

CHAPTER ONE – CHANGING WORK, CHANGING WORKERS

Globalisation and the intensified economic competition it engenders are profoundly altering the way we live and relate to each other. For a start, work is undergoing such transformation that in future the notion of a job may change its meaning entirely. (Carnoy, 2001: 306)

CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS OF WORK LIFE

There is a widely held view that, in the last quarter of the last century and now spilling into this century, there have been considerable changes to the kinds of work available, how they are practised and who engages in them. The world of work has become unstable with changes to global economic activity, technology and cultural practices (e.g. McBrier and Wilson, 2004). In many recent accounts of work, work practice and career development much is made of the disempowerment and anxiety caused by the constantly turbulent and uncertain nature of contemporary work (e.g. Bauman, 1998; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). For instance, a common claim is that a continuous and logically coherent working life is now less available, thereby making continuity of work skills and identity problematic. Many new jobs are held to be contingent -- fixed term and part-time (Carnoy, 1999), making work insecure and insufficient.

According to Rifkin (1995) more than 75 per cent of the labour force in industrialised nations engages in work that is little more than simple repetitive tasks that do not provide any gratifying and meaningful identity for the workers. Leicht (1998) claims that contemporary workplaces are characterised as featuring: (a) flatter organizational hierarchies, as new information technologies eliminate the need for most layers of middle management; (b) the growing use of temporary workers employed on an 'as-needed' basis to perform specific jobs for the duration of single projects; (c) the extensive use of subcontracting and outsourcing to small firms; (d) massive down-sizing of the permanent workforce resulting from flatter hierarchies and the replacement of skilled workers by machine tenders; (e) a post-unionised bargaining environment where unions have no place and no structural ability to gain a foothold to bargain with employers; and (f) virtual organisations that exist not as distinctive structural locations but as webs of technologically driven interactions. Such characteristics are presented as significant trends that are transforming existing conceptions and practices of paid work that individuals encounter in their working life.

Beyond the unpredictability of what constitutes much contemporary work is the claim that the kinds of work we engage in are increasingly subject to change. It is popularly claimed that individuals will

need to engage in multiple careers and will be required to reinvent their occupational identity a number of times throughout their working lives.

These work-related manifestations of change are held by some to reflect a broader and more ubiquitous set of conditions that create great uncertainty. Beck (1992) proposes that contemporary (modern) society presents greater risks than in former times, rendering a greater sense of insecurity and uncertainty. Giddens (1991) proposes that contemporary society is generative of anxiety and has individuals standing before it as anxiety ridden. Work and working life are not exceptions to this general claim, particularly if Leicht's (1998) six claims outlined above are upheld. So, finding continuity in working life in late modernity is held to be a precarious enterprise for individuals because of its turbulent and transformative character (e.g. O'Doherty and Willmot, 2001).

All this fuels the notion that paid work which provides adequate and consistent remuneration, personal fulfilment, and pathways to self-identity and sense of self is becoming less likely, and that jobs which are both secure and well regarded are becoming a rarity (Bauman, 1998). This suggests, rather bleakly, that high salary levels, the ability to enact social good, personal discretion in how individuals engage in work, for how long and to what level of intensity, and the prospect of engaging in interesting work, in the humanist tradition, may be becoming the privilege of fewer workers.

Such propositions emanate most strongly from theoretical accounts of work that might be described as social theorising, and are admittedly speculative. Often, such accounts are premised in theoretical rather than empirical analyses. That is, these accounts are based on propositions deduced from the authors' theoretical (Giddens, 1991) or ideological stance (Beck, 1992) or their observations of the past and present, and speculations about the future (Bauman, 1998). These analyses extend from meta-analysis about changing societal conditions through to accounts that explain how individuals and society come together. For instance, the social structuring of work is often the key premise, with individuals by degree being viewed as captive, subjugated or resistant to these socially derived practices. So, the degree to which an individual is free to make decisions and act autonomously in work is subject to diverse viewpoints.

