

Wildman, P. (2002). *Creating Communities of Freedom through NeWork - The Liberation of Work*. Brisbane, The Kalgrove Institute (TKI): 11pgs.

## **Creating Communities of Freedom through NeWork - The Liberation of Work**

**Developing a rationale for the NeWork Community Centre**

by Paul Wildman  
The Kalgrove Institute  
pwildman@optushome.com.au  
PO 74 Nundah 4012 Brisbane Aust  
07 32667570 0412027818  
05-2002

## **An Invitation**

This is an invitation to imaginative thinkers, educators, and activists to help create an innovative environment to house The Center for NeWork in Ann Arbor, Michigan. In addition to giving greater visibility to an energetic and growing international movement, a professionally staffed Center will function as an information and communications hub and will provide vital support services to affiliated NeWork programs in businesses, educational institutions, and neighborhood organisations.

## **A New Way of Working**

NeWork is an innovative and flexible response to the far-reaching changes which are sweeping across the entire landscape of work. It is an evolving set of ideas about work and the human spirit rooted in self-reliance, individual freedom, and community. Open-ended and experimental, but deeply committed to the life-enhancing potential of work that is purposeful and good, NeWork emphasises practical steps we can take to transform how we pursue our livelihoods.

The forces that are reshaping work include the proliferation of new technologies, the restructuring of corporations to achieve greater productivity, and the emergence of a genuine global economy. For many people, this is a distressing time marked by mergers, downsizing, layoffs, and the disappearance of high-paying jobs in industry. For others, it is a period of unprecedented opportunities for new and better jobs - in home-based employment, in high-tech industries, in new fields of human service. Old assumptions about secure, long-term employment are unraveling with stunning speed, but at the same time, exciting new fields of creativity and service are opening up all around us.

NeWork is an invitation to seize upon the opportunities implicit in these developments. It calls for changes in business, education, and career development that will make it possible for more people to achieve their potential and assume control over their lives. NeWork proponents believe that the greatest underutilised resource on this planet is the talent, passion, and creative potential of ordinary human beings. NeWork calls for enhancing productivity by liberating and elevating the full humanity of workers.

Although technological advances are often utilised in ways that are detrimental to workers and, as a result, may be greeted with widespread fear and resistance, NeWork focuses on the positive side of technology. Technology has eliminated some of the most onerous and dehumanising kinds of work. It should enable us to concentrate our energies on work that draws upon our most human capabilities and lifts us up.

Advocates of NeWork point out that the current job system is not an eternal construct. It is a relatively modern phenomenon that took hold during the Industrial Revolution. NeWork suggests a more flexible approach in which the work people do is divided into roughly equal shares of part-time job-work, self-employment in the form of paid callings, self-providing and service such as citizenship activities and volunteering, and last and never least quality time for family and friends. And all this is 5 days? 7 days? This multi-tiered way of working should help restore a secure foundation for employment,

involvement and incomes while encouraging people to pursue work they care about and believe in, work that is charged with a sense of calling. Calling that contributes to who we are and how we understand ourselves while helping others.

NeWork then bestows some small modicum of personal power both as rights and responsibilities on the NeWorker's life and work as an individual citizen and more importantly it lets each of us enter the 'politics of time' debate. Now we have a disposability of time never before experienced. I will recall my father, a plumber, in the 50's saying the weekend is the time you have off from work.

### **Employment rates**

Estimates of workers made redundant to workers remaining over the past generation in large business range from 5:1 to 10:1. The range of new jobs to old jobs ranges from 1:7 to 1:14. 128-129. [This was even in 19980] Therefore in summary we may say that: over the next generation 3/4ers of all blue collar workers even in the third world will be eliminated and that of these only 1/10 will find jobs in the IT industry that is eliminating them. Even this simplistic calculation shows a loss of 2/3rds of shop-floor and associated jobs by 2025. PW Prediction. This would generate a world wide employment rate of around 1/3rd by 2025. This is directly in line with Dator's prognosis, although not a bold as Rifkin. When combined with Gorz's estimate that 25% of the workforce are at present needed to produce the necessities of life then less than 10% ie 1/4er of even these that have jobs will be providing the necessities. Here we need to distinguish between a job and work and involvement and inclusion.

### **Vocation: Discovering What We Really Want To Do With Our Lives**

NeWork believes in the enormous potential of good work, work you can give your life to, work that makes you more alive in return. Traditional jobs, which are predicated on an exchange of time and talent for money, often obscure the true potential of work. Ironically the disappearance of secure employment may actually help us discover the profound importance of work in shaping our lives and identities. Work is tremendous when it has a purpose, when it *is lit by an inner spark*. When that happens, it is more than just a job. It is a vocation.

