many years. Millions of workers are using phrases such as 'toxic', 'being trapped and exploited', 'exhausted' and 'stressed', to describe their experience of work. In April 2021 alone over 4 million workers in the United States quit their careers (e.g., Matuson, 2021). This massive and unprecedented employee turnover has led management specialists to coin phrases such as "the great resignation", "the big quit" and "turnover tsunami" (Jorgenson, 2021). We are seeing an active rise in 'anti-work' mindsets. During the lockdowns people have had the opportunity to introspect about the way they work and live their lives. In fact, we could say that The Great Resignation has been brought about by the opportunity for a "Great Rethink" (Arulmani & Kumar, in press). A common thread running through these pandemic epiphanies seems to suggest that we don't actually like our jobs. How did this happen? Are these viscerally negative sentiments linked to specific jobs or toward work itself? Does this have something to do with the manner in which work, and career, have evolved?

Global Trends in the History of Work

The tendency to work has characterised human existence ever since the hands of our ancient forefathers grasped a chunk of stone and transformed it into a tool. Over thousands of years, it is the human being's highly developed capability to intentionally and intelligently apply effort and energy to reach a goal, solve a problem and achieve a target, that gave birth to a foundational human

***Gideon Arulmani**, Co-Editor, IJCLP. Director, The Promise Foundation. email: garulmani@t-p-f.org

institution: the occupation. History shows us that while the *emergence* of occupations is a universal phenomenon, the *practice* of occupations has differentiated into the *livelihood* and *careerist* modes of engagement. It was perhaps during the first industrial revolution that notion of a personal “career” originated (e.g., Parsons, 1909). This new form of practicing an occupation called for fitting into *predefined* institutional structures and following prescribed rules, while *competing* constantly to excel against others. The careerist places him/herself between the traces of a career and willingly meets its demands because it is believed that this investment of effort yields substantial personal gain. But, since the last century of its existence, has the careerist approach to the practice of occupation lived up to these expectations?

Mechanisation and automation brought about by the first and second Industrial Revolutions, perhaps triggered the first departure from livelihood orientations. Work shifted from the “handmade” to the “machine made” and reduced direct human engagement with work. The Protestant Reformation provided moral sanction to embed individualistic materialism into the motivation for work. The third Industrial Revolution, undergirded by the computer/digital revolution caused the next big shift. Here again we saw and continue to see a further distancing between work and the human worker. And today it is said that the fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is upon us. The technological advances introduced by these revolutions are leading not merely to automation but to the autonomisation of work tools and processes (e.g., driverless cars) leading in turn to a further devalorisation of human effort. This and the impacts of the earlier shifts in human engagement with work could possibly explain the almost universal theme underlying the narratives of those who are disillusioned with their careers: a loss of connection, depletion of meaning and purpose in relation to their work tasks.

The question now is whether this phenomenon has been *caused* by the pandemic. Will these deep frustrations with work abate as the effects of the pandemic decline? A closer look indicates that while the pandemic might have been a trigger, unhappiness with work, not just the conditions of work, runs deeper. It is important that career development specialists, reckon with the possibility that the pandemic has unmasked not just an immediate, but a chronic unhappiness with careerist orientations to work. People are leaving their careers with the intention of retraining for other jobs. Many are preparing for new careers. But would fatigue and frustration be reexperienced once the honeymoon with their new career has passed? Is a more fundamental, attitudinal shift required of the careerist?

Is it time for a Fifth Industrial Revolution?

To date, it has mainly been the economists who have commented on human-work transitions, where productivity, information technology and the market remain at the center. And these revolutions seem to have brought us to the “great resignations”! Is it time for the guidance fraternity to take the lead and bring the *person* back to the center? What are some of the trends in the evolution of work that could inform such a revolution?