For instance, in the risky and uncertain era of late modernity, it is suggested that individuals have become 'enterprising selves' (Du Gay, 1996; Rose, 1990), engaging in self-regulation as they act in ways against their preferred sense of self. In so doing, they adopt an almost Machiavellian persona that seeks to project a self that meets the requirements of their work, while fostering quite different personal beliefs. Hence, in this view, it is suggested that individuals direct their critical faculties in ways that subvert and bury their real selves in efforts to secure continuity and advancement in their employment (Grey, 1994). The theoretical view here would be to see these individuals as socialised subjects, engaged in self-deception and regulation generative of a false consciousness. Clearly, this perspective privileges the social world and

positions it as objective and comprising potent institutional facts (Searle, 1995), the press of social institutions that cannot be wished away.

Wright Mills (1973) suggested that in identifying the close relationship between human development and work, Marx proposed that the essence of being a human rests upon work. What comprises a human being “coincides with their production, both what they produce and with how they produce” (p. 8). Within this perspective the nature of individuals, their conditions, their prospects and their rewards depend on “the material conditions determining their production” (p.8). Here, individuals are held to be dependent upon these social structures both materially and for their identity. The work, working life and sense of self of those engaged in paid work are therefore dependent upon the social structures that shape their work and behaviour. Given that many of these theorists report erosion in the conditions of work and working life, they extrapolate directly their propositions to the quality of an individual’s working life and the prospect for a positive sense of self.

Yet to what degree are both of the conditions and conclusions supported by empirical accounts of work and workplace activities?

QUALITIES AND BENEFITS OF WORKING LIFE

There is evidence to support some of what is suggested in these theoretical accounts. The immediate post-war period was a time of economic development, stable employment and declining inequality. However, the period since the mid 1970s has featured increasing global competition, pressure on labour to be more productive and the assertion of management practices in Western countries such as the USA (Handel, 2005), the United Kingdom (Carnoy, 1999), Canada (Livingstone, 2004), many European states and Australia (Pusey, 2003). According to Carnoy (2001), in the face of intense global competition, work is being reorganised around

“... the centralised management, customised products, and work differentiation, such that work has become individualised and workers differentiated” (p. 306).

The consequences of this reorganisation are to make work more readily sub-contracted, undertaken by part-time and temporary workers, while core work becomes more broadly skilled and conducted in teams. These actions separate workers from the kinds of stable work and work identities that have become accepted in modern industrialised societies (Carnoy, 2001). These practices and their consequences are likely to be felt in different ways, degrees and at different times and paces, across and within countries. For instance, some kinds of work (e.g. garment and automobile manufacturing and steel production) were exported from some countries having particular, and sometimes, devastating effects within communities usually sustained by those industries. Then there are changes that pervade these countries more generally and broadly across a range of industry

sectors. For instance, in considering the increasing erosion of job security, drawing upon empirical data, Handel (2005) proposes that

... there is now a general agreement that job security and internal labour markets also eroded in the 1990s, but the effect fell disproportionately on white-collar and more educated workers, narrowing some of the insecurity gap between the more and less privileged workers ... (2005: 69).

This suggests that it is not only exported work that has caused job losses and uncertainty, but also more widespread adjustments about work, its standing and its regard within the community. In this way, some of the claims of social theorists previously mentioned appear to be upheld and these extend to the worth of the available work.

Indeed, those employed part-time and contractually often report contemporary work to now be more unsatisfactory in terms of remuneration, security and opportunities for advancement (Bolle, 2001, McGovern et al, 2004). Moreover, although women workers are now participating in greater numbers in the American, British and Australian workforces, there is a tendency for work that is highly regarded, remunerated and that offers advancement to experience reductions in conditions and opportunities when occupied by women (Skuratowicz and Hunter, 2004). So the pursuit of worthwhile work is, in part, frustrated by such changes. Analogously, Skinner (2004) and others (e.g. McNair et al, 2004) have noted that a polarisation of employment patterns has arisen through shifts from manufacturing to service work and transformations brought about by technology. This polarisation sees a hollowing out of mid-skilled work and a concentration in both high and low skill occupations. Yet, the impact of this hollowing-out may be different across populations. McBrier and Wilson (2004) claim that any falls in the occupational mobility of white-collar workers are likely to be more extreme for African Americans than their white counterparts. The shift to low skill and less secure forms of work had particularly negative impacts for African Americans. So there is some empirical evidence to support the theorising and speculation of the grand social theorists of general erosion in the quality of work and work life.

