Freedom, work and organizations in the 21st century – Freedom for whom and for whose purpose?

Guest Editors:
Lynne Andersson (Fox School of Business, Temple University, USA)
Dirk Lindebaum (Cardiff Business School, UK)
James Chamberlain (Political Science & Public Administration, Mississippi State University, USA)
Michelle Greenwood (Monash Business School, Monash University, Australia)
Frank den Hond (Hanken School of Economics, Finland & Faculty of Social Sciences, Vrije Universiteit, the Netherlands)

Freedom is one of those concepts that many - if not most - people are intuitively happy to embrace. Freedom is good, and more freedom is better. At the same time, "the meaning of this term is so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist" (Berlin, 1969/1999: 159). Freedom is core to many socio-cultural politico-economical events, be they contemporary (e.g., Brexit) or historical (e.g., the US Declaration of Independence, the French Revolution). Small wonder that, with this pedigree, freedom is perhaps *the* archetypical Western value, and thus culturally circumscribed. However, upon deeper inspection, freedom can also be a problematic concept.

We learn from Enlightenment philosophers (e.g., Kant, 1996) that freedom is an obligation and a right; that is, we are obliged to treat oneself and others as ends in themselves and not merely as means to some end, and to develop oneself in the fullest sense of the meaning. Liberal thinkers across disciplines (e.g., Rawls, Berlin, Dewey, Fromm or Mill) value freedom, and recognize that this in turn requires certain constraints on individual conduct. These constraints can at least be partly explained through some of the different conceptualizations of freedom. For example, Berlin argues that negative freedom is concerned with the question "*what is the area within which the subject — a person or group of persons — is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?*", whereas the positive freedom concept seeks to answer the question "*what, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that*?" (1969/1999: 160).

For the purpose of this special issue, we wish to explore both how freedom structures and legitimizes organizations, and how it provides a critical benchmark against which to evaluate them. Rather than privileging one particular account of freedom among numerous candidates, we encourage submissions that examine it from diverse perspectives, reflecting the intuition that how freedom is mobilized (and for what purposes) varies across contexts and is intimately connected to specific relations of power and interests. As such, this special issue exhibits a firm commitment to better understanding social relations in and around work (Turner, 2017).

In relation to work, different forms of freedom raise distinct questions and problems. For example, workers enjoy significant negative freedom when management takes a

hands-off approach, but unless workers are actively involved in decision-making at the level of the organization, they remain subject to domination and relatively unfree. Another example concerns occupational freedom more broadly: individual workers may be free to choose jobs in the sense that no other agent is determining this for them, yet they lack freedom in the sense that they have little input on the broader labour market. So, when multiple persons, groups, or organizations come together, questions of how much freedom, what kind of freedom, and whose freedom is to be pursued (or constrained) are inescapable and of utmost political magnitude. Individual versus community, 'freedom from' versus 'freedom to' (Fromm, 1941/2011), or freedom versus equality are but a few of key contradictions that can emerge.

Like others before us, we maintain that freedom is inextricably linked to dominant socio-economic conditions (Fromm, 1941/2011). That is, work is never abstract, but it is concrete work in a specific economic system (industrial vs cognitive capitalism) or context (cf. manufacturing vs. digital work) that shapes how free we are and how we relate to each other. Elizabeth Anderson's (2017) treatise on 'private governments' and the objection of constructing 'community' around the idea of paid work (and the loss of freedom it entails) in the current capitalist system (Chamberlain, 2018) are only two examples to this end. The contemporary relevance of examining freedom is also underlined by reports show that the richest eight individuals hold the same wealth as the 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity (OXFAM, 2018), and that more than 40 million people across the globe work under conditions of slavery (Andersson et al., 2018). These accounts underline that some people are economically freer than others. But freedom is also under pressure when businesses are "using artificial intelligence to scrutinise staff behaviour minute-to-minute by harvesting data on who emails whom and when, who accesses and edits files and who meets whom and when" in order to evaluate staff (Booth, 2019).

In a policy and practical sense, therefore, we believe that far too much scholarship in management and organization studies focuses upon the regulation and manipulation of workers for organizational or economic purposes, as opposed to the emancipation (Lindebaum, 2017) of workers and the understanding of neoliberal capitalist constraints upon it. It is our hope that scholarly attention to freedom in the context of work can contribute to building novel solutions and robust action (Ferraro et al., 2015) in terms of new forms of worker activism, reconfigurations of work, and the building of institutional forces to pressure and counter neoliberal ideology (Redman and Snape, 2004; Fleming, 2014).

Objectives:
With this special issue, our objective is to invite critical interrogations of the meaning of freedom and its current and potential relationship with social relations in and around work. We ask, in particular, (i) What is freedom in the context of work in the 21st century? (ii) How does freedom relate to the way we organize ourselves in the present socio-economic conditions? And finally, (iii) How could a reconfiguration of the meaning of freedom translate into changes concerning what and for whose purpose we organize ourselves – and ultimately, our socio-economic conditions?

