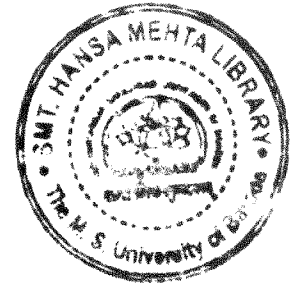


CHAPTER-1



CHAPTER-1

PROLOGUE

1.1 PROBLEM OF STUDY

The pathological state of societies including modern business organisations shows signs of growth and development on one hand and cynicism and desperation on the other. Shareholders' worth increases and so does unhappiness at personal and societal levels. All these manifestations are products of 'work' and 'working'.

It is observed that attrition of talent, low level of employee commitment, lack of creativity, internal conflicts, increasing focus on self-gratification, rampant corruption, sense of powerlessness, low level of inter-personal trust, lack of team effort and a host of energy and vitality sapping attributes plague the modern organisations. Indian organizations are bearing the brunt of talent attrition in an environment where poverty and plenty co-exist in the employment market. Salary rise is unable to check flight of organizational talent. At the same time increasing levels of unemployment continue. Attraction and retention of talent—one of the important strategic HR issues—has become critical for Indian organizations. Work and meaning associated with it is expectedly hiding secrets of this malaise that organizations need to uncover.

All these are reflective of action and its consequence. Quite often we talk and discuss over outcomes of action but rarely about action *per-se* which is the root-cause of these manifestations. Therefore, there is a need to understand as to what is 'work'? Why does one engage into work? And whether it has any connect with higher goals of life instead of only being concerned with material well being.

Further, it may be postulated that seemingly what one does, one actually should not do and what one should be doing, possibly one does not understand or even be aware of. If that be the case, there is need to explore the meaning of 'work' which one

assigns and derives during the course of action that one performs and to examine the theoretical foundations of action and empirically identify as to what one really aspires for and attaches importance to, as this meaning acts as stimulant to action.

Under such conditions, the present study aims to understand as to how Indian executives in large organisations view their 'work' and inferences that could be drawn from their collective perception. Do factors like age or gender have anything to do with the phenomenon? Does the organizational culture (public vs. private sector) impact executive thinking and action? Does religion have anything to do in shaping the thoughts? If so, what are the factors underlying their current thought process, the understanding of which may lead to examining the issues from holistic perspective for generating appropriate organizational responses. The present study is aimed at attempting to unfold the hidden.

1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

A man is both cause and effect of society and culture. "Work" forms the basis of medium of expression of human engagement. Through this creative pursuit of his choice, seemingly man seeks to derive 'peace' and 'happiness'. The intensity, commitment and quality of work, however, does not remain the same for all and changes with time, place and situation. This variability offers a variety of challenges and opportunities making it an interesting problem needing exploration.

"Work" has acquired various meanings within the domain ranging from physics to meta-physics. It has been the driver of human development and also a product of the same exhibiting reversibility of interconnects as also the basis of human existence. Work in physical terms has been understood as – engagement in bodily or mental pursuit – result of a force to move an object through a distance mostly against resistance, to reflect what is done and not the effort applied.

It is recognized that the context reflects the meaning of a situation. 'Work' and 'action' is synonymously used in quite a few situations. Action manifests life. Inaction signifies death. Action is required even for salvation in a meta-physical context.

It is quite interesting to observe that the meaning of work undergoes change and is perceived differently depending on the domain of or meaning assigned by observers. Attitude to work thus could change from a total laziness to indifference to work-addiction.

There are organizations and societies, which behave responsively in a disciplined manner while many others depict dysfunctional characteristics in this regard. As a result, what emerges is heterogeneity of culture, varied preferences, different ideologies and economic status coming out basically as a 'product' of work. It also has its manifestation in psychological pre-disposition of individuals and could as well be symbolic at times. It is for this reason that a work of art results in production of a song, a book, painting or a sculpture.

The history of human development has typically traversed through three distinct phases – agrarian, industrial and knowledge centered development processes. These essentially reflected the cause and effect of how human beings perceived 'work' which they were engaged in. It affected their thought process, which was fountainhead of actions. Repetitive actions were typically classified as behaviour patterns, which resulted in shaping the attitudinal orientation of an individual. A bundle of attitudes shaped their belief systems and eventually became part of their values and character. Thus, 'meaning' to 'work' assigned by the individuals and groups shaped values eventually, which were cherished by the organizations and the societies – as this process became fundamental to their evolution, growth and development.

Researchers have established that behaviour of individuals is a function of their own persona and environment in which they work. The personality traits and the environmental factors – schools, institutions, homes and work places – also impinge on shaping the basic values and attitude towards work.

