

Conceptualizing Work within the Capability Approach

Thematic Panel - Reasons to value work - instrumental or intrinsic to wellbeing?

Nicolai Suppa
University of Barcelona

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Objectives

Conceptualization of work within the capability approach (CA)
—at the most general level: the approach itself.

- 1 permit to **inform plurality of exercises** one could do within CA (guidance on operationalization)
 - ▶ **comprehensive assessment** of well-being (WB) and agency
 - ▶ in-depth study of **individual dimensions** in specific contexts
 - ▶ both theoretical and empirical work
- 2 applicable to **all forms** of work and **across time** and **space**
 - ▶ employed, self-employed, voluntary worker; formal and informal work
 - ▶ farmers, fishers, and pastoralist, etc (incl. self-sufficient persons)
 - ▶ miners, assembly line workers, sweatshop workers
 - ▶ craftsmen, mechanics, clerks, managers, engineers , lawyers, etc
 - ▶ carer, nurses, teacher and domestic worker
 - ▶ child labour, forced labour, slavery

Work can be seen as a **multi-purpose mean** to achieve wellbeing:

- jobs are seen as **specific configurations of job characteristics** (external to the individual), e.g.,
 - ▶ exposure to hazardous substances
 - ▶ types and intensity of physical activities
 - ▶ contractual aspects (dismissal protection)
 - ▶ contribution to social security
 - ▶ degree of responsibility and decision autonomy
- key **functionings** in the context of work:
 - ▶ health (physically and mentally)
 - ▶ agency (possibly beyond well-being)
 - ▶ political participation (different levels, incl. local organisation)
 - ▶ social participation
 - ▶ appearing in public w/o shame
 - ▶ respecting yourself
- How job characteristics are transformed into WB is governed by individual, social and environmental **conversion factors**.

Selected advantages

- Points explicitly to the role of **social conversion factors**, including social and legal normal which govern the impact on well-being.
- Suggests potentially relevant functionings and job characteristics ('**capability lists**' and '**list of job characteristics**')
- Permits a **mismatch between job and job holder** ('Human beings are thoroughly diverse.' (Sen 1992, p.1))
- Helps to **organise and collate evidence** across disciplines, time and space.
- Clearly distinguishes between **characteristics** pertaining to the job and their impact on human **well-being** (manifold and heterogeneous).
- Explicitly permits to study situations of people holding **several jobs**
- Cautions against too **simplistic evaluation exercises** of jobs (purpose of the study, relevant dimensions,...), points to relevance of context, and permits to study **more complex cases**, such as child labour.

Evaluation: job quality vs well-being

- measuring and analysing job quality is highly policy-relevant
 - job characteristics: **favourable or adverse** for human well-being
 - identify 'bad jobs' (= multiple adverse JC)
 - e.g., none of the available JC supports **social and political participation**
 - e.g., social contacts and relation with colleagues (if any); works council, unions and other participation in decisions at the workplace
 - conclusions w.r.t. **job quality** – justified
 - ▶ job fails to support (or prevents) both social and political participation
 - ▶ legitimate concern and target for public policy
 - conclusion w.r.t. **well-being** – potentially hasty
 - ▶ job holder falls short in political and social participation
 - ▶ other means to achieve WB include (i) secondary jobs, (ii) voluntary work activities (incl., parties, NGOs, etc.), (iii) leisure activities
- ➔ need to **argue or assume** alternative means to be irrelevant to bridge the **gap between job quality and wellbeing** assessment.

The underlying paper is

- Suppa, N. (2019): Work and wellbeing: A conceptual proposal. OPHI Working Paper 131, University of Oxford.