

The Psychology Of Work: Changes In The 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Work is something common to all of humanity and it always has been. Throughout human history there have been many major revolutions in the world of work that have changed how people work and the types of things that they produce. The Agricultural Revolution changed how people produced and used food and changed how and where they lived. Similarly, when humans started producing pottery and metal tools and weapons there were additional changes in work and what kinds of things people did to support and protect themselves. The Industrial Revolution resulted in significant changes in the nature of work, but also where people worked and lived and they kinds of products they were now able to produce. More recently, the Information Revolution has also dramatically changed the nature of work and what people do while at work.

This paper will review the nature of work and look at this topic as an important part of the psychology of humans and how work has changed over the centuries and millennia and what it looks like today. By work we mean, “A purposeful activity that is intended to facilitate survival, comfort, protection of the society, and self-fulfillment.” In addition to examining the history and evolution of work, this paper examines the functional nature of work and how that has changed and evolved as well. In addition, the motivational basis of work will be examined and the various reasons why people work will also be explored as well. One of the principal foci of this paper will be a thorough examination of how work is changing in the 21st century and looking at how globalization and technology have changed the world of work and the psychological importance of work today.

Keywords: Work; Jobs; Careers; 21st Century

THE HISTORY OF WORK

*W*e know that people have had to work since the beginning of time, but it is obvious that the nature of work has changed over time and which people do different types of work has also changed. In recent years, some scholars and practitioners have begun studying details about work and how it affects people and looking at the role of work in people’s lives and how this impacts family and community life. “The Psychology of Work” is a relatively new area in psychology that addresses some of the questions and issues that are involved with the personal and interpersonal aspects of work (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008).

From archeological evidence, cave drawings, and early recorded history it is very clear that work has always been part of the human experience. There is little doubt that the early humans “worked” by hunting and gathering food, and by building and repairing structures to live in, caring for the young, elders, and ill/injured members of their social group. Thus, work was more about survival than anything else although it seems likely that one’s place in the social status of a group might depend, at least in part, to a person’s skills in providing what the group needed, e.g., hunting, gathering, or caring for others. As this era of work history progressed it is very likely that some people began to specialize in certain types of tasks and social and work roles based upon skills and expertise would have started to emerge as well (Blustein, 2006).

The Emergence of Agriculture

One of the most important changes in human history was the development of agriculture. This not only provided for having a more predictable and sustainable source of food but also changed how people lived; not that hunting and gathering would have ended, but now people did not have to rely totally on these less predictable ways of supporting themselves. Probably the main change in society with the emergence of agriculture was the change from the nomadic life where people had to travel to follow the game and plant life to find enough to eat, clothe themselves, and support their group; agriculture meant having a stable place to live and work and that people did not have to move with the change of seasons or with the migration of animals they depended on. By living in one place, many other things could and did change as well. For example, the kinds of housing that people could have become quite different. Homes could now be more solid, safer, weather resistant, warmer or cooler as the weather dictated, and more permanent. Now relatively permanent housing also meant that issues like owning property, gaining more land and crops, having more strata in society, and having more reasons to guard and protect their property and goods.

While the styles of people's lives demonstrably changed with the development of agriculture, so did the nature of society. New social roles and structures emerged, new jobs and professions arose, and in many cultures men began to own property while women were often relegated to caregiving roles and tasks. With these changes, more hierarchical social structures started to evolve. People owning more land and crops became "more important" and influential, and would have others who worked for them who were under the control of the more powerful members of society. While inter-group conflict prehistorically would have been about control of necessary resources like food and game (and sometimes about the possession of women for breeding purposes), after the development of agriculturally-based cultures conflict was now more based on gaining control of land and the people who lived on it, and this is when political systems became more elaborate and the warrior class began to emerge as a way for the people who were of higher status and who controlled the land to keep their position and advantages. The type of work that people other than the ruling classes did during this era was difficult, unpleasant, dangerous, and unrewarding and this was particularly true of the masses who did not own land or businesses. Agriculture was the main type of job in which people were engaged, but now there were also people who were in skilled trades like carpentry, blacksmith, and others. There were also professional military people and a limited number of other professionals (e.g., medicine, law, and clergy). In most cultures, the more prestigious professions were limited to people from wealthy and influential families who were more powerful and better educated (Bluestein, 2006).

