Tomorrow's Workplace: A Journey to True Self-Actualization

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Simply put, the workplace of tomorrow will finally reconcile the currently conflicting goals of individuals and business entities. The workforce is shifting; corporate values are no longer solely focused on the bottom line, but rather now include concepts like sustainability and charitable giving. Increased globalization and today's digital economy, are dictating that corporate values are no longer just for investors, the journey to success is now for everyone. The so-called "War for Talent" is already changing how businesses operate every day, putting people at the center, ensuring that productivity and employee satisfaction are aligned. When values align, self-discovery becomes the key driver of personal growth, self-actualization becomes the rewarding result, and widespread self-awareness drives a new, proactive approach to career and employee management, all contributing to superior business performance for those firms who tangibly care. Through greater understanding of individuals, the workplace of tomorrow can focus on aligning abilities and ambitions, rather than past experiences and academic grooming. This self-aware workforce in a connected world will usher the new age of talent liquidity, on a global scale, providing greater options for individuals and corporations to assess and take advantage of opportunities for growth. The result? The workplace of tomorrow can address and dramatically reduce the impact of today's most crippling societal issues such as unemployment, through greater visibility into matching talent with opportunities for example. Governments will have full visibility into the talent markets and upcoming opportunities, enabling them to bypass many beaurocratic processes to provide individuals and business entities with appropriate support. The shift of focus onto individuals is simple in theory, but difficult in practice, as it requires a fundamental change in our personal, societal, corporate and academic beliefs, and measures of success. This self-aware workforce will redefine wealth and happiness, gauged primarily by sustainability and growth as metrics of success.

To attain this world, the notion of each individual's journey must be reshaped, starting with the founding blocks of personal development. Today's standards must be examined through the lens of tomorrow's knowledge workers to understand their validity and sustainability. Tomorrow's successful workplaces will be dependent on a new framework, The Self-Actualization Framework, which contains three distinct phases of individual growth.

Phase 1: Self-Discovery

The journey begins with self-discovery, the most important phase in shaping the workforce of tomorrow. In most developed cultures, this typically describes the phase in which an individual enters an education system, complemented by personal growth guided by families and friends. This phase focuses entirely on identifying and directing one's abilities and ambitions towards personal, business, and societal needs, a combination that results in knowledge.

The goal of education is to provide knowledge and experiences that will create a foundation for success in the professional world. The issue is that one must first learn about oneself to understand how their abilities and ambitions match with the demand of the marketplace, in order to know what they should do for a living. Today, habits and values are being taught to the masses in terms that are meant to relate to specific societal roles. This role-based learning system has created a world where people identify themselves with the roles given to them, rather than the abilities and ambitions they hold. In this world, losing one's job is compared to losing one's identity, and unemployment becomes a constant psychological burden on the growing population.

True self-discovery can be difficult, however. Outside influences can often lead individuals astray with differing notions of success. The education system, for example, enforces a mentality that focuses on averages – a student's measure of success is usually an average of all the scores achieved in each class. This system praises those with the highest averages, and urges those with lower averages to focus on 'areas of weakness.' As a result, students with outstanding achievements in one area are often spending their time improving their lower performances rather than further honing their distinguishing abilities. Influence from or the search for validation from parents and friends can also add to a child's confusion, leading to unsustainable efforts, artificial measures of happiness, and ultimately swaying further away from true self-discovery.

The education system must focus on a different foundation for personal enrichment and success, one driven by metrics of self-discovery and the satisfaction derived from achievements rather than scores generated by standardized exams. A competency-based learning system, for example, would allow individuals to reverse-engineer their lives in a proactive manner, selecting opportunities that fit them best based on their abilities and ambitions. Once discovered, these competencies could be tested and developed using real-world opportunities, much like today's project-based internships. If workers today knew their specific competencies, and identified themselves with them, many of the professional hardships felt by individuals would be eliminated, and terms that drive our economy, like wealth, would be redefined.

Today, the end of this phase is typically marked by the achievements of significant milestones: such as college graduations, entering the work force, moving away from the family for the first time, etc. The current system forces individuals to make decisions about their careers while they are still early in the self-discovery phase. This new framework will enable the individual to gauge his or her level of knowledge accurately before progressing to the self-development phase. With an adequate amount of self-discovery, the period where young professionals are known to 'bounce around' will be reduced dramatically, saving painful hardships for individuals and costly turnover for companies. This phase ultimately helps individuals become self-aware in the context of their strengths, abilities and interest in a framework of market and societal needs, with an emphasis on perpetual self-discovery and self-development.

Phase 2: Self-Development

This phase marks the beginning of an individual's professional life, and transitions the introspective lens to now incorporate the environment and other individuals. With proper self-discovery, individuals will have both actionable knowledge and understanding of their personal skills and interests and therefore will be able to transition smoothly and productively into the workforce.. The self-development phase focuses on the following professional equation: knowledge + other people + environment = opportunities for success.

