

Work: The Prevailing Paradigm Has Serious Shortcomings

Part 1

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The nature of work is suboptimal, and often detrimental, for propelling organizational accomplishment and people's well-being. For many, the design of work has become dangerously weak for reliably achieving current business requirements, and may be woefully inadequate for the realization of many enterprise strategies. Equally, lopsided constructs of work fail to satisfy the needs of the most desirable, capable and discerning workers. Beyond these growing problems, deficiencies in the prevailing work paradigm are impacting our societies' well-being, on which we all depend. Widespread indications and symptoms of work's many impairments can be found in most working environments, more and more income statements, endless meetings and committees, boardrooms, homes, communities and government capitals.



Today's prevalent, unexamined work paradigm is summarized as: *gaining productivity from generic labor with strategically incoherent, generic designs, ...* simplified herein as: *generic-productivity™*. This timeworn philosophy *employs* people as nonspecific, plug-and-play commodities, known as “*human resources*,” who are assigned to minimally-configured *jobs* for functional output, typically without optimizing latent human potential, or the rigorous pursuit of strategic congruity. Workers are interchangeable, expedient *expenses*, to be reduced, or eliminated when possible. Nevertheless, it is clear that productivity metrics *alone* no longer forecast either business or career success. Work should be coupled to strategy within the minds and acts of *all* workers, including leaders and supervisors. It isn't.

Worse, this weak, prevalent paradigm warps the mind's eye of executives, accountants, shareholders, analysts and consultants so they only see a myopic vantage of a work *relationship*, thus each remains blind to tapping into its far greater business potential. Instructed by a defective worldview, organizations form *zero-sum, marginal affiliations* with working people. This limited, increasingly absurd, work construct brings loss to all parties, all the while adding more harmful trends across varied business, personal and political landscapes.

The underlying work pathology is partially rooted in the unquestioned inertia of legacy concepts; unchallenged, trusted conventions; and pervasive, firmly implanted memes, that go unnoticed. These subtle forces tend to cause mindless, comfortable, mechanical sleepwalking by leadership regarding the true nature of good work. Yesterday's work mentalities are insufficient for even today's work realities; and will prove to be an extremely undependable foundation of thin ice for future-facing thought and leadership effectiveness. No leader or supervisor can accept the risk of sleepwalking upon thin ice into tomorrow.

It's not news that generic-productivity ushers forth reciprocal entitlement, disenfranchisement, and multitudes of dysfunctions and toxicities, including misplaced accountabilities, extreme relational ineffectiveness and inefficiencies, which sometimes advance into various relational augmentations such as collective bargaining, or counters such as acrimonious class action lawsuits. What is new is that reliance upon generic-productivity in demanding business climates now can threaten operational viability, distort the moral compasses of citizen-capitalist leaders; and in the

best of cases, wastes human potential that's mission-critical for achieving and bettering an organization's purpose and intents. We squander both present and future business opportunities and personal fulfillment (which shouldn't be mutually exclusive). While innovation explodes elsewhere, there hasn't been attention placed to precipitating substantive innovation to improve the basic work paradigm. There is an urgent need for this crucial innovation.

The crux of weakness within the current paradigm is: generic-productivity perpetuates *two inherent flaws* in the thought, design and deployment of work, each being interrelated, formidable and largely intractable:

1. A failure to define, design and *produce yields from all work that is strategically coherent*.
2. A failure to define, design and *capture optimal yields from each work relationship*.

Generic-productivity is analogous to an outdated car, propelled by an extremely inefficient, unsophisticated engine, ...over-rev'ing, under-powered, over-heating and unreliable. Perhaps better than walking; or maybe not such a big deal if reaching one's destination, or fuel and repair costs, are considered to be unimportant. But if "getting there" is important with the least costs and risks, we can understand it is the engine's *design that is the issue*. The problem can then be solved by *engineering* better design for optimal output from each unit of fuel. Likewise, we can apply engineering to design better "engines of work," enabling organizations and people to arrive at destinations, ... more efficiently and dependably.

Work productivity that is incongruent with strategic business case brings wastes and risks. Conversely, human potential cannot be fully unleashed in a generic manner. Leaders, and those workers possessing great strategic potential, need and should demand more, than they're getting. Yet each is still settling for far less, resigning themselves to loss and frustrations arising from *shared relational inefficiencies*. In part 2, I'll share a means to engineer better work: *Mutual Optima™ with WRYM®*.

Author's note: Today's generic-productivity paradigm is a narrow artifact of ancient anthropology for engaging physical and limbic capabilities of "human resources" that are applied to routine, regimented functions, such as manufacturing environments that applied centralized thinking combined with "salute-and-do personnel." Generic-productivity evolved and sufficed for centuries, producing pyramids, cathedrals, ships, textiles, books, steel, automobiles, jetliners and now, iPhones, ... even if applied with repetitive, boring drudgery or toxic stress from brutish bosses. It generated both business and political empires; and historically, it distributed wealth, and by doing so, raised the quality of life and improved many societies.

However, leaders and workers are discovering that generic-productivity playbooks and HR-departmentalization are no longer very reliable for achieving their needed competitive advantage, sustained profitability or strategic results. Amorphous work "performance" and "engagement" trends aren't correlating well to business conditions or satisfying work. Perfect storms are brewing as work's functional center-of-gravity shifts from brawn/limbic to cerebral/emotive. Decentralized, contextual judgment and applied "know-why?" knowledge throughout workplaces are becoming as important as were traditional commands and salutes of "know-what?" or "know-how?". Thus, work is moving toward specifying and gaining far more complex "talent" attributes than those found in today's practices of job descriptions, performance reviews, extrinsic compensation schemes and labor relations. Some of storm contributors are: repetitive, routine muscle- or rule-based functions being decomposed and displaced by eager, cheaper and faster options. Those may be outsourcing, off-shoring, brainy machines, friction-free information, processors and servos, check-out/check-in kiosks, data-chewing algorithms, unrelenting software and digital-to-physical tech rivers, exemplified by 3-D printing. This plethora of emerging options combine to ignite disruptive business models. Many lower barriers to entry, as small, focused teams now can speedily annihilate vast corporations, even raze industries, yet create fertile conditions for new industries and ecosystems (and many destroy trusted career paths, ... yet create more fulfilling new work). Approaching storms display no concern for unintended consequences, fairness or accelerating inequalities.