Nevertheless, much of this evidence is premised on quantitative accounts, using surveys and other measures, albeit with some consideration for the individual's satisfaction with what is being proposed. However, in all of these evidenced based accounts, the appraisal of the changes to and impacts of work is through socially and culturally derived measures, rather than more subjective accounts of an individual's experience of work (Handel, 2005). Consequently, conceptions of what constitutes good work and an effective working life are shaped by these kinds of objective accounts, rather than those that accommodate individual subjective experience.

SUBJECTIVE ACCOUNTS OF WORK LIFE

However, the experience of work needs also to be understood from personal or subjective viewpoints. From interviews with Australian workers, Pusey (2003) found the centrality of work for humans was both rehearsed and reinforced: “For nearly everyone work is a social protein, a buttress for identity and not a tradeable commodity.” (p.2). This suggests that it is important to understand work not only from the perspective of objective measures, but also individual subjective experience of what constitutes work and working life. For instance, Noon and Blyton (1997) propose that the majority of people in all categories of jobs would continue to work even if there is no financial need, because of social contact and its purposefulness in sustaining an identity. This suggests either wholesale social subjugation (i.e. the individual becomes socialised to engaging in work) or individuals finding meaning and sense of self within their work which is personally fulfilling. In studies examining the lived experience of contemporary workers (e.g. Billett, Barker and Hernon-Tinning, 2004; Billett and Pavlova, 2005; Fenwick, 2002; 2004, Somerville, 2002, Somerville and Abrahamsson, 2003), a more complex pattern emerges. That is, there is an intertwining between the press of the social world and an individual’s agency and intentionality that shapes and is shaped by their sense of self.

For instance, fire fighters are required to be highly agentic and exercise discretion in their work yet revel in their identities as fire fighters yet as subject to command and control work organisation in which subordinates are required to unquestioningly obey instructions from a superior (Billett, Smith and Barker, 2005). Coalminers are immersed in a culture that provides identity as a worker and member of a community yet also engages them in behaviours that are potentially deleterious to the health (Somerville, 2002)

It seems that, for the workers in these studies, work is important and central to their sense of self, yet their sense of it, engagement with it and control over it is not so readily characterised by social subjugation or even localised press. Instead, there is a rich interplay between what the workplace and the social world affords these workers and how they engage with (i.e. construe, construct and respond to) what is afforded them. While their degree of autonomy and prospect of exercising their self is in part contingent upon the kind of work they undertake and their prospects for discretion and autonomy, the underlying condition that emerges is of these workers being able to make a space for themselves and to exercise their self in different ways (Billett and Pavlova, 2005; Billett, Smith and Barker, 2005, Fenwick, 2002, Somerville, 2002). Indeed, Giddens (1991) advancing from his theory of structuration suggests a space for individuals to negotiate with the social world and positions them as being agentic. He offers a view of individuals engaging with the world of work to be seen as more personally agentic than views that hold individuals as being socially subjugated. Therefore, beyond objective accounts, more personally based perspectives (i.e. how work relates to an individual’s needs), are

warranted, as they articulate salient qualities about work and workers' identity, and the worth of working life to individuals.

In response to Giddens' (1991) proposal that individuals exercise agency when confronted by the anxiety-creating, socially subjugating conditions of contemporary working life, Fenwick (1998) counters by suggesting that individuals are not cowering and anxiety ridden. Instead they engage with changing circumstances agentically. Fenwick (1998) identifies this agency, discretion and personal intentionality in the actions and agency of small business operators in their working lives. The women in her study were able to exercise their preference for the kinds of businesses they wanted to pursue and the ways they pursued their business goals. In this way, they were able to demonstrate that rather than being captive to business orthodoxy and entrepreneurialism, they could pursue their own goals and develop their own practices. Similarly, Billett, Ehrich and Hernon-Tinning (2003) in examining how small business operators learnt to implement a goods and service tax, identified the central role of individual agency in learning new practices, in the relative isolation of small-business settings. Here, small business operators' learning of new practice was characterised through the enactment of their personal initiative and a reflective approach to learning, not only in deciding what and how to learn, but also how they elected to engage with the support that was available to them.

