

PHILANTHROPY and the FUTURE of WORK:

Dimensions of Change and Opportunities for Action

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Introduction

The disappearance of work has adversely affected not only individuals, families, and neighborhoods, but the social life of the city at large as well.

—William Julius Wilson


When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor, 1996

The future of work has animated conversations in academia, business, the press, and, of course, philanthropy. Work is changing in many ways, with the advancement of technologies that could replace traditional jobs, alter the relationship between employers and employees, or transform the skills needed for future jobs. Work is influenced by not only technological change but also changes in a variety of political, social, and economic forces. Work is a vital function within any community and both influences and is influenced by the local culture, political environment, and well-being of a place.

A substantially changed world of work has profound implications for society. Work is not only the means by which individuals and families obtain the resources needed to support themselves. Work also provides important social connections — it can significantly influence personal and community life, it can provide a sense of purpose, and it can form an important component of identity. Work is often the central activity around which individuals construct the structure of their day, and it has a significant influence on the rhythm of life in a community.

The questions associated with the future of work are not trivial, particularly for philanthropy that aims to address poverty or improve social conditions. Foundations that seek to strengthen vulnerable communities — whether geographic or demographic — often invest in strategies to expand work opportunities and connect individuals to rewarding work. Indeed, a dominant paradigm has been to connect people to work as a means of improving their economic status, facilitating social connections and inclusion, and supporting the ability of families to care for children. A variety of programs offer assistance for young people, single mothers, the formerly incarcerated, the disabled, young men of color, adults with low basic skills, and others who experience barriers to work and economic advancement. Foundations have supported important innovations in job preparation and job connection strategies for these populations. Many of these programs have experienced great success in helping individuals connect to better jobs and have made an important difference in the lives of the individuals who they work with.

And yet, these programs have rarely been able to expand to a scale of service where they could impact the larger challenges that they are set against — such as high rates of unemployment and underemployment among the above-mentioned demographic groups, or high rates of child poverty. Programs have been constrained by reduced public investment in job training and human services and limited philanthropic resources; thus, services often cannot be expanded to reach large numbers. More



profoundly, however, these initiatives are constrained by the changing nature of work and economic opportunity. As these programs became better at helping individuals acquire skills to connect to work, work seemed to offer fewer good jobs and clear pathways to economic stability and advancement.

A number of foundations have been exploring the future of work as they consider how to address issues of economic and social inclusion and how to advance healthy communities. If the future of work is in question, what are the implications for philanthropic investment strategies? That is the question animating this paper.

Approach

This paper is informed by a series of interviews conducted with over a dozen individuals in philanthropy in February and March 2016. Grantmakers were selected based on a known interest in the topic and a history of grantmaking that involves helping low-income people access economic opportunity through work. The individuals interviewed all have portfolios that in some way address the issue of connecting unemployed and underemployed individuals to jobs, improving the quality of jobs, or both. Some interviewees have particular populations of interest, such as parents of young children or people of color, but all are concerned with people experiencing some level of economic disadvantage. Some interviewees focus on particular geographic areas, while others are primarily national in perspective. The interviews covered three broad questions:

1. To what degree have you found the conversation on the future of work informative and useful to your work as a grantmaker? In your experience, what issues are driving the conversation on the future of work?
2. What is your current perspective on the future of work; that is, to what degree do you see the future outlook for work as cause for concern when you consider economic opportunities available to the populations that your grantmaking seeks to help?
3. What do you see as a response to the changing nature of work? In particular, what do you believe are opportunities to improve the future of work and/or what do you believe are opportunities to help people cope with a future of work that may offer less opportunity than in the past?

Interviews were conducted primarily by phone and lasted approximately one hour. In addition to the interviews, the paper also draws on previous work done in organizing public and private conversations on the topic of the future of work. Finally, the paper draws on the author's experience of approximately two decades of work in documenting and evaluating philanthropically supported efforts to connect low-income people, often facing multiple barriers, to work.

