The Contribution of ‘Good’ Jobs to Development and Cohesion: The Human Empowerment Perspective

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The human empowerment perspective

From the viewpoint of human empowerment, development is an agency-creating process because it gives ordinary people control over their lives (Inglehart & Welzel 2005). Development does this by enhancing people’s capabilities, aspirations, and entitlements to act at own will (Welzel, Inglehart & Klingemann 2003). Capabilities grow with cognitive mobilization—a process that is visible, among other things, in rising levels of formal education. Growing aspirations are evident in an increasing emphasis on emancipative values. And expanding entitlements are manifest in wider and more effectively respected civil rights (Welzel & Inglehart 2010). Figure 1 illustrates this concept of human empowerment.

The three partial empowerments tend to concur: where people are cognitively more empowered, they tend to be more empowered motivationally and legally too. This is evident in the three-dimensional scattergram across ninety-three societies with available data for all three variables (Welzel forthcoming).

Human empowerment is consistent over the cognitive, motivational, and legal aspects of human agency. But even though human empowerment is a syndrome, the partial empowerments occur in a specific sequence: cognitive empowerment tends to precede motivational empowerment, and both cognitive and motivational empowerment tend to precede legal empowerment—at least insofar as legal empowerment is truly effective in respecting people’s civil rights (Welzel forthcoming). This direction of impact is consistent with the central theorem of the human empowerment framework: the freedom-utility-theorem (Welzel 2009). As this theorem posits, formal education increases the utility of freedom because educated people know more to do more with freedom. Since evolution has shaped humans as perceptive beings, a higher utility of freedom does not remain unrecognized: it leads people to value freedom more (which is manifest in emancipative values). From this follows a stronger legalization of freedom (visible in wider and more effectively protected civil rights) because it is costly to suppress freedom when its utility and value have risen.

‘Good’ jobs in the human empowerment perspective

The question of good jobs is normative and the perspective of human empowerment offers a clear norm against which ‘good’ is to be judged: agency (Welzel & Inglehart 2010). Good jobs are the jobs that empower people by making them the agents of their own actions. These are jobs that leave people at least some leverage on how to perform their tasks. Evidently, this ‘agentic’ character of jobs becomes more pronounced as the cognitive, creative, and autonomous aspects of one’s tasks increase. These agentic features in turn depend on the skill level of the involved tasks (Florida 2003).

Of course, under conditions of extreme poverty, people might be satisfied with any type of job, irrespective of the required skill and offered agency. In this condition, skill and agency might be irrelevant luxury considerations. However, when we detach the notion of skill and agency from academic education and work and, instead, widen the notion of skill and agency to mastery and craftsmanship in a broader sense, the issue of skill formation and agency building is relevant in the context of poverty as well (Sen 1999).
For instance, a self-employed farmer and an unskilled seasonal farm worker might basically perform the same tasks. But while the hired farm worker operates under instructions and close supervision, the self-employed farmer makes her own decisions and gathers knowhow to make informed choices. These agentic features change the nature of the same work quite substantially.

**Social cohesion: Not a Good per se**

The relationship between agentic job features and social cohesion is ambivalent at times. The ambivalence reflects the fact that patterns of social cohesion are often clientelistic-patrimonial in character. If so, social cohesion locks people in: it restricts their agency and makes them unavailable for training, education, and jobs with agentic features. Women’s potential in particular is locked in where clientelistic-patrimonial structures prevail (Sachs 2006). Hence, the task of creating better jobs often requires unchain people from traditional patterns of cohesion. In that sense, social cohesion is sometimes the problem rather than the solution to create good jobs (Boserup 1970).

A widely discussed example is female garment factory workers in countries like Bangladesh. On one hand, development practitioners bemoan the working conditions of these women and the fact that they work for wages that would be considered below human dignity in affluent societies. On the other hand, representatives of these women have pointed out that controlling an own income offers them new options, gives them bargaining power within the family, and allows them to control their reproductive behaviour (Blumberg 2004). Usually, the result is lowered fertility and a greater emphasis on one’s offspring’s skills. According to unified growth theory, the combination of lowered fertility with skill investment is the way out of the Malthusian trap in which population growth eats up income growth (Galor 2010).

