

Value at work

Sustainable employability as capability; a multidisciplinary perspective



Inaugural address by
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Given in shortened form at the public acceptance of the appointment of professor of mental health at work and sustainable employability at Tilburg University on Friday, 17 April 2015.



*For my wife Ariane, my children Jolijn en Lein-Jan, Laura, Chiel en Floor
and my granddaughter Anneleine*

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Introduction; 'value-plays'

‘Dear mister Rector, dear mister dean of the Tilburg School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, dear colleagues, dear family, friends and highly valued audience’,

The French philosopher Michel Foucault introduced the concept of ‘jeux de la vérité’ (Foucault, 1994), which literally means ‘truth-plays’, and which refers to what kind of truth can exist and is allowed in a specific power configuration. The underlying thought is that power defines truth, which we all know by the truismⁱ: ‘history is written by the victors’. This treatise is about ‘value’, and more specifically, ‘value at work’. Referring to, but also with a ‘nod’ or ‘wink’ to Foucault’s concept, I introduce the term ‘value-plays’ and I will ‘play’ in the following with how values in relation to work and health are, as truth in ‘jeux de la vérité’, determined by the context and influenced by societal configurations and perspectives.

Freedom and freedom related concepts, like autonomy, self-direction and authenticity are highly valued in our societal and philosophical ideology. That culminated in existentialism where the freedom of choice, and the choice itself, are essential and existential. According to Sartre (1946), we constantly have to choose and in his view *making* a choice is far more important than *what* we choose. We often cannot make a rational choice; but, then too, we have to choose. That is where, and why, existentialism is closely related to absurdism - and not only in the person of Camus (Camus, 1942).

Value is the beacon and the guide that enables us to act freely without falling into absurdism. Beacon in the sense that it offers us a contextual orientation that shows us *what* to choose, guide in the sense that it tells *how* to choose and to travel towards that choice and in accordance with it. In present-day’s work, self-direction and autonomy in making choices are considered important, for example in realising sustainable employability (SE). But here also: without values to guide us these concepts are meaningless and even absurd. We can have an impressive musculature of freedom, if we lack a skeleton of values to anchor our tendons, we cannot intentionally move.

ⁱ ‘truism’ is used here in the sense that the quote is idiomatic: it is accepted in the popular consciousness as a truth but its origin cannot be unequivocally established. The quote is often ascribed to Sir Winston Churchill but no authoritative source decisively attributes it to him.

So, values should guide and anchor our choices but, they are often a choice themselves. That is, of course, what Sartre meant. We can argue that the choice for a value should be guided by a higher or deeper value but that creates the problem of an infinite sequence of babaushka puppets inside or onion peel layers. Here, morality meets logic and mathematics in the central problem of deduction: we need some pre-defined axioms to avoid either falling into absurdism or rambling in the market like Nietzsche's 'toller Mensch' looking for the God he had just murdered (Nietzsche, 1882). However, whether our final anchors are to be found in religion or in a non-religious value system, the mission and the challenge for daily life and daily work is to devise realisable core values, practical anchors for daily (working) life, a skeleton that enables us to move.

Embarking for a value trip

In analogy with what Foucault stated about truth, there are many possible perspectives on value; perspectives that I would like to explore with you in the next pages. In the first part of this discourse I will take you to various and different points of view, each with their own perspective on 'value at work'. You might see it as a discovery journey: many perspectives will be shown and there will be a lot to see, but for the really interested the stops may be too short. That is the disadvantage of such a journey. If I could take you to a mountain top, with one impressive and overarching view on the value-field of work and health, it might have the impact and the persuasiveness of a comprehensive vision, and I might succeed to convince you – for the moment. But, the truth about values is, that there are many perspectives that might differ from person to person and from context to context and not a single, conclusive answer (Arendt, 1958; Berlin, 1998). This predicament is reflected in our journey. So, if we return and your conclusion is that you have seen a lot, I have succeeded in entertaining you. If your conclusion is that the journey enabled you to reflect on our occupational playing- and value-field, I have succeeded in giving you some potentially valuable thoughts. If your conclusion is that I challenged you to rethink some of your values, I may have succeeded in recruiting some companions for future exploratory journeys and value-plays.

Before we leave I will give you a short travel itinerary. This may help you to decide what you would like to take home from the different perspectives: what take home messages or souvenirs would you like to acquire?

Firstly, I will give you a very short description of the ship we are on: the vessel of work and health. It was thoroughly rebuilt and renovated recently but our instruments are outdated: we navigate with old maps and a sextant as our major tools. The lack of adequate navigational devices and instruments is felt immediately since our trip starts under treacherous conditions.

The first viewpoint we arrive at is immediately alerting and precarious as it shows us an underlying conceptual problem in securing our core values, a Bermuda triangle in which values can vanish. That difficulty exists in our field of work and health, but also more broadly in the field of prevention. My view is that core values of prevention and of work and health cannot be founded on a consequential (teleological) model. And consequentialism is the dominant model of our time. So, I will try to argue that there is an urgent need for a model with deontological elements.

Continuing our journey, three perspectives on value in relation to work will be shown, inspired by three economic theories:

The first of these perspectives relates to the political economic value of work inspired by Thomas Piketty. The core of Piketty's argument is that throughout history, wealth grew faster than economic output, and, related to that, than income. Extrapolation of this historical trend forebodes a society in 2050 where the ratio of capital / income is very strongly skewed in the direction of capital and where this capital is almost entirely concentrated in the hereditary capital of a very narrow elite. In other words: *the economic value of work will reduce to an almost negligible dimension*. This development is reinforced by the processes of mechanisation, robotics and computerisation, which will further marginalise the productive value of human work. We are going through bad weather on a treacherous sea.

If we take this prospect seriously, how should we respond to it? In order to answer this question, I suggest to look back and invite you to join me in considering the value-plays of work in a historical and philosophical perspective: the value of work 'from Aristotle to Arendt'. This may help us to realise that the value of work can only be preserved if we make a dramatic change in perspective and start to look at work as a 'consumption good' and not as a production factor. This is exactly the way the ancient Greeks looked upon valued work; the future can learn here from the past.

The next perspective that I would like to show to you concerns the intrinsic value of work, as inspired by Amartya Sen's capability approach. I will try to show that this approach is highly compatible with work valued as a consumption good and can provide us with adequate tools to continue our journey and navigate to friendlier places. The capability approach (CA) looks for what is valuable for and valued by people, and how these values can be realised in (working) life. According to the CA people should possess a 'capability set', a set of options to realise 'beings and doings people have reason to value'. The CA is a normative approach that surmounts the conventional dichotomy between consequentialism and deontology.

So, if we want to safeguard work as a valued domain of life in the future, we will have to be prepared to radically change our perspective on work and play a completely different 'value-play'. But, the current practice of work and health is still determined by work as a production factor. The CA provides an appropriate framework for both 'value-playing-fields', a conceptual safe haven.

Using the CA as a starting point, I will shed some light on what sort of journeys are waiting for us in the future: our research and educational ambitions with respect to SE and mental health at work and the academic collaborative centre for work and health. This is where our ideas and ambitions meet practice. Our research group, the 'work and health group' and the academic collaborative centre form a bustling and lively harbour and a charming port town. It is a hive of activity in all the workshops and studios where scientists, professionals and customers are working jointly on new concepts and tools. Here lies the challenge to integrate our ideas and value-plays in a practical and implementable vision of 'value at work' and to prepare new journeys.

At the endpoint of our journey, I will introduce one more perspective. It treats the value of stable growth as an asset for the practice of companies and is inspired by the theories of Antonio Fatas. Fatas asserts that economic growth is to some extent determined by traditional economic aspects like innovation, initial conditions and investments. However, only those economies that invests in 'societal' aspects, in particular in good institutions, succeed in a stable growth. My thesis is that, analogous to this, only those companies will show a stable growth, that invest in their 'institutions': a good human resources policy and especially a working environment in which people feel themselves valuable and valued.

Our vessel and our instruments

Newton was a genius and Euclid determined geometry for more than two millennia. Their concepts have been invaluable to the fields of physics and mathematics, but current physicists and mathematicians cannot innovate and make progress on the basis of these concepts. We need quantum mechanics, the theory of relativity and computer science to understand the world of our atomic models, our universe and of our computers. For daily use, Newton and Euclid might still be useful to some extent, but for innovative strength in physics, we must rely on Heisenberg, Einstein, Riemann and Turing.

It is my theory that, in the field of work and health, we still rely on Newton and Euclid; or, in the metaphor used above, we still navigate with a sextant. We will have to rethink the concepts and operationalisations of our field to make further scientific and societal progress. This is the more urgent because the world of work and health has changed dramatically in the past decades.

