

# Advancing the Paradigm of Work

## ... shifting from *Generic Productivity™* to *Mutual Optima™*

### Part 2

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**Fact:** good leaders continuously seek to optimize the value of all work performed.

**Fact:** good workers continuously seek to optimize the value of satisfying work in life.

A better work paradigm is discovered at the intersection of these two powerful forces; one that's more effective and efficient for the current challenges: ***mutual optima***.



Mutual optima can be defined by either of these two interrelated definitions:

1. *Achieving excellent work by the needs of both parties being accurately understood and optimally satisfied.*
2. *The consistent presence of high-quality work relationships (quality=degree to which work requirements of both parties are met).*

By *integrating* the two above forces into cohesive, purpose-driven work role designs, mutual optima becomes a timely template to achieve vastly improved work results for both parties. Better approaches in work design are urgently needed *wherever excellent work is being consistently sought from highly-capable people*, for purging the many risks of zero sum mindsets, increasing strategically coherent work yields and being magnetic to mission-critical talent. Fortunately, the flawed thought perpetuating work dysfunctions can be displaced whenever mutual optima worldviews are shared by leaders, workers and supervisors. Mutual-optima work relations are foundational for achieving “*strategic productivity™*.” This pragmatic and timely approach to work is a giant leap forward in organizational potential, ... *and responsibility*.

For many organizations, the *quality of work relationships* has become a key indicator of personal *and* organizational performance, competitive advantage, strategic success, innovation prowess and corporate citizenship. However, this mission-critical factor is often hidden, misunderstood or unattended. Leaders endanger organizations by tolerating (or sponsoring) relational liabilities, such as harmful supervisory practices and variances, imprecise hiring, unilateral job descriptions or performance reviews, mediocre work relations quality, or wasteful, ineffective incentives (often while they hemorrhage capable talent or repel candidates who possess vital attributes). In fact, few organizations possess the ways and means to frame or measure the levels of work relationship quality that's present throughout the enterprise.

Quaint “job-think” is far too anemic and generic for today's demanding, extremely specialized work conditions. For some leaders this liability can threaten survival. Fortunately, organizations can embrace more substantive techniques and tools to apply *relationship engineering* that enables *talent stewardship* for superlative enterprise success. By doing so, they better define, and gain what they seek from all work performed. Mutual optima is a bright beacon for enjoying harvests from great work with less relational inefficiencies, frustration, wastes, risks, dissatisfaction or undesirable exits. Sustained outstanding personal performance can be the norm, versus being random, noteworthy anomalies. “Us versus them” can change to “we;” enthusiasm can displace entitlement; and mercenaries can be transformed into patriots.

But a paradigm alone, even if compelling, remains only an abstraction without adoption, action and compliant practice. Mutual optima practices are a more strategically suitable, scalable and scientific alternative to the status quo of work. Accountability for mutual optimal resides with the organization, and this paradigm-shift always must begin in the same location: top executives. Why there? ... *No organization, or work within, will be better than its leadership.* Leadership initiates, regulates and perpetuates organizational realities, for better or worse. Period. Have no doubt, mutual optima is *transformational change* for most organizations. As such, it must be an integral aspect of a leader's personal attention, accountability, oft-repeated vision and unrelenting expectation. CEOs are the fountainhead of old or new realities that cascade through the organization into work and lives. Only when top leadership has a “big aha!” does vastly improved work become a pervasive, practiced imperative. Good leaders are receptive to the strong business case for radical improvements to work philosophies and practices. To the degree executives embrace mutual optima as their paradigm, more innovative work relationships become mission-critical *investments*, each deserving of greater respect and rigor.

Operationally, a structure for the work relationships known as a “*work role*” is the framework that houses diagnostics, information/knowledge, blueprints and guidance for mutual optima relationships (note: this isn't a “job description!”). The work role architecture encompasses comprehensive specifications for high-yield, talent-magnetic relationships. When correctly designed and deployed, a work role addresses the two significant shortcomings of generic productivity: 1) absence of strategic coherence and, 2) failure of optimizing yields from each relationship. Directed by business mission and strategy sequence, work is engineered in a more granular, contextually precise and adaptive manner, using science and data to optimize effectiveness and efficiencies in producing yields. *Work role architecture is relationship engineering* applied as an advanced, enlightened and refined methodology of work performance via attentive talent stewardship.

