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Hi Ho! Hi Ho! Its off (to Ne)Work we go?

THE FUTURES OF WORK: Localism, The Post-Job Economy, a role of Community & Learning Organisations*

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Introduction

Twenty percent employment by 2030? Sounds bizarre? Well strange as this may sound other authors are projecting even more scary scenarios. This article seeks to explore such a post-job economy and suggests roles for learning* and other organisations involved in helping their communities come to terms with low job futures. To this end recent developments in the labour market such as jobless growth and informal work need to be explored. The article suggests we need to redefine 'job'. It identifies several options and alternatives to the conventional 9-5x7 job. These options include, minimum guaranteed income, rejigging the tax/welfare system, combining pay and work in 'perk' activities, new ways of **working** that combine various paid and unpaid and self-employment options ie NeWork, various 'localist' and 'alternative economics' options. In all these initiatives there is need for collective integrity and ample opportunity for a futures oriented learning organisation* to contributing to build local job capability.

Let us ask ourselves what will our children's' children see as 'the' limitation in our thinking and learning that inhibited the emergence of creative, fruitful responses to unemployment today? Anon

Will the jobs future be a bleak one?

One where an automated machine just requires an occasional crank? In this article I will explore some labour market trends and offer an opinion on the question - probably 'yes' with current trends. Political parties, labour market programs or regional development programs (sic!) don't seem to be able to gear up to meet the challenge. In fact there still seems to be the paradigm of lets train, apprentice the unemployed in existing jobs or even worse 'warehouse' the unemployed person in 'make work' projects. The article concludes with several innovatory ideas for Regional Development (RD) and the Learning Institution's role in helping local communities' address these dilemmas. Conclusions are offered for sustainable community based economic development within the emerging political environment.

Already the richest 225 people in the world own as much as the bottom 1/2 of all the worlds people (2.5billion). No wonder futurist economists such as Wallerstein say this is the worst time in history to be alive. No longer is it land mines but rather debt that is the bullets that are killing and maiming so many children world wide esp. in developing nations. No longer can we see an Asian century as the first in the next millennium. Here we see a stalling world economy with no or negative jobs growth. So that if the cake ie. national production does not expand the impact of debt becomes even more severe in poor nations - especially those with out social security (unemployment protection).

Dator speaks of 20% employment by 2035 and Rifkin by much less than this by 2050. Yet Nation States tax/welfare systems remain firmly tied to the concept of the full time job so much so that the further away from sch a job you get the more assistance you get to get one. Policy issues such as 'NeWork', community based informal 'multiployment' and minimum guaranteed income (also called a citizen's income) still seem to be a long way from the

agenda. Too long, I argue we need to develop something in the interim while waiting for the 'powers that be' to act.

Critically Today's labour market is characterised by casualisation, jobless growth, declining blue and increasing pink-collar jobs. And a collapse of traditional labour market entry points for youth. Technologicalisation causes selective reduction in capital needed and always net reductions in labour required. Work as we know it is on the way out.

Current estimates broad acre unemployment puts the unemployment and underemployment rates in Australia at around 15-20% @6-01. In this rate the LTU's account for about 25% of overall unemployment. This combined figure has been steadily increasing since the early 1990's. Further a disproportionate of these people excluded from the conventional job market are the over 50's. Yet demographically Australia's age pyramid is shrinking in that the proportion of youth is declining compared to us oldies. So employers will need to understand the needs and desires and capabilities of the mature worker to remain competitive beyond 2010.

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% i.e. 1/4er of even these that have jobs will be providing the necessities. Clearly the overall rate of unemployment is several times the Natural Rate of around 5%.

These trends could well generate a world wide employment rate of around 1/3rd by 2025. This is in line with, though somewhat more conservative than, Dator's prognosis, although not as bold as Rifkin. Clearly alternatives to conventional full time employment especially for older workers is a critical need. NeWork is one such response.

What then can we do?

I argue therefore that several responses need to be explored:

- . Flexible Productive Regions and localist options
- . Minimum Guaranteed Income
- . Plerk – combing play and work
- . NeWork and multiployment
- . Additional Alternative Economic programs concentrating on the 'informal' sector
- . Conventional economic responses (are 'working' effectively less and less)

Space does not permit the review of each of these and in this regard the first will be explored in some detail. As far as resources are concerned I argue we need the equivalent of the 'peace dividend' with the end of the cold war huge armies were no longer needed. Likewise today we need a 'jobs dividend' with the huge expenditure particularly on vocational and some areas of higher education can be redirected to these areas.