Our concept of health has changed radically. The World Health Organisation (WHO) definition of 1948 (WHO, 1948) – which is still the prevailing definition – points out an almost unreachable spot on the horizon; a static state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, which as a goal, especially as a sustainable goal, is unattainable. In the ICF model, the WHO no longer gives health the position of a final outcome, but of a determinant or input for participation (WHO, 2001). And modern descriptions view health as a capability, a resource or meta-capability, or as a process of constant adaptation (Law and Widdows, 2008; Venkatapuram, 2011; Huber, 2011).

Thus, in a few decades, our idea of health has dramatically changed: from output to input, from state to process and from target to agent.

Work and the position of work in our lives have also undergone enormous changes. In the industrialised and partly agricultural society of a few decades ago work was seen as a necessary evil, a means of providing livelihood and often a health risk. Work was a mostly negative determinant of health. Now, in the post-industrial service economy for many people work is a life domain in which they can realise ambitions and achieve important goals. Meanwhile, health has become a condition or resource that enables us to carry out our work.

So, work and health exchanged places. Where in the past work was the determinant and health a state that we strove to maintain despite the burden of work, in the present health is the resource and work is the state that we want to preserve, sometimes despite the burden of a suboptimal health.

Notwithstanding these and other changes, models and operationalisations which we use to understand the relationship between work and health, and to influence practice, root in the period of the industrialised society. However, if we want to understand the contemporary relationship between work and health and if we want to influence today's practice, we should not use yesterday's models and tools. Our professional field needs new models and new tools that are present- and future-proof. The core concept and guiding principle in this undertaking should be the value of work.

Value threats

A conceptual problem

It is important to realise that the domain of work and health and sustainable employability (SE) – and the field of prevention and the discipline of public health in general -, are values driven. A healthy, safe and sustainable work – and life - environment are values in itself that are worth pursuing. As this right to work and live in a safe environment that does not threaten health, is a broadly shared vision that people have, it might seem obvious that there should be a firm base for prevention. However, in practice, professionals encounter huge problems to ‘sell’ prevention and only a minimal fraction of the total budget for health care is allocated to prevention (Volksgezondheidszorg, 2015).

There are many possible explanations for this but in my opinion there is an underlying problem at the conceptual level.

Since the 19th century the dominant conceptual framework in the Western world is consequentialism, a goal oriented (teleological) system, with utilitarianism as the main representative. Consequentialism holds that the consequences of one’s conduct are the ultimate basis for any judgment about the rightness or wrongness of that conduct. Its philosophical counterpart, deontology, holds that the morality of the action is judged on the action’s adherence to a moral rule or value, irrespective of the outcome of the conduct. From a consequentialist point of view, a morally right act will produce, for example “the greatest good for the greatest number of people”, as Jeremy Bentham, the founding father of utilitarianism, has put it (Bentham, 1789). In this view, the ends justify the means.

In daily life we are fully aware that many of the important and precious things in life are not important by their consequences but are valuable in itself. What is the goal of a relation or a marriage? A long relationship or marriage or a happy relationship or marriage? As these are legitimate goals, the justification and value lies in the process of having a good relationship and being happily married. And everyone who manages to have lasting relationships and a happy marriage knows that these assets require the ‘conduct’ of being a good friend or husband or spouse. For life itself applies the same: the value of a good life is in the process and the conduct of living a good life, not merely in the endpoint of having lived a long or happy life.

In the free society we live in we can realise these values in our private lives to

a large extent by freely making the required choices. However, the pressure of increasing societal responsibilities at work, informal care and voluntary work, sometimes force us into life schemes in which we have to plan and organise our private life as if it were output driven.

In our occupational lives, most of us are completely forced into output driven structures, even if this conflicts with our core values. This is why professionals in e.g. health care become demotivated and in the end even leave the profession or develop a burnout. They are personally and professionally driven by the process-oriented ideal to provide optimal care embedded in a good professional relationship, but they are controlled by a mainly output-driven system focusing on efficiency and cost effectiveness, ‘Tayloring’ⁱⁱ their activities to the minimum of technically necessary actions instead of tailoring it to the needs of the client and their own professional norms (Effting, 2015; Van Bommel, 2015).

It is not only at the personal professional level that the conceptual dilemma exists. Also on the level of our professional domains, a teleological, output driven ideology is at odds with core values of e.g. prevention. Especially in combination with the economisation of societal goals and endpoints, this leads to the position that prevention is one-sidedly judged by its economic consequences and is only better than a cure if it is cheaper than cure. In that view, prevention needs to be cost effective to be ‘valued’ and that confronts us with a problem because cost-effectiveness of prevention can only be ‘proven’ in complex, long lasting and expensive studies.

It is my theorem that we cannot establish the core values of our professional performance in a consequential model, particularly not when the outputs are one-sidedly defined in financial-economic terms. What we need is a deontological value driven conceptual model to anchor the core concepts and values of prevention in general and occupational care and SE in particular. For prevention, starting points (starting values) are as important as end points (values). Fortunately, there are some first indications of a renewed interest in deontology and morality

(van Tongeren, 2012) and also stakeholders in the field look for alternatives:

ii Frederick Taylor is the originator of the concept of scientific management; his work signified the beginning of the managerial era in industrial production and the end of the craft era (Taylor, 1911). He should not be confused with Charles Taylor, the Canadian present-day philosopher who developed some very interesting value related philosophical concepts, e.g. value as orientation point.

value cases instead of business cases, corporate social responsibility and broader interpretations of effectiveness than merely cost-effectiveness (Van der Wilt et al., 2014).

The concept of value can bridge the gap between teleology and deontology as a value can serve, as hinted above, as a beacon and as a guideline: a beacon for the direction or the goal and a guide for the road, the conduct. And also the value related concept of capability that will be explained later, can bridge that gap.

With respect to ‘work’ or ‘making’, the contraposition between deontology and teleology is reflected in the different meanings of the old-Greek words for ‘making’: ποιειν and πραττειν. The verb ‘Poiein’ (ποιειν) with ‘Poïesis’ as a noun represents labour that is goal oriented and done ‘in the sweat of thy face’. ‘Prattein’ (πραττειν) with ‘Praxis’ as a noun signifies work that is performed for the pleasure of the activity itself. In line with our argument that we need a deontological approach to anchor the core values of our professional field, it may be clear that praxis has a better proposition to be sustainable than poiësis.

In the following section we will encounter another threat for the value of work than consequentialism and poiësis.

Piketty’s analyses

In 2011 a dud with huge explosive potential was laid bare under our field of work and health and particularly under the concept of work as a value. I refer to the work of Thomas Piketty ‘Le Capital au XXI^e siècle’ (Piketty, 2011). The French edition of 2011 hardly caused a stir in the economic community. However, the English edition of 2012 ‘Capital in the Twenty-First Century’ acted as an exploding bombshell in that community, which, since the work of Simon Kuznets, regarded ‘distribution’ – the courteous term for inequality – as a subject belonging to the past.

‘Capital’ is built on more than a decade of research by Piketty and his group and details historical changes in the concentration of income and wealth. Piketty establishes in nearly 1,000 pages that intrinsic mechanisms in capitalism lead to an increasing weight of capital in the ratio of capital / income, and furthermore, that capital tends to concentrate.

He depicts a very convincing historical image and from this history he derives

laws of capital and inequality. The central rule is that wealth grows faster than economic output, captured in the expression $r > g$ (where r is the rate of return to wealth and g is the economic growth rate. Faster economic growth will thus diminish the importance of wealth in a society, whereas slower growth will increase it. Extrapolation of the historical trend to the future gives a picture of a society in 2050 where the ratio of capital / income is very strongly skewed in the direction of capital and where capital is almost entirely concentrated in the hereditary capital of a very narrow elite group.

At the beginning of the 20th century inequality was already very pronounced. The reason why we have not yet experienced the extreme inequality which is inherent to the system – but will experience it in the 21st century -, is the levelling effect of the two world wars and the Great Depression in the interwar period. Together with the post-war period of building up the social welfare states in the United States and Europe, this has had such an impact that temporary income – and thus labour - has had a relatively great importance. Piketty states about this period “...,and for the first time in history, perhaps, work and study became the surest routes to the top. (... , et pour la première fois peut-être dans l’histoire le travail et les études sont devenus le plus sûr chemin vers le sommet; p382)”. *And that is precisely the period of confidence and optimism in which our discipline of work and health developed* and in which many of the current practitioners are professionally and conceptually rooted. But the effect of the great events of the early 20th century are fading out and the importance of wealth in modern economies is reaching levels compatible with those before the first world war. In the 21st century the system will lead to an extreme imbalance to the detriment of income from labour. Already in 2016, the capital of the richest 1% will be larger than that of the rest of the world’s population (Oxfam, 2015). Indeed, the crises we are going through are, in Piketty’s view, not incidents but symptoms of the way capitalism develops; “The crisis is the product of the system working normally, and we should expect more” (Mason, 2014).

If Piketty is right, the positive re-evaluation of the importance of labour due to demographic trends, predicted by many, will not materialise. Indeed, according to Piketty, these demographic trends will *strengthen* the mechanisms which he outlines (any demographic change that slows global growth - like ageing - will make capital more dominant).