The notion that social realities are a 'collective' construct is not new. It is through this process that a 'mind-set' and a belief system tempered by cultural ethos of organizations and societies get created. It is, however, interesting to observe that sometimes individual mind-set is at variance with the collective mindset. Group

behavior, therefore, becomes an interesting area of exploration along with individual behavior. At the root, however, of such group conduct is an individual carrying his 'meaning' of work.

Since individuals find an avenue to express themselves through the medium of 'work', it provides an interesting domain of study to explore a set of common variables which shape such understanding. The meanings of "work" that individuals assign---or its contextualization, if we may call it so- would lead to emergence of any new work culture or a social order, if addressed and modified.

History plays a significant role in creating and shaping future. The happenings of today may have had their seeds sown sometime in the past. Present, thus, holds in itself the potential of future. 'Work' thus becomes a vehicle in the present to create future.

1.3 RELEVANCE FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Kolb's (1984) learning cycle typically postulates that a concrete experience of a learner leads to reflective observation and abstract conceptualization. Subsequently, active experimentation either results in similar or changed experience which goes to reinforce or otherwise the belief formation. This essentially is the process which gives rise to different meaning to 'work' by individuals. Like human beings, organizations too require and seek fulfillment of their aspirations and objectives through "work". The alignment of various processes while performing the work could reduce conflict. The alignment in meaning of work could establish congruence between individual and organizational goals.

The corporates have started playing significant role in economic development of a country. They also impact on societal welfare either through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives or indirectly by aiding fiscal consolidation efforts of government besides direct economic benefits to various stake- holders. Globally, there are corporates which are bigger than nations. Wall-mart, for example, has revenues exceeding that of 170 countries of the world and is equal to 22nd richest nation. Such could be the economic mite of a corporate. In our country, too, there are manufacturing organizations which singly contribute over four percent of GDP.

Understanding the nature and meaning of “work”, therefore is an area holding considerable potential to influence organizational performance. The multi-variant nature of this understanding may unfold strategic issues which in turn are expected to help fine-tune the corporate strategy.

1.3.1 THE LEADERSHIP (MANAGERIAL) CONTEXT

Leaders play a crucial role in organizational processes and creating congenial environment for performance delivery and work-life balance besides creation of wealth.

The leadership at various levels in the organization paves and shows the way and delineates growth trajectory for the organization and makes attempts to achieve the goals. Developing an understanding as to how the leadership views and gives meaning to work may help in understanding current organizational values and character.

Social reality is a collective construct and therefore developing insights in the aspects which form basis of ‘work’ would make it quite relevant and interesting field of study in a leadership context. Capturing thoughts of those who are in leadership roles becomes relevant and important.

At the time of independence (1947), India had half of its GDP coming out of agriculture sector. Today, it is replaced by services sector. The share of industrial sector is maintained almost at the same level. On the societal plane, people on one hand wish to get benefited on account of industrial development but at the same time resist any negative environmental impact. The inequity in distribution of wealth is equally resisted and detested. The Indian demography is changing. 50% population is below 35 years of age. It offers both opportunities and challenges. Women are increasingly joining the work-force. Indian Public Sector Units (PSU) and Private Sector Organisations (PSO) are faced with global competitive pressures needing innovation in managerial practices. The call for ‘inclusive growth’ is becoming louder. Under such conditions of pressures and pulls, it becomes an interesting area of exploration to find out as to what drives “work” as far as Indian corporate executives

are concerned? What “work” means to them-at least in current economic and social context?

The study therefore attempts to identify and capture as to what are the factors that Indian executives think to be of importance rather than attempting to seek a confirmation or otherwise of a set of a-priori theories or hypotheses. However, hypotheses that emanated during the course of study have been examined.

The results of the study could throw up pointers towards generation, evaluation and implementation of organizational policies for enhancing values alignment between executives and organizations and shaping its culture and work behavior of individuals or groups. This hopefully would provide a wide canvas for all organizations and policy makers to remain abreast with the ‘meaning’ of work in current context to help them frame appropriate policies and actions in that context.

1.4 FACTORS AFFECTING *WHY* OF ‘WORK’ AND ITS MEANING

The aspect of work could reflect any dimension namely-compulsion, consciousness and choice for creativity. Classifying the work-force in two varieties namely “have to work” (compulsion) and “want to work” (consciousness and choice), we get following four combinations:

- Those who have to work and want to work.
- Those who have to work but do not want to work.
- Those do not have to work but want to work.
- Those do not have to work and do not want to work.