Regional groupings are vital to future work

These groupings, particularly of NGO's are already starting to transcend the Nation State. Hopefully emerging systems of regional governance will include trust and a much greater

level of citizen participation in the context of 'learning regions'. What all this means is that as we near the next millennium is what may be described as a global regional mosaic comprising **Flexible Productive Regions** is emerging. Such regions are intermeshed with international commodity chains. They are today the dynamic core of modern capitalism. Flexible regions may be seen as definite localised complexes of economic and social activity inscribed durably on the landscape. This may well be a pattern for co-operative and intentional communities to emulate. Further such regions enhance competitive (rather than comparative) advantage. Such enhancement has four main aspects:

- . **Specialisation and complementarity** (such as fashion, TV production, convention centres, festivals)
- . **Skilled, mobile habituated flexible workforce**
- . **Producer network interaction** that generates cumulative learning/innovation and,
- . **Governance** to facilitate these.

When matched with **low cost mass transport for people and product, low cost communications and instant transnational capital flows** one can see how it is that the velocity of trade inc. the circulation of finance, communication and goods and services movements has increased post World War II. And it has increased in the space between Nation State's economies. Some negative outcomes of this process include - rural/urban shift, unemployment (particularly among youth), crime, social dislocation, polarisation of income and occupations.

Consequently exploring the role for **regional institutions**, one needs to be cognisant of this likely future. One of a low job economic future located in an international marketscape being continuously shaped and reshaped by international trade policy and technology. All this is within the historically unprecedented economic uncertainty of emerging Asian economic collapse and against a demographic backdrop where the proportion of Caucasian population of the world declining from 50% 100 yrs ago to less than 10% in 50 yrs time. It is a time when our great western icons of Coke and Macdonald's have left home and are doing more business outside America. Further the anchor concept of the Nation State, in its Western (and Asian) manifestations, is declining in economic potency and succumbing to what may be described as long term unemployed and other social pathologies.

What role can Community and Learning Organisations take?

At ground zero level it may be argued that much of this social dislocation is triggered by the increasing polarisation of wealth manifest for instance through the distribution of employment opportunities. In turn this is leading to fundamental unsustainabilities in the social, economic and natural environments. Yet many Learning Institutions, such as Universities, remind the author of what HG Wells said of them over 60 yrs ago. When commenting on their seeming inability to facilitate the emergence of Word Brain, which incidentally has now fallen to the Web to birth. He said **Universities** were *'hovering over a battlefield watching the setting sun'*. The battlefield spoken of here is that of the full time job and the setting sun its demise.

Today social change initiatives such as NeWork, Community Economic Development have to have cognisance of the need for recovery from this Global Dysfunction as well as growing a 'bigger economic pie'. As such this recovery includes recognising the role of the informal and community sector and local responses as a counterpoint to 'internationalisation'. Ultimately this means being able to act ethically, learn from our mistakes, and engage perspective's beyond the purely rational. Consequently this article has argued that the future of 'work' into this century is indeed bleak, however there is a great opportunity for Learning and Community Institutions and Associations to serve its immediate geographic community. Serve, in the sense of helping us reconstruct the meaning of work and in the generation of sustainable jobs while introducing more longer term alternatives to 'job consciousness'. Clearly conventional formal economic systems can play as important role in future work however innovative informal initiatives can play a crucial role in helping a community/region prepare to engage an uncertain low jobs future.

In short pro-active involvement of Community and Learning Institutions can provide practical things like Learning Circles for increased community spirit and informal and sustainable jobs for young people, documentation of such initiatives, clearing house for local organisations to swap stories. Further this approach can offer a theoretical and practical challenge for Business, Government and Unions alike to lift their act and embrace **harmonised local diversity** rather than forsaking all in the interests of **homogenised international conformity**. Even if this sort of approach impacts 10-20% of the local economy it can earn its place as part of a strategy combining conventional and alternative approaches to regional development.

Conclusion

Consequently this article has sought to argue strongly for Learning/Leading/Labour Market Institution involvement in developing futures oriented community development, especially in the jobs area - ***no more hovering***. It has proposed several innovative pilot projects that can seed the above 'future work' ideas. For instance by incorporating bioregional considerations into informal jobs, urban design and networking via. the web between communities to facilitate sustainable jobs, community finance, NeWork programs, some form of basic income, strategic planning assistance, a perking pilot, and community based futures workshops. In turn the community can be involved in joint pilot initiatives and the in the provision of these types of action learning experiences for students and adult learners. In these ways the community/Learning Institution can help generate policy awareness and debate as well as meaningful 'new work' towards a positive future in an uncertain world.

So our motto can become

Hi Ho! Hi Ho! Its off (to new options) work we go?

* What Universities/Technical Colleges, Adult Learning Associations and those relating to the general welfare and empowerment of the over 50's (such as Work and Age Trust NZ, Councils on the Aging Aust) should/could be, among other things - futures oriented NeWork organisations.

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