The Industrial Revolution

While agriculture dramatically changed society and work for humanity, the Industrial Revolution was another major impact that significantly changed society and the way people work. Starting at about 1760 and lasting until the mid-1800s, this social and economic evolution changed almost every element of human lives and work. Certainly, agriculture was a major aspect of the work of many people, but as agriculture got better and more efficient it was taking fewer people to provide the crops, and as populations were growing, new opportunities for work were needed. One of the main social and economic changes that arose with the Industrial Revolution was the increasing urbanization of society. Factories were built in cities and workers came to live in the cities where they could get jobs. This led to the concentration of capital in the urban centers (e.g., factories, banks, etc.) and to a concentration of the population into smaller geographic areas to make them available to work in the factories.

The iron and textile industries and the development of the steam engine played central roles in the Industrial Revolution, and there were also considerably improved systems of transportation, communication, and banking. While industrialization provided many more and different types of manufactured goods and an improved standard of living for some, not all the changes were beneficial for many people—especially workers. It was not uncommon for factory workers to have 12-14-hour work days for six days per week and one 20-minute break for lunch in the middle of the day. Child labor and exploitation of women, particularly in the garment industry, was common and largely accepted.

With this new revolution in the world of work, the nature of work changed substantially with an increased need for skilled workers. Even then, however, workers were largely looked at impersonally as interchangeable parts in a huge machine, and treating employees like "real people," individuals with unique needs and aspirations, was not evident in

many if any large factories. With increased need for more highly trained employees with relevant work skills and basic literacy, new expectations were placed on public schools. It was now the role of public schools to get students prepared to enter the workplace and to take on the new roles of the “worker,” which was a different role than had ever been seen in the world history of work (Bluestein, 2006).

Work During and Between the World Wars

Before WWI, America was starting to become more urbanized and was transitioning from a largely agricultural country to one heavily focused on manufacturing. Most workplace jobs were held by men with women largely working as homemakers or in occupations concentrated in lower paying service sector positions in traditional “women’s jobs.” Women could be nurses, teachers, secretaries, domestic workers, and retail clerks, but it was unusual to find women in factory jobs other than in the garment industry, or in professions. Interestingly, with the American entry into WWI our heavily manufacturing-based economy was challenged to fill jobs vacated by men who joined the service to “fight for their country.” The most obvious and available source for new workers was women, and this proved to be a very important contribution to the war effort. Of course, these women did not trade being a homemaker for being a factory worker - they now had two jobs and were expected to do both which most did without question or complaint. In fact, those women who were unable to leave home to work frequently contributed to the war effort by knitting socks for the soldiers, rolling bandages, assembling first aid kits and other helpful tasks that they could fulfill at home.

After the end of WWI when the troops returned home, women typically returned to their primary job of being a homemaker or working in one of the usual jobs for women at that time. Very few women remained in the factories, and in fact those who wanted to continue working were seen as being unfair to the soldiers who had risked their lives for the country to come home and not find a job because the jobs were now held by women. Consequently, the work environment started to slowly return to the pre-War norms with many men working in factories and most women working at home. Between the end of WWI in 1918 and the Stock Market Crash in 1929 the nature of work remained consistent with what had been the norm before the War. However, when the Stock Market Crashed, the work environment changed dramatically again, but this time the changes were largely negative.

When elected, Franklin Delano Roosevelt promised to put America back to work and keep us out of any further world wars. By revamping the banking system and putting other financial controls in place to guard against financial depression, FDR started making some headway in financial recovery. Interestingly, many of the controls his administration put into place were removed or “watered down” by more recent Presidents, and this lack of controls was clearly one reason for the recessions that have occurred in recent years. In addition to financial controls, FDR also started the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which gave many Americans full-time and important jobs building and repairing the roads, dams, and bridges in the country and many new and important projects were completed while also putting many thousands of workers back on the job. Unfortunately, the one thing that did most to end the Depression was the entry of the U.S. into the new war in Europe.