At any rate, only jobs with agentic features can be considered good jobs in a humane sense. And creating agentic jobs depends critically on skill building and the formation of human capital. As new growth theory argues (Becker 1964; Romer 1990; Warsh 2006), the workforce’s skill level is the key to prosperity: since sizeable profit is usually made by selling higher-end products, escaping poverty requires the knowhow to process low-end into high-end products. Although the export of strongly demanded natural products, such as oil and minerals, seems to be an easier route to prosperity, this option is unavailable to countries that lack natural resources. Worse, societies that seem to be lucky with respect to natural resources, often fall victim to the ‘resource curse’: rent-seeking economies that do not invest in human capital and concentrate wealth in state-supported oligopolies. In conclusion, sustainable prosperity depends on the workforce’s skill level and the key to enhance the skill level is to extend education.

Consistent with this proposition, Figure 2 shows that a society’s per capita GDP is explained to a large extent by its population’s average years of schooling ten years ago. Furthermore, the dependence of GDP on schooling has increased over time: the left-hand diagram documents that schooling explained GDP to 68 per cent in 1980 and 75 per cent in 2000.

**Three empowering job features in people’s perception**

The ‘agentic’ features of a given job can be read from the tasks’ cognitive, creative, and autonomous character. The World Values Surveys (2010) have covered these three job aspects
for the first time in the 2005-08 round of surveys, which were fielded in some fifty societies around the globe, including the societies with the largest populations and biggest economies in each world region. The three questions were phrased as follows:

V244. Are the tasks you perform at work mostly manual or mostly cognitive? If you do not work currently, characterize your major work in the past. Use this scale where 1 means “mostly manual tasks” and 10 means “mostly cognitive tasks” (code one answer):

Mostly manual tasks | Mostly cognitive tasks
---|---
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

V245. Are the tasks you perform at work mostly routine tasks or mostly creative tasks? If you do not work currently, characterize your major work in the past. Use this scale where 1 means “mostly routine tasks” and 10 means “mostly creative tasks” (code one answer):

Mostly routine tasks | Mostly creative tasks
---|---
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

V246. How much independence do you have in performing your tasks at work? If you do not work currently, characterize your major work in the past. Use this scale to indicate your degree of independence where 1 means “no independence at all” and 10 means “complete independence” (code one answer):

No independence at all | Complete independence
---|---
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

In Figure 3, we group all respondents into ten categories of ascending perceptions of jobs as cognitive. The categories are shown on the horizontal axis. On the vertical axis, we see the related perceptions of jobs as autonomous and creative. It is evident from the line graph that perceiving jobs as cognitive goes together with perceiving them as autonomous and creative. Hence, it is justified to summarize cognitive, creative, and autonomous perceptions as ‘agentic’ job perceptions.

As Figure 4 shows, a population perceives its jobs as more cognitive when the economy’s knowledge index is higher. A key component of the knowledge index is the given population’s

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1 The World Banks’ “Knowledge Index” indicates “a society’s ability to generate, adopt and, diffuse knowledge. The KI is the simple average of the normalized scores of a society on the key variables in the three knowledge economy pillars: education, innovation, and ICT (World Bank, 2008).” The knowledge index combines data on education (using indicators like the tertiary enrolment ratio), on innovation (using indicators like the number of patents per 10,000 inhabitants), and on information technology (using indicators like the number of internet hosts per 1,000 inhabitants). We rescale the index into a range from 0 to 1.0, with higher values indicating a more advanced knowledge economy and thus farther advanced technology. A description of index construction and data are available at: http://info.worldbank.org/etools/kam2/ KAM_page5.asp
education level. Hence, the most plausible interpretation of this pattern is that rising levels of education bring jobs with a stronger cognitive component, which leaves a recognizable mark in people’s perceptions.

Figure 5 demonstrates that rising education is one of the most forceful global trends of recent decades. This holds true when we look at the primary years of schooling as well as the total years of schooling. Moreover, all world regions—including the most impoverished ones—participate in this cognitive mobilization. As is evident, the light grey bars for 2000 are everywhere considerably larger than the dark grey ones for 1960, even in Sub-Saharan Africa. These data illustrate nothing less than a global cognitive revolution over the last forty years.

Figure 6 summarizes the perception of jobs as cognitive, creative, and autonomous into a single index: the ‘agentic job perception index.’ The graph illustrates that the agentic job perception grows with both income and education but the link with education is much stronger. From another angle, this evidence suggests that the agentic job perception is most powerfully driven by the education-induced cognitive revolution.