According to Marx, morality follows economic reality. One needs not to be an orthodox Marxist to recognise the truth in that statement which implies that, if Piketty is right, not only the impact on the economic value of work is enormous but also the moral and ethical assignment of value to work will change considerably. A recent indication, if not an example of this is that the owner of the investment company that owns V&D, a Dutch retail chain of department stores, bought a villa for 20 million Euros in the same week that V&D employees were asked to hand in almost 6% of their wage (10 million Euros annually) to ensure the survival of the chain (Smits, 2015).

Mechanisation, robotics, computerisation: a further marginalisation of the productive value of human labour

The developments outlined by Piketty will probably be reinforced by robotics and the mechanisation of labour, which will further disrupt the balance between work and capital. Until recently, mechanisation substituted mainly muscle power, and jobs that were lost in that process were replaced by ‘brain power’ jobs. The pace of the process of mechanisation could be met by the process of creating new jobs. However, at present and in the future, computers and robots will also take over brainpower. It is far from obvious that jobs lost by these developments will be substituted too and at comparable pace, the more because processes of digitalisation obey Moore’s Law: they progress exponentially (Moore, 1965). In a few decades computers and robots can take over important aspects of retail, transport, care and education. Computers can already compose Bach cantatas in a way that only an expert can hear the difference. And they surpass Van Meegeren in falsifying Vermeer: 3D printer can provide those who would like it, with an original Vermeer every day of the year. Also in the field of science, computers will be able to generate interesting new hypotheses and make a design to test them within fractions of a second. Currently, human intervention is needed to design and program computers but they are already self-learning within their programs and it is only a matter of years until computers can design and program other computers.

What will be the effect on the value of work if computers and robots will be able to do all the things that we do, and do them better, faster and without getting tired, overworked or demotivated? For some, it is a source of grave concern, for others it is an attractive perspective (Asscher, 2014; Van Oijk, 2014).

Piketty himself is particularly concerned about the societal and political consequences. He states:

“Our democratic societies rest on a meritocratic worldview, or at any rate a meritocratic hope, by which I mean a belief in a society in which inequality is based more on merit and effort than on kinship and rents. This belief and this hope play a very crucial role in modern society, for a simple reason: in a democracy, the professed equality of rights of all citizens contrasts sharply with the very real inequality of living conditions, and in order to overcome this contradiction it is vital to make sure that social inequalities derive from rational and universal principles rather than arbitrary contingencies. Inequalities must therefore be just and useful to all, at least in the realm of discourse and as far as possible in reality as well” (pg. 671-672, French edition).

And Piketty’s concern about democracy is realistic. Work, and merits through work, are interrelated and inseparable from the very start of democracy in classical Athens. According to Plutarch, Pericles, probably the greatest protagonist of classical Athenian democracy, used work to spread wealth over the ‘polis’:

“[5] And it was true that his military expeditions supplied those who were in the full vigour of manhood with abundant resources from the common funds, and in his desire that the unwarlike throng of common labourers should neither have no share at all in the public receipts, nor yet get fees for laziness and idleness, he boldly suggested to the people projects for great constructions, and designs for works which would call many arts into play and involve long periods of time, in order that the stay-at-homes, no whit less than the sailors and sentinels and soldiers, might have a pretext for getting a beneficial share of the public wealth. [6] ...{in this section, Plutarch appoints the materials used and the craftsmen and artisans working with them (JvdK)}...[7]... And since each particular art, like a general with the army under his separate command, kept its own throng of unskilled and untrained labourers in compact array, to be as an instrument unto a player and as body unto soul in subordinate service, it came to pass that for every age, almost, and every capacity the city’s great abundance was distributed and scattered abroad by such demands.” (Plutarch, 1952 ed.)

Pericles' democratic stimulus program as it was called (van Hooff, 2011), provided Athens with the 'grandeur' of the classical era. The Parthenon and many other iconic constructions were built in an incredibly short period. But it was evenly meant to save and preserve democracy, as Pericles understood very well that democracy can only exist if not only political power but also wealth is spread in a transparent and acceptable way over the polis.

So, Piketty's concern on societal and political consequences of his theory, represent a significant and realistic 'value-play', with worrisome consequences on the value and appreciation of work.

In addition to the conceptual, societal and economical approach of the value concept I will now shortly elaborate on historical and philosophical perspectives.

Value-plays in the
past and the future;
Blokkers paradise or
Piketty's doom

On October 26th 1985 a column was published by Jan Blokker, regular columnist in the Dutch newspaper De Volkskrant. The column was written in response to protests against reduction of working hours and reduction of work in general. It was entitled 'Half' and the scope was that only half of the workers were needed due to reorganisations in companies and developments on the labour market; and employers were eager to show that they could perform with only half of their employees. Blokker argued that half of the people take it easy in their work anyway and that in the sixties the half (three-day) work week was a dream and the realisation of that reduction by half then seemed like paradise. He ended with the conclusion that, anyhow, half of the people were so fond of their work that they probably were happy to work fulltime and be prepared to provide for the other half. So, actually, there was no problem (Blokker, 1985).

It is interesting to analyse how different aspects of 'value of work' and 'value plays' come together in this column. In the first place the tendency to reduce the factor labour in production, as from the perspective of 'capital' labour is seen as a cost factor. Secondly, the appreciation of work is an interesting issue. At that former stage of the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy, it may have been quite an accurate estimate that half of the workers experienced work as a burden, a plight, while the other half 'was fond of their work' and experienced it as an asset and a right. In the following, the duality plight-right will be discussed from a historical-political-philosophical perspective.

Before urbanisation humans lived in a subsistence economy: a non-monetary economy which relies on natural resources to provide for basic needs, through hunting, gathering, and subsistence agriculture. In such an economy work is aimed at self-existence at a basic level and economic surplus is minimal and only used to trade for basic goods. Work is not a plight nor a right but an integral aspect of daily life and an obvious necessity.

Since urbanisation, the division of labour spread and the influence of 'capital' increased in various civilisations and societies, moving towards different economic systems and different ratios of the share of subsistence and capital at various times. However, subsistence remained the base until modern times. In Europe the transition from subsistence to wage work took centuries, with different paces for urban and rural areas. In the United States it only took decennia. A farmer in New England noted in 1793 in his diary that he had spent

that year about 10 dollars on commodities that were not home-made (e.g. salt, nails) and in 1810 94% of the wool in the US was home produced. Halfway through the 19th century however, wage work was the main driver of the US economy (Achterhuis, 1984).

In Europe, in the classical era, in particular the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages and the early phase of the modern time, subsistence economy coincides with societal systems based on patronage. People were dependent on a lord, a nobleman or a patrician for their protection or even for their livelihood. In ancient Rome the 'plebs' were fed by the emperor or by nobles and in the Middle Ages people were servile to a nobleman. People were allowed to cultivate their lord's lands for their subsistence and provided labour services in exchange for protection. Subsistence was a right, work was a plight. 'Work as right' would have been meaningless or even absurd in that context.

'Work as value' might have sounded equally strange, but, throughout history, people have philosophised about the value of work, or, maybe better: the position of work. The first who expressed explicit ideas on this issue were the Greeks of the classic era. In particular Plato and Aristotle have determined our idea about how the Greeks thought about labour. For Plato, in his description of the ideal state in *Politeia* (*The Republic*, Plato, ed. 2008), labour was assigned to the lower class; indeed, it was their only function and they needed no education or political influence. The 'value' of their work was that they enabled the other two classes to do the things that were important for the polis state: the defence of the state by the military class and governance and contemplation by the class of philosophers. Aristotle differed from Plato in his political view but had also a very low esteem of labour (Aristotle, ed. 1995). Productive labour prevented people to engage in really important activities like politics and contemplation and in a virtuous life. In Aristotle's view labour was at odds with freedom, the highest esteemed value in his philosophy. In general, economic activities were valued much lower than cultural and political activities. Any activity was low esteemed when it served a purely economic aim, while the same activity might be valued if it served a respected goal, like freedom or independence. So, by the words of Bertrand Russell: a Greek who made his own shoes with the aim to be independent performed a valued activity, while manufacturing shoes to sell them for a living was, in Aristotle's eyes, not better than slavery (Anthony, 1979). Hannah Arendt (1958) stated that in the Greek world labour was not low

esteemed because it was associated with slavery as in modern times, but, the other way around, work was ‘outsourced’ to slaves because it was seen as a threat for a virtuous life by a free man. The views of Plato and Aristotle on work, both Athenians, might well reflect a broadly shared vision in the Greek world, which is also reflected in the Greek words Praxis and Poiësis, mentioned above. In Sparta, work was even forbidden for Spartan citizens by the laws of Lycurgus (Xenophon, ed. 2012). In Athens itself, and especially in the democratic period, there might have been a more nuanced vision on work: the citation of Plutarch above and also other texts from Plutarch, point in that direction (Plutarch, ed. 1952). In the democratic period work might partly have been seen as contributing to the spread of wealth by income and by that of influence and freedom. Although, in general, classic era democracy aimed at spreading political power, not economic power or ‘capital’. Plato was an anti-democrat and Aristotle lived in the aftermath of democratic Athens and was the tutor of Alexander who made a definitive end to ancient Greek democracy. They obviously didn’t share all democratic values and it might be that their valuation of work differed somewhat from that in democratic Athens.

