Management and the Meaning of Work

The science of management started as a necessary response to the challenges of the Second Industrial Revolution. From the start, scholars and practitioners faced the problem of dealing with workforces in ways that were both economically efficient and morally respectful. Early discoveries in the science of management delivered huge improvements in productivity, although they sometimes exacerbated tensions with laborers. Further developments led to a better understanding of the motivations and conditions of human work. Studies in leadership and organizational behavior also contributed to the understanding of the subjective dimension of work and its impact in performance and commitment.

Debates around work moved from the question of labor rights at the legal and deontological level to many other aspects of workers’ performance and organization of labor, such as employees’ participation in the governance of the firm or in the definition of their own responsibilities. From the field of psychology, a lot of attention has been paid to meaningful work, which – apart from a clear sense of self – implies an understanding of both the nature and expectations of work environment, and how people deal with their organizations to accomplish their work objectives.

Ultimately a humanistic approach reminds us that there are normative issues at stake in dealing with the meaning of work, such as the meaning and conditions of freedom or dignity; the integration of work in a purposeful life; and so forth. At bottom lies the question of whether work is a purely instrumental activity or has some intrinsic value. The latter is the Catholic Social Teaching perspective, which reinterprets profit as a secondary driver of business organizations, while recognizing its relevance in measuring efficiency, incentivizing improvements and guaranteeing businesses’ sustainability. At that normative level, recent Business Ethics literature has delved into work as an intrinsic human good, and thus emphasized the centrality of work as the formal common good of the firm.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Future of Work

History shows – and literature and the arts have reflected – the traumatic experience of change during the First and Second Industrialization. Thinkers and moral leaders responded to those changes and developed a new understanding of human work and the whole social fabric. Prominent in that sense were the Marxist account of work and its tension with capital; existentialist reactions to the
mechanization of life and the expansion of technology, which could lead to forms of totalitarian communitarianism; and the unique contribution of Catholic Social Teaching, with its Biblical valuation of work and care for the disadvantaged, updating the humanistic tradition of social philosophy. As a result, certain basic rights for workers were recognized, and well-paid, life-long jobs were considered central in the Western hemisphere after World War II. However, in the late 20th Century, new phenomena of unemployment and delocalization of jobs gave rise to social concerns that also included reprehensible working conditions in developing countries.

In the late 20th century and early 21st century, a new set of technological innovations, mostly in the field of computation and communications, led to the so-called Third Industrial Revolution, reinforcing the process of globalization, giving birth to an economy of knowledge, and fostering new financial challenges.

While the implications of the Third Industrial Revolution are still unfolding, new technological disruptions and the promise of immediate breakthroughs at many levels have contributed to the narrative of a Fourth Industrial Revolution in the making. This expression refers to a number of interrelated innovations, characterized - according to Klaus Schwab - “by a range of new technologies that are fusing the physical, digital and biological worlds, impacting all disciplines, economies and industries, and even challenging ideas about what it means to be human.”

There is a growing social concern regarding the disruptive impact of this new wave of technological changes on the future of work, due to a mounting perception of inequality, unsafety and frustrated expectations for the future. Some of the most apparent implications are: new business models; massive technological unemployment, temporary or permanent; issues regarding privacy and safety in an interconnected world; transformation of professions, workplaces and dynamics; most regulatory principles regarding employees no longer being valid; accumulation of wealth by entrepreneurs and investors at the cost of jobs of lower quality; and, of course, challenges for educational institutions and policy makers.

The challenges that lie ahead are not purely technocratic, nor are their potential solutions. Academia must contribute its specific approach, describing and understanding these trends, and suggesting solutions for business organizations, regulators and other social actors. This task requires having an explicit conversation on the deep values at stake – particularly the role of work in human life – to provide a sense of orientation and contribute to social peace and prosperity.