The rise of agentic job perceptions is also linked with changing values, indicating a cultural transformation towards increasingly people-powered societies. The most important change in this respect is the rise of emancipative values, which parallel the rise of agentic job perceptions. This is obvious from Figure 7.

As one might suspect, the rise of agentic job perceptions comes along with changing job priorities. To illustrate this point, Figure 10 shows the relationship between agentic job perceptions and four different job priorities. Accordingly, with more agentic job perceptions, to have a well-paid job and to have a secure job becomes less important. By contrast, to have a fulfilling job steeply rises to a top priority. The job as an arena of social contacts does not change its importance.

An equally dramatic transformation surfaces when we look at the relationship between agentic job perceptions and the importance of basic life domains. Figure 11 documents that agentic job perceptions do not associate with any change in the importance of work (despite the fact that priorities at work change, as we have seen). At the same time, there is a modest increase in the importance of leisure and friends. The importance of religion decreases considerably and is compensated by a similar increase in the importance of politics. This lies in the logic of increasing human agency insofar as religion describes a world of fate and destiny whereas politics is a world of shaping and engineering processes. Furthermore, the graph shows that, with stronger agency perceptions, more life domains are important. With a note of caution, we can read this as evidence that people become more multi-valued as their agency perceptions rise.

Evaluating agentic job perceptions under the criterion of human wellbeing, the key question is how these perceptions relate to people’s satisfaction, happiness, and feelings of health and freedom. As Figure 9 demonstrates, there is a very strong association. Indeed, all four dimensions of subjective wellbeing—general life satisfaction, momentary happiness, feelings of ...

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2 Using a so-called “formative index” construction logic, the index is the sum of the three component scores, standardized into a normalized scale with minimum 0 and maximum 1.0.
health, and feelings of freedom—increase steeply and in unison with each other as agentic job perceptions grow.

**Agentic job perceptions and Social cohesion**

From the viewpoint of human empowerment, speaking about social cohesion in an unspecific way does not make sense. Instead, it is important to further qualify social cohesion because different types of cohesion have diametrically opposing implications for human agency. Clientelistic-patrimonial forms of cohesion suffocate human agency. By contrast, forms of cohesion that involve voluntary cooperation among equals translate individual agency into productive collective self-organization. From this point of view, we have to single out specific forms of interaction: voluntary participation in citizen-managed associations and in citizen-initiated actions.

As Figure 11 shows, agentic job perceptions come with increased participation in both of these phenomena, especially citizen-initiated actions. The latter involve nonviolent protest activity. Interestingly, a high frequency of such activities is often misinterpreted as an indication of social misery and disruption—the very opposite of social cohesion. But nothing could be more wrong. Participation in nonviolent protest activities requires extensive networking activities in society. It is an indication of a vibrant civil society, with citizens acting as social and political initiators. Cross-national evidence indicates that where nonviolent protest is frequent and widespread, public governance is both more effective and accountable (Welzel, Inglehart & Deutsch 2005). Hence, nonviolent protest activity indicates a particularly healthy form of social cohesion.

Another crucial aspect of social cohesion is how trustworthy people perceive other people. A huge literature on social capital emphasizes that the diversity of human interactions needed to keep complex societies operating requires a generalized form of interpersonal trust (Delhey, Newton & Welzel 2011). The key characteristic of generalized interpersonal trust is that it extends one’s trust to out-groups, without eroding trust in one’s in-group. The World Values Survey measures out-group trust by asking people how much they trust in people they meet for the first time and people who differ on group-identity characteristics, such as religion and nationality. In-group trust is measured by asking people how much they trust family members, friends, and neighbours. As Figure 12 evidences, agentic job perceptions associate with interpersonal trust precisely in the way that the social capital literature suggests to be healthy for societies: stronger agentic perceptions do not erode in-group trust while they do come with increased out-group trust.

**Focusing on low-income societies**

It’s easy to suspect that the relevance of agentic job perceptions shown in the previous analyses is mostly driven by the circumstances of the high-income societies in our sample. However, if one looks at the composition of the WVS-sample in Figure 3, this suspicion receives weak support: high-income societies are not the majority of the sample. But let’s have a closer look at the low-income societies to get some direct evidence.