WORK AND SENSE OF SELF

In extending this emphasis of personal agency, some claim individual agency is not directed towards individuals 'being themselves', as humanists propose, but towards constructing a 'sense of self' albeit constrained by the parameters of their work and working life (e.g. Knights and Willmott, 1989). These views suggest that individuals are negotiating and exercising agency in their work practices, albeit constrained in different degrees by the requirements of the workplace and conditions of their working lives. Through analyses of the working lives of three workers (Billett, Barker and Hernon-Tinning, 2004), then another five workers (Billett and Pavlova, 2005) over periods of six months and a year respectively, and then groups of workers in the same workplace (Billett, Smith and Barker, 2005) the following was noted: not only were these workers able to adapt to the changing circumstances of their work, but these changes, in the main, supported the individuals' personal workplace goals. For instance, changes in circumstances in a small business within a fruit and vegetable wholesaler permitted a casual part-time employee to establish a role for herself at work and in doing so realised her goal of securing an identity outside of the home, as a care giver to her children (Billett and Pavlova, 2005).

Also challenging the view advanced earlier about the disempowerment experienced by workers, survey data offers a different picture. For instance, surveys of Australian employees identify the

contribution of workplace support for their workplace-based learning (ABS, 2002) to be at a higher level than their employers report providing it (ABS, 2003). This is surprising given that in a country which previously had a national training levy and required employers to report their expenditure to a prescribed level (or pay the equivalent in additional tax), employers may be under-reporting their learning support. Furthermore, as much learning support in the workplace is not always obvious or appreciated by employees, there might be an expectation that employees would under-report. The data across these two surveys then calls into question claims that contemporary workplaces are inherently hostile towards and non-supportive of employees.

Consequently, rather than seeing contemporary work as turbulent, inevitably disempowering and causing anxiety, the evidence from these studies suggests more differentiated outcomes. This is not to say that all workers are able to exercise discretion and secure workplace outcomes that are suited to and driven by the personal goals. However, the studies reported above challenge the view that all workers are inherently captive to the press of the immediate social experience, which at this time makes working life seem more insecure and less rewarding or supportive. In seeking to understand workers' engagement with their paid employment, the investigations of working life experiences, referred to in this section capture something of the role of individuals in negotiating the changing character of contemporary working life. They proceed in quite a different way from the studies reflecting social theories and based on more quantitative measures of the quality of working life. Although the small-scale investigations are only illustrative, referring to their specific populations rather than offering any kind of generalisation, they provide a particular and different perspective that warrants further consideration. In particular, it could be concluded that the accounts of contemporary working life provided through theoretical and objectively based socially derived measures may not be providing the complete picture of contemporary and emerging working life.

Changing work and its impacts

The perspectives discussed in the previous two sections offer quite different, although not always contradictory views of working life, and its consequences for workers. Each makes important contributions to understanding work life. Yet, the gulf between them is such that there needs to be some reconciliation in order to advance a more comprehensive and viable account of work and working life. These distinctions are only reconcilable, in part, through an acceptance of their representing different levels of analysis or methods of analysis, or research orientations. They suggest something quite different in how we understand how individuals might come to experience, make sense of and engage in working life. Certainly the differences in these views suggest the need for a more comprehensive view of working life is needed. On the one hand, and

consistent with economic and sociological accounts of work, judgements about the worth of contemporary working life have been premised on objective and socially valued measures (e.g. level of remuneration, other benefits, employment security, opportunities for promotion). On the other hand, the more subjective accounts focusing on how work meets the needs and desires of individuals may provide a different kind of account. It seems that both kinds of accounts are important in particular ways. Yet, it is perhaps only when their contributions are integrated, attempts made to reconcile and examine them together that a fuller and more comprehensive account of contemporary working life and its impact upon individuals can be advanced.