As in WWI, after the declaration of war many Americans volunteered for military service and many more were drafted. With an amazingly ambitious mobilization effort, the U.S. started modifying its impressive manufacturing capabilities to start manufacturing weapons, ships, planes, tanks, trucks, and other types of needed supplies and equipment. This was a huge stimulant to the economy and suddenly there was virtually no unemployment. Those who could, served, and those who could not were left to pick up the slack at home and fill all the needed and vacated jobs. Once again, women were called on to step up and take on new roles. They fulfilled all the traditional roles for women in our society, but they also took factory jobs and other traditionally male jobs like driving trucks and taxis. Some women joined the new female branches of the service (WAVES and WACS), and many worked in medical and clerical roles in the military and at home.

Following WWII America started finding its way back into “normal” patterns of work. Men returned to their jobs and started working again, however, this time women were not so quick to return to “business as usual” and many of them felt that they should have the right for education and career options like their male counterparts. Of course, even though things were changing, the change was gradual and not without its rough spots. For example, this was also the

time when African-Americans and other people of color started standing up for the rights that they felt they deserved as much as their white male colleagues. The GI Bill also was making college education available to more people than ever before, and provided mortgages for former military personnel to make the dream of home ownership a possibility for people who never expected to actually have their own piece of the American Dream.

The Digital and Information Age

In the past few decades since WWII the nature and type of work has changed dramatically. The relationship between workers and their employers has likewise changed, and for many people the idea of job security is completely foreign to their work experience. Today, in many parts of the world, numerous jobs have been turned over to computers or robots and often we do not have any contact with a “real person” with whom we are doing business. Many lower-level service jobs have been replaced by machines, and most of these jobs could have been performed by people. Thus, many of these types of jobs are now obsolete for human beings, and these might have been the only hope for upward mobility in a job market that many people do not have the skills or education to enter the work force in any other capacity (Rifkin, 1996).

Clearly, digital technology is replacing skilled, unskilled, and service workers across the entire globe, and it is estimated that about 75% of the labor market in most of the industrialized countries in the world perform jobs that require repetitive tasks that do not require much in the way of problem solving or training. In many organizations, there is an increased need for highly trained workers, but since there are trained and educated workers all over the world, companies are very likely to hire the least expensive employees and manage/supervise them remotely.

Some Differences in the World of Work Today

Globalization

This is a current trend that will continue to increase and affects every business around the world from the biggest to the smallest. By using the Internet, even small business can locate new markets, find new employees, find suppliers to provide the goods and services they need, and explore new opportunities. Globalization is here to stay, and in many ways it has improved the way people shop and do business. It seems obvious that the economic base of our entire society is being rearranged by globalization. Economically, globalization has led to a pervasive spread of free market capitalism, and this is even true in countries like Russia that used to be communistic, and it is becoming even more prevalent in so-called “communistic” countries like China (Friedman, 2005).

In this new global environment, education is even more important to get a good job, but education and experience do not necessarily lead to long-term careers in the person’s area of training. As employees get more expensive, many companies simply let them go and hire someone cheaper. Further, the interaction of globalization and technology has resulted in a labor market that is not affected by national boundaries or even by languages. Work and jobs have become more frenetic and harried, and people are working harder and longer as well as having more pressures and needs at home—life for many people today is increasingly stressful, non-rewarding, and difficult. It is hardly surprising that many people resent their jobs, dislike the company their work for, and feel increasingly helpless and hopeless about their career prospects.