Figure 13 isolates the twelve low-income societies in the sample of WVS-round five. These are societies with per capita GDPs in 2002 of less than 1,000 US-Dollars a year in purchasing power
parities. The diagram shows how people’s perceptions of their jobs as cognitive co-varies with perceptions of jobs as creative and autonomous and with education levels, job skill levels, emancipative values, out-group trust, voluntary commitments, collective action as well as life satisfaction.

Apparently, as the perceptions of jobs as cognitive increase, so do all of these other variables. In case of each variable, the correlation with cognitive perceptions is statistically highly significant. According to this evidence, agentic job perceptions operate in the same direction and are as relevant in low-income societies as they are in other societies.

Do agentic job perceptions correlate systematically with the type of job? And do the same correlations show up in low-income societies? Unfortunately, the World Values Surveys do not include very detailed questions of the type of a person’s occupation. But one question does ask for the respondents’ occupational status, using a closed-ended question with a preformatted set of twenty responses. The boxplot in Figure 14 shows for each of these occupational categories the mean score of the respective respondents’ agentic job perception as well as the standard deviation and score range around the mean score. The left-hand diagram shows this only for the 12,000 respondents in our twelve low-income societies; the right-hand diagram shows it for all of the 50,000 respondents in the whole set of fifty societies.

As is obvious, the patterns do not dramatically differ across the two graphs. Quite the contrary, there are some apparent commonalities. As one would expect, agentic perceptions are the most pronounced among managers of larger companies and professionals. More generally, agentic perceptions are more pronounced among office workers than manual workers and among the latter they are the least pronounced among agricultural workers. The latter are on a par with jobless people. Obviously, the general pattern underlying the differentiation in agentic perceptions is the skill-ladder of jobs. This pattern evidences yet from another angle how important it is for a society to move up the skill-ladder of economic production and job creation. A noteworthy difference that sets low-income societies a little bit apart from the general pattern is the fact that having no job comes with the least agentic perception in these societies while this is not the case more generally speaking. A plausible interpretation of this finding is that low-income societies have only rudimentary transfer income schemes for jobless people, so having no job is indeed the worst of all options under conditions of poverty.

**Conclusion**

In summary, the rise of agentic job perceptions is a first-rate indicator of the ‘good’ jobs that empower the people and make our societies better places to live. Job development is to create good conditions for these jobs, especially through investment into education and education systems. Often, this means to break people free from social cohesion patterns that chain their initiative and restrict their agency as autonomous individuals. Under increased agency, social cohesion will be reshaped from group-clientelism toward voluntary commitments.
References


Figure 1. The Concept of Human Empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Development</th>
<th>Intellectual Resources: knowledge, skills, and access to information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capabilities of Agency: ability to exercise freedoms in one’s actions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive Empowerment: objective action repertoire widens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivational Empowerment: subjective action horizon widens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legal Empowerment: codified action radius widens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Rights:</td>
<td>personal rights in private matters and political rights in public affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aspirations for Agency: strive to exercise freedoms in one’s actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entitlements to Agency: license to exercise freedoms in one’s actions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People Empowerment
Figure 2. Years of Schooling and Per Capita GDP

Data Source: Barro & Lee (2010); World Bank 2010.
Figure 3. Cognitive, Creative, and Autonomous Job Perceptions

COG: Cognitive Perceptions increasing from COG01 to COG10.

Data Source: World Values Survey Association (2010); round of the WVS (ca. 50,000 respondents in 50 societies, samples weighted to have equal size).
Figure 4. Knowledge Development and Cognitive Job Perceptions

Figure 5. The Expansion of Schooling Years around the World 1960 to 2000

Data Source: Barro & Lee (2010).
Figure 6. Agentic Job Perceptions Related to Income and Education

CCA: Cognitive-Creative-Autonomous Perceptions increasing from CCA01 to CCA10.

Data Source: World Values Survey Association (2010), round V in 2005 (ca. 50,000 respondents in 50 societies, samples weighted to have equal size).
Figure 7. Agentic Job Perceptions Related to Secular Values and Emancipative Values

CCA: Cognitive-Creative-Autonomous Perceptions increasing from CCA01 to CCA10.

Data Source: World Values Survey Association (2010); round V-2005 (ca. 50,000 respondents in 50 societies, samples weighted to have equal size).
Figure 8. Agentic Job Perceptions and Job Priorities

CCA: Cognitive-Creative-Autonomous Perceptions increasing from CCA01 to CCA10.

