Value at Work
The capability approach as model to apply the value perspective in work
Tranzo academic collaborative centre for work and health, represented by Jac van der Klink and Dick Freriks

The main risk and challenge of present day work

The main risk and challenge in present-day western workplaces is not in the presence of health-threatening but in the absence of health-promoting elements. Especially the value of work is considered to be an important aspect of workers Quality of Working Life.

This value aspect of present day work fits very well with the capability approach.

The capability approach

The capability approach (CA) is an approach that is value-driven and gives the possibility to identify important values and to analyze how people are enabled and able to achieve these values. The approach, developed by Nobel prize laureate Amartya Sen, is an ethical framework that states that social justice should focus on supporting the capabilities of all individuals to conceive, pursue, and revise their life plans. The CA looks for what is valuable for and valued by people, and how these values can be achieved in life. The approach states explicitly that it is the shared responsibility of the individual and the social context to build up and facilitate the capability set and to achieve and enable these values. Capabilities are the opportunities for fulfilling achievements / ‘functionings’ or ‘beings and doings people have reason to value’.

Equality of what?

In the CA resources (‘means to achieve’ such as income and wealth but also a health condition or labour conditions), only have meaning because of what individuals can be and do through using them and ‘converting’ such ‘means’ into outcomes. For Sen equity in capabilities is important and not equality in means as in most economic and political philosophical theories.

Equality in means
Equality in capability

The capability set for work questionnaire

Van der Klink et al. have recently proposed a set of work values based on interviews with workers in the Dutch labour force. This ‘capability set for work’ consists of seven non-hierarchical work capabilities. This instrument generated a lot of research and practical applications.

Practical applications - impact

Example personal guidance:
Teacher university of applies sciences; woman, 29 years old; successful in business, wanted to do something that has more social significance.
Panic attacks, social anxiety.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Enabled</th>
<th>Able</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Very</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributing to something valuable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in important decisions</td>
<td>Not Neutral</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a good income</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting own goals</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing to something valuable</td>
<td>Not Neutral</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a good income</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Not</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other applications
Preventive (collective); in HR cycle; when applying (expectation management); personal guidance; at changing job; et cetera.

Contact and information

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