Mutual optima will not be accomplished by organic, grass roots or laissez-faire methods, or in localized, half-hearted “pilot” tests, that have been proven to be a flawed method for substantive change.<sup>1</sup> A few reasons for this – within both parties there can be inherent conflicts, flawed worldviews, distractions and illiteracy leading to short-term, self-centered or limited thought, along with resistance, undisciplined and unconstructive behaviors. Furthermore, when only localized pockets adopt mutual optima, it is inevitably suffocated by downward and/or lateral forces of conflicting worldviews, that in effect creates an “immunity” to betterment. Consistency in high-quality relationships is *only* realized by *purposeful, adaptive work design, deliberate stewardship and continuous improvement*. Only determined and coordinated efforts can unify the differing business and personal needs into a well-choreographed strategic synthesis. If a leader doesn't embrace, commit to and expect the ultimate realization of higher-quality relationship practices and shared worldviews for the mutual rewards, they shouldn't embark on the process of transformative change it entails.

As with anything that's (actually) important in business, *attention is an imperative* (as opposed to hollow, disingenuous, feel-good “intentions” found upon walls and in speeches). Relationships with capable workers are no longer disrespected and dismissed as mere, expendable commodities (aka: human resources). Faceless, churning workforces morph into well-attended, stable, relational portfolios that are diligently and creatively developed to unleash business potential by unleashing personal potential. Work relationships acquire “a long view” akin to caring for an orchard or vineyard; as opposed to the “plant, pluck and discard” mode used for seasonal tomato plants and many jobs today. One-size-fits-all “workforce strategies,” that have been all too general, become obsolete. Accurately defined work roles lead to better casting of workers, who are more respected, extending “give-to-get” strategic responsiveness to the stewardship of more attentive supervisors and leaders. Magnetic work relationship quality brings *realism* and *durability* that empowers business agility with worker enthusiasm that flexes to changing needs. Mutual optima's empowering pursuit of high-quality work relationships converts the old “employee bird cage” into an extremely attractive “talent bird feeder.”<sup>2</sup> In sum, not only do mutual optima relationships offer greater mutual bounties, but by design they can be more resilient and less fragile, thus are more dependable for organizations and lives that are surfing waves of unending change.

As a leader might appreciate at this point, mutual optima is beyond the scope of typical HR orthodoxies and limiting departmentalization, variable and/or brute force supervision, conventional false-positive recruiting and lopsided, nebulous or erosive accountabilities, corporate fads and misleading euphemisms. Jobs have been defined and pursued in a relatively unsophisticated and highly-variable manner, or by throwing money to prevent or extinguish fires. *Too often there has been no relational design, thus the single most crucial aspect of unleashing human potential is left, at best, to the amorphous whims, moods and prowess of unmonitored supervisors.* Work's relational complexities, often ignored, or only superficially addressed, can now be understood, leveraged and cultivated to better ends as leaders pursue mutual optima. It follows that competencies, outfitting and practices of work role engineering and talent stewardship are non-trivial. This healthy new model of work relationship architecture requires reliable theory, effective methods and empowering tools ...

So, an astute leader may now be very confused, sober, skeptical, curious and/or perhaps intrigued. Fortunately, over the last decades the ways and means to counsel and outfit leaders and their organizations that are desiring to examine or pursue mutual optima has been created: **Work Role Yields Management® (WRYM®)**. WRYM makes mutual optima relationships possible and practical for organizations of any size or type. WRYM outfits organizations with a comprehensive, proprietary knowledge, work role design tools, relational quality assurance systems and support to transform themselves to harvest the many benefits of the mutual optima paradigm (or simply to escape the risks and wastes of remaining in generic-productivity). We encourage dialog with qualified leaders who desire to learn more. Questions and inquiries should be directed to myself: [dmccall@generaltalent.com](mailto:dmccall@generaltalent.com) or phone: 865 546 4990.