Data Source: World Values Survey Association (2010), round V-2005 (ca. 50,000 respondents in 50 societies, samples weighted to have equal size).
Figure 9. Agentic Job Perceptions and Life Domains

CCA: Cognitive-Creative-Autonomous Perceptions increasing from CCA01 to CCA10.

Data Source: World Values Survey Association (2010), round V-2005 (ca. 50,000 respondents in 50 societies, samples weighted to have equal size).
Figure 10. Agentic Job Perceptions and Subjective Wellbeing

CCA: Cognitive-Creative-Autonomous Perceptions increasing from CCA01 to CCA10.

Data Source: World Values Survey Association (2010), round V-2005 (ca. 50,000 respondents in 50 societies, samples weighted to have equal size).
Figure 11. Agentic Job Perceptions and Community Engagement

CCA: Cognitive-Creative-Autonomous Perceptions increasing from CCA01 to CCA10.

Data Source: World Values Survey Association (2010), round V-2005 (ca. 50,000 respondents in 50 societies, samples weighted to have equal size).
Figure 12. Agentic Job Perceptions and Interpersonal Trust

CCA: Cognitive-Creative-Autonomous Perceptions increasing from CCA01 to CCA10.

Data Source: World Values Survey Association (2010), round V-2005 (ca. 50,000 respondents in 50 societies, samples weighted to have equal size).
Figure 13. Agentic Job Perceptions and their Correlates in Low-Income Societies

Data Source: World Values Survey Association (2010), round V-2005. Analyses is for a subset of low income societies (GDP/p.c. in 2002 below 1,000 UDS), including samples from Burkina Faso, China, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Mali, Moldova, Rwanda, Ukraine, Vietnam, Zambia (ca. 12,000 respondents in 12 societies, samples weighted to have equal size).
Figure 14. Agentic Task Perceptions and Job Skill Level

Data Source: World Values Survey Association (2010). For left-hand diagram, see Figure 13; for right-hand diagram, see Figure 12.
Appendix: Measuring Emancipative Values

To measure emancipative values, we use data from the World Values Surveys. Emancipative values represent a multi-point index from 0 to 1.0 based on twelve items, averaged in a two-step procedure. In the first step, the twelve items are averaged into four sub-indices, each consisting of three items. In the second step, the four sub-indices are averaged into the overall index of emancipative values. What follows is a description of the two-step index construction procedure.

First Step: Creating Four Sub-Indices of emancipative values

(1) Autonomy: Four-point index from 0 to 1.

Question Wording:

“Here is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mentioned</th>
<th>Not mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of responsibility</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagination</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance and respect for other people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrift, saving money and things</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination, perseverance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious faith</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unselfishness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mentioning of ‘independence’ and ‘imagination’ are both coded 1 and 0 otherwise. Mentioning of ‘obedience’ is coded 0 and 1 otherwise. Codes are averaged over the three items.
(2) **Equality**: Twelve-point index from 0 to 1.

**Question Wording**:

“For each of the following statements I read out, can you tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with each. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree?

- A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl.
- On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do.

Do you agree, disagree or neither agree nor disagree with the following statements?

- When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.”

For the first two items, strongly is coded 0, agree is coded 0.25, disagree is coded 0.75 and strongly disagree is coded 1. For the third item, agree is coded 0, neither nor is coded 0.5 and disagree is coded 1. Codes are averaged over the three items.

(3) **Choice**: Thirty-point index from 0 to 1.

**Question Wording**:

“Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between using this card (10-point scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never justifiable</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homosexuality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
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Codes are rescaled from minimum 0 to maximum 1 for each of the three items. Then the codes are averaged over the three items.

(4) **Voice**: Six-point index from minimum 0 to maximum 1.

**Question Wording**:

“People sometimes talk about what the aims of this country should be for the next ten years. On this card are listed some of the goals which different people would give top priority. Would you please say which one of these you, yourself, consider the most important? (…) And second most important?

There are twelve aims in total, among them:
- Giving people more say in important government decisions
- Protecting freedom of speech
- Seeing that people have more say about how things are done at their jobs and in their communities.”
An emphasis on these items is coded: 1.0=first priority, 0.5=second priority, 0=not mentioned.

**Second Step**: Creating the *Overall Index* of Emancipative Values
The overall index of emancipative values is the average over the four subindices, yielding a multi-point scale from minimum 0 to maximum 1. This procedure is justified on the basis of the hierarchical factor analysis shown below.