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Chapter 1: Prologue – In Search of Decent Work

By the Editors - Marilena Antoniadou, Mark Crowder, Fiona Christie, Kevin Albertson

Abstract

‘Decent work’. The very phrase conjures up a range of images and interpretations. But what does it mean for practitioners? What does it mean for academics? Much has been spoken, and even more has been written, but there is still little consensus as to how these questions can be answered. This book aims to offer some answers by exploring the increasingly relevant topic of decent work from a range of perspectives. This initial chapter introduces readers to the purpose, rationale and structure of the book. It offers a description of the concept of decent work, and introduces readers to the work of the Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre of Manchester Metropolitan University.

An introduction to decent work

By the term “work” we mean an individual’s offering of their time to undertake paid employment or self-employment. These offers of “time for money” or “time for resources” take place in the “labour market”, a theoretical construct in which suppliers of time are matched with those who have a demand for labour services holders and means of compensation such as finance or other resources.

At the time of writing, the labour market is undergoing radical transformations, with the global economy in a four-decade long synchronised slowdown (Dorling, 2020; Lea, 2019) and with the number of ‘good jobs’ (jobs that give a measure of security of income to allow workers to plan for the future) being sufficient for only one third of the adult population around the world (Gallup, 2019). Moreover, the unprecedented circumstances resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic are threatening to exacerbate a crisis in employment; potentially reducing wages and salaries, decreasing the safety of working conditions, impacting on the treatment workers can expect, and impinging on employee mental health.

As in any market, in the labour market the gains from trade are more easily realised by those who hold market power. The consequences of the pandemic on the labour market, reducing the demand for labour impacts on relative power imbalances in the market. This heightens the risks of employers misusing the power; power that arises from controlling a scarce resource

(access to the means of production). As a consequence, there is the potential for employers to shift the costs and burdens of the pandemic onto workers. The current crisis also alters the routine of employees, for example, the need of carers of the vulnerable to engage in physical distancing and/or parents to engage in home schooling. Yet employees risk disciplinary action or dismissal if they fail to turn up to their place of work even where government guidelines recommend they are to stay at home in order to avoid serious and imminent danger. In contrast, others are required to work in environments where adequate protective equipment is not provided and physical distancing rules are not strictly adhered to. Clearly, individual employees cannot reasonably be expected to avert the danger posed by Covid-19; nonetheless, the crisis should also not deprive them of their basic right to safe working conditions.

Amidst such radical changes in the world of work, international organisations, global leaders and scholars have provided much needed guidelines about the quality of work that people should be able to access in contemporary society (ILO, 1999, 2013, 2017; Yoshida and Torihara, 1977). Their guidance has yielded an aspirational statement about the kind of work that ought to define the lives of all individuals who work and who wish to work: **Decent Work**.

The concept of Decent Work conveys the broad and varied dimensions associated with work today, and encapsulates them in an expression that everyone can appreciate. But what does the concept of Decent Work really cover? And what might be the current issues and future progress of decent work globally? As a means of answering these questions and creating a knowledge base that will help to foster relevant research, we have instigated this book, which has been written to help academics, managers and those aspiring to a career in management, and workers themselves to understand and deal with the issues and opportunities they face in offering or achieving Decent Work in contemporary contexts.

A unique aspect of this book is the integration of empirical real-life cases from experienced professionals and leading academics that offer readers a greater understanding of decent work issues and opportunities. We explore issues surrounding Decent Work for individuals, organisations and society as a whole and what can be done to shape a decent future for workers and work.

Decent Work is paid employment where the return will at least sustain a person's life and provide sufficient additional resources to allow them to take part in society and achieve

reasonable human aspirations. However, the concept is more holistic than mere subsistence. Decent Work is not just about employment and social and income security in the formal economy but is also relevant in framing questions and discussions about unregulated wage workers and the self-employed.

It cannot be assumed, of course, that the labour market will naturally deliver work of a quality or quantity that is decent. Since the 1980s, increasing global competition has resulted in pressure being applied to working conditions generally. The workers' democratic means to resist has been weakened by legislation undermining trade unions and privatisation and marketisation combining to make even public sector jobs increasingly precarious. Such pressure is systemic, as employers struggle to survive in the face of downward pressure on prices from global competition.

There is special emphasis in the book on the changing nature of the current workplace with a focus on the gig economy, precarious work and the informal economy. In particular, the book explores the growing interest in critically appraising claims of a growing so-called 'gig economy' of informal employment; looking at who this affects most and how, and critical reviews of the productivity of this way of using labour. At the time of writing, the Covid-19 pandemic was underway, a situation that has disproportionately affected people in lower-paid jobs and those working in 'essential' sectors. Indeed, it has highlighted that often those who carry out the most essential jobs are also amongst the less well paid. Challenges for such workers are addressed in the chapters on atypical and gig economy workers.

