

Measuring Work as Worship: Bringing More Intentionality to Our Relationship with Creation

This paper represents a summary of discussions and learning from the **KIF Spiritual Impact Learning Community**, in partnership with the Accord Network. It is intended to encourage dialogue on the issue, and continued learning.

In the 'Shalom framework' or idea that whole-life discipleship encompasses growing in four relationships (with God, self, others and Creation), the 'relationship with Creation' is less often measured amongst Christian relief and development organizations. Within this dimension is the concept of 'work as worship' or 'meaningful work' (as well as creation as culture/institutions, and as natural environment). We explore the definition and meaning of the concept of 'work as worship' or 'meaningful work', why it is less measured, and how we might integrate into holistic measures of discipleship and well-being.

Definitions of Meaningful Work

1. "Meaningful work" can be understood as a crucial aspect of our relationship with creation, in that God ordained work for Adam and Eve as significant part of their purpose in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1, Colossians 1). One way of describing it that came out of our Learning Community discussions is "bringing glory to God in service to others".
2. Meaningful work includes several elements: practically such as helping economically, providing personal and social value (e.g. through identity and sense of worth), as well as spiritual value in intentionally bringing glory to God through the way in which we work. These can be intimately related and can have spiritual aspects to them.
3. These elements can look different depending on the cultural, economic and theological context. Because of this, it's hard to define meaningful work in a way that crosses context.

Why is this not being measured?

Given the importance of this concept therefore in the flourishing and discipleship of individuals, why aren't more Christian relief and development organizations measuring it? We explored a few reasons:

1. There is an underdeveloped theology of work as worship in many Western churches, instead seen primarily as a means to generate income. This is related to a modern Western habit of separating the spiritual from the physical. This contrasts with many of the business as mission, redemptive entrepreneurship, faith and work, and Kingdom business movements, that put glorifying God and the workplace as a mission field as central themes.
2. There are contexts where the concept of 'meaningful work' is problematic and challenging, such as when people have little choice over the nature of their work, it is degrading, and/or when they have been forced into it. When working with women coming out of sex work for instance, it is more challenging to conceptualise work as a form of worship rather than purely means to generate income.
3. Integrating the spiritual dimensions of work is more straightforward in certain contexts. For instance, in farming and agriculture it is relatively straightforward given the way Scripture directly addresses this. Unsurprisingly, there are Christian development organizations working in agriculture that are reflecting work as worship and see farmers shift their worldview, and in doing so find profound meaning. For other contexts, such as business, there is perhaps much to be learned from movements such as Business as Mission as mentioned above.

Practical Implications and Future Directions

1. **Intentional Focus on Work Theology:** To integrate meaningful work into development programs, organizations need to intentionally develop theologies of work that are sensitive to both the cultural context and the type of work being done. Further research is needed to create meaningful and contextually appropriate metrics.
2. **Impact on Other Indicators:** It's important to recognize that progress in meaningful work might lead to a decline in other areas, like income. For example, someone choosing a lower-paying but more spiritually fulfilling job could improve their spiritual well-being but earn less money.
3. **Power and Ethics in Measurement:** Evaluation should prioritize serving the people we work with, but it's important to avoid using metrics to justify focusing on secondary needs. The goal should be to align monitoring and evaluation with the primary needs expressed by the community.