Work and Well-Being: A Conceptual Proposal
Some Remarks

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The underlying paper is


The basic idea

In order to conceptualize work from a capability perspective consider work as a characteristic-providing activity where

- ... characteristics are converted into well-being
- ... well-being is multidimensional
- ... fundamental unfreedoms can be taken explicitly into account
The conceptual structure

Capability set of individual $i$

$$Q_i = \{ b_i \mid b_i = f(c(x_i), z_i, z_s, z_e) \quad \forall x_i \in X_i \}$$ (1)

Characteristics

1. are objective to goods and measurable in principle
2. all individual obtain the same amount from a given good
3. one good may provide several characteristics
   (and each characteristic may be obtained from different goods)

The resource vector $x_i$ includes time and its various uses, including hours worked (potentially even in different jobs).

Note: Sen (1985) references Lancaster (1966) for characteristics (who also provides and illustration for occupational choice).
The labour well-being link

contracted wage
perm. contract
pension claim
empl. protection
hours limit
auton. decisions
repetitive tasks
risk injury
risk fatality

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social security system
quality of judicial system
social norms & values
(employment) legislation
individual predispositions

health
agency
social participation
flow
political participation
in public wo shame
self-respect
practical reason

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Key functionings related work

• health
  ▶ silicosis, asbestos
  ▶ miners’ nystagmus
  ▶ postural defects
  ▶ occupational diseases

• mental health
  ▶ post-traumatic stress disorder
  ▶ burnout
  ▶ fear of failure
  ▶ depression

• without shame
  ▶ stigmatization of jobs & joblessness

• agency
  ▶ job as a means to achieve self-set goals
  ▶ doctors, politicians, journalists, researcher
  ▶ vocation or calling

• self-respect
  ▶ comply with internalized norms and self conceptions

• (economic & social) security

• being in the zone (flow)

• contribute one’s share

• happiness, education, practical reason

→ a job may be perceived as multi-purpose mean
Some desirable features

1. characteristics approach allows for **several jobs** and thus source of characteristics and, thereby, **more complex arrangements** (e.g., one job for more econ security; one for achieving self-set goals)

2. natural **interface with previous research** (related data and theory); CA as such is underspecified

3. empirical appl. may be informed by related research on particular **section of the labour market** in a particular part of the world w.r.t. both **relevant characteristics and functionings** (e.g., health)

4. clear structure to study job-wellbeing relevant effects, **functioning by functioning** (while accounting for conversion factors)
Some insights from poverty research

1. Poverty is conceptualised as capability deprivation, so in the functioning space, but **across functionings** (as multiple deprivation)

2. Conceptual structure facilitates deprivation **indicator construction**
   - resources → characteristics → conversion factors → functioning

3. ‘**Resource dimensions**’ may be justified in applied work (e.g., poverty measures). Likewise, an ‘**employment dimension**’ may make sense in a capability-framed poverty measure.

4. Shared **structure and framework of measures facilitate transparency** despite varying content of the measure (different countries may have different dimensions and indicators)
On the intrinsic value of work

1. ‘intrinsic value of work’ can be found in **valuation and achievements in many functionings**, including
   - agency, respecting yourself, flow experience, happiness, contribute one’s share, social & political participation

2. the **content of ‘meaningful work’** varies with both (i) particular individual and (ii) job(s) under consideration
   - for measurement: need for assumption (evidence & arguments)

3. oftentimes **high achievements** in those functionings may follow from non-work activities too (e.g., spiritual life style, hobbies, gardening, etc.)
Some concerns regarding a capability of work

1. huge complexity within a single dimension of well-being, which varies within and across countries and over time.

2. risk of losing conceptual strengths of the CA
   ▶ charcteristics are related to job and external to the individual (other well-being relevant aspects may vary with individuals)
   ▶ conversion factors are a natural way to conceptualize why same objective job characteristics may translate into effects for different dimensions of human wellbeing

3. nowadays work is often considered a specific domain of life almost distinct from the rest of our lives;
   ▶ not an imperative necessity, but rather expression of how societies are currently organised (e.g., Taylorism, pervasiveness of wage labor)