The Changing Contract

In the past, employees may have had an employment contract that defined the legal connection between the employee and the employer. In addition, however, there was also a “Psychological Contract” that defined the informal expectations regarding the relationship between the employee and the employer. This psychological contract usually implied expectations regarding a long-term relationship between the worker and the company, but in today’s world there is very little in the psychological contract that has anything to do with long term expectations. Now it is likely that the psychological contract is more skill- and responsibly-based and is basically an agreement that if the employee works hard and does not cause trouble the company will give them a paycheck and maybe even some benefits. However, many companies are focused on short-term gains, profitability, and remaining flexible. Therefore,

companies are using more part-time, contract, and other contingent employees to minimize their long-term connections and responsibilities, and to keep expenses as low as possible.

Changes in Caregiver Work

In most cultures, women provide the largest part of the caregiver work in the home and professionally. However, there is no reason men cannot fulfill these roles as well, and in recent years we have seen more stay-at-home dads, more male nurses, and more men working as nursing assistants and home health aides. It is obvious that in many cultures there are significant changes in the roles in families and while these changes appear to be reasonable and appropriate in most contexts, it is still not clear how these differences will affect families and society in the future.

Changes in Labor Unions

In 1954 39% of American workers belonged to labor unions, but in the U.S. today it is closer to 12%, and this is probably due to several factors. Earlier we discussed the facts that unions had some difficulties because of the history of some unions and their association with organized crime. Of course, this was not true of most unions, but did involve a few of the very visible and important unions and this altered the way many people looked at unions. It is also true that many unions have not adapted very well to changing times and new needs. Some of the specific changes that have affected union membership include changing demographics and unions not focusing on the needs of the new members but trying to maintain some of the past gains they had achieved; also, factors like globalization and politics have also impacted the perception and needs for unions (Bluestein, 2006).

Many countries in the rest of the industrialized world, including Europe and South America, have much higher rates of union membership than the U.S., and it may be overly optimistic, but it would seem beneficial if workers, companies, politicians, the government, and the public could find common ground and interests that would encourage and support more collaborative effort from these different sectors for the benefit of all. Under these circumstances increased union membership might become a very helpful and positive influence. This will take considerable effort and cultural change, but this will hopefully be something that may grow and develop. Even today there are a few examples of a partnership between unions and companies that seem very promising.

The Working Poor

This has become a very large and important problem in this country and in other areas of the world. We have many millions of people in the U.S. who are working full time but who have minimal or no real benefits. The very tragic reality for many people is that they have a full-time (or almost full-time) job but have no health insurance and because they are working they do not qualify for health insurance programs like Medicaid. For many people with families, they cannot afford to work because they cannot afford to buy private health insurance and cannot get Medicaid while they are working. Consequently, there are many people who have jobs but do not have insurance or any kind of pension program. We are going to find in several decades that there are many people who are not in good health because they could not afford insurance or health care when they were younger, and as they get older their medical needs will increase and cost even more. Further, these people will be financially unprepared for retirement and will “have to work until they die.” Unfortunately, many of these people will end up in nursing homes or extended care facilities and their cost will be borne by the society as a whole—these are huge problems that are presently not being dealt with effectively.

Summary of Changes for Work in the New Millennium

The new work environment will need new types of workers with different types of skills, abilities, and characteristics. Many work organizations will change from highly regimented and structured to smaller groups that will often work in local settings producing specialized products. Because these smaller organizations need to be adaptable to changes in marketplace and in the larger organizations that they depend on, the employees will have to master many different and changing tasks as well. Consequently, workers will need to be socially and mentally flexible and able and willing to deal with frequent and often unanticipated changes which will require them to master new tasks and adjust to new

requirements. Workers who can adapt to these demands will be most valued. The cognitive attributes that will be needed in the new work environment include excellent technology skills, exceptional problem-solving skills, and the ability to work well in teams and to communicate effectively with other employees.

Reasons Why People Work

Survival

The one motive for people working that has been true for the entire history of humanity is survival. The need to provide nourishment, safety, shelter, and social structure has very likely always been a part of the human experience. Work was one thing that people could do to help them survive. By needing to eat and drink, people had to find ways to provide for themselves. Since there were no stores to go to and no plumbing to bring water into the house they had to find food and bring it back; further, they had to find water and find ways to make it available when it was needed. It was also important that people were available to care for the young, old, and ill or injured.