The intent of this paper is not to build a consensus about what the future holds or what philanthropy should do. Instead, it identifies some of the key issues included in the broad-ranging conversation around the future of work, and highlights practical implications and ideas worthy of philanthropic consideration.

What's Driving the Future of Work?

The topic of the future of work stems from several questions about the way that work is currently changing or is projected to change. The primary issues were referenced in the interviews and are reflected in existing literature on the future of work. First is the question of technological displacement: As artificial intelligence and robotics advance, will human workers be needed in the future of work? Second, another vision of the future of work revolves around platform companies and the gig economy: Will working people all be freelancers in the future of work? A third question again relates to technology: How will technology influence the skills workers will need to be employed and earn a decent living? A final question relates to the changing relationship between employers and employees: How have changing business norms, regulatory approaches, and power dynamics influenced and how may they continue to influence the future of work? These questions are described further below.

Technological displacement: Are the robots eating our jobs? That automation has made many jobs redundant, and will likely continue to do so, is undeniable. In the past, changing technology reduced the need for large numbers of people to work on farms, and changing technology continues to reduce the need for large numbers of people to work in factories.

Some argue that this current wave of technological change will similarly lead to a reduction in some kinds of employment but a rise in others (Isaacson 2015) and that, in essence, the Luddites will be wrong again. Others argue that the pace of change in robotics and artificial intelligence and the power of these technologies may make this era different from previous eras of technological advancement and economic change. There is a risk that the opportunities for humans to compete for work will indeed be limited in this new digital and robotic world of work. In *The Second Machine Age*, Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee (2014) make the case that this time is different, and yet they also note that advances in technology are not the sole determinant of the future of work — we have choices about how the benefits of technological advances are harnessed and shared.

While there is certainly disagreement about whether enough jobs will be created to make up for those that are lost in the changing technology landscape, there is also general agreement that current technological change can yield significant economic and societal benefits that would make us all better off.

Technological intermediation: Technology is also changing how people connect to work. Companies and platforms in the “sharing” or “gig” economy are conceptualized as peer-to-peer marketplaces, with the sharing company serving as an intermediary between the seller and the consumer. Many platforms include rating systems where consumers are able to review the laborer or the seller of the goods, and the laborer or seller of goods may rate the consumer as well. The platform companies propose these rating systems in order to give platform users confidence about the quality of the service that they are purchasing through the platform, and in that sense aim to use these rating systems as a more efficient approach to consumer protection than other mechanisms for quality standards, such as licensing or training.

In this version of the future of work, the questions are not so much about whether there will be work. Instead, concerns focus on the conditions of work, who will be able to access work, and how the conditions and terms of access are set. For instance, will competition among workers over each task create an inexorable downward pressure on earnings, limiting workers' ability to meet basic needs and get by, never mind their ability to amass the resources needed to save and get ahead? Will certain populations lack the assets, financial capability, or skills needed to manage their economic life successfully while moving from job to job?

In addition, as these platforms remove work from the previous era of labor laws, what are the implications for worker protections? How will we prevent discrimination based on race, age, gender, or other variables? Regulations to ensure health and safety, equal opportunity, and other important societal goals were not designed for different institutional arrangements in the organization of work. What is the right approach to ensure these values are not undermined?

Technology and skills: The changing technology landscape means changes in the technologies used at work. We can see jobs change all around us as technology influences the nature of work in industries ranging from manufacturing to healthcare to retail to hospitality. Will jobs require higher levels of skills, or will some jobs require fewer skills as computers manage complex tasks? Or will jobs simply require different skills? How will the supply of skills influence the design of jobs? How will access to education and skill-building opportunities influence who qualifies for better jobs? These are among the questions considered in the influence of technology on job skills.