Understanding the meaning of work for executives over the work-life span may help in shaping the recruitment and retention policies. For those who have to work, health benefits and regular income systems are important and for those who want to work provision of avenues for them to gainfully use their skills, experience and maintain social connections or network and spiritual pursuits or altruistic motives could be specially important.

The “triple helix” of occupation, family and leisure also impact on the career development and therefore meaning of work across the life span changes. (Rapaport

and Rapaport 1980; Riley, Kahn & Foner, 1994). The generation gap and risk of aging also change the meaning of work. Several studies have brought out links between the individual aging and the meaning of work (Sarason, S. 1977). Men and women, young and old, are required to perform different roles at different points of time in their lives and as such associated meaning of 'work' also undergoes change for them. Gender, age and meaning of 'work' thus also are integrally linked.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

As could be seen, meaning of 'work' could be studied from various perspectives. In order that the study remains focused and generates utility value, it was necessary to define the boundaries of this study.

This study, in Indian context, covers supervisory and managerial work-force (executives) from large Indian industrial organizations and attempts to explore the meaning that executives give to 'work' and the drivers that operate on the leaders.

The meaning of work assigned by individuals may vary with the age, gender, economic status, socio-technical factors and cultural variables. This aspect is covered in the study. It seeks to study meaning of 'work' as is attributed by executives and managers of Indian companies of public and private sectors particularly employees who are performing their supervisory and managerial roles at various levels of organizational hierarchy—from lowest to highest. Thus 'workers' are not covered in this study. It includes both genders of executives i.e. males and females. To capture age both old and young executives have been covered.

The words like supervisory employees, executives, managers (junior, middle, senior and top) have thus to be understood in this context as synonymous unless otherwise specified.

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study seeks to explore and present some significant researches that have been done on the aspects of 'Meaning of Work' and to:

- State philosophical underpinnings as are enunciated in scriptures covering Sanatan dharma, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam that signify 'work'.

- Expound the drivers of meaning of 'work' assigned by executives and understand, if any, differences in various age groups, genders and organizational hierarchy in assigning 'meaning' to work both in public and private sector enterprises in India.
- Develop strategic understanding, identify action areas for promoting organizational success and developing managerial and leadership resources.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

In the platonic dialogue LACHES, Socrates asks: What is "courage"?

The young Laches, to whom question is addressed, replies: "Courage is not running away from battle". Socrates points out that it was not a particular example of courage that was asked for but the identification of some quality or property common to all courageous acts and which entitles them to be called courageous. This tactic is typical of Socratic *search for definitions*. The chief philosophical method was that of "ELENCHUS": an eliciting and questioning of beliefs in order to establish truth and reveal inconsistencies (Collinson, 1998).

Firstly, search for definition which encompass maximum variables that go in creating the meaning and reasons (the 'what' and 'why') of work; Secondly, juxtapose with 'what' is work, the reasons (why') of work-such as in Maslowian explanations-to generate alternative perspectives on 'work'. Thirdly, elucidate how this understanding, therefore, would help in modeling or shaping of policies and actions to enhance effectiveness (of the 'why') of work for individual or collective benefit.

Accordingly, an empirical study is proposed to be carried out covering the domain of executives from large Indian corporates. Becoming too futuristic is fraught with risk of becoming fictional. Only looking back may not provide full insights either. Therefore, dealing with present context appears to be more appropriate for a study of this nature (with a mix of past and eye on future).

1.7.1 INSTRUMENT: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Structured questionnaires (Exhibit-1) to capture the demographic details, the professional expertise and what an individual assigns as 'meaning of work' has been used to ferret out data needed for the study. The instrument used for the study is the

Meaning of Work Questionnaire (MWQ)¹ developed by Singh, Jain and Bhandarkar (2006). This was supplemented with details that were required for this study.

The questionnaire contains thirty-two statements to capture ‘meaning of work’ assigned by corporate executives². Each statement is considered as the meaning assigned to work and is treated as a ‘**variable**’ for purposes of this study. Though each variable describes a meaning of ‘work’ but does not holistically convey the full meaning. This opens up avenues for typical Socratic mode of enquiry to unfold the meaning in as much detail as feasible.

The **respondents’** demographic details and other **attributes**, needed for the study namely sex, age, sector, hierarchical level, qualifications and length of work experience were also captured.

The responses to questionnaire were captured using seven-point **Likert-type Scale** (for Strongly Disagree =1; Disagree = 2; Slightly Disagree = 3; Somewhat Not Sure = 4; Slightly Agree =5; Agree =6 and Strongly Agree =7). Data so collected is analyzed using statistical tools.