In the workplace today, many people do not think of basic survival as one of the reasons why they work, but it is as true today as it was in the past, but it is much more complex than it was in previous eras. Of course, we have jobs to make money, and we need money to pay rent or buy houses, we need it to buy groceries and supplies; money pays for the means of transportation, it pays for medical and dental care, and it pays for our clothing and shoes so that we are protected against the weather and other conditions. Money is also needed to pay for roads and bridges and we pay for that through taxes which really means that we are paying the government so that they can hire people to do the jobs that are necessary to build and fix the roads and bridges that we need. Taxes also pay for fire fighters, police, military, teachers, and government workers all of whom do jobs that are important for the rest of us to have the safe and comfortable lives that we have come to expect. Having jobs provides ways for us to meet our personal and community needs that allow us to survive and prosper.

Need for Control and Power

All people have needs for control and power; of course, some people have extremely high needs and others may have somewhat low needs, but everyone has these needs in one way or another. Let us also be aware of what these needs mean—control needs refer to being competent and effective in one’s physical and social environments. Similarly, the need for power does not mean that a person wants or needs to be powerful and to order people around and always manipulate others to do their bidding. Specifically, the need for power in most people simply means that they want to have an impact on situations or other people and to do something that makes a difference; jobs are one way that people can satisfy their needs for control and power.

Work as a Means of Gaining Success and Comfort

In our culture, people frequently talk about “the important things in life” like health, family, friends, being happy with our life and other such things. However, there is no doubt that we tend to judge success by what kind of a job someone has, how famous they are, and by how much money they make. Whether we think this is a good thing or not it is certainly the way that many people feel and act. It is easy to see how making money will help people lead and live a more comfortable life. However, it is probably true that most people like having money because of the prestige it brings them, the control it gives them over others, as well as the comforts it provides them. The fact that most Americans are significantly in debt is probably a good indicator of how much we want and apparently need money to have the kind of lifestyle that many people aspire to.

The Social Contract

In social philosophy, the idea of the social contract reflects the actual or implicit agreement between citizens and the governing person or body that the people will give up some of their rights and freedoms in exchange for protection and for the provision of services. In the work environment, the social contract refers to the employee giving up some rights and following directions and orders that the employer requires or requests in exchange for a salary and benefits,

appropriate training, supplies (as well as support and equipment) necessary to do one's job, a safe place to work, and reasonable job security.

If we look at the workplace today it is not difficult to see how the social contract is not as balanced and equitable as it might have been in the past, and is one of the reasons why the relationship between employers and employees is not as strong and stable as it was in the recent past. At this point, many employers feel that if an employee does not do everything that is expected, then they can just be fired and find someone else to do the job. Employees, on the other hand, often feel that if they do not like their job or employer they will just quit and find another job. This may not be true of all organizations or employees, but it does seem to be a trend that may be of concern.

Work and Social Connectedness

Most people who have jobs outside their own home spend more time with their colleagues at work than they do with their family and friends — particularly if we do not count time sleeping. Many people socialize with their work colleagues which makes these relationships even more important, but even for people who do not “hang out” with co-workers; the work group is still an important group in their lives. When workers report good relationships with co-workers this will be reflected in higher levels of job satisfaction, less absenteeism, and lower turnover. It also leads to workers reporting less stress and fewer stress-related health and mental health issues. This is particularly true when workers report having good relationships with the supervisors and managers. Conversely, research demonstrates that poor supervision and inadequate managers are one of the main sources of stress reported by workers. Thus, if the social relationships at work (with both co-workers and superiors) are reported as positive by employees, they are more satisfied and productive and less likely to voluntarily leave their job.