There is an ongoing debate about the changing nature of job skills and the implications for people trying to earn a living. The “skills biased technical change” theory states that technical change allows higher skilled individuals to command higher wages given that new technologies have disproportionately enhanced the productivity of high-skilled workers relative to other workers, and thus increased demand for these higher skilled workers. Some believe this phenomena explains a significant portion of the growth in earnings inequality experienced over the past few decades. However, others have noted that the data on wage trends reveal patterns inconsistent with that theory (Card and DiNardo 2002). Some argue that the labor market is “hollowing out,” with demand primarily concentrated in high-skill jobs and in low-skill jobs (Autor 2010), while others argue that the demand for middle skills is robust and there is an insufficient middle-skill talent pool (Holzer 2015).

These debates will surely continue as people seek to understand what skills will be needed to find work in the future. But there are also concerns about how individuals will develop the skills needed to navigate an increasingly atomized labor market. What skills will be needed not only to qualify for a job, but to manage a career that may require movement across a range of types of work? How should education and training systems adapt to meet these changing needs? Can new, online modes of learning meet these new needs? Can a renewal in work-based learning and apprenticeship play a role in meeting the changing demand for skills?

Policies, norms, and relationships: Technology continues to change many aspects of work, but it is not only technology that is changing the nature of work. In particular, the changed employer-employee relationship stands out as a theme in the future of work conversation.

David Weil's (2014) work is often cited as a good explanation of how the employer-employee relationship has been evolving in recent decades. Seen in the context of the rise of outsourcing, off-shoring, and increasing reliance on staffing companies, the organization of work in a way that divides what used to be one person's job into a variety of tasks that are done by contractors on digital platforms is seen as a next step in the attenuating employer-employee relationship.

Several interviewees argued that the decline in union membership in the United States, which fell from 35 percent in 1954 to about 11 percent in 2014 (Aspen Institute 2015), leaves working people with less representation in public policy conversations as well as less ability to negotiate with employers. Additionally, some noted that the erosion of worker protections and weak enforcement of existing labor laws has contributed to economic precariousness among low-wage workers and families. Many, however, commented that while in past eras these systems had benefited many working people and contributed to the growth of the middle class, they certainly did not benefit all people — blacks, in particular, were excluded from many of the benefits of both unions and labor laws.

Interviewees noted that power, policy, and politics matter in shaping the future of work. Several expressed concerns that the experience and perspective of working people gets lost in the discussion of the future of work. For instance, how do we ensure policies, practices, and norms support equity and inclusion in a future of work? What are the appropriate institutions and structures to support worker agency and worker voice? How do we recognize interests in innovation and economic growth while protecting the values of democracy, participation, and dignity of work?

Why Discuss the Future of Work?

The conversation on the future of work has been ongoing for several years, and while some interviewees expressed some frustration in what they perceive to be a lack of clear actions flowing from the conversation, all thought the conversation has been useful in some ways as well. Below are a few of the recurring themes from their discussions of the usefulness of the conversation on the future of work.

It's not only the future: Just like good science fiction is often a social commentary on the present day, so too are the conversations about the imagined future of work. For many interviewees, the conversation about this future has presented an opportunity to discuss what is happening in the labor market right now. Several noted that the conversation has offered a language and framing to engage on issues that were not being discussed enough. For example, interviewees noted that the idea of “gig” or intermittent work is not new, but is newly affecting a much broader part of the labor market. The phenomena of platform work and the potential for intermittent work reaching a broader portion of the labor market has opened opportunities for a conversation — about the instability of work and the legitimate need for an enhanced safety net — that has engaged a broader set of individuals.

In particular, respondents noted that unstable incomes, unpredictable hours, and few employment benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, or retirement savings are challenges that many low-income women and workers of color have been experiencing for decades. As one respondent noted, “Our folks

have been experiencing it for a long time.” The prospect of these precarious conditions spreading to a broader swath of the workforce, however, has diminished hostility toward the idea that the public sector may need to play a larger role in supplementing labor income or providing access to what had been common employment benefits, such as health insurance and pensions.