1.7.2 THE SAMPLE

The sample data was **drawn** from executives of following organizations (large corporates with employee strength more than 1000) from their various departments:

Gujarat Alkalies and Chemicals Limited (GACL), Vadodara	Public sector
Gujarat Industrial Power Company Limited (GIPCL), Vadodara	Public sector
Heavy Engineering Corporation Limited, Ranchi	Public sector
Indian Farmers’ Fertilizers Cooperative (IFFCO) ³ , Phulpur, Kandla	Public sector
Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOC), Vadodara	Public sector
Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) Vadodara, Ankleshwar	Public sector
Atul Limited, Valsad	Private sector
Larsen and Toubro (L&T), Vadodara	Private sector
Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), Vadodara, Hazira and Jamnagar	Private sector

Total **668** responses were received and analysed. Of this 364 participants (i.e. 54.5%) were from Private Sector organization; comprising 313 male managers (i.e. 46.9%) and 51 female managers (i.e. 7.6%) while 304 participants (i.e. 45.5%) were from Public Sector organizations that included 233 male managers (i.e. 34.9%) and 71 female managers (i.e. 10.6%) respectively.

1.7.3 DATA ANALYSIS

The statistical analysis was done to decipher significant variables that reflected meaning of 'work' given by Indian executives.

Besides 668 responses received through the questionnaire, more than 500 executives were also engaged in discussion (over the period of study) on the theme of meaning of 'work' to elicit views on:

How they define work?

Why do they work?

What makes them work?

What alienates them from work?

What do they wish to get out of their lives?

This was undertaken with a view to further enhance understanding of the subject, capture diversity and depth of the assigned meaning and to supplement empirical data analysis and conclusions based on the same. The context is Indian.

1.8 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to current organizational scholarship and practice as they may:

- a. Enable scholars to understand as to what gives meaning to 'work' in current context of Indian managers in corporate sector;
- b. Bring together various dimensions of meaningful work in one framework and show the relationship of one with the other;
- c. Point the importance of engaging with the inspiration towards an ideal as well as often less-than-perfect reality of self and the organizational context in which meaning gets expressed ;
- d. Identify plural thinking on 'work'—convergences and divergences- that exists among genders and generations of Indian managers;
- e. Indicate sectoral differences that may be impinging on the thought process of managers in Public and Private sectors;
- f. Highlight significant factors which need to be acted upon by the corporates for developing effective HR strategy and action for attracting and retaining talent and fine tuning HR sub-systems;

- g. Help executives (read leaders) to compare their 'own' meaning of work against the backdrop of 'collective' construct captured in this study and shape their learning-unlearning-relearning cycle appropriately;
- h. Contribute to our understanding of how to engage individuals in conversations about meaningful work that are not prescriptive or exclusive, but which also are significant and show what meanings are commonly held in the current Indian management context;
- i. Attempt to provide meaning of 'work' in the context of meaning of 'life' in Indian context; and
- j. Throw-up areas for further exploration based on understanding of meaning of 'work' as captured in this study.

This opens up avenues for future research as well in other life-domains.

1.9 PLAN OF THE STUDY

Besides the present introductory chapter stating the problem, rationale, objectives and methodology of study, the study spans over other five chapters which are briefly described below.

Chapter two deals with the analysis of different religious beliefs that provide underpinnings of the concept of 'work' to individuals and social context that shapes meaning of 'work' in ones' life as (s) he evolves. This is covered in three parts. First part of the chapter explores the perspective provided by Sanatan Dharma emanating from Vedic and Pauranic literature. It also discusses Buddhism and Jainism being variants of Sanatan Dharma as these have evolved on Indian soil. The second part of the chapter deals with the tenets of Christianity with a view to understand the shaping of meaning of 'work' in individuals' mind. The third part deals with the principles as enunciated in Islamic text-The Holy Qur-'aan- that impart meaning to life and 'work'.

Chapter three reviews the literature highlighting meaning of 'work' and explores the causal linkages of the same. A thematic review instead of chronological account of research in different life-contexts is presented.

Chapter four presents 'Empirical Study' data drawn from executives of large corporates from public and private sectors with different demographic profiles like

gender and age and managerial hierarchy after a parametric analysis. The meaning assigned by executives revolves around 3-S model of Sammriddhi, Sukh and Shaanti.

Chapter five presents discussion of the subject of 'Meaning of Work' in the context of organizational architecture and leadership.

Chapter six is the epilogue of the study presenting the summary of findings and offers suggestions to organizations with a resolute belief that proper understanding of meaning of 'work' would create congenial environment, work-life balance along with healthy and sustainable organizations by enhancing employee retention and ensuring higher level of commitment.