This points out a very interesting development in the modern workplace that we are beginning to recognize as an issue. It is common for many workers to “telecommute” or to work from home at least part of the time. In fact, virtual workplaces are becoming much more common and this is when workers do not come into the office at all, but will work from home or via computer/tablet and rarely interact directly with their co-workers or bosses. As important a development as telecommuting and virtual work teams have become, these advances are not without complications. Probably the main problem with these types of work is the substantial change in the role of socialization at work. There are not the same social cues, body language, and other non-verbal communication subtleties that cannot be replaced with emoticons or other cute little visual symbols. Not only do we not have as rich communication, but we are finding that with people working remotely they do not have as much connection with their work group, do not interact with their supervisor as much, do not feel as committed to their group and organization, are more likely to leave and find another job, and they do not have as high job satisfaction.

Work as a Means of Self-Determination and Identity

“Self-determination” refers to things that a person may do that will establish them as an active and self-controlled individual who is able to do the things that he or she needs or wants to do. For all of us, the idea of “freedom” refers to the state of being where we have many options for things that we can do and the ability to choose among those options to determine what it is that we would like to do. From this perspective then, to the extent that we have many opportunities from which to select our activities, and we can access and act upon our preferences, then we are “free.” Having a job that provides opportunities for us to do things we choose or want to do as well as having a salary and benefits that gives us the capacity to do things that we would like to do - travel, sports, entertainment, etc., is also one of the things that allows for more “self-determination.”

Probably the most important aspect of self-determination is how that links to a person's “identity.” By identity we are referring to how a person is viewed and “identified” as an individual by other people. “Self-identity” refers to how we perceive and identify ourselves. When we are introduced to someone we do not know, there are some very basic questions we ask of one another. For example, “Where do you live?” “Do you have a family?” “What do you do?” These questions refer to elements of a person's identity, and it is very clear that part of our identities is based on our “job” or what we do.

Work as a Way of Structuring Individual and Social Life

People do not usually think of work as an important element in how we organize and structure our time. For example, some people have jobs and must go to work and they usually have a fixed schedule as to when they are supposed to be at work and how long they have to stay. Other people may be care-givers and have responsibility for children or others who depend upon them. In this case, it may be other people's needs that determine how and when we spend our time, but still is a way of determining how our time is spent.

For most people, their work is a major determinant of how they structure all of their time. Even the time that we sleep may depend on our work. Some people work on different shifts because of their job and if they must work at night then they may actually have to sleep during the day and some people actually like and prefer these different types of job schedules. All people have some type of work that they must do—even if that work is not a job. The things that we must do to support ourselves and to provide for ourselves are a big part of how we structure our time. Even people who are disabled or retired still have things that they must do to take care of themselves and their responsibilities, and these activities will determine how we spend at least part of our time.

One piece of evidence as to the importance of jobs as a way of structuring our time is the difficult time many people have trying to figure out how to structure their time after they retire. This issue occurs even when people “can't wait to retire and stop working.” It is also true that this is more frequently a problem for men than women, and while this is very likely due to several factors, one of the reasons is that women often have more roles to balance in their lives, and they have had more practice in learning how to structure their time. However, for most retirees--men and women alike—life after retirement is a big adjustment and requires new ways of structuring and managing time.

The Changing Nature of Work Today

There is no doubt that work is very different today than it was even a few years ago, and it is very probable that these changes will continue in ways that we do not even imagine today. The impact of computers and other information technologies has dramatically altered the ways in which people work and how they spend their time during their days at work as well as the time they spend away from work. In most jobs today, technology and computer literacy are essential. The check-out clerk at the supermarket, the sales person in the department store, the mechanic in your automotive repair shop all use computers every day at work. Police, fire fighters, military, doctors, nurses, and even garbage collectors use computers and different types of robotic devices in their work every day. How most people do their jobs today is very different than in the past, but the nature of jobs has changed as well. For example, in the past jobs were defined by the “job description” which very clearly and specifically detailed the exact responsibilities and tasks that each job entailed. However, today the work requirements, external demands, changing customers, etc. mean that jobs need to be much more broadly defined and they change frequently. Ask any worker what they do during a given work day, and compare that to their job description and it is obvious that the job description is not very close to what the workers actually do. Jobs today change frequently depending on the needs and demands, and workers and organizations need to be flexible and adaptable to cope with the changes and demands.