The first new ingredient is other people. This is a critical aspect in uncovering meaningful opportunities, as individuals learn to work with others and ultimately accomplish more as a group. This is a fundamental difference from the earlier period of self-discovery where focus was on the individual and not on a group. With an effective group , the general premise is that more knowledge is better. Working with the right people having the right knowledge and complementary skills will bring more opportunities for success; in this new environment, the individual must learn to work with others of differing cultures, personalities and interest towards a common goal. This brings about a notion of mutual respect and deeper relationships and acceptance, as individuals must be able to articulate their abilities and ambitions as well as understand other's inherent value to the task at hand.

Our theory of business must also include the environment as an essential ingredient, as true self-development must incorporate one's surrounding. In the context of this equation, environment can relate to business, geography, corporate culture, industry, trends and any inter relations between them. Becoming aware of one's surroundings and understanding the implications on one's knowledge enables each worker to better guide their development. Incorporating the environment offers a new opportunity for self-discovery, one geared towards personal growth in the context of various business and societal landscapes. The result is a more aware worker who can adapt more effectively when situations change and eventually proactively manage their opportunities.

If the right group of people is assembled with a common vision or purpose in the right environment, opportunities for true self-development arise. This phase teaches individuals the notion of personal, corporate and social values, and urges them to find alignment in a fitting environment. A corporate culture of aligned values, for example, brings unison in vision but infinite depth in perspective and voices, as each person is unique in details and contribution. In developed nations and economies, this type of alignment is usually a strong indicator of fruitful opportunities. Thus, this phase teaches individuals that opportunities are to be gauged by a blend of knowledge, people and environment, and that one can become self-aware through enough different experiences.

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Phase 3: Self-Awareness

This phase centers around first defining, then amassing, wealth and happiness (with happiness defined in its broadest sense, in particular the joy of achieving difficult objectives which require hard work, commitment and dedication can be particularly rewarding). Once someone is deemed self-aware, he is self-sustainable in his ability to select opportunities where the team is more productive than the sum of each person on that team. In this phase the goal is personal, corporate and societal wealth and happiness, leading to true Self-Actualization. This is the longest phase, and in fact is a never-ending journey, as it is the professional period when individuals hone develop their lives based on opportunities that can create as much sustainable success as possible. This phase is driven by the following equation: Experience + Knowledge = Sustainable Wealth and Happiness, leading to Self-Actualization.

Before carrying on, it is important to note that the equation positions wealth and happiness as a result of self-awareness, however they are truly part of every step of the Self-Actualization Framework. Incremental gains in wealth and happiness throughout the self-discovery and self-development phases will provide a focus on sustainability rather than immediate gains, and a notion that *wealth is not merely monetary compensation*. Throughout the prior self-development phase, individuals experienced many kinds of wealth and happiness, and gauged opportunities by these types of metrics. The Self-Awareness and Actualization phase is about honing in on those opportunities that brought the desired type and quantity of wealth and happiness.

The introduction of success metrics is vital to self-awareness because it forces individuals to prioritize the metrics most important to them. There are external factors like the cost of living, which often sway current notions of success metrics, which must be assumed equal amongst all opportunities in order to of adequately gauge a professional match. The self-aware worker's metrics revolve mainly around a sense of satisfaction and happiness, as well as a quantifiable notion of sustainability of that satisfaction and happiness.

Self-aware individuals who focus on sustainable metrics for business and personal growth, rather than selfish individuals that make many times their employees' salaries, will drive tomorrow's workplace. New merit-based compensation models would factor impact and contribution, providing more accuracy and accountability than the purely capitalistic model driving today's economy. Perpetual discovery and development will be a key factor amongst everyone, but even more important for the leaders of tomorrow. This, matched with increased globalization and digitization of economies, will create a workplace where efficiency rules all. For example, decentralization and outsourcing will be common themes amongst individuals with strong family values and corporations interested in hiring them. This is a great example of how selecting the right success metrics and articulating them effectively to everyone, will create full liquidity in the talent markets, and thus eliminate inefficiencies like high unemployment. This final phase will teach everyone perspective and usher in a world where, as Albert Einstein puts it, "everybody is a genius [because] if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

The Result: Self-Actualization

The Self-Actualization Framework will drive the workplace of tomorrow. Self-discovery leads to knowledge and self-development, which in turn leads to opportunities and self-awareness, which ultimately results in self-actualization for individuals, corporations, governments, and society at large. Unlike the current, linear model of personal development that relies on a progression from education to a professional career, the Self-Actualization Framework is designed to urge individuals to become self-aware and incorporate all three phases of their life. This co-existence of discovery, development, awareness and actualization creates more standout individuals that are happier, more open and ultimately much wealthier than today's leaders who are glorified based on metrics of success such as monetary compensation.

Talent liquidity, decentralization of corporations, and a drastic increase in proactive career management, are just a few of the many ways the workplace of tomorrow will ultimately combat issues like unemployment and poverty. With a simple shift in our educational models from role-based to competency-based learning, a monumental shift in society can occur through this new Framework. Self-actualization and productivity will finally be united as one, paving the way for sustainable personal, corporate, governmental and societal growth.