Crates of Athens, a comedy poet from the middle of the 5th century BC., shows a surprisingly modern view on the distribution of work. According to Aristotle he was innovating in abandoning, as the first Athenian comic poet, the ‘iambic’ style, but also in being the first who renounced personal ridicule and produced plays with a connected storyline and a general scope and coherence, (Aristotle, ed. 1902). In his piece Θήρεια (wild beasts) he also shows to be visionary on the socio-economic facet as he reflects on the position of slaves (Crates, ed. 2011). Plato and Aristotle point out the dehumanising aspects of labour but their solution is that either the upper classes or the free Athenian citizen should be exempted from productive labour by allocating it to a special class or to slaves and women. Crates depicts, by words of a choir of animals, a Golden Age, where slaves would be unnecessary and all the needs of the people would be satisfied, if only they denounced the eating of meat. Even now, this aspect can be considered as visionary in light of current discussions on the economic impact and the ecological footprint of meat production (Steinfeld et al., 2006, 2010; Gerber, 2010). He shows us a visionary fantasy from antiquity on robotics, domotics and home automation, where people are served, without the moral problem of servility or slavery.

(A) Then absolutely no one will get a slave man or woman,
 But an old man will have to be his own servant?
 (B) No! I'll make everything able to walk.
 (A) but what good is that to them? (B) Each of the utensils
 Will come to you by itself, when you call it." Appear besides me, table!
 Set Yourself! Grain sack, knead the dough!
 Ladle, pour! Where is the wine cup? Go and wash yourself!
 Up here, bread-dough! The pot should spit out those beets!
 Come here, fish" "But I am done only on one side yet."
 "Then turn yourself over, and baste yourself-with a little salt."
 (C) Well, try this on! To counter you, first
 I'll bring hot baths to my people
 On top of pillars like in the Paionion,
 To flow from the sea into everyone's tub;
 The water will say "you can turn me off now";
 Then the perfume-bottle will march right up
 Followed by the moving sponge and sandals.ⁱⁱⁱ

This historical and philosophical value-play shows us that the value of work is not necessarily identical with its output but can also be found in what work means to us in our lives, a meaning that is given to it by ourselves.

I will bypass the next 2500 years with the observation that in the history of agrarian, pre-industrial, early industrial and industrial work, the dehumanising aspect of work prevailed; people were exploited, especially where they were servile or in slavery, but often also in wage work. Important for the 'value-play' is that work also became a theological factor. In the Middle Ages, in the Catholic church, the *Regula Benedicti* (Rule of Benedict) was the most influential doctrine for monks. Work took an important place in that rule, however, not as a value in itself or in the societal context, but as a means to contemplate in the seclusion of monastic life: *ora et labora* (pray and work). In Protestantism a real work ethics arises, in which the expulsion from paradise is a theological factor: 'in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return'^{iv}.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fontane & Scafuro, 2013

^{iv} Genesis 3:19; King James Bible

But in daily practice not only the penal character of work was stressed in the Protestant doctrine, but also the intrinsic virtue and necessity of labour and the positive impact this would have on individuals and the Christian community at large. Max Weber considered this Protestant work ethics as the basis for capitalism and analysed the connection between Calvinism and the rise of capitalist institutions (Weber, 1905).

In modern times, the dehumanising character, the alienation and exploitation of human beings was challenged by a moral-ethical analysis by Immanuel Kant, resulting in his categorical imperative (Kant, 1785), and by an economic analysis by Karl Marx resulting in 'Das Kapital' (Marx, 1867). The categorical imperative is the central philosophical concept in the deontological moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The most common formulation is: 'Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law' or in more common language: 'one must act in the way which one can wish that everyone would do so'. Another formulation is that one should never merely consider and treat another human being as a means, but always at the same time as an end in itself. Kant's strength is that he builds a deontological moral and logical system, based on the demands of the categorical imperative. This philosophy provided the moral and ethical base for human rights and more specific for the abolition of slavery and exploitation of human beings.

The development from a subsistence based economy to an industrialised economy based on paid labour implied the transition from a right on subsistence to a right on work. The guarantee, for what it was worth, of an existence - but an existence in dependency - was exchanged for the uncertainty to build up a free existence, based on income from work. Work was no longer a plight to a lord or to The Lord, more or less independent from livelihood, but a right with livelihood as the central value. Only recently, in the post industrial economy, other values became connected to work for a considerable amount of the workers. For Jahoda, income remains the central value; but she stresses the importance of other values, which she calls 'latent values', (Jahoda, 1982). Hannah Arendt formulates three central values for work, resembling those of Aristotle, of which livelihood is one (labour). The other two are creativity (work) and participation (action) (Arendt, 1958). The difference between labour and work reflects the difference between *poiësis* and *praxis*. In our own research, we found seven values or work capabilities of which income is only one. I will come to that later.

It is ironic that now the humanising aspects of work begin to outweigh the dehumanising aspects, work itself is threatened by the developments depicted above: Piketty's economic mechanisms reinforced by mechanisation, robotics and computerisation. The short historical overview makes us aware that 'work as value', as an asset for a considerable amount of workers, counts only for a very short period and only in developed democratic countries.

But, the loss of work and the probable loss of the value of work only concerns the '*production*' aspect of work. However, work can also be seen as a '*consumption*' good (Heertje, 2006). In that view, the aspects that we value in work besides income, become important. As we all grew up in the doctrine of valorising our work in a financial-economic perspective, a transition is needed that implies an 'Umwertung aller Werte'. We will have to leave our orientation on financial-economic outcomes and revert to the way the Greeks in the classical era valued work: as a production factor it was low esteemed, but if it served other values it was esteemed high. Advantage of this transition is that the competition between workers that exists on the 'labour' (*poiësis*) market, is hardly to be expected on the market of 'work' (*praxis*); 'work' as a consumption good is not output driven and not dependent on a limited demand of this output and thereby of a limited supply of labour. Moreover, there is no competition or threat from computers or robots on the market of work as a consumption good. Computers may produce excellent pieces of music in the style of Bach, they don't enjoy it 'for a bit'. At the one hand may a computer not get depressed or demotivated, at the other hand it neither experiences engagement nor a flow of creativity. It can replace humans on the market of productive labour, but not on the market of consumptive work. Here may even lay a difference between human-made and robot-made products: if the pleasure of the 'making-of' is visible in the human-made product it could have added value compared to robot-made products.

Robots can bring us the Golden Age of Crates, freed from work as a production factor and freed from the moral problem that indecent work is allotted to an exploited class. It might seem a faraway future, but as mentioned above, the transition from an economy mainly based on subsistence to an economy based on paid work took a relatively short period, particularly in the US. Crates' Golden Age can coincide with Blokker's paradise. When Blokker wrote his column he stated or estimated that half of the people were fond of their work. In the present economy this might even be more, and in the future they can enjoy work as a

consumption good to realise their creative ambitions and engage in freedom in e.g. the activities highly esteemed by Aristotle: culture and polis-matters, politics. However, over this paradise still lies the shadow of Piketty's doom: a concentration of capital and wealth in the hands of a very happy few. As indicated, 'Piketty' denotes an important value-play and a societal and political responsibility and challenge. It is a huge challenge as the credibility and justification of the democratic system itself is at stake. Other mechanisms for the positioning and distribution of work, income and capital are needed. Interesting (thought) experiments and developments are taking place, in this respect. If work is no longer the obvious and necessary route to acquire income and we do not wish to accept situations of extreme poverty or dependency of the vast majority of people, subsistence should be assured in other ways. In several European countries there is a debate about a basic income (Bregman, 2013) and worldwide there are developments that are focusing on local communities with an emphasis on the exchange of services and on self-reliance, such as transition towns. A combination of such developments may be part of the solution.

This discourse started with a reference to Michel Foucault: his 'truth-plays'. That is a concept that fitted in the period in which 'power' stood central in his work. In his latest period he made a huge transition, almost an 'Umwertung aller Werte', probably his most principal and personal 'value-play'. Inspired by the classical era, especially by the lifestyle and the Art-of-Living in that era, he developed a philosophy of the Art-of-Living that triggered a renaissance on that aspect in modern philosophy. His thoughts about truth became – already in an earlier stage - centred around the Greek concept of Parrhêsia: the courage to speak the truth, rooted in knowing the truth about oneself (Foucault, 1984; Rojas, 2012). The transition he made not only influenced modern philosophy, it changed his own life too, and enabled him to accept his untimely death as one of the first AIDS victims, or at least one of the first public figures who died of that disease. Compared to his loss of life, the loss of work that is valued as production factor seems a minor loss, and maybe we can be inspired by his inspiration and learn from the ancient Greeks how they valued work as a consumption good, an asset in itself, a capability. And that brings us to the capability approach that can serve as a framework to help us meet the challenges we have denoted.