Whose future?: While respondents generally were glad that the conversation about the future of work has created openness to a broader set of policy ideas for improving the welfare of working people, they also expressed concern that some of the long-standing issues of race, discrimination, and unequal opportunity are not getting adequate consideration in these discussions. As one respondent commented, “Who’s going to be in the crappy jobs of the future? Still women and people of color?” Several respondents noted that their respective foundations are explicit in focusing on issues of race, gender, and/or ethnicity,¹ particularly in the context of work and economic opportunity, and were concerned that the idea that the future of work will be determined by technology and abstract market forces may divert attention from the too often overlooked problems of occupational segregation and discrimination. What’s more, some were concerned that the few existing tools to combat employment discrimination were constructed for the context of an employee-employer relationship. As that structure changes, some believe a resurgence in various types of employment discrimination is occurring. For example, one respondent noted that grantees are now reporting discrimination challenges in the temporary staffing industry, a trend that journalists have documented as well (Evans 2016). Overall, interviewees who noted a specific interest in addressing the problem of disparate employment outcomes by race and gender were concerned that the issues of race and gender are getting insufficient attention in the future of work conversation, and that this omission could lead to a resurgence of unequal access to economic opportunity for groups that have historically faced discrimination.

A focus on systemic issues: Several interviewees noted that the focus on systemic issues rather than the skills and abilities, family status, or other characteristics of specific populations or individuals was a positive aspect of the conversation on the future of work. Often, concerns for constituency groups have led to strategies that focus on the situation of that group somewhat in isolation of larger trends. For some interviewees, the focus on the future of work and how the landscape of opportunity might be shifting provided a helpful opportunity to step back from the specific problems of a group of individuals and ideas for ameliorating them, and to consider a broader set of issues. As one interviewee commented, it was a helpful reassessment of the theory of change.

Despite the benefits of the conversation, a number of interviewees seemed to feel frustrated with a conversation that seemed to remain abstract. Keeping a future orientation made some issues easier to bring up, but it also seemed to mute any sense of urgency about addressing them today. Thus, while the future orientation has had its benefits, many felt that it was time to move toward a more practical and concrete conversation about what to do now.

¹ Respondents had somewhat different frames in how they raised the issues of discrimination and unequal opportunity in that some exclusively mentioned race, some discussed race and gender, and others noted that they are broadly concerned about systems that perpetuate division and inequality across a range of demographic characteristics, including race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, and country of origin.

What Is the Future of Work?

Most respondents voiced significant concerns about the future of work. A few were pessimistic about the availability of work in the future and concerned that technological change might lead to many fewer jobs or opportunities for work. Most were less concerned about there being no work and more concerned about there being no *decent* work. Many felt that a continuation of current labor market trends and what seems to be the declining availability of good jobs — jobs that provide a stable and sufficient income, benefits that allow for managing illness or injury and saving for the future, and opportunities to build skills and advance — did not bode well for large numbers of working people and families. All interviewees were concerned about the changing conditions of work.

This concern about economic stability is not unfounded. In a 2014 survey, 92 percent of Americans responded that they would prefer to have financial stability rather than move up the economic ladder, an increase of 7 percentage points in only three years (Pew Charitable Trusts 2015). The JPMorgan Chase Institute released a report that analyzes the transaction history of a sample of its 30 million customers and found high levels of income volatility in both monthly and annual income across a broad spectrum of their consumers (Farrell and Greig 2015). The Financial Diaries project, which offers a detailed look at the lives of 235 low- and moderate-income US households over the course of a year, also documents significant month-to-month volatility and a strong desire to find greater economic security and stability (Hannagan and Morduch 2015). Similarly, in a qualitative investigation of the experiences of very low-income consumers — a group of particular concern to many foundations — Cathie Mahon and Kristen Moy (2015) find that these individuals and families experience significant income volatility and a profound level of uncertainty in their lives due to their work situations and the lack of a sufficient social safety net.

A growing body of research supports a strong consensus about the challenge that income volatility and economic insecurity presents for many in the US, particularly lower-income groups, and that much of this instability and insecurity is a function of the changed nature of work. It is therefore not surprising that one of the key issues that presented during the interviews was the need for a system in which individuals would have confidence that their work would likely lead to a measure of economic security and stability. Several mentioned the need to develop new narratives around work that engage people in a positive vision, and then drive the future of work toward that vision.