20th Business Ethics Symposium at IESE

The 20th IESE International Symposium on Ethics, Business and Society coincides with the 60th Anniversary of the School. The topic chosen for this edition is consistent with the original inspiration of IESE around the spiritual and human value of all kinds of work. The Symposium is an international and interdisciplinary academic event that aims at high standards of academic rigor and also at a deep impact on responsible business practices.

Business Ethics is a unique academic field that, through multiple methodologies, aspires to contribute to addressing the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in an exceptional way. We welcome papers focused on the current and future transformations of work and their social and moral implications (mainly in business organizations), from a wide range of scientific perspectives: philosophy and
theology, empirical social sciences, law and regulation, humanistic studies such as history and the arts, among others.

We expect to contribute to building a new vision of work that places the centrality of the human being at the core of the definition and practice of work, as well as the centrality of work for the development of societies, as Pope Francis recently declared:

“It is therefore necessary to look without fear, but with responsibility, to the technological transformations of the economy and life, and not to be resigned to the ideology that is gaining ground everywhere, that imagines a world where only half or maybe two-thirds of the workers will work, and the others will be maintained by social subsidies. It must be clear that the real goal to reach is not that of ‘income for all’ but rather, ‘work for all’. Because without work, without work for all, there will be no dignity for all (...) The work of today and that of tomorrow will be different, perhaps very different – we think of the industrial revolution, there has been a change; here too there will be a revolution – it will be different from yesterday's work, but it will have to be work, not pension, not retirement: work.”

Possible Topics for Paper Submissions

Conceptual papers, as well as empirical research, including case studies, are welcome.

A collection of papers will be published in a special issue of one of the major journals of the field [currently in process of negotiation]. The selection process will consider both the academic quality of the paper and its proximity to the general theme of the Symposium.

Relevant topics for submissions may address, but are not restricted to, the following:

1. **Ethical challenges in technological unemployment.** Managing technological disruption responsibly within the firm. Public policy measures. The role of social entrepreneurship.
4. **Educational challenges.** Lifelong learning and talent management. The transformative effect of technology in developing countries.
6. **The meaning of work: philosophical and theological perspectives.** Liberal and Marxian approaches to work. Existential approaches to work and the meaning of work. Aristotelian and virtue ethics approaches. Work and the common good. Ethical concerns of posthumanism and transhumanism. The meaning of work in religious traditions. Theology of work and the meaning of work. Catholic Social Teaching and the meaning of work.
7. **Spirituality in the workplace.** Spirituality of work and organizations. Managing workplace spirituality.

8. **Defining meaningful work.** Ethical and psychological perspectives on meaningful work. Workplace policies fostering meaningful work. Meaningful work and purpose in organizations.

9. **The transformation of work in the arts.** Early industrialization in literature. The corporation and the workplace in the seventh art. Science-fiction intuitions about the future of work.

**Deadlines**

- February 13, 2018: **Paper proposal** of about 1000 words, explaining the aim, methodology, possible findings and relevant references.
- March 6, 2018: **Response** to authors, informing them of acceptance of their proposals.
- June 5, 2018: Deadline for receiving **full papers**. Authors interested in submitting their paper for the **special issue** of the Journal should make their interest explicit in the cover page. An abstract of about 250 words should be included. Length suggested for papers is about 7000 words.
- July 25, 2018: Response to authors of accepted papers for a **review process** for publication in a special issue of one of the major journals of the field [currently in process of negotiation]

**Instructions**

- The official language of the Symposium is English.
- Please send proposals using the paper submission platform at www.iese.edu/20symposium.
- We suggest using Times New Roman 12-point font and a line spacing of 1.5 lines. Place do not insert a line between each paragraph. Title pages are not necessary. Employ endnotes, place page numbers in the lower right corner, and use the style guidelines of the *Journal of Business Ethics* for paper style and references.

**For Further Information**

Prof. Joan Fontrodona  
Phone: +34 932 534 200  
E-mail: 20symposium@iese.edu

**For the Most Updated Information**

www.iese.edu/20symposium