Opportunities for a
valuable and valued
working life:
The capability approach

Like Piketty's theories, the capability approach (CA) is an economic theory that introduced ideas in the economic community that were hitherto disregarded. The approach gained importance in human development and it greatly inspired the creation of the United Nations Human Development Index. Since the early 2000s, the approach has been adopted by political theorists, philosophers, social scientists and health scientists, including those with a particular interest in public health.

The CA is an ethical framework that states that social justice should focus on supporting the capabilities of individuals to conceive, pursue, and revise their life plans. (Sen, 1999a; Alkire, 2002b; Alkire, 2005b; Robeyns, 2005; Nussbaum, 2006; Vizard, 2006, Venkatapuram, 2011). Capabilities are the alternative combinations of 'functionings' that are feasible for a person to achieve. In the most basic sense, functionings consist of 'beings and doings': the states and activities constitutive of a person's being (Sen, 1992). Often, the element of value is added: 'beings and doings people have reason to value'. Amartya Sen asserts that 'functionings' are crucial to an adequate understanding of the CA.

Freedom is another central aspect in the ideas of Sen. Capability can be formulated as the freedom to achieve valuable functionings (Sen, 1992). Thus, capability has two aspects: functionings and freedom: the freedom to realise different functioning combinations (Alkire, 2009). Capabilities stand for a person's opportunity and ability to realise valuable outcomes, taking into account relevant personal characteristics and external factors: being able and enabled. In this conception of 'freedom to achieve', freedom is not only an instrumental value (valuable as a means to achieve an end) but above all an intrinsic value (valuable in and of itself) to a person's well-being. If this were not the case, the value of the capability set would simply coincide with the value of a person's actual combination of functionings; but value and freedom are essential characteristics of the process and not only of the end. According to Sen, freedom is, on the one hand the possibility to shape one's life and one's living environment (process aspect) and on the other hand, the possibility to achieve valued goals (opportunity aspect). (Sen, 2009) So, Sen's conception of freedom relates freedom to values – giving the musculature a skeleton to anchor to, in the metaphor used above – and it concerns both teleological and deontological characteristics. These aspects are relevant for SE as they can offer a solution for the problems and threats described above.

Not only with respect to achievements (outcomes), also with respect to resources (inputs) the CA presents a point of view different from mainstream economics, namely that economic goods such as income and wealth only have value because of what individuals can be and do through using and ‘converting’ such goods. Thus, instead of focusing exclusively on the means or instrumental value of goods the CA advocates a focus on what we really value and care about. It should be on what individuals are practically able to be and do — i.e. what ‘functionings’ they can achieve — enabled by the presence of economic goods, commodities, or any other resources.

The capability concept brings the individual’s capacity (what a person is able to) in relation to the possibilities that the environment offers (to which an individual is enabled) for achieving valuable goals. Alkire [2005a] has clarified the richness of the capability concept with a simple example regarding cycling: If someone has the physical properties and the skills essential for cycling, he can cycle (he has the capacity). However, if he does not possess or can make use of a bicycle then he ‘can’ not cycle. Similarly, if there are no roads that are suitable for cycling, he ‘can’ not cycle. And if there is a curfew in effect, he ‘can’ not cycle either. Capability includes all those diverse aspects: personal resources, the physical properties and skills to cycle; material resources, ownership of or at least access to a bike, and the physical (appropriate route) and social (no curfew) environment that allows that personal and environmental resources and characteristics can actually be exploited to realise the ‘functioning’ of cycling (with as a starting point that this is a valuable functioning in the circumstances). The crux of the capability concept lies in the combination of various meanings of ‘can’, which refers to: (1) ‘be able to’; (2) ‘to have opportunities’, and (3) ‘to be facilitated and allowed’. In fact, (1) refers to what a person can do, whereas (2) and (3) refer to the interaction with the context that enables the person to use his capacities and to realise opportunities. Different from resource models or utilitarianism, in the CA the possession of a bike or the ability to cycle are only important to the extent that they allow a person to cycle, if relevant.

As with cycling, in work all these aspects of capability – a valued ‘functioning’, to be able and to be enabled - are crucial. In other words: both the individual worker must be able and motivated to work and the context in which the work is performed, must enable the carrying out of valued tasks, contributing to goals that are personally significant and valued by the organisation.

The added value of the capability approach for work and health

Existing models of work and health, although valuable, lack several important aspects to reflect the dynamics in and the challenges of present days' work. The CA is, more than prevailing models, present and future proof. To illustrate this, the development of models on work and health will be shortly discussed.

In the classical medical model a passive view on workers prevailed. Work was seen as a – mostly adverse – determinant of health, as a health risk factor– what it unquestionably was in many industrialized contexts - against which workers had to be protected. Laws on occupational accidents, industrial health and safety and child labour rooted in this model.

In the sixties of the previous century the first organizational psychological models on work stress were developed, that specified the relation between work and health. For instance, the Michigan Stress Model [French & Caplan, 1972] conceived workload, job control, and social support as unidimensional determinants of work stress. In the next phase, balance models were developed. Karasek developed a two-dimensional model that assumed that 'job control', the freedom that workers have to make choices in their work, may balance the stress of high work demands, and can even lead to a situation in which demanding work is challenging, as in a learning environment (Karasek, 1979). Other models focus on the importance of a good fit between person and environment (PE-Fit), and more specifically between person and job (Person-Job-Fit model (Edwards, 1991, 2007). In some models a specific aspect of this balance is particularised: the Effort-Reward-Balance model (Siegrist, 1986, 1996, 1998). The Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model [Schaufeli & Taris, 2014] is a broadening of the Karasek model in the sense that it extends to all types of resources that an individual can have (instead of just job-control, which is actually more a job characteristic than a resource) and emphasises the energising and motivational aspects that work may have if relevant resources or characteristics are present.

These existing models, although valuable, lack several important aspects. Although relevant and necessary, it is not sufficient for the modern worker to have 'just' a fit or balance between demands and resources. For SE in the current work setting it is crucial that workers can attain significant goals in their work that are concordant with their core values.

The added value of the CA is that it challenges researchers, policy makers and practitioners to look for *what is important and valuable for people to realise in a given (work) context and whether people are able and enabled to do so*. Because it is an explicitly normative model, the CA is better than prevailing models, able to reflect the dynamics in and the challenges of present days' work. It depicts *valuable* goals, i.e. a set of capabilities that constitute valuable work, rather than merely describing relationships between variables, as existing descriptive models often do. The CA can give direction to (and within) the balance and fit models: what aspects of a fit are important, where is the motivation aimed at, what resources are needed and what aspects of work are rewarding and contribute positively to the effort-reward-balance of a worker. These insights are relevant as the existence of dis-balances can threaten SE (Juvani et al, 2014).

The model is also normative in the aspect that it is not open-ended. It is the responsibility of the individual as well as the work context to build up and facilitate the capability set and to realise and enable valuable work. So, the CA broadens the scope of prevention beyond the responsibility of the individual because it not only includes the adaptation of the individual to the environment (opportunity freedom), but also the adaptation of the context to (and by) the individual (process freedom).

An extra asset of the CA is the combination of the normative component with a strong 'demand driven' nature, especially in Sen's approach of identifying capabilities in the target population. For Sen, the identification of capabilities in a specific situation should be the result of 'a deliberative democratic process', and not of an exercise for experts (Sen, 2004). This is in accordance with developments of needs assessment and shared decision making and with considering work as a consumption good.

For SE, it is important to consider the capability set, rather than actual functioning. Even optimal actual functioning is vulnerable if there is no development possible and there are no alternative options. If a worker experiences no alternatives for his present functioning and no opportunities to develop or switch, he has no capabilities and is not sustainably employable. Exactly the fact that people have a set of options from which they can choose for performing valuable work beyond their actual functioning, makes them less vulnerable. Sen stated: "It is imperative to look beyond an individual's functioning to his/her capability, the

functionings s/he could have achieved” (Sen, 1985). Only then, the worker will be able to achieve alternative functionings in case of a change in the status-quo (for example due to aging, change in health or reorganisation in the workplace).

So, the CA offers a framework to predict being sustainably employable *by giving preference to the set of tangible opportunities over present functioning*, while most theories and practices assume implicitly or explicitly that the current performance is the best predictor or proxy for future performance. In addition to the argumentation given above, there is another, related argument to detach from present functioning as predictor for SE. On the basis of extensive analyses, Stiglitz et al. argued that a system that is successful and profitable in the present but exhausts its resources, is not sustainable (Stiglitz et al., 2009). They recommend defining specific sustainability indicators, separate from those that describe the current situation. There are obvious parallels with SE. A successful worker who exhausts his or her resources, either energy resources or relational or social, will burn-out and not be sustainably employable. In the capability approach the intrinsic value of work lies in having a set of (work) capabilities and not merely in the output of work, which diminishes the risk of exhausting resources. Moreover, our proposed model, explained below, offers opportunities to analyse and ensure the sustainability of work.