NeWork teaches us to become career entrepreneurs and frees us from having to accept the first McJob that comes along. It encourages us to seek jobs that are more fulfilling and to complement traditional jobs with home-based enterprises that draw on our talents and interests and relate to the needs of those around us. It reminds us that much of the most important work still remains to be done - the work of educating the young, caring for the elderly, and helping each of us become what we are capable of being. As workers, providers, and consumers, it offers a more integrated, holistic approach to our lives.

From a NeWork perspective, the crisis in jobs is not merely something to be deplored. It may actually be the birth pangs of a better way of working, the dominance of a passive job mentality giving way to a deeper, more spiritual appreciation of work. In NeWork,

the notion of vocation, which has generally been reserved for a few small categories of work, emerges as a way of describing a quality of work all of us can aspire to.

The most dramatic proof of the power of NeWork can be seen in the transformation of individual lives. Even in the most dispiriting circumstances, people are being lifted up. Through NeWork educational programs and one-on-one counseling, they are discovering a panorama of exciting possibilities. They are figuring out what they really want to do with their lives.

### **High-Tech Self-Providing**

High-tech self-providing is an important ingredient of a more flexible approach to work. Although self-providing has ties to pre-industrial self-sufficiency, high-tech self-providers are not attempting to turn back the clock. They utilise computers, modern tools and materials, and a plethora of how-to resources, and they have the skills and insights it takes to live fulfilling lives in an economy where secure jobs are rapidly disappearing.

The possibilities for self-providing are unlimited: auto repair, housing construction and maintenance, biodynamic and hydroponic gardening, aquaculture, money management and financial planning, second-hand and wholesale purchasing, participation in child care, credit, and consumer cooperatives.... High-tech self-providing has both individual and communal dimensions, and group self-providing ventures can make a powerful contribution to reviving a lost sense of community.

Whether acting as individuals or community members, self-providers are resourceful and self-reliant, and they enjoy new freedom to shape their careers and pursue their own callings. If industrial age workers were like classical musicians who played their assigned parts, high-tech self-providers are like jazz performers who improvise as they adapt to the rapidly changing tempos of the information era.

### **Communities of Freedom**

In the years since the first Center for NeWork opened in 1982 to serve auto workers in Flint, Michigan, a number of other organisations in the U.S., Canada, and Germany have begun teaching and practicing NeWork in order to secure a better future for themselves and their children. These organisations have their own leaders and agendas, but they are united by a commitment to helping people discover the freedom that resides in grounding their work in their deepest interests and concerns.

### **They are building communities of freedom. Will you be part of this?**

Here are some examples of institution- and community-based NeWork (US New Work) initiatives:

#### **\* NeWork for a New Generation**

A series of television programs and neighborhood discussions on preparing young people to live and work in the new economy, together with a print-video curriculum based on the series.

*WTVS, Detroit Public Television*

\* **The Living Wall Garden Project**

An intensive and highly successful NeWork remedial training group which involved unemployed youth and adults in establishing a small horticultural business and learning an entrepreneurial approach to career development.

*Canadian NeWork Institute and Tully & Company, Vancouver, BC*

\* **Haus der Eigenarbeit (The House for One's Own Work)**

A facility where people learn to make household objects and everyday articles out of a variety of materials for self-provider purposes.

*Anstiftung, Munich, Germany*

\* **International Writing Workshops**

Writing workshops in Michigan and Germany for American and European young people with a special emphasis on the changing nature of work.

*Huron Shores Writing Institute, Rogers City, MI, and Muhlhauser Initiative, Muhlhausen, Germany*

A number of new projects are also taking shape:

\* **NeWork Institute**

An effort to redirect an urban adult education program toward broader, more realistic objectives related to jobs, paid callings, and self-providing. In the preparatory phase, staff members have been meeting monthly to study the NeWork Curriculum and to redesign their program.

*Detroit Public Schools*

\* **The Entrepreneurial Development Center**

A church-based self-help initiative in Detroit's East Side aimed at teaching entrepreneurial and self-provider skills and creating economic opportunities founded on community needs. Unit teams are now working on business development in landscaping, janitorial and maid services, and small garden specialty marketing.

*Detroit Eastside Coalition of Churches.*

\* **NeWork College Course**

A NeWork philosophy course being prepared by faculty members at Washtenaw Community College for offering by 2000, a pilot intended for replication at other institutions of higher learning. Also under development - a humanities major in NeWork.

*Washtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor, MI*

\* **Energy Storage Device Factory**

An enterprise in the development phase which is intended to create a plant in the blighted East Side of Detroit for assembling new ecologically friendly EDC, Inc., batteries. In NeWork fashion, employees will work two days a week in the plant, two days at paid callings, and one or two days on self-providing.

*Carlson & Weber, Detroit, MI*

\* **Health Impact Study**

Discussions now under way at the University of Michigan and a Detroit area hospital to design a study of the impact of community-based NeWork vocational and self-provider training on the participants' mental and physical health. The study will be done with residents in Detroit's East Side and/or participants in the Detroit Public Schools adult education program.

*University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI*

**The Center For NeWork**

For a number of years, the Center for NeWork has consisted primarily of Dr. Frithjof Bergmann and his telephone. NeWork advocates have not lacked an inspirational leader, and they have forged ahead with a number of impressive projects. Everyone realises, however, that in order to replicate and expand these efforts and achieve critical mass for the movement, it is absolutely essential to establish the Center on a firm organisational footing.

In the US Dr. Bergmann and a group of close associates have now established the Center for NeWork as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organisation with officers and a board of directors, an international advisory team, an Ann Arbor office and address, and a clear set of immediate objectives. NeWork leaders and representatives of allied movements have completed two intensive conferences in the last two years. These meetings were devoted to sharing information about a variety of NeWork programs and to developing a coordinated strategy for emancipating work from the current job system and giving work a central place in the creation of a more humane, equitable, and cheerful culture.

Operating with a small professional staff, the Center for NeWork will pursue a variety of important functions. Although many of these roles are intertwined, we have found it useful to organise them under six headings. The table below shows the breadth of activities that we envision will be carried on at the Center in the long term. The table includes activities which will be accomplished in the first year, as well as more advanced tasks which can be undertaken only after certain organisational structures and NeWork resources are in place.

\*\*\* In Australia the Centre for NeWork has been set up in Toowoomba.

**Aspects of a NeWork Centre**

# **Information Clearing House**

The Center will serve as a clearinghouse of print and electronic information resources that are needed to conduct educational, networking, and outreach functions and respond to the needs of members and inquirers. Because they are essential for a wide range of NeWork activities, these informational resources should receive top priority during the Center's first year of operation.

In this capacity, the Center will:

- \* Compile information on the activities of the Center and its affiliates

- \* Develop a library of materials about the history of work and work liberation efforts
- \* Produce an introductory brochure, a NeWork primer, a lecture flyer, and a press kit
- \* Create a NeWork introductory video and audio cassette
- \* Produce and assemble print and electronic resources for NeWork counseling
- \* Produce and circulate a newsletter and other member support materials
- \* Market NeWork books, pamphlets, educational curricula, and tapes
- \* Develop a directory of NeWork leaders and resource people
- \* Create and maintain a NeWork web site
- \* Maintain an office with regular hours

### # **Support Services for Community- Based NeWork Affiliates**

A number of churches and community organisations are conducting NeWork entrepreneurial and economic development projects in their neighborhoods. These programs have their own indigenous leaders and they are tailored to local needs, but they rely on the Center for expertise in NeWork, as well as teaching and counseling resources.

The Center will also assist these organisations by facilitating communication and information sharing among them. The Center will publicise successful projects and promote their replication in other localities.

Specifically, the Center will:

- \* Consult with local leaders on program design
- \* Help these leaders with proposal writing and grantsmanship
- \* Support local programs with print and electronic education and training resources
- \* Provide specialists and experts to participate in local programs
- \* Promote information sharing and cross-fertilization among community-based NeWork programs
- \* Train staff members - organisational leaders, workshop facilitators, NeWork career counselors
- \* Assist with entrepreneurial initiatives and the creation of individual and community-based small business enterprises
- \* Publicise successful programs and promote their replication

### # **Educational Projects Development**

NeWork has great relevance to education and career guidance on all levels. The Center for NeWork will work with educators on the development and refinement of curriculum materials and the creation of NeWork courses, and it will conduct workshops and provide consultation for institutions which are interested in incorporating NeWork into their instructional programs.

The Center will:

- \* Assist in the development of college-level NeWork courses and career guidance programs

- \* Conduct seminars and workshops for community college administrators and faculty on teaching NeWork
- \* Create packets for campus NeWork teach-ins on the job crisis
- \* Expand NeWork for a New Generation (high school curriculum) and produce ancillary print and video materials
- \* Assist high school teachers, counselors, and administrators in utilising the curriculum and adapting it to local needs
- \* Develop theological seminary courses and internships on church-based economic development and ministry to the whole person
- \* Using the Detroit Public Schools' NeWork Initiative as a model, work to incorporate small business development, career entrepreneurship, paid callings, and high-tech self-providing training into remedial adult education
- \* Generate mailings and on-line announcements to promote these educational programs

### # **Business and Civic Outreach**

The Center for NeWork must play a pro-active role in creating opportunities for NeWork thinkers and activists to address all segments of the community: business and labor, government, the media, civic and service organisations, and the general public.