Moreover, the book includes chapters that examine contemporary human resource practices and evaluate their impact on productivity and the quality of working life; it also highlights the extent to which current employment relationships enable workers to influence the quality of their work experience, and their productivity. It further investigates the extent to which the rewards available from work are both fair and equitable and drive worker productivity. Finally, it includes research that portrays how sustainability thinking and reporting has evolved in recent years to include staff/employees and discusses how this enables the co-evolution of wider sustainability action alongside enhanced decent work practices.

Centre for Decent Work and Productivity

This book is informed by the research of the members of the Centre for Decent Work and Productivity of the Manchester Metropolitan University Business School. The Centre was

established in 2018, bringing together researchers in human resource management, organisational behaviour, economics, business strategy, entrepreneurship, career development and equality and diversity to think across disciplines about the future of work. The book has grown from material originally prepared to promote the work of the Centre. Its motivation is to address, at this time of global change, the shortfall in academic literature adequately to cover the decent work and productivity agenda. The Centre is comprised of four knowledge platforms considering different aspects of employment with respect to:

- (i) Work and working lives
- (ii) Work capabilities, innovation and productivity
- (iii) The Sylvia Pankhurst Gender and Diversity Research Centre, and
- (iv) Work in small enterprises.

In each of the above areas, members of the Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre acted as contributors to this book, and consider the application of ideas and practices on stakeholder and identity groupings (e.g. in relation to gender, class, ethnicity, disability, age, occupation) and in different settings (e.g. SMEs, industries, countries). Additional contributors are co-authors with Research Centre members. In sum, the book discusses the concept of Decent Work, which conveys components of employment, social protection, workers' rights and social dialogue. Specifically, it integrates research from the four knowledge platforms of the Centre and contains chapters that cover a range of challenges, which decent work and productivity face.

Collectively, the knowledge platforms also address the seven challenges, which we believe decent work faces and relate to areas of specialism within the Centre. These are:

1. The Changing Nature of Work
2. Workplace Wellbeing
3. Vulnerable Workers in Employment and Self-Employment
4. Creating Greater Diversity and Social Mobility in the Workplace
5. Generating Decent and Productive Work in Small Enterprises
6. Designing Decent and Productive Work in Health and Social Care
7. Using Knowledge to Generate Decent Work and Productivity for All

The above challenges are integral to the chapters from multiple authors who are experienced and well-recognised in this field.

The aim of this book is to highlight a collection of key challenges and suggest ways to tackle these challenges, with the main intention to promote and raise awareness on decent work. The book combines chapters from authors who see the concept of Decent Work from different angles, but with the same aspiration to see both the concept and the realisation of Decent Work flourish in the formal and informal economic arena. There are implications for senior management and policy makers who might facilitate new approaches for operationalising decent work.

Book Structure

Following on from this first introductory Chapter, **Part 1** of the book sets the scene of decent work: an overview of debates about the concept is provided in Chapter 2; the history and future of work from a social, economic and political perspective is explored in Chapter 3; and Chapter 4 looks at the concept of decent work from a psychological perspective.

Part 2 includes chapters on several opportunities for stimulating decent work: namely, equal opportunity policies and outcomes in Chapter 5; the role of employee value and sustainability thinking in Chapter 6; and the ways that entrepreneurship skills can be developed to facilitate decent work in Chapter 7.

Part 3 emphasises the widespread prevalence of atypical jobs as one of the main challenges of decent work. The employment regulation of gig work is discussed in Chapter 8, by comparing two distinct geographic contexts. In Chapter 9 we explore work patterns for self-employed contemporary musicians in the UK; and Chapter 10 we utilise a critical employment relations approach to evaluate precarious work in the tourism and hospitality industry in Greece.

Ultimately, Chapter 11, our Epilogue summarises key issues covered in the book and considers how research may continue to influence the decent work agenda so that it can clearly and forcefully set standards for work that is safe, secure, meaningful, dignified, and consistent with the best aspects of the human spirit. There follows an outline of the chapters with a brief description of each.

Part 1 – Setting the Scene: Decent Work

Chapter 1: Introduction

By Marilena Antoniadou, Mark Crowder, Fiona Christie, Kevin Albertson

We begin by introducing the readers to the purpose, structure and style of the book. Specifically, Chapter 1 offers a description of the concept of Decent Work, and introduces the work of the Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre of the Manchester Metropolitan University. These elements enable readers to gain a comprehensive introduction to the emerging field of decent work and appreciate its growth and influence in the contemporary workplace.

Chapter 2: What is Decent work? A review of the literature

By Lucy Brill

The literature surrounding the concept of decent work, is reviewed in this chapter, beginning with its adoption by the International Labour Organisation as its primary objective in 1999 within the context of neoliberal globalisation and the increasing precariatisation of work. The analysis examines the concept from its historical perspective and then moves onto explaining how varied scholars and policymakers have sought to define and extend the concept of decent work. It concludes with a brief review of attempts to operationalise the concept and remove barriers to decent work; also drawing upon policy documents and grey literature focused on related terms such as good work and job quality.