Ambitions; value creation

Research; status quo and ambitions

Sustainable employability: definition, model and assessment instrument

In the past five years I had the privilege to chair a consortium of researchers from five universities in the Netherlands that had been commissioned by the National Organisation for Health and Health Care Research (ZonMw) to develop a definition, a model and an instrument to define, conceptualise and assess sustainable employability (SE). The team approached this task using Sen's concept of capability as described above. Based on that concept we formulated the following definition of sustainable employability:

Sustainable employability means that, throughout their working lives, workers can realise tangible opportunities in the form of a set of capabilities. They also enjoy the necessary conditions that allow them to make a valuable contribution to their work now and in the future while safeguarding their health and welfare. This requires on the one hand a work situation that facilitates them, and on the other hand the attitude and motivation to exploit these opportunities (Van der Klink et al, 2010, submitted).

In line with this definition we developed a model of sustainable employability (Figure 1). It is derived from models by Sen (1985), Robeyns (2005), Morris (2009) and Welch Saleeby (2006) and applied to SE.

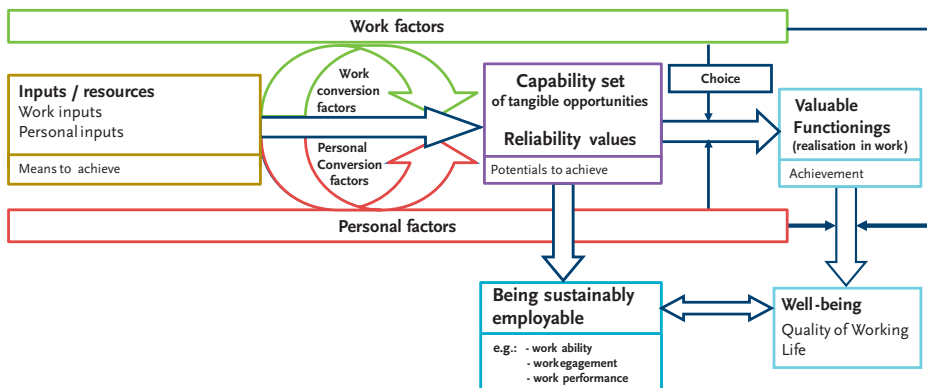
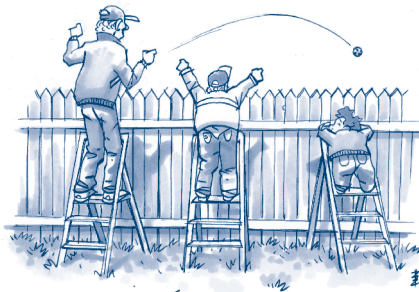


Figure 1: model of sustainable employability based on the capability approach

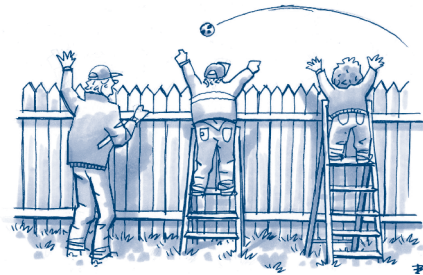
Central in the model is the capability set - the set of tangible opportunities. This set is in our view the best possible operationalisation of SE. An example of a work value important for many people is the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills. In a particular work situation, this value can be considered as a (work) capability for a person if a) it is valuable and important for this person (in his particular work situation), b) if he is enabled to it by his work context and c) if he can realise it. This combination of value, being enabled and being able constitutes a (work) capability. Through interviews and expert opinion we came to seven work capabilities that reflected what people valued in their work. I will elaborate on that later.

At the left side of the model, personal and work resources at the worker's disposition are depicted. In the example of the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills, personal resources that a worker can draw upon are e.g. his or her present knowledge and skills and the ability to learn. Besides that, other more general resources are important, such as health, education and general competences and abilities. Relevant workplace inputs and resources in this example are a diversity of tasks on different levels of required skills and complexity, constituting a learning environment.

Following the model from left to right, the next elements are the so-called conversion factors. To reach their goals, workers should not only be able to draw upon resources and other inputs, they should also have the possibilities to *exploit* those inputs. This requires 'conversion factors', factors that enable the worker to convert inputs into tangible opportunities, which are instrumental in reaching valuable goals in work. Relevant conversion factors in our example are the attitude and motivation to learn and acquire new skills on the personal level and a HRM-policy of employee development on the organisational level. Thus, in this conception, based on the CA, work resources and personal resources are not mere determinants of SE in the classical sense, but can lead to a set of potentials (the capability set) to achieve valuable work functioning, provided that appropriate personal and environmental conversion factors are present as enablers. Differentiation between workers in the allocation of resources and enablers may be required to realise capabilities (and equity; see figure 2).



equality / utility



equity / capability

Figure 2: equality and equity

At the right side of the model the actual (work) functioning of the worker - 'valuable functionings' - is depicted, the realisation into actual performance from his/her wider capability set. This realisation is the outcome of a choice by the worker and his work context. Therefore, the element of 'choice' is represented in the model. For a growing number of workers, current work involves the making of choices, different from those in the former, 'classical' economy; not only choices *directly related to the execution* of work (as in the concept of job control), but also 'intrapreneurship' (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003), that is, choices *about and beyond the execution* of work. This implies the freedom and opportunities to make these choices about which capabilities a worker actually realises in his or her work. This is relevant for all workers and even more for the older or chronically ill worker who has, due to health problems and limitations, a stronger need to optimise the utilisation of resources and to be able to make 'free' choices about what they can realise in their work (Koolhaas et al., 2009).

However important achievements are, to assess SE, it is important to consider the capability set, rather than actual functioning, as argued and discussed above.

In the case of gaps in the capability set, it is important to explore the 'left side' of the model. Insight in personal and organisational inputs, and conversion factors may provide the key to expand the workers' capability set, and, thereby, the workers' SE.

Besides achieved functionings, we see at the right side of the model 'well-being;

quality of working life'. This element, too, is regarded as a less important proxy for being sustainably employable than the capability set, since the perception of a situation can be subject to a 'response shift', i.e. adaptation of norms to the prevailing situation, while capabilities represent factual opportunities and freedoms.

To assess SE for present day workers we need new and innovative instruments. As argued above, the CA offers a model that can meet the challenges of today's work. Based on that model presented above, we developed a questionnaire. Because of the centrality of the capability set in our model, the central part of that instrument is a module to identify whether an individual has a capability set that allows him or her to achieve valuable work functionings.

For identifying relevant capabilities we used a mixed method approach the core of which was to conduct a qualitative interview study, inquiring what workers value in their work. The literature was searched to check the completeness of our findings. In a final expert meeting, we decided on seven 'work capabilities'. In our questioning we kept close to the basic idea of the capability concept by querying on each of the seven topics the triptych: a) how important is <the topic> for you, b) Does your work offer you the opportunities to realise <the topic>? c) To what extent do you actually realise <the topic>? Discrepancies between 'a' and 'b', 'a' and 'c' and 'b' and 'c' were scored. These discrepancies indicate whether people are able or not to get essential values out of their work (Abma et al, submitted). The centrality of the capability set was tested and confirmed (Schaufeli et al., submitted). The other – individual and contextual - aspects of the model presented in figure 1 are covered partly by existing scales and partly by scales that were newly developed on the base of the literature and cohort studies.

The consortium aspires to continue to validate and further develop the instrument, if funds are available. In Tilburg we started a PhD project, with Patricia van Casteren as researcher, with the research aims to develop new instruments in the fields of SE and mental health at work. We will use qualitative methods that are in line with Sen's approach to identify what people need to stay sustainably employable and mentally healthy. Also in the domain of sustainable employability is the PhD project of Joost de Beer concerning SE in people with dyslexia.

Mental Health at work

The second focus of my Chair is mental health at work. Here too, we need a new conceptual framework for our interventions and instruments and new operationalisations of existing concepts. The CA can provide a source of inspiration and a useful model also in this domain.

I shall now discuss the topics of the guidance by occupational physicians of employees with mental health problems; the instruments we currently use to assess aspects of mental health and that, in my view, are outdated; and the importance of the context in which work is being carried out.