Such a task requires engaging with theoretical and empirical work that can address the complexity and relatedness of the kinds of issues that have emerged in the overview presented above. In essence, it is necessary to understand and account for, firstly, the institutional facts that constitute the experience of work and working life that individuals encounter; secondly, the experience that individuals have in their encounters with paid work; and, thirdly, how the agency of the social and individual are negotiated through participation in working life, and the remaking of the work in which workers engage. At its heart, the central concern is to understand the relations between the socially structured world in which work and working life occur and how individuals make sense (construe), construct meaning and engage with the social world.

This task is set within an existing and long-standing debate within the social sciences about structure and agency, and their relations. This book has a particular purpose and focus for engaging in that debate and using its deliberations to elaborate a more comprehensive and complex understanding of work, working life and the processes of learning and remaking the cultural practice of work. The next section introduces this debate.

Interdependency between affordances and agency

The bases of relations between individuals' agency (i.e. their directed and intentional thinking and acting) and their engagement in social practice are multiple, complex and overlapping. In considering relations between the personal and social, Valsiner (1994) refers to the 'relatedness' between an individual's values and the mores of the social practice. Individuals' agentic actions are directed to sustaining and extending their work practice, for instance, in ways that are not always consistent with the goals of their workplace). The exercise of their agentic action might even lead individuals to disassociate or dis-identify with the practices (e.g. Hodges, 1998) of their workplace. Tensions arise when the kinds of participation individuals desire are not afforded by the workplace. A workers' pursuit of promotion and learning the kinds of skills required for promotion might be inhibited by workplace practices, resulted in tensions between the individuals' goals for the continuity of their practice and the workplace's

practices that are directed to its continuity (e.g. the need for certain skills, numbers of workers, achieving service or production goals). For instance, in one study a qualified fitter employed as a production worker, was highly agentic in his efforts to become a fitter in this work place. Yet he was frustrated by the lack of available positions and the greater he exercised his agency (e.g. following fitters to off-limit work areas) the more he eroded his prospects of achieving his goal, because he became perceived as a nuisance by the fitters and a risk by his supervisors.

Understanding further these reciprocal processes contributes to key discussions within psychological theorising about the relations between individual cognition and the socio-geneses of knowledge (e.g. Cobb, 1998, Rogoff, 1995, Scribner, 1997, Valsiner and Van de Veer, 2000). Valsiner (1994) refers to this process as the co-construction of knowledge, the reciprocal act of knowledge construction through which both the object and the subject are transformed. Analogously, engagement in work activities are held to be co-participative (Billett, 2004) -- constituted by the relationship between how the work practice affords participation and how individuals elect to participate in the work practice and engage with what is afforded. More than just influencing engagement in work, these co-participative practices are also held to mediate individuals' learning (Billett, 2001a). That is, if change arises through engagement in goal-directed activity, the basis of that engagement (e.g. whether it was full-bodied or not), and the purposes of individuals' engagement (e.g. superficial compliance or relating to core interests) will influence the learning that transpires and how work is remade. When engaging in work individuals are both learning and remaking practice through the constructive processes that accompany their engagement.

This conception of co-participation may help to understand the emerging concepts of the social geneses of human cognition. This is because these conceptual premises assist understanding how: (a) the social practice (e.g. workplace) affords opportunities for participation, learning and remaking practice; (b) individuals' decisions to engage in social practice influence their learning; and (c) the interdependent relations between (a) and (b) make useful contributions to understanding the relations between social practice and individuals' learning through work.

UNDERSTANDING WORK AND WORKERS

From the discussions above, it is important to understand paid work both as an institutional fact (Searle, 1995) that individuals will encounter, and experience its changes and transformations, as well as something which is experienced more subjectively by individuals. Commencing by considering work as an institutional fact, it is possible to identify three dimensions of the changing character of work as something likely to be experienced in the contemporary world of work and which cannot be wished away albeit is reflected in myriad forms.