It is also true that how we think of careers will be very different in the new millennium. Traditionally, people in professions or skilled trades as well as people in occupations like sales would plan to stay in a career area for their working lives and expect to be promoted into better jobs within their career path. It is not likely that careers will be completely gone, but they will be different. For example, many businesses will keep professionals or skilled workers for a few years until they start getting more expensive to keep because of the raises they have received and so they are fired or laid off and replaced with a younger worker who does not cost as much. Many recognize this as a very short-sighted approach that is of questionable ethics if they look at the impact on the workers and the organization. To lose older and more experienced workers also means you are losing all the wisdom they have acquired that cannot be replaced by a new worker. Many are finding that if they want to stay in a career that means that they will have to continually be willing to move to another company and to take on new jobs if they want to continue in their career. Unlike in the past, in many organizations, a person's career path is not likely to be found in one organization, and the moving around disrupts social relationships at work but also decreases job engagement and company loyalty —

workers now are more likely to be loyal to their profession than to their organization and expect to further their professional goals by focusing primarily on their own needs and aspirations rather than those of the organization.

Clearly, as jobs change and people relate to their organizations differently, one would expect that job satisfaction does not mean the same thing as it used to. We used to believe that a “happy worker is a productive worker,” but we know that this was never completely true. Research has demonstrated that job satisfaction is only modestly related to productivity and attendance; this is understandable when we realize that both productivity and attendance are affected by many other factors as well as job satisfaction. In the past, job satisfaction was usually found to be negatively correlated with voluntary turnover — in other words, the better someone likes their job the less likely they are to leave. It will be interesting to see how these relationships change in the new millennium. We expect that job satisfaction will have even less to do with productivity and attendance, and as people move from one job to another for many different reasons it will probably be found that the relationship between job satisfaction and voluntary turnover is not as clear as it was in the past. Thus, with all the changes in work and in jobs and careers, it is expected that job satisfaction will mean less and less than it used to.

Research and experience are already starting to show that social relationships at work are starting to be less important than they were in the past. People take new jobs today not expecting to stay in them for a long time and therefore are less invested in developing new friendships at work. Of course, people will still make friends at work, but they will usually not expect that these relationships will last over time. By decreasing the importance of work relationships, we are also altering things like job satisfaction and organizational attachment. This trend will be even more obvious when we consider that changes in jobs because of things like telecommuting and virtual workplaces.

One thing that does not appear to be decreasing at work is stress. Particularly given the lack of job security and the inadequate benefits in many organizations, the levels of stress in organizations is increasing for many workers. Some organizations pride themselves in being “Darwinian;” e.g., this is a tough place, and if you cannot take it you had best find someplace else to work.” This sounds very reasonable to some people, but the reality is that the higher the workplace stress the lower the morale; the lower the morale the higher the voluntary turnover. Consequently, in the higher stress environments it is not the “deadwood” that leaves, but rather those employees who are good enough to get jobs elsewhere. The work environment is very stressful for many workers, and we are also seeing an increase in workplace violence and aggression which is also higher during stressful times but also produces more stress itself. As bad as workplace violence is and can be, the increase in non-violent aggression like bullying is increasing even faster. This is even more noticeable when people do not place as much value on work relationships because they do not care as much about hurting others’ feelings and will take out their own frustrations on those around them.

To add to the stress at work, discrimination continues to be an issue for many people and many organizations. Many feel that discrimination is a thing of the past and is not as big an issue today as it was years ago. However, from issues in recruiting and hiring, paying and promoting, firing or laying off, benefits and even training we have ample evidence that many people are treated differently because of their age, race, gender, ethnicity, and many other factors as well. Of course, discrimination is illegal, unethical, and always to the disadvantage of the organization as well as the people directly affected; nonetheless it still happens and unfortunately, very frequently.