Can We Influence the Future of Work?

While the changes in the nature of work present daunting challenges to today's working people and no obvious solution has presented itself, most interviewees noted they feel compelled to invest in strategies that would address the issue in some way. Several believe investing in many diverse solutions is useful. Recognizing that building a more resilient system of work is a fairly large goal with diffuse outcomes, many noted the need to break down the goal into discrete, manageable parts within the context of a grant portfolio. Further, many noted they feel investing in long-term change is difficult when the effectiveness of a strategy may remain unclear for a significant period of time. This tension around the difficulty of demonstrating accountability and appropriate stewardship of foundation resources, while working toward important but difficult-to-measure system-level changes, came up in a number of discussions about potential strategies. Nonetheless, interviewees identified a range of approaches they are investing in or considering.

Creating better work: Several interviewees mentioned they seek to encourage better business models that create better work experiences and offer higher returns to work. There has been strong documentation of the value of engaging employees in the purpose of the business and in creating meaningful and rewarding work, and how these management strategies can lead to both business and worker success. Most notably, Zeynep Ton describes in her book, *The Good Jobs Strategy* (2014), how even companies in highly competitive and cost-sensitive retail sectors can create very successful businesses — more profitable than their peers — and also create better jobs than the industry norm. She demonstrates how this investment in the workforce is an integral component of the operational excellence that leads to business success. Similarly, interviewees reported an interest in spreading the idea of open-book management, in which all employees learn to understand the business and business finances are transparent. Business models that promote shared equity and shared ownership, including employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs) and worker cooperatives, or social-purpose businesses such as benefit corporations (B Corps) that explicitly include quality and inclusive employment as part of their purpose, are also seen as promising. In a recent paper, Steven Dawson (2016) argues that a variety of organizations that seek to help low-income workers can engage in efforts to make bad jobs better.

The question of course then becomes how to shift the dominant business model toward these good work paradigms. Many interviewees said they thought prevailing business thinking around efficiency and controlling cost, and general short-term pressures, are significant factors inhibiting the uptake of better human capital practices. Interviewees mentioned recognizing “good jobs” business and encouraging peer-to-peer dialogue, engaging investors to analyze businesses differently, encouraging business schools to rethink how they teach students about managing their workforce, and even addressing how business investments in training and human capital development are considered for tax purposes, or reported in US Securities and Exchange Commission filings, were seen as opportunities to create change in the dominant business model in a way that would lead to better quality jobs.

The Hitachi Foundation: Shining a Light on the Good Jobs Strategy

The Hitachi Foundation has been a leading investor and player in advancing the idea that business can do more when it comes to building a better future of work. Its Good Companies @ Work program includes both an active research and communications strategy on the part of the Foundation, to surface and highlight exemplary companies that are building good jobs and good businesses, and an investment strategy that includes organizations that can both deepen the research and amplify the message. A central piece of the investment strategy, however, is to invest in organizations that have a strategy to promote the adoption of business models that support better jobs. For example, the Foundation has made a major investment in the Care Team Redesign Initiative, working with major medical centers to upgrade specific occupations, such as medical assistants, in ways that make the job more rewarding for the worker while also contributing to better operations that improve both the quality of care and the fiscal health of the provider. Healthcare is a large and growing employment sector with many good jobs, but it also has a substantial proportion of low-wage and often high-turnover jobs. By going deep into the sector and focusing on key frontline worker occupations, the Hitachi Foundation aims to encourage job redesign, document the challenges to job redesign and how they are overcome, and spread a new approach to business in healthcare that can improve the jobs of tens of thousands of frontline healthcare workers. The foundation has taken a somewhat similar approach to encouraging good jobs in the manufacturing sector as well. This deep investigation of the nature of work in the context of a particular industry, including significant research, support for implementing new practices, and a multifaceted approach to communication, is an interesting strategy for shaping the future of work for a defined set of workers.