We look forward to receiving submissions from a variety of philosophical, theoretical, and empirical traditions. At the same time, we particularly encourage imaginative yet rigorously argued submissions reflecting dedication to normative theory (i.e. what

ought to be?), as well as submissions subscribing to the idea that human imagination can precede scientific discovery (Arendt, 1958/1985). It is against this background that we invite submissions that address a range of indicative but not exhaustive themes and questions, below.

Example Questions:
Conceptualising and measuring Freedom and Work
- How is freedom defined for and by workers?
- How is work freedom bound by prevailing (and possible future) socio-economic conditions?
- How have Enlightenment values (or a lack thereof) contributed to contemporary conceptions of worker freedom?
- Given this, can we operationalize and measure freedom?
- What is the function (Wright, 1973) of freedom across levels of analysis? For example, what challenges and opportunities would a functional analysis of freedom offer for workers, groups or teams, organizations or society in response to growing economic inequalities?

Diagnosing Freedom in Contemporary Work
- What are the varying degrees of employee freedom, from modern slavery (Andersson et al., 2018) to the work arrangements of the 'precariat class'?
- How do workers gain or lose freedom at work? What are the tools (emotional, financial, structural, technological) and processes through which this proceeds?
- Given the contradictory meaning of freedom under neoliberalism, what are the psychological and sociological mechanisms through which this ostensible contradiction emerged and continues to exist, and how can we better understand them?
- Are some workers freer than others, and what role does diversity (e.g., class or racial identity, gender, sexuality) at work play in this?

Barriers to Freedom and Overcoming Them
- How do voluntary servitude (Lindebaum and Courpasson, 2019) and the abdication of worker autonomy play against worker freedom? Specifically, and in direct challenge to Kant's version of enlightenment, what is the role of 'nudging' (Helbing et al., 2017) or 'human hacking' (Harari, 2018) in rendering workers incapable to see through the power relations surrounding and manipulating them (Connerton, 1976)
- What is the role of technology, especially AI and robotics in affording or obstructing worker freedom (Lindebaum, Vesa & den Hond, 2019)?
- What potential fresh insights can be provoked by linking the idea of freedom with the literature of alternative organizing (Parker et al., 2014)?
- What role do or should labor unions play in expanding the freedom of workers?
- What opportunities and challenges do worker cooperatives or co-ownership schemes hold?
- What insights can the notion of the identity-resistance-control nexus (Gotsi et al., 2010) bring to understanding freedom at work in the 21st century?

Work in the Global Context
- How do borders and, in particular, employment-related immigration policies, affect the freedom of both local and migrant workers? How does the governance of migration respond to the valuation of work and its depiction as a site of freedom?
- What organizing strategies are available to migrant workers to contest their domination? What effects (positive or negative) do or might successes in this area have on the freedom of local workers?
- Can the expansion of freedom on a global scale be premised on the incorporation of ever greater numbers of people, especially in the global South, into the formal labour market?

The scope of submission is intentionally broad, but submissions should have a bearing on the theme of freedom and work, as well as a visible desire to contribute to a better understanding of social relations in and around work, as per the overall purpose and general guidelines of *Human Relations.*

A prerequisite for all submissions must be firm theoretical grounding in the relevant literature. For theoretical pieces, we expect that they also offer significant novel theoretical insights. For empirical papers, we expect that they have a strong methodological design, competently execute the data analysis, and offer significant new insights as a result. Authors are strongly encouraged to refer to the *Human Relations* website and the instructions on submitting a paper for more details about the types of manuscripts that will be considered for publication.

Contributors should note:
- This is an open and competitive call for manuscripts, and the submitted manuscripts will be blind reviewed by experienced scholars in the field.
- Submitted manuscripts must be based on original material not accepted by or under consideration by any other journal or publication outlet.
- For empirical papers based on data sets from which multiple papers have been generated, the guest editors must be provided with copies of all other papers based on the same data to ensure a unique intellectual contribution is being made.
- The guest editors will select a number of papers to be included in the special issue, but other papers submitted in this process may be considered for publication in other issues of the journal.

The deadline for submissions is 1 June 2020 with submissions submitted no earlier than 01 May 2020. The special issue is intended for publication in 2022.

To be considered for this special issue, submissions must fit with the aim and scope of Human Relations. Papers should be prepared in accordance with the journal's submission guidelines. Papers to be considered for this special issue should be submitted online. Please indicate in your cover letter that the submission is intended for this Special Issue. Please direct questions about the submission process, or any administrative matter, to the Editorial Office: humanrelationsjournal@tavinstitute.org.

Questions about expectations, requirements, and the appropriateness of a topic should be directed to the guest editors of the special issue. They are also open to discussing initial ideas for papers, and can be contacted by email:

Lynne Andersson (landerss@temple.edu)
Dirk Lindebaum (mail@dirklindebaum.EU)
James Chamberlain (Jac1287@msstate.edu)
Michelle Greenwod (michelle.greenwood@monash.edu)
Frank den Hond (frank.denhond@hanken.fi)

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