These are the means by which NeWork will make a contribution to the public discussion of issues and contribute to forward-looking institutional and public policy initiatives.

The Center will:

- \* Develop contacts and evolve a strategy for promoting lectures to college, business, and community group audiences
- \* Design and distribute promotional and public education materials for community teach-ins and townhall meetings
- \* Schedule speakers, radio and television spokespersons, seminar and workshop leaders
- \* Offer business and labor consultations and advise firms on instituting NeWork principles in their employment and operational practices
- \* Generate NeWork articles in local and national print media and NeWork segments in local and national broadcast media

### # **Organisation and Movement Building**

One of the chief reasons for the existence of a Center is to provide a means by which groups and individuals interested in the liberation of work can join in a movement which gives them a stronger voice.

NeWork has developed a language and action models that articulate what many people have been struggling to say. It should also open doors for them to participate and contribute to a growing force for positive change.

The Center will:

- \* Build and nurture a membership organisation



- \* Develop member services and activities, provide vehicles for input and exchange
- \* Conduct direct mail and in-house membership solicitations
- \* Connect members with NeWork affiliates in their own area and assist them in creating new affiliates
- \* Create a directory of closely related action and advocacy groups: movements supporting shorter hours, voluntary simplicity, employee-owned businesses, cooperatives, intentional communities, entrepreneurial education, a sustainable economy, etc.
- \* Network with these groups and participate in joint endeavors

### # **Research and Public Policy Initiatives**

At a time when interest groups on the right and the left are relying on "think tanks" to influence public opinion and policy, the Center will create an "action learning plane" or "action thinking tank" that is more authentically visionary and creative.

NeWork revolves around a core set of concerns - emancipating work, elevating vocation, creating communities of freedom, commitment to family and friends and civic duty - yet it draws much of its strength from the diversity of its supporters.

The Center will:

- \* Create a think tank on the future of work
- \* Conduct research studies
- \* Publish monographs and research studies.
- \* Issue public policy recommendations
- \* Organise public forums
- \* Dialogue with public officials and community leaders
- \* Produce radio and television programs that contribute to the discussion of the future of work

### **The Ultimate Goal**

The Center for NeWork does not exist merely to support a fascinating smorgasbord of educational and community development projects. The Center's ultimate goal is to produce a movement that will effect a profound change in the way people live and work. It exists to break the stranglehold of jobs on work and to challenge people everywhere to expect more, much more from their work.

NeWork recognises that work at its best is a primary form of self-expression, a source of pleasurable and meaningful activity, a way of using our talents and interests to serve others. It is an expression of our gratitude for the gift of life.

Whether it is embraced by individuals, political and economic leaders, or religious and community groups, NeWork implies a more flexible, wide-ranging approach to work. Good work may be found in traditional jobs, in individual paid callings, in cooperative efforts, in high-tech self-providing. It has practical possibilities we have scarcely dreamed of.

But at the heart of NeWork is a revolutionary way of thinking which transforms work from being a means to an end into a basic constituent of life which can fill it with joy, purpose and learning.

---

**Acknowledgement** – this work draws from <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/newwork/center.htm> ie. the Centre for New Work in Arbor Michigan USA and work by the New Zealand Nework Centre [nework@xtra.co.nz](mailto:nework@xtra.co.nz)

**For More Information** - We welcome your comments and suggestions

**In Australia**

**The NeWork Community Centre**

Paul Wildman

[pwildman@optushome.com.au](mailto:pwildman@optushome.com.au)

PO Box 74 Nundah 4012

07 32667570

NeWork Community Centre

252 Spring Street TOOWOOMBA 4350

Phone: 07 4636 4850

Fax: 07 4636 4850

Toowoomba, Qld

**In New Zealand**

**The Nework Centre**

Level 2 Willbank House

PO Box 9826

Wellington

Ph NZ 4991048

Email [nework@xtra.co.nz](mailto:nework@xtra.co.nz)

**In the US**

**The Center for New Work.**

P.O Box 4266

Ann Arbor

MI 48107.

Ph +1-313-988-0111

Email to the Executive Director, Frithjof Bergmann at ([fberg@umich.edu](mailto:fberg@umich.edu)).