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### Author's Notes:

**1. Work as symbiosis:** When we drill down to the foundation of “organized work,” past or present, we always find a *relationship*. In fact, work relationships mimic a construct and varied conditions found throughout nature. We can learn from nature and apply this to circumstances found in all work relations:

Work is a ***symbiotic relationship*** existing between two *very different* entities – an organization and a life. As in nature, we may find **six primary conditions** that are present, as to the relationships effects upon the parties:

- a. ***Parasitic*** ... good for one, the other harmed
- b. ***Amensalism*** ... one is harmed, the other unaffected
- c. ***Synnecrosis*** ... both are harmed
- d. ***Neutralism*** ... no effect upon either party
- e. ***Commensalism*** ... good for one, the other unaffected
- f. ***Mutualism*** ... good for both (often referred to as symbiosis)

Note: work relationship conditions may be contextual; thus many conditions may be occurring simultaneously in work. Furthermore, both “good” and “harm” are both relative and subjective.

**Since *relationships are the actual “engines” of work, mutual optima is mutualism “engineered” by an organization.*** It's an organization's ways and means to frame, integrate and constructively capture the forces of two widely different sets of motives, capabilities and accountabilities into a consolidated, holistic design. This brings a far more *constructive balance* of power, positive tensions and more appropriately distributed accountabilities into work relationships, and does so by design. Finally, we can apply both of Adam Smith's (invisible) hands to assist better work, with each party directed by the guiding influence of better thoughts and behaviors that are more naturally drawn to

symbiosis or mutualism. In sum, mutual optima, when outfitted and supported by WRYM, simultaneously creates and maintains *better work in a better life*<sup>™</sup>.

Conversely, the zero-sum nature of generic-productivity tends to generate power differentials that have underlying *destructive tensions*, thus a propensity to producing *parasitic* conditions, sometimes advancing to *synnecrosis*. This can be a function of who possesses the upper hand in a relationship at a given time, their actions and the ultimate consequences. For example, some organizations and/or their supervisors exert power to exploit short-term gains, and do so in a manner undesirable, or causing outright harm, to workers. This pattern can be the result of the myopic presence of, and attention to, short-sighted productivity or financial measurements, including direct or indirect personal incentives.

One common scenario of this phenomenon is the leader who is focused on the current share price or next quarter's financial performance to satisfy fickle shareholders. This prevalent, dangerous, near-sighted dynamic can be especially seductive whenever leaders enjoy ample supplies of generic, expendable labor which can be exploited in a least-expense and/or disposable manner. Interestingly, the more financially successful the organization becomes, the more likely this is to be self-reinforcing (at least for a period). Worse, such myopic success causes leadership to have little concern of "*Black Swans*"<sup>3</sup> that may be lurking in their future. Accordingly, there also tends to be an absence of vigilance and strategic rigor to adequately defend against ambient innovation occurring around them. This can explain why generic-productivity is often found to be incoherent with strategy, ... presuming true strategy is present at all, which, if not exposes future perils and jeopardy. It's understandable how this form of parasitic work relationships can fester into synnecrosis, thus slowly but surely destroying the organization as well. In sum, generic-productivity tends to perpetuate leadership myopia, who then, unconsciously or deliberately become not only poor stewards of talent, but ultimately of their organization's future.

This was only one example of destructive tensions that arise from generic-productivity. Conversely and equally, "labor" can apply power in collective bargaining to excesses that bring about parasitic demands upon organizations, progressively leading to conditions of synnecrosis, resulting in both business failures *and* jobs loss. Examples of this phenomenon are widespread in many industries. Zero-sum model brings loss to one party, and sometimes to both.

