About Good Work

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This research is an effort to explore the nature of good work, a concept that describes work that is beneficial to the physical, psychological, and social dimensions of its stakeholders, including and especially the worker. This effort is divided into four distinct parts. First, the construct of good work is explored in terms of its core elements. By studying theories and research in domains such as psychology and business management, twelve controllable dimensions of work are identified to be influential to the well-being of the workers: compensation, safety, variety, demand, autonomy, feedback, aesthetics, social interaction, technical growth, personal growth, accomplishment and status, and value. These dimensions provide a basis for characterizing work in other parts and in future studies.

The second part of this research applies the aforementioned twelve work dimensions to develop and conduct a survey study at electronics manufacturing companies located in the United States of America and the People’s Republic of China. Preliminary findings suggest that while migrant status and education among the Chinese workers had little impact on how they perceive good work, statistically significant differences do exist between the American and Chinese workers. The third part of the research focuses on identifying prior efforts to improve work and developing a prototype tool that could be used to guide work design and redesign efforts. The last part of this research applies principles of Buddhist ethics to explore the moral responsibilities of industrial engineers, and provides ethical guidelines for industrial engineers in designing better work.

The research when viewed as a whole suggests that not only are modern industrial engineers responsible for bettering work for the workers and other stakeholders, but many examples exist to guide the process for creating better work. This research adds to existing efforts by suggesting that the construct of work is indeed different among cultures, and provides a set of tools to characterize and create good work.

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