In 2000 the first edition of the guideline on mental health problems of the Netherlands Society of Occupational Medicine was published (Van der Klink, 2000). Initially, evaluations of the effectiveness of this guideline on RTW and the prevention of recurrences, pointed out that the method was effective (Van der Klink, 2003; Blonk, 2006; Nieuwenhuijssen, 2003) and that there was a relationship between guideline adherence and effect. Later interventions, however, showed no effect. Moreover, it was shown that, notwithstanding a positive attitude among professionals, guideline adherence was low (Rebergen, 2006). It seemed plausible that ameliorating guideline adherence could 'restore' the effectivity of the guidance of mental health problems. Here in Tilburg, we designed a method and an intervention meant to improve guideline adherence: the projects of Margot Joosen and Karlijn van Beurden with Evelien Brouwers as project leader (Van Beurden, 2013). The results of this intervention are not yet published but they appear to be disappointing. That challenges us on the one hand to further research, to which we are enabled by a grant from the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, and on the other hand to allow creative reflections and considering explanations.

One of these reflections is to change focus. When an intervention fails to exceed care as usual (CAU), it is obvious that our focus is on the intervention that we should either reject or improve. When we look for an explanation for the development outlined above, in which the intervention was initially successful but failed to continue in this success, we should look to what changed. And in this case it is interesting to assume that CAU probably changed more than the intervention did, notwithstanding the fact that the guideline was revised in 2007 (Van der Klink, 2007).

From the late 1980s onwards there has been a strong focus on sickness absence and disability in the Netherlands. This resulted in attention for all kind of political and professional measures to restore and enhance participation. The guideline was part of, but also a factor in, these societal and socio-political developments. Mental health problems had a strong focus and the guideline became one of the basic documents in the governmental committee on mental health disability ('Donner committee') and via that committee for the 'gatekeeper law'. Relevant for my argument is that the guideline was part of and played a role in societal developments that shaped the public and professional vision with respect to (mental) disability policy. An active and activating role by occupational physicians in mental health and disability management was an innovative aspect of the guideline in 2000 but was common sense five to ten years later.

This might explain why there is no contrast in recent studies between guideline based interventions and CAU. It might also explain why the SHARP at work intervention by Arends et al. proved to be effective (Arends, 2014). This intervention is also a guideline based intervention but it aimed at another phase of the process, namely the prevention of recurrences after (partial) work resumption and this phase is not targeted by CAU. If CAU improved, however, one might have expected that the general percentage for sickness absence and disability would have descended in the last decennium, which is in contradiction with the facts. But, at the other hand, it is also plausible that with the growing complexity of work in combination with growing uncertainty and a continuously increased experienced workload, percentages had increased. So, effects may have neutralised each other.

New interventions are necessary to guide workers who experience problems with the developments in work as mentioned and the growing uncertainties not only *in* their work but also *over* their work. Other strategies are needed to keep control, other ways of coping and other techniques of mobilising social support. And that brings me to the operationalisation of concepts that play a role in stress and mental health.

What was said above counts for this domain, too: existing operationalisations of stress and stress related concepts might fall short to fully grasp the new challenges in today's working life. An example is the concept of social support. Many of our instruments assessing social support are several decades old and are rooted in models of social support that are outdated. Indeed, the social

support that today's workers need in work arrangements with short employment contracts, interspersed with maybe periods of self-employment or periods without work differs completely from the support people needed a few decades ago to complete a lifelong employment with a single employer. As mentioned above, we started a PhD project, with Patricia van Casteren as researcher, at the interface of SE and mental health at work, to make a start in redefining useful concepts of which the operationalisation might fall short to cover the present day's reality.

Another challenge people meet is the ever more demanding load of the cognitive system. We lack assessment instruments to perform a kind of Functional Capacity Assessment on the cognitive level. The thesis of Arno van Dam (2013) was a good start, as is other research done in Nijmegen, but it will be very useful to direct more research attention to that theme. Our group is involved in a Multiple Sclerosis at Work project in which cognitive functioning is an important aspect.

Finally, I will discuss shortly the role of the context. In many studies the role of the context proves to be important (Van der Velden, 2012, 2014). However, most of our interventions are focused on the individual, who is easier to target than the organisation. The finding that many interventions appear to be not or minimally effective, might indicate that the limits of achieving results via the individual are reached. This might concur with what is said above, about the changes in CAU, implying that not only our professional attitude and maybe even our ideology changed with respect to participation in relation to compensation of income, but that also the attitude of our clients changed, implicating that simple motivational strategies do not work anymore. In some cases more advanced and specialised individual focused interventions may be the solution. But, in most cases interventions targeted at the context, aimed at making organisations more facilitating might be more effective. There is, however, a strong tendency, among professionals but even more in organisations to 'credit' all problems that the employee encounters to him or her as an individual, and consider him or her responsible for the solution. So, problems and solutions are personalised, and this is particularly true for mental problems. This infers that the organisation does not feel a responsibility, let alone an urgency, to change or adapt or adjust the organisational context to be more facilitating and inclusive. There might be a lot to gain by developing and

implementing organisation focused interventions. The CA, with her focus on contextual responsibility, can offer a framework for this policy and related research.

However, if we intend to involve the work context, we have to take in mind that this context changed for many workers. Only two or three decades ago the vast majority of workers was employee and had a work-lifetime employment contract. Nowadays, many workers have mainly short contracts on a project base and an increasing amount of workers is self-employed and control their work environment largely themselves. So, for employees with an employer the context must be taken into account via that employer, but for employees who work on a project base or who are self-employed it is yet to be studied how they can control and optimise their work environment. Using the positive deviance method, that focuses on good examples by peers, in learning groups, interventions can be developed in close interaction with the practice and the environment of those workers.

Academic Collaborative Centre for Work and Health

The Chair mental health at work and sustainable employability is embedded in the Academic Collaborative Centre for Work and Health (ACCWH). I stem from the generation and the time in which it was hotly debated that science should be value free. Since Michel Foucault – and others – we know that science is not and cannot be value free. Indeed, in this lecture it is argued that a value is only a capability if it is embedded in the context and shared. Moreover, according to Sen, capabilities and values can only stem from the target group. They cannot be wholly expert-formulated. Sharing values is certainly not at odds with independency, what is and always should be, the core principle of science. Indeed, if one of the core values is parrhêsia, the courage to stand up for one's independent point of view, science can be a truly independent factor in the value-play, as it should be. So, I consider it as an asset, also scientifically, that this Chair is sponsored and embedded and that there is explicit commitment of important partners in the field of work and health to realise the scientific and societal program of this chair. Besides the partners that made the chair possible, also HumanCapitalCare participates in the academic centre.

The ACCWH is about the exchange of knowledge between science and practice. This is one of the core values of Tranzo. Until now this discourse has been

rather conceptual. But, I would like to repeat here a citation that I also used in my inaugural lecture in Groningen, by Kurt Lewin: “there is nothing as practical as a good theory” (Lewin, 1951). I am more than convinced that this is true and I consider it as a challenge to integrate the conceptual perspectives in one vision that is relevant for practice. That vision is that work is sustainable and contributes to mental health and welfare when it serves intrinsic values and can be regarded as a Praxis, a capability. This is only possible if, in the practice of the work context, work values or capabilities can be assessed, discussed and implemented. For this, parrhêsia is a necessary condition in all layers of the organisation. In an oration in this room, almost a year ago, prof. Erik van de Loo stressed the importance of parrhêsia in the board room, as essential part of serving and effective leadership (Van de Loo, 2014). Only when parrhêsia governs the board room, it can be expected in the company as a whole. For the growing amount of people working in self-employment, the courage to recognise their own truth and values and the courage to take them as leading principle, is important.

I will give three short examples of how the value concept can be of a practical use on the individual level and on the group level. Then I will shortly introduce the third perspective I announced at the start of this lecture, the theory of Antonio Fatas, and use this as a framework to show that a value based policy might increase the competitiveness of companies.

The first two examples relate value to aspects of diversity. Diversity is a fundamental human characteristic (Berlin, 1998) and probably evolutionary based. The fact that we are genetically and phenotypically different as individuals and consequently can adapt to different circumstances, results in higher survival chances for the species; if we would be all the same we would be vulnerable. Where nature strives to diversity, culture often strives to uniformity; and organisations certainly do.

In the practice of companies, a commonly heard complaint by supervisors is that their employees are not self-directive enough and should take more responsibility for their working life. From the evolutionary point of view mentioned above, it is evident that if we all would have been self-directed decision makers the human species would not have had a chance in the two to four million years that humans lived, hunted and gathered in groups. And after domesti-

cation and urbanisation people lived in even more centralised circumstances and were socialised in submissiveness and subservience;^v and the same counted in companies and workplaces until quite recently. Many people will feel more convenient – and maybe also more competent and valued – in a role-position that is structured by leadership that is directive – what is not the same as authoritarian. In the present corporate culture it might require parrhêsia from both sides to acknowledge and respect that difference in values. But, if we do, we might experience that the diversity and combination of at the one hand people that can execute process freedom in shaping their circumstances and at the other hand people who can use opportunity freedom in seizing opportunities as they arise, can be very fruitful.