It should be noted that the idea of raising standards for work can create unease among some whose primary concern is for populations that struggle to access any employment at all. Some interviewees who focus on groups that experience very high rates of unemployment, such as the disabled, the formerly incarcerated, low-income young adults, and people of color, expressed concern that improving the quality of employment may limit access to employment for these disadvantaged groups. These respondents focus on creating employment access strategies that provide an entry point into the labor market for particularly disadvantaged individuals, with the long-term goal of helping them build work experience and a stronger connection to formal employment. Recognizing the intermittent nature of work in staffing agencies or entry-level service jobs that are likely to provide the most accessible opportunities for disadvantaged groups, interviewees suggested that organizations that are trusted service providers for these populations could offer coaching and assistance to help new workers combine a series of short-term jobs into a work history that will help them move forward.

Other respondents who focus on particularly disadvantaged groups noted they felt strongly that one should not view the goals of creating access to employment and raising the standards for work as conflicting; rather, the two must go hand in hand. In this view, low or declining labor standards create additional barriers to labor market success for the most disadvantaged. Respondents noted that the economic instability associated with entry-level employment makes it especially challenging for the

disadvantaged populations that they work with, who are likely to remain in these frontline positions for some time, to build a stable working life. Thus, the work of helping these individuals achieve economic self-sufficiency becomes all the more challenging. These respondents said they felt that the idea of creating work specifically for disadvantaged individuals, such as in social enterprises or in public employment programs, with a focus on helping individuals move on to “regular” employment when they are ready, offers a way to help disadvantaged individuals connect to work that does not conflict with others’ efforts to improve job quality or standards for work.

REDF’s Venture Philanthropy Supporting Social Enterprise

REDF has a long history of investing in social enterprises that create jobs for individuals who typically struggle to find work. Originally investing in social enterprises that were designed for the homeless, REDF’s venture philanthropy now also includes social enterprises that offer jobs to the formerly incarcerated, youths who are disconnected from school and work, and other populations that face some of the highest barriers to employment. One example is Central City Concern (CCC) in Portland, Oregon. The organization operates three social enterprises — a cleaning company, a call center, and a craft coffee roasting business — that provide transitional employment opportunities. In addition, the organization connects individuals to housing and healthcare assistance and other services that homeless individuals often need to stabilize their lives. Social enterprises such as CCC pursue both profits and the public good; offer ideas about how business, government, and philanthropy can come together to shape viable employment opportunities for those most at risk in today’s changing world of work; and create real work opportunities for those being left ever further behind by a changing world of work.

Building worker agency and voice: Most interviewees said they felt that low-income workers have too little power to advocate for themselves both at work and in terms of public policy, and that the steady erosion of the standing of working people over the past several decades has contributed substantially to declining standards for wages and working conditions. Some also noted that service providers who seek to help low-income workers connect to or advance in work are reluctant to tell employers anything that might be construed as critical and thus often will not bring up the issues related to pay, scheduling practices, sick leave policies, quality of supervision, or any of a number of issues that could improve job quality. Unfortunately, many service providers feel both the desperation of their low-income clientele to get some kind of job and their own organizational pressures to engage companies and make their job placement target numbers. Thus, both working people themselves and the agencies that serve them all too often feel disempowered and remain silent about the conditions of work.

Interviewees expressed this challenge of worker agency and worker voice was expressed by interviewees as both an economic issue and as an issue that is inconsistent with the values of a democratic society. The economics of the issue of course is that workers’ ability to negotiate with employers has decreased and that even as the economy has grown and companies have been profitable, most working people have not benefited from this growth. Some interviewees noted that this decline in workers’ bargaining power has contributed to income inequality and to the growth in the share of national income that

is going to profits rather than to payrolls (Norris 2014). Some interviewees focused on the decline of unions as contributing to diminished worker agency, others noted the retreat of public policy in the area of worker protections, and some saw the two issues as interrelated. Areas of public policy that were of particular concern included those related to income, such as the erosion in the value of the minimum wage, the particularly low minimum wage for tipped workers, and the limited enforcement of existing wage and hour policies that has left many workers vulnerable to wage theft. Interviewees also frequently referenced policies that would help build stability, such as paid sick leave or paid family and medical leave. Several interviewees noted how unfavorably worker protections in the US compare with other developed countries. A couple interviewees noted specific policy concerns, such as evasion of rules on employment discrimination based on race or gender, and occupational health and safety issues that include standards not being enforced and the introduction of new chemicals or materials into the workplace without addressing worker safety implications.