Stress and fatigue could underlie both livelihood and careerist orientations. It seems however that a deep sense of disequilibrium and loss of wellbeing is reported more frequently amongst careerists. The common attitude toward livelihood is that it meets subsistence needs and is practiced by humbler (usually rural) folk such as farmers, artisans and skilled workers. However, an interesting trend seen is that careerists who have made shifts to a more livelihood-oriented practice of occupation demonstrate greater contentment with their new work orientations (Arulmani, in press). The following quotation from an interview with a computer scientist who shifted to a much more manual engagement with work is revealing: “It was all very exciting at first... pushing buttons to get machines to do things. But over time, I felt ...I was not using any actual skills. The algorithm was doing it. I’ve left all that now... some friends and I have gotten together to start a haberdashery. I’m happily sewing and selling buttons now... not tapping them!”

Against this background, could a fifth industrial revolution consider bidirectional collaborations between careerist orientations and “livelihood thinking” (Arulmani, in press). With this as a guiding principle, could we as career development practitioners describe a new world of work that:

- re-examines the dynamics of competition versus collaboration, independence versus interdependence, and duty to the in-group versus personal rights as factors that influence engagement with work.

- considers the decades old Gandhian philosophy of *Nai Talim* (New Education) based upon the principle that pedagogy could be located around work.
- acknowledges the cultural reality that children are a part of the fabric of the family's ethos of work and look at ways of educating children such that they begin to ponder over the meaning and purpose of work for themselves.
- explores what manual work could mean in an increasingly digitalized and virtualized world. Indeed, there are sound work principles to be learned from the craftsperson and artisan who even before the industrial revolution, working by hand, used simple tools with highly developed skill, to weave cloth, construct furniture, build pyramids, temples, cathedrals and ships! (Arulmani and Kumar, in press).

Turning to the contents of this the 11th issue of the IJCLP, Kjærgård et al., in their paper, "Career Reflections in Sámi Reindeer Herding...", present evidence that make a strong case for bidirectionality between career orientations and livelihood thinking. Robertson in his paper on "Career Development and Criminal Justice", turns our attention to the intersections between career development and criminal justice and presents five foundational principles that could integrate career development with efforts to promote peace and justice. Pickerell and Hopkins present the compelling argument that "Metrics Matter when Building a Sustainable Career Development Sector." They point out that it is vital that those in frontline practice learn to collect data to articulate the impact of their services. In the final paper of this issue, Bhogle discusses the "Challenges Facing Career Counselling and Guidance Service Delivery in India." This paper highlights the importance of recognising the challenges facing service delivery in India and developing strategies to mitigate them.

Today human work occurs in the interface between financial capitalism and an amoral technological evolution on the one hand and the forced abdication of human cognitive and cultural engagement with work on the other (Arulmani, 2018). The pandemic is a new milestone in the evolution of work. Attitudes toward work have changed dramatically. Going forward, the challenge before the career development professional is to acknowledge that an interplay can exist between the preindustrial, the industrial and postindustrial, between the personal and the shared, the handcrafted and the machine-made. Our profession is well positioned to contribute to rehumanising work to herald a fifth revolution, a revolution that valorises human effort.

Gideon Arulmani,

Co-Editor,

Indian Journal of Career and Livelihood Planning.

References

- Arulmani, G. (2018). Cultural preparedness: Equilibrium and its alteration. In M. McMahon & N. Arthur (Eds.), *Contemporary theories of career development: International perspectives* (pp. 195-207). London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Arulmani, G., Kumar S. (in press). Livelihood thinking for career development: Rethinking work from alternative perspectives. In D. L. Blustein, Flores, L. Y. (Ed.), *Rethinking work: Essays on building a better workplace*. New York: Routledge.
- Arulmani, G. (in press). Rethinking education, training and work: Time for a great re-think? *NORRAG Special Issue 08: The education-training-work continuums: Pathways to socio-professional inclusion for youth and adults*.
- Jorgenson, D. (2021). [The Great resignation](#). Archived from the original on 2021-11-10. Retrieved 2021-10-25. *Washington Post* –
- Matuson, R. (2021, November 10). [The big quit: Fact or fiction?](#) *Forbes*.
- Parsons, F. (1909). *Choosing a vocation*. Boston, USA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Workforce Institute. (2022). *We can fix work*. MA, United States: Workforce Institute at UKG.