Chapter 3: The History and Future of Work

By Kevin Albertson, Christina Purcell and Richard Whittle

The historical background of work from a social, economic and political perspective forms the narrative of this chapter. In it the beginning of the supply of and demand for work and of industrial relations is considered on a macro-temporal scale. Taking an historical perspective, the authors review the beginning of work and of industrial relations from stone age economics until today, when the pandemic has caused disruption and loss of jobs. Lessons from the past encourage the authors to draw conclusions about the future of (Decent) work.

Chapter 4: The Development of the Decent Work Scale as a Cross-cultural Measure of Decent Work

By Vanessa Dodd and Ciaran Burke

The chapter explores the development of an individual-level measure of decent work. It

further discusses the importance of a psychological perspective on decent work to better understand working lives and outline the findings from the validation studies of a Decent Work Scale in eight countries. The potential uses and limitations of the Decent Work Scale are considered, together with the challenges to conceptualising decent work more generally.

Part 2 – Organisational and Policy Drivers: Opportunities for Decent Work

Chapter 5: Decent Work: Gender and Equal Opportunity Policies and Outcomes

By Maria Allen

The potential causes of inequality for different genders in employment are reviewed in this chapter. It particularly highlights how the persistence of the gender pay gap in the UK and in other countries suggests that there is no simple explanation for the disparities in pay between men and women. The author suggests that theories and empirical analyses need to be extended to identify other potential causes of pay discrimination.

Chapter 6: The Role of International and Integrated Sustainability Frameworks in Enhancing Decent Work and Employee Value

By Janet Haddock-Fraser

The chapter shares an appreciation of the interdependencies between human- and physical-systems to drive forward positive change. It emphasises on how employees interact with the wider sustainability agenda for the benefit of themselves and their welfare and wellbeing, as well as that of their employers, the planet and wider society.

Chapter 7: Entrepreneurship Skills Needs and Policies: Contribution to Decent Work

By Sumona Mukhuty and Steve Johnson

The relationship between entrepreneurship skills and decent work, and how policy can help achieve this is explored in this chapter. The authors review the entrepreneurship skills literature in the context of Decent Work, highlighting the key entrepreneurship skills needed in small enterprises. They extract lessons from selected policy initiatives in countries with broad similarities and draw on peer-reviewed journals and key United Nations and global entrepreneurship platform publications. The analysis concludes that, to develop and retain

even a semblance of Decent Work, entrepreneurs need to develop appropriate skills; there is a need for suitable policy addressing this.

Part 3 – Atypical Jobs: A challenge to Decent Work

Chapter 8: Indecent Work? The rise of digital platform work in France and the UK

By Christina Purcell and Reece Garcia

Platform work in two European countries, France and the UK, is examined in this chapter, which examines the similarities and differences of platform work across a number of dimensions. The numbers of platform workers is increasing, and the authors recognise both the flexibility and perceived autonomy of platform work, yet highlight the necessity of a range of measures to combat the negative aspects of this work. The authors further review government responses in the UK and in France, which have been influenced not only by industrial relations and regulatory contexts, but also by the ideological outlook of successive governments.

Chapter 9: Musicians' Work: Creativity, community and insecurity

By Jason Woolley and Fiona Christie

The evolving nature of work patterns and income streams for contemporary musicians in the UK is examined in this chapter. Specifically, it explores the experiences of independent, portfolio career musicians working in the Rock/Pop/Indie/Jazz Live Music scene. The authors discuss how these musicians utilise informal community mechanisms to navigate poor working conditions, value 'dignity' and 'meaningfulness' above remuneration, and yet often default to individualist assumptions regarding career success.

Chapter 10: Structural Barriers to Achieving Decent Work in the Greek Hospitality Industry: A critical employment relations approach

By Orestis Papadopoulos

This chapter illustrates the implications of labour market reforms for workers, through their own accounts, and unravels the antagonistic and conflict-driven elements of the employment relationship. Using evidence from the Greek hospitality industry, the chapter outlines the

significant challenges that the decent work agenda faces in the hospitality industry even in the more regulated Greek context where unions are present and collective agreements still exist. The chapter further makes reference to how the global COVID pandemic has affected the Greek hospitality industry.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

By Marilena Antoniadou, Mark Crowder, Fiona Christie, Kevin Albertson

In this final chapter, the editors present their epilogue. They summarise the book's contribution and conclude with the implications, interactions between, and future of Decent Work and Productivity.

The book is prepared and written by members of the Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre - grounded by high quality research. Our unique blend of authors (who come from disciplines including economics, labour market studies, organisation studies, sociology, psychology, career development and education) positions our book well to contribute to important questions about the future of work. It makes a unique contribution, in an emerging field with burgeoning interest. Therefore, our hope is that readers will find this book relevant to their existing or potential work, regardless of where they live, helping them understand the nature, challenges and opportunities of fair and decent working lives.

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