While most interviewees touched on the challenge of limited worker agency, not all felt that this issue could be addressed in the context of their grant portfolio. Strategies among those who do seek to address this issue include support for various kinds of policy advocacy, such as supporting local paid leave or minimum wage campaigns, support for labor rights and union organizing, and investing in new kinds of worker organizations that could represent worker interests in a postindustrial economy.

Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance: Creating an Organization to Lift Workers' Voices and Raise the Floor

The Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance (CWFA) includes local, regional, and national funders with a common interest in workforce development that can increase employment earnings and racial equity for underprepared workers in the Chicago region. In 2012, CWFA began a planning process that included a specific focus on the challenge of low-wage work. Funders were concerned that the economic fragility and instability that low-wage workers and their families faced was a significant impediment to the creation of a healthy labor market and thriving communities. CWFA sought ideas for addressing the challenge of low-wage work and strategies to help low-income workers achieve some measure of stability, a necessary prerequisite to economic mobility. Ultimately, CWFA supported the creation of the Raise the Floor Alliance, a new organization built on a network of worker centers that was already sharing legal services and organizing joint campaigns to help low-wage workers. The Raise the Floor Alliance supports the worker center movement in Chicago to ensure that low-wage workers have access to quality jobs and are empowered to uphold and improve workplace standards. The organization conducts research, provides legal services, engages in policy advocacy, and seeks to shape the public narrative about low-wage workers by empowering them to speak for themselves about the issues that most deeply impact their lives.

Re-envisioning the social contract and the role of community connections: Some interviewees noted that, in the long run, it might be better to not have all forms of social support tied to work. In a world in which people may change jobs frequently, work independently, or hold multiple jobs at the same time, tying health insurance, retirement savings, or other important benefits to a particular job may not be practical. And yet in order for people to work productively and with confidence, many of these supports are necessary. Further, and more important for many interviewees, providing the kinds of supports that will allow working people to achieve a basic level of economic stability and to work with dignity is critical to a just society.

Interviewees mentioned two primary ideas as part of a reimagined system of social support: portable benefits and universal basic income. The idea of universal basic income is that everyone, regardless of employment status, would receive a certain level of income, generally proposed as enough to support a minimum living standard. This idea is not new, but it has seen renewed interest in the context of discussions of the future of work, particularly among those who are concerned about new technologies reducing demand for human labor and limiting opportunities for work in the future. With universal basic income, individuals who could no longer find work, or find regular work, would still have a regular basic income. Portable benefits is another concept designed to promote stability while accommodating a changed world of work. The idea of portable benefits is that benefits and protections such as workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, paid time off, and retirement savings could be separated from a job with a single employer. Benefits could be accrued across multiple forms of work and managed by a third party, which would allow people to move from job to job or work independently without, for example, losing their ability to take a paid sick day (Portable Benefits 2015).

Several interviewees expressed interest in these ideas, but most thought the concepts remained too far removed from our current policy environment to invest in at the moment. A few saw these ideas as connected to their grantees' current work in the area of policy advocacy; nevertheless, they do not see practical opportunities for grant investments at this time.

On the other hand, some do see opportunities to invest in new conversations within communities to take a new look at the changed economy and the implications for work and working people. Some noted that investments in local civic conversations seem to lead to better communication across long-standing social, economic, and geographic divides and could potentially lay the groundwork for a shared interest in systems that promote economic inclusivity and social stability.