For example, with more women entering the workforce and with an aging workforce the issues of gender and age are major sources of discrimination in the U.S. and other countries as well. In the U.S. there is currently an increase of female and older workers, and by 2050 it is estimated that 19% of the workforce will be 55 and older and older applicants seeking jobs will increase by 36% (Ruggs, Hebl, Walker, Singletary & Fa-Kajiet, 2014). Women currently make up about 46.7% of the workforce and it is anticipated that they will become 50% of the workforce in the near future. In fact, they presently comprise 51.5% of managerial and professional occupations (Ruggs, et al., 2014).

Typically, older workers are thought to be less productive, less competent, and to have less than adequate interpersonal skills. Consequently, they are not usually hired first unless the employer is looking to hire someone at a lower salary who does not need benefits. This is truly unfortunate because research literature and experience tells us that more experienced workers are more productive, more likely to be conscientious, and are less likely to leave for another job. Similarly, women are frequently given more negative performance evaluations than men and even when their

measurable performance is better than their male counterparts. Suffice it to say, that when a person falls in more than one group that is a target of discrimination (e.g., being an older woman) the effects are even worse; they are discriminated against at higher rates.

One source of discrimination for women has to do with pregnancy and child rearing. From 1992-2003 pregnancy complaints filed with the EEOC increased by 39% while the birth rate decreased by 9% (Armour, 2005). Women have been denied promotion and fired for being pregnant and there are even cases reported where women have been told by their employers that if they wanted to keep their job they needed to terminate their pregnancy (Armour, 2005). While this is clearly illegal, that fact does not appear to make any difference to some companies. Similarly, women continue to face the “glass ceiling” and are not given access to higher level management positions to the same extent as males, and this has nothing to do with their capabilities or performance. Even regarding salary, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 passed into law the fact that women must be paid the same as men in the same position, and yet across the board today women are paid 77% of what men are paid in the same position, and this problem is even worse for African-American women and worse than that for Latino women (Department of Labor, 2016). Some will assert that they are paid less for taking time out for pregnancy and for child care. First, why should a woman be punished for having children? Second, why do child care responsibilities fall primarily on the mother? Should not this be an equal responsibility for both parents? In today’s workplace, these issues of discrimination are an even bigger issue because there are more women and older people in the workforce than ever before, and this will continue to increase in the near future. One very interesting study reported that very attractive women were discriminated against in jobs that were traditionally “masculine.” For example, jobs in research and development, director of finance, mechanical engineering, and construction supervision discriminated against beautiful women who apparently are not expected to be competent in these types of jobs (Science Daily, 2010).

Discrimination against minorities and immigrants continues to be a major issue in the U.S. as well as many other parts of the world. Some complain about “reverse discrimination” where the majority (e.g., white males) is discriminated against because of their status, and while there may be isolated cases of this, the research literature is very clear that the huge majority of cases of discrimination are directed at women, elderly, minorities, and immigrants. In recent years, we have heard that immigrants are taking away jobs from Americans. There are politicians that are making noise about this in the hope of rallying voter support on their behalf, but it turns out that this is a myth that has been fostered for political reasons and has no basis. There are four jobs out of the many hundreds of different types of jobs that exist that have a majority of immigrant workers and this accounts for less than 1% of the workforce; even in these jobs native born Americans are still 47% of the workforce in those types of jobs. The reality is that the idea of immigrants taking away jobs from other Americans is not really a problem; however, companies sending jobs overseas to avoid paying American workers is and will continue to be an issue and is clearly taking jobs away from American workers (Camarota & Zeigler, 2009).

SUMMARY

The workplace, jobs, and the nature of work itself has changed in the new millennium and will continue to change even more in the future. Globalization, changes in technology, changing demographics, the changing nature of jobs and careers have all affected workers, jobs, and the workplace in general. The Psychology of Work is a relatively new area that is exploring in more depth some of the psychological issues found in the world of work, and will hopefully make it easier to understand and deal with some of the problems and new issues in the workplace today.

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