Changes in work

There are changes to the kinds of work to be done and participation in occupational categories that reflect this work. Some industries and occupations are in the ascendancy, as employment in them flourishes, and the scope of their applications broadens. Others are in decline or changing forms. There are also changes to what constitutes the categories of work. Technical work may need to be redefined, for instance, as diverse forms of work embrace information technology, thereby potentially rendering individuals increasingly as technicians (Barley, 1996). However, other forms of work are being discarded as they are no longer required (e.g. hot metal printing, watch repairing), or have been transformed in ways that makes existing skills redundant (e.g. typesetting). The cultural practices that comprise paid work are in need of transformation when cultural need changes. Shifting demands for particular kinds of work are likely to reflect changes in cultural needs, albeit initiated by technical innovation, new forms of social organisation or new and emerging cultural needs.

Changes in work participation

How individuals participate in work is also in transformation in current times. Full-time workers are working longer and with greater intensity in many countries. Consequently, for instance, there is a need for older workers to maintain their competence as workers, even in the face of a societal preference for youth that is reflected in how enterprises distribute their resources for developing workers' skills. Workers with disabilities are also participating in the workforce. Yet again their participation is complicated by their need to be seen as competent without making too many demands upon their employers (Church, 2004). Women workers are now almost a majority in many Western nations' workforces, yet still experience lower wages and poorer (Jacobsen, 2004). Moreover, it seems a greater percentage of the work force is now involuntarily contingent (part-time, contracted and temporary) even in buoyant labour markets.

Also, and compared with previous times, more work is also perhaps being conducted in relative social and geographical isolation, such as from home. Consequently, the kinds of engagement between workers and workplaces are being transformed. While employers exercise less of an interest in an individual's progression and development because of the breakdown of (traditional) relations between workers and employers (Carnoy, 1999), employees themselves may well be exercising a greater commitment to managing more uncertain work lives. That is, the 'enterprising self' and efforts directed to being oneself through work is now replacing the concept of the faithful and loyal employee, particularly when work and workers are contingent.

Changing work performance requirements

It follows from the previous two factors that the requirements for performing effectively in working life are also changing. The capacities and competencies that individuals require to be effective in their work practice are being transformed by the different means of conducting and organising work, as well as the specific occupational skills required to achieve work goals. As the organisation of work and its requirements change, as cultural need proposes particular ways of working, the use of technology and the knowledge, practices and capacities or ways of knowing required for work also change. Certainly, the debate about whether work is being up-skilled or down-skilled by technology and new ways of working is still open to debate, because it differs widely and is person-dependant in part. However, given the frequency of change, work tasks are likely to be less routine, yet more intense, complex and requiring greater levels of interactions with others and artefacts, which all bring with it additional demands.

These sets of changes reflect the world of work that individuals will encounter as presented by social theory and research that identifies significant trends in the changing nature of contemporary work. However, there is also a need to consider the more subjective experience that arises from these conditions and, importantly, the negotiations between the two that constitute an individual's experience of work, and they participate in and learning about work.

WORK AS RELATIONAL INTERDEPENDENCE

Contemporary work and workers can be seen as comprising a relational interdependence between the institutional facts that constitute the work individuals encounter and how these are shaped as individuals participate in work. This is not to posit the individual against the social, because individuals are socially shaped, albeit uniquely through an idiosyncratic set of experiences. Instead, this interdependence is characterised not so much by a strong emphasis on either the social institutions that comprise the sites for paid work or an individual's vocational practice but in terms of a dualistic interdependence between the two.

Indeed, rather than being reciprocal or mutual, these relationships are negotiated and differ in intensity: they are relational (Billett, 2003). For one worker, the workplace may well be highly invitational and supportive of their development and career progression. As a result, this individual may elect to engage effortfully in the workplace. They might also take advantage of their privileged position. For another worker, the same workplace might afford fewer opportunities, perhaps being denied what others are granted and excluded from opportunities for maintaining the currency of their skills let alone developing them further. This worker may elect to withdraw and only participate reluctantly or strategically for their own purposes. Conversely, they might engage effortfully and intensely to secure opportunities and acknowledgement despite the limited affordances being advanced. Importantly, the interdependence between socially

constructed individuals and socially constructed workplaces is central to the continuity of both. That is, both individual development and the making of cultural practices that comprise paid work activities, depend upon the interaction between the individual and social contributions. The social suggestion is not comprehensive enough, pervasive nor uniformly applicable to secure socialised outcomes. Therefore, if for no other reason, individuals are required to be agentic to understand what is being proposed socially and in enacting and remaking what is encountered in work.