**2. Coupling strategy with work relationships:** We can use a simple chain of logic to link a strategy (or business model) directly to all mutual optima work roles, in order to design and generate "strategic productivity:"

1. With leaders' feet placed firmly in current settings, their mind's eye envisions how their organization will offer value for thriving in the translucent conditions of tomorrow. Astute leaders appreciate that trailblazing into tomorrow is safest when performed in a *sequence* of reasoned, malleable, experimental *steps*. *Each pliable step is strategy*. Viewed across time these steps become a "*strategic stairway*"<sup>™</sup> to reach their ultimate destination.
2. Each strategic step instructs the *architecture* of the organization to accomplish that period's objectives. As each step is accomplished, the architecture is modified either by gradually evolving or radical changes. Therefore, great organizations are analogous to fluid, vibrant, never-ending "epic screenplays" that span varied settings and casts (versus lesser, mediocre organizations being more analogous to static "photos," that fade and gradually disintegrate, or lose relevance over time). Therefore, climbing strategic stairways demands caution and vigilance to avoid falling into "legacy ruts," which may seem presently comfortable, but may prove to be ultimately very dangerous. Organizational failure isn't instant, but rather happens in slow-motion.
3. Organizational architecture is comprised of the components deemed to be essential, such as capital, technologies, processes, a hierarchal and/or functional accountability schematic and its vital building blocks-work roles.

4. A sound, dependable architecture integrates all components into a powerful operational gestalt that will most effectively achieve a strategic step's objective(s) largely by elegantly deriving yields from work functions. Which bring us specifically to the work performed within strategy: *organizational success over time tends to be directly proportionate to the work role yields that are achieved* (presuming other architectural elements are well-designed and attended).

Therefore, it's imperative for all work role designs to be rigorously engineered and continuously improved to generate optimal, strategically coherent yields from high-quality relationships with workers who possess specific and relevant attributes for functional performance. Work relationships are crucial architectural building blocks for strategic accomplishment. This isn't reliably realized by luck, wishes, or good intentions, or most of yesterday's "HR" practices.

**3. Yes, this secret has been written upon many billboards:**<sup>4</sup> Mutual optima, as stated in the first paragraph of this document, is *discovery*, not invention. Just look around and you'll readily find that the very best organizations, leaders, supervisors, recruiters and workers in every industry have been practicing their own versions of this overt truth for decades, if not eons; as have performance-oriented environs such as sports teams, orchestras, entertainment environs and often non-profits and classrooms. These special folks get the give-to-get, yin/yang of crucial relationships.

On the other hand, WRYM is in fact a *patented invention* that brings highly-effective proprietary theory, structure, methodology, tools and systems for those pursuing mutual optima. WRYM is approachable and systematized, thus making deployment and benefits pragmatic, expedient, universal and inexpensive for leaders and their organizations.

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#### Footnotes

1. Examples of "pilot" failures related to substantive transformations abound, such as the cloistered, limited adoption of valuable principles such as those of Demming/Japanese, Six Sigma/Lean, JIT, etc; or the various related costly "partitioned pilot" or "venture" failures as the pitfalls of learning that GM demonstrated in the joint [GM/Toyota NUMMI project](#).
2. Often organizational generic-productivity thought is analogous to considering employees as "owned birds" held within an imagined, tightly-controlled "bird cage," with periodic pay and benefits being the food and water. In fact, it's all too common to hear the word "retention" still widely used in reference to keeping employees (even though only a valid term with prisoners). However, mutual optima is far more grounded in today's reality, with an appreciation that *great people (aka: talent) are discerning in their choices of work and workplaces* from a variety of options always available to them. Whereas mutual optima is analogous to operating a "bird feeder." *Retention thinking is absurd* if you seek the most capable performers. Only work role "attraction" is reliable with talent (hence, work role design is, in part, marketing science). Equally important, this implies well-crafted work role designs must fundamentally differ in many ways in order to be more precisely magnetic and adaptable to people's varied preferences and lives (just as different types of birds require different types of feeders, and different types of food). Hence, generic one-size/one-way-fits-all HR isn't too effective for getting or keeping the best of people in widely differing work roles. Mutual optima is.
3. From the book [Black Swan](#) Nassim Taleb 2007
4. Source: "*The greatest secrets are written on billboards.*" Daniel Quinn