And when people operate in groups, companies can profit even more from diversity. In most organisations employees have individual targets and people are, more or less, forced into competition with each other. In such situations, employees are very alert to an equal treatment. Equality is the norm and supervisors need a lot of courage and parrhêsia to establish equity. When group targets are introduced, employees are challenged and stimulated to optimise not only their own performance, but also their colleagues'. That facilitates equity, which is far more effective than equality (see figure 2), and it optimises the benefits of diversity and of the different capability states that people have. An example is that in a one size fits all roster for 24/7 shift work in industry there is no possibility to reckon with individual, e.g. chronotypical differences, resulting in the situation that with every shift a certain amount of the workers experiences the shift as extra burdening (Juda, 2013). Self-regulation on a group base can result in schemes that are equally effective from the company's point of view, but more effective from a perspective on health, well-being and SE (Vetter, 2015).

The third example is on the company level. Companies that are ambitious with respect to SE and willing to implement measures, experience the challenge, which is sometimes a burden, that there is a huge supply of interventions that are often based more on the self-belief of the providing consultants than on evidence . If they choose for such a project it might have some effects, but these

^v In modern times this culminated or was at least exemplified in the two Frondes in which a total class of French nobles that was in power until then was made submissive to the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV. What that implied for the experience of values by that class is aptly 'reflected' by François de la Rochefoucauld in his *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales* (1665)

effects fade away when the project is finished. Often a series of measures and interventions is implemented but they are experienced as incoherent and ineffective. There is a need for a model that can give a base for choices and measures. In our experience, the model of sustainable employment based on the CA can stand in that service.

Antonio Fatas: institutional value as sine qua non for growth

A consistent and sustainable human resources policy, or, maybe better: capability management, might be a decisive condition for the stable growth of companies. That brings me to the fulfilment of the promise in the introduction of a third perspective inspired by an economic model: the theory of Antonio Fatas. Fatas and Mihov (2009) analysed the growth rates of countries. They show that innovation, initial conditions and investments are important aspects and predictors of economic growth, but that only those countries can pick up with the ‘core group’ of rich countries and converge with this group to the same stable growth rate, that have high quality societal institutions. And with institutions is meant all those environmental factors in a country that shape the entrepreneurial climate for companies and make them perform and re-invest; ‘moral’ aspects as the absence of corruption and a societal feeling of fairness, are important ‘institutions’ in this respect. In analogy: if national economies can grow as companies flourish and perform, companies can grow if employees flourish and perform. And as companies need an environment of high quality institutions, corollary employees need an environment of institutions of high quality and morality. This concurs completely with Sen’s ideas of an enabling context (Sen, 2009). It is interesting in this respect that in a series of interviews with successful and highly-performing companies in the Netherlands, all companies stated that they put their employees first (SZW, 2014). And the same counts for an institution as the ‘Rijksmuseum’ where Meynen, the head of the communication and marketing department stated: “an inside start is outside smart”^{vi} (Stam, 2015).

One of the challenges in the ACCWH is to investigate if a valued based policy, based on the capability approach can establish a ‘Fatas-effect’ in companies.

^{vi} In Dutch: “binnen beginnen is buiten winnen”

Post graduate education

This Chair is a research Chair, which means that there is no educational requirement, no obligation to teach undergraduates. However, there will certainly be attention for postgraduate education. Postgraduate education is an important means to disseminate knowledge, but also to share values.

Moreover, in the development in (postgraduate) education from knowledge transfer to the acquisition of competencies, the next step could be from competence acquisition to capability management. Capabilities are ‘competencies in the context’ in my view: realisable and enabled competencies which can lead to actual professional performance or achievement. It is a challenge to adapt and apply the capability model for educational purposes.

The fact that the NSPOH participates in the Chair, and besides that my direct affiliation with the NSPOH, creates ample opportunities to implement the outcomes of our research into practice via postgraduate education and continuous professional development.

At this point I want to stress the importance of multidisciplinary and trans-disciplinarity. The field and value-plays of work and health are getting more and more complex. To meet the challenges of SE and (mental) health at work a broad and multidisciplinary approach is needed. That places demands on the professionals working in the field. Besides the traditional players such as occupational physicians, insurance physicians, labour experts and occupational psychologists we might need the input of economists, human resource scientists and philosophers. I hope I can involve those disciplines in our professional field and education. This discourse aims to present a conceptual environment for that development. Tilburg University can offer the network environment.

Acknowledgements;
valued and
important others

At the end of this inaugural lecture, I would like to thank those who have contributed to my appointment as professor of mental health at work and sustainable employability.

When I worked at the Royal Dutch Telecom and Post Company, more than 20 years ago, the 58+ were scarce and 62+ could, save a single eccentric in the boardroom, only be found within the corporate offices when there were trips for retirees. Now, 20 years later, I have delivered my inaugural lecture to you. I will be 62 next month and I have a health condition. Nevertheless, I signed last October for 5 years at this University and at the two other parties with whom I entered into an employment contract: Ascender and the Netherlands School of Public and Occupational Health. I also want to mention Dow Benelux and HumanCapitalCare, where I am not employed but that also invest in the Chair and participate in the Academic Collaborative Centre. I thank the National Organisation for Health and Health Care Research (ZonMw) for their support of the Academic Collaborative Centre.

In general, it says something about how the situation has changed in the Netherlands; In particular, it says something about the parties mentioned who are willing to take a certain risk. A good example of how elder workers should be facilitated in order to stay in employment.

In that respect I also want to thank 'Groningen', where I came from professionally. I have worked there for almost eight years and that has been a good time. I have learnt there the skills of the academic craftsmanship and we have built a pretty productive department. In the latter part of those eight years my health condition manifested itself, but we came through that period very well. My thanks for the facilitating context that Groningen has provided me is therefore high; which includes my immediate colleagues Ute, Sandra, Menno and other staff members, but also all postdocs and PhD students and seniors and juniors that I had the opportunity and privilege to work with - and to some extent still do - and not in the least Lida and Janneke of the secretariat.

Almost 35 years ago I took the oath of Hippocrates. Part of this is that you swear or promise to honour your teachers to their death or your own death. I will limit myself to my two supervisors: Frank van Dijk and Aart Schene and my co-supervisor Roland Blonk. Under their guidance, I took the first steps on the academic

path and it's not just because of the oath that I therefore sincerely thank them.

In my new work context, Tilburg, it's wonderful, inspiring and stimulating to work with immediate colleagues as Evelien, Margot and Jaap,, Karlijn, Patricia and Joost. I confine myself to colleagues that are directly involved in PhD trajectories, but also the other Tranzo colleagues contribute to the 'wellness' feeling. Henk Garretsen, director of Tranzo plays a decisive role. In the very competitive academic world he values people above top publications; and exactly because of that, top publications come quite naturally: a kind of Fatas effect.

Although the emphasis of this lecture is on my academic affiliation I explicitly want to thank the NSPOH and Ascender, with whom I am also connected. There too, I experience the warm atmosphere and a leadership style that facilitates and encourages. There are wonderful challenges to connect scientific knowledge through training with the practice of professionals.

With respect to the private context, I want to limit myself to the 'nuclear family': Ariane, and our children, Jolijn, Laura and Chiel and my granddaughter Anneleine, and Lein-Jan and Floor. But before I go to them I would like to thank Gert Jan van der Wilt, Nicola Balzan and Sridhar Venkatapuram for their thorough proofreading of the manuscript and their useful comments on the content and the English. I thank Bert Cornelius for designing Figure 2 and J. Blokker jr. and F. Linmans for their help in tracing the column of J. Blokker sr.

I can long perorate about my children and I can brag about my granddaughter like any grandfather. However, I will confine myself to the statement that my children and my granddaughter are the nicest and most valuable people in the world. I realise that many fathers and grandfathers say that about their children and grandchildren and that this means that many people will have to relativise that position because only one can be right in this; and that happens to be me.

Ariane, my love, I'm the one at home with the highest academic degree, but that does not mean that I am the wisest: that's you. I can develop and present beautiful concepts about work and health and the relationship between those two, but you're the one that occasionally and delicately reminds me that its implementation in practice still needs improvement. Also for you, my condition has serious consequences, but you handle that as you handle almost everything you do: lovingly.

Formerly people sometimes referred to the woman behind the man. If I would wish to establish such an image I might succeed here in Tilburg, a safe 100 miles from our home. In Radio Kootwijk and in Apeldoorn, people know better: you are in the lead and I am the man behind. But that's not the whole truth: you are indeed the prominent factor in the cosiness, comfort and safety of our family and you are at the forefront of the social participation of that family, but you are certainly behind me when I need backing, literally and metaphorically. You are in front of me, behind me, next to me and, after 30 years of marriage, in me as an integral part of me, and I hope that we are only halfway together. Dreaming is allowed.

Ladies and gentlemen, this speech was about capabilities: opportunities in the context. I hope I have been able to show you the opportunities that I see and also to give you a glance of the context in which I hope to realise my plans. I experience that context as a great facilitator and inspirer. You've understood that, but you know it too, because you, who are collected here, are an important part of that context.

I thank you for that

'ik heb gezegd'.

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