Of course, the issues addressed in discussing work and workers are wide, diverse and differentiated. While it is necessary to refer to work and workers in general terms, this risks masking the diversity of work, workers and working lives. The ideas in this book are drawn from national surveys of employment patterns, accounts of work based on specific instances, and detailed analyses of individuals' working lives. Yet as Darrah (1997) proposed, work can be so diverse as to obviate generalisations about its requirements. This sentiment can be extended to categories of work, categories of workers and the diverse circumstances of individuals' working lives, and the bases by which workers construct meaning within their working lives. So while the accounts of work presented here, can at best be selective, partial and notably incomplete, an attempt has been made to not restrict the analysis to just the so-called objective accounts of work and working life. Instead, richer accounts of individuals' working lives need including in consideration of work, work life and how it is transformed.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book seeks to understand the contemporary and changing experience of work. It comprises three sections. Following the introductory chapter, the first section, *Social and individual bases for understanding work life*, establishes the conceptual case for understanding the requirements for work and its transformation. Its three chapters focus on the cultural, social and individual genesis of knowledge required for work (Chapter 2) Social and Individual Bases for Understanding Work Life; an elaboration of the relational interdependence between social and individual factors (Chapter 3) A Relational Bases for Understanding Working Life; and conceptions of the worth of work (Chapter 4) The Worth of Work.

The second section of the book, *Changing concepts and requirements of work*, has four chapters which focus on the changing availability and categorisations of paid work (Chapter 5) Changes in the Available Work; practices of participation in work (Chapter 6) Changes in Participation in Work; character of those participating in work (Chapter 7) Changing Composition of the Work Forces; and the requirements for work performance (Chapter 8) Changing Requirements for Paid Work.

The third section of the book, *Describing and elaborating work*, consists of three chapters. The first offers a framework to describe and illuminate work (Chapter 9) A Framework for Describing Work, the next

elaborates the factors shaping working life (Chapter 10) Changing Work Practices and Requirements: Case studies, with the conceptual contributions synthesised in the final chapter (Chapter 11) Work, Learning and Identity.

This first chapter -- Changing work, changing workers -- has aimed to outline the case for the need for and an approach to examine changing work and the experience of work for workers (i.e. changing workers). It has argued that without an understanding of relationships between the changing character of work and the changing basis by which individuals engage in work in Western economies, work and working life will remain misunderstood and unclear. The chapter outlines an understanding of what constitutes work, how work practice might best proceed, on what bases individuals engage in work and learn through work, and how lifelong learning for work occurs and might be best supported. The chapter also introduces the conceptual terrain that is traversed through the book and foreshadows the case it makes throughout. Relations between the social and the individual are held to be a way of understanding the contributions of both and, in particular, how they are negotiated between the agency of the social and the individual.

Structuring of chapters

The structuring of each chapter and sections of this book is premised on the assumption that few readers will work through the text in a linear fashion. Rather, it is assumed that readers will focus on areas of specific interest. Consequently, each chapter is intended to be largely self sufficient, as in the structure and organisation of a chapter within an edited collection. Hence, each chapter provides examples and instances of concepts, which may well be repeated elsewhere. Moreover, the sections of the book emphasise particular interests. The first section comprises conceptual accounts which are illuminated through the use of examples, trails of which can be found in other sections. The second section comprises the products of a broadly based review of literature on work and work life. The third section focuses more strongly on empirical evidence. In order to assist the reader utilise the contents of the book to greatest effect, in addition to the contents pages and index to guide the reader to particular areas of interest, notes are made about where else within the book particular concepts can be found.

This means that, if you read across the chapters in a linear fashion there may be some instances of repetition and redundancy. However, the structure and design of the book is intended to accommodate what is assumed to be the most likely use of the book: selective and targeted engagement with its contents.