Surdna and Open Society Foundations: Encouraging Leadership for Equitable Economic Development

Local economic development efforts often include leaders from business and government. Often, however, other community voices may not be involved and their interests not considered. The Surdna Foundation and Open Society Foundation, however, were inspired by examples of local leaders employing innovative strategies to renew regional economies that were grounded in the principles of equity, inclusion, and sustainability and that showed promise for extending benefits to people of color, immigrants, low-income communities, and others who have been historically shortchanged. In order to recognize, strengthen, and promote this approach, the two foundations decided to create the Equitable Economic Development Fellowship. PolicyLink, the National League of Cities, and the Urban Land Institute have partnered to implement this fellowship, which launched in June 2016 with a first cohort of six cities. Over the course of the fellowship, economic development leaders will convene for leadership development, technical assistance, and peer learning. The question facing these leaders is how to build a future economy — and a future of work — that is aligned with the values and vision of their community. Highlighting, connecting, and strengthening innovative leaders who are focused on equity and inclusion can create new connections within communities to drive economic growth and can spread strategies that work to advance regional economies in ways that benefit the community broadly rather than only a select few.

Preparing people to manage a changed world of work: While interviewees did not mention this strategy as something that would improve the conditions of work, some noted that the conversation around the future of work has raised questions about the sufficiency of many workforce development training and employment connection approaches. While training people for the skills needed in the labor market is important, is that enough? Should initiatives not just focus on helping people to acquire skills, but also help them to identify skills that are in demand, since they will likely need to move from job to job or manage multiple jobs simultaneously over the course of their work life? Some respondents voiced concerns that current approaches are not sufficiently preparing individuals to deal with this growing complexity in the world of work.

At the end of the day, the future of work conversation has persuaded most respondents to refine their grant-making strategy for the moment, rather than make wholesale changes just yet. They are investing in research, in building new organizations, in highlighting innovative practices and innovative leaders, and in communicating new ideas and new narratives. All of these strategies have a role to play in moving forward a brighter picture of the future of work, but the conversation has led some to sharpen strategies, question assumptions, clarify goals, and yet maintain a comfort with ambiguity as they approach their vitally important task of advancing the chances that economically vulnerable people can adapt to and thrive in a changed world of work.

Conclusion

What are the common wages of labour, depends everywhere upon the contract usually made between those two parties, whose interests are by no means the same. The workmen desire to get as much, the masters to give as little as possible.

—Adam Smith

An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, 1776

In the long run, the interests of employees and employers are aligned — each supports the success of the other, and one does not thrive without the other. We all recognize the benefits of a strong economy with a vibrant business sector, as well as the benefits of individuals who can support themselves with dignity and families that can invest in their children. We often like to focus on this win-win in our conversations about how to build a better future of work that benefits both business and working people.

Several of the interviewees noted, however, that work has always been a contested space. As Adam Smith noted long ago, at the level of the individual business, workers and employers often have conflicting interests. Work is the means by which our society distributes resources, and the questions of resource allocation are contentious. Who is deserving and why? What is enough? What is too much? What is fair? Whose needs are more important? Many of the issues associated with the future of work are the subject of sharp conflict — what is the role of government? What is the role of unions or other worker organizations? What is the responsibility of an employer to an employee? What should be done to create a positive environment for business growth and competitiveness? What is a public responsibility? What is an individual's responsibility? How do we invest in the future? There are many difficult questions and no easy answers.

It has been valuable to look at work through a future lens. It has allowed some of the areas of conflict to recede and the areas of alignment to take precedence, which has helped in imagining systems that can benefit both working people and business. Building those systems and putting them into practice, however, will require coming back to and engaging with present conflicts.

Philanthropy can play an important and valuable role in investing in knowledge development and supporting research to illuminate what is happening — this has been critical to sounding the alarm. Philanthropy can also play a strong role in communicating the bigger-picture narrative about the changing economic landscape and the barriers to economic stability and mobility today. Most importantly, philanthropy can keep playing its vital role of investing in local communities in ways that support local innovation and local leadership, engage diverse and cross-sector partnerships, and build organizations and systems that can support inclusive economies in local communities. There is no shortage of work to do in building a better future of work.

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