

Blustein, D. L. (2019).

**The Importance of Work in an Age of Uncertainty: The Erosion of Work in America.**

New York: Oxford University Press

pp. 264, Kindle format €17.17; Hardcover

€32.56

This book by David L. Blustein (Ph.D., Professor and Golden Eagle Faculty Fellow at Boston College at the Department of Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology) deals with such an important and particularly contemporary topic: the importance of work in the current and uncertain age. The book is a unique and precious contribution, embedding both the thought and the heart of this author. As David Blustein states in the preface of this book, the volume represents one of the outcomes of his lifelong hope to improve the working lives of people. In this volume, the author adopts an open perspective that considers both the voices of scholars and the voices of individuals experiencing a specific situation of crisis as worthwhile sources for constructing knowledge. The book offers a psychological perspective of working in the USA with the purpose of changing existing policies about work. A picture of work emerged that includes its complexity and richness, with possibilities for both happiness and meaning on the one hand and desolation and despair on the other. The book applies a perspective based on psychological and social science research including qualitative analyses of in-depth interviews with

adults who were working or battling to find work. On the basis of the interviews analysed, the themes of each chapter were derived. These themes were built considering the Psychology of Working framework, including the value of the Relational Theory of Working developed by the author.

The volume comprises nine chapters. Each chapter includes the voices of individuals from the Boston College Working Project (BCWP), a psychological view on the principal topic and a concluding reflection on how the related challenges might be addressed.

The first chapter, «Being alive: Work as a central role in life», offers a reflection on «What is work?», delineating the age of uncertainty, the history of working, and enabling us to understand how work has a central role in life through both lived experiences and the psychological view.

The second chapter, «Being able to survive and thrive», presents an introductory journey through survival needs also by means of lived experiences and the psychological focus, including time perspective, work volition, survival and self-determination.

The third chapter, «Being with others», is centred on the value of relationships at work, using, here as well, lived experiences relative to balancing work and family/caregiving. The value of internalising others by creating soothing support, networking and instrumental support is underlined. From a psychological perspective, the roles of attachment and social support at work,

mentoring at work, social network, and work-family balance are highlighted.

In the fourth chapter, «Being part of something bigger than ourselves», good work is underlined as a contribution to the social good and the experience of being part of something bigger than we are. Both lived experiences and the psychological perspective are included here too. In particular, the psychological point of view emphasises work as a calling, and as crafting work to enhance meaning.

In the fifth chapter, «Being motivated and being the best we can be», a theoretical framework relative to motivation is presented. Furthermore, lived experiences on being motivated at work are reported. The psychological perspective is focused on self-determination and work, organisational justice and motivation.

The sixth chapter, «Being able to care», introduces the nature of caring and the relationships between caregiving and work. The different aspects of caregiving are detailed through lived experiences. The psychological view underlines the motivation behind caring and caregiving and work-family relationships.

The seventh chapter, «Being able to work without oppression and harassment», charts a journey through this theme, including psychological implications of marginalisation and oppression and numerous lived experiences on different issues connected to work (race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, social class, poverty, immigration and marginalisation as

a social identity). The psychological perspective centres on the erosion of the social foundations of work and on the prevalence of racial disparities in employment, underlining racial colour-blindness as the workplace default. This chapter also offers a reflection on critical consciousness in terms of thinking and acting critically for fair work.

In the eighth chapter, «Being without work», a reflection on the nature of unemployment is presented. A historical view of the relationship between unemployment and mental health is offered with a definition of the current view, which is more centred on promoting psychological well-being also for the unemployed. The lived experiences proposed are focused on unemployment, job searching, and public policy impressions about unemployment. The psychological view emphasises «Blaming the Self/blaming the system» for unemployed individuals and the psychological consequences of unemployment.

The ninth chapter, «Being able to work with dignity and opportunity», summarises emerging themes: psychological experiences of working, sustainable livelihoods and working, the broad landscape of contemporary work, social and psychological erosion of the workplace, and assessing causality in the workplace crisis. A way forward for individual and community is proposed. The individual perspective highlights coping with uncertainty but changing the context of work through a psychological perspective of macro-

level solutions at a level of community as a whole is also proposed. The reference is to neoliberal policies and the psychological experience of working and sustainable livelihoods, underlining the relevance of developing and implementing public policies about work.

The book thus puts forward recommendations for individual and community-based adaptations along with suggestions for public policy reforms with the aim of spreading human rights at work, realising more sustainable working conditions, and developing a social and economic supportive structure to promote decent work for all.

The volume constitutes a fundamental contribution for those who are interested in the rapid changes and inequalities in the world of work: not only academics, professionals and students but also economists and policy makers. It also represents an appealing resource for those who want to know more about work in the United States from the perspective of individuals and their lived experience through a psychological lens. The book is a significant input for people who are interested in the psychology of their own working lives and also for those who are sensitive to the issues related to decent work.

The book represents a noteworthy up-to-date point of reference including an essential psychological perspective, fully mirroring the hope of the author that «stories that are told in each chapter resonate deeply, and readers will learn important new insights about how our society can support people

and communities in creating fair and equitable access to work» (Blustein, 2019), even more so in the current period of the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. The message of this book is particularly precious for us and it is a «call for work as a human birthright» (Blustein, 2019). We sincerely thank Prof. Blustein for the valuable contribution that he has given us, integrating profound aspects of his thoughts and his personal life. He represents such a role model as a scientist, a professional and a human being that our gratitude is deep and full of admiration. In particular, our respect is moved by the constant tenacity with which he has continued on the impervious slopes of the issue of work and vulnerable workers, supporting and creating the most uncomfortable narrative compared to the dominant one, giving voice to the needs and importance of the least viewed, least considered workers, and to the value of work, which should always be built within a decent work perimeter, for each human being. This book is a masterpiece of coherence and unmissable meaning for any researcher, professional, scholar, student or reader interested in the issues of work and the well-being of workers.

*Annamaria Di Fabio<sup>1</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> Università degli Studi di Firenze.