

15.668  
People & Organizations

Work & Careers:  
Past, Present, Future

Session 2

# Agenda

- Expectations Summary
- Overview of Evolution of Work
- Team Discussion of 3 Generations of Work
- Reports, Discussion, Posting Team Findings

# Your Expectations for the Course

- Learn about the workplace, organizational politics, etc.
- Learn skills we can apply to our current activities (clubs, sports, etc)
- Key skills: Negotiations, leadership, group interactions, communications
- Develop knowledge/skills to support interests in entrepreneurship
- Have fun in doing so

# How has work changed over the years?

Ask yourself four questions:

1. What do ***you*** want most from your first job after graduation?
2. What does ***your employer*** want from you in your first job?
3. ***What it will take*** for you to be successful in your work and career?
4. ***Take a leadership perspective:*** What will it take for all others in the labor force to be successful in their work, careers, and families?

# Two Concepts to Keep in Mind

- **Work System**: the constellation of interrelated features that describe the employment relationship
- **Social Contract**: the mutual obligations and expectations between workers, employers, and their communities; underlying context in which the employment relationship is situated

# Agrarian Work Systems

e.g., the independent farmer: Families working their own or someone else's land

- “The earth is given as common stock for man to labor and live on.” –Thomas Jefferson
- “O farmers, pray that your summers be wet.”  
–Virgil
- But not too wet—have to be able to “make hay while the sun shines” —Wisconsin farmer's proverb

# Agrarian: Key Success Factors

- Personal Factors
  - Hard physical labor; perseverance
  - “24-7” Farmer’s work never ends
  - Family support—work & family tightly coupled
  - “Jack-of-all-trades:” able to make tools & fix machinery
  - Ability to adapt to new methods/technologies
- External-Institutional Factors:
  - good soil, weather, and other natural resources
  - good credit—local banks financed planting of crops
  - University extension research & education systems
  - Public education for next generation—ability to move off the farm to new job opportunities!

# Craft Work Systems

e.g., the shoemaker or cabinet maker responding to individual, custom orders

Learn from the Masters: “Masters” teach, then hire, supervise, and pay “apprentices”

What are some modern day “crafts”?



# Craft Work: Key Success Factors

- Personal:
  - Deep and holistic craft skills
  - Access to the craft labor market
  - Ability to plan, organize, balance, and complete multiple projects
  - Teaching ability
  - Access to a master (which hints at **nepotism**)
  - Ability to learn/adapt to changing technologies
- External/Institutional
  - Stable technologies and specialized jobs & work systems
  - Guilds, craft unions, professional associations
  - Ability to protect craft jurisdictions e.g., lawyers; doctors, railroad crafts (favorite was railroad “firemen”)

# Mass Production Work Systems & Factories

e.g., the autoworker on the assembly line

- Henry Ford's genius—
  - narrow division of labor “Fordism”
  - brought us the \$5 day
  - tight control over the workforce
- “knowing exactly what you want men to do and then seeing that they do it in the best and cheapest way.” —Frederick Winslow Taylor's preferred definition of “management”
- Industrial Unions: Walter Reuther, Innovative UAW President called “The most dangerous man in Detroit” (by Mayor of Detroit George Romney)

# Mass Production: Key Success Factors

- Personal

- Physical strength; endurance of repetition (physical & mental)
- Learn to take and/or give orders
- Union membership
- Seniority

- External/Institutional

- Large mass markets for standardized goods
- Large pools of capital; big firms
- Good industrial engineering—dividing up the jobs; standardizing tasks; detailed rules; stopwatches...
- Steady, reliable supply of low-skilled workers
- Organization Man: Wife at home doing family work
- Industrial unions and collective bargaining
- National government set minimum labor standards & laws

# Knowledge Work Systems

e.g., writing the code for Harry Potter; designing this building

“Be nice to nerds. Chances are, you’ll end up working for one.” —Bill Gates

*“Recruiters who named Ivy League or elite liberal-arts school as a topic pick say they prize their graduates’ intellect an cachet among clients...’soft skills’ like critical thinking and communications. But..they need people with practical skills to serve as operations managers, product developers, business analysts, and engineers.”*

*(Wall St. Journal. 9/13/10)*

# Independent Agent or Organization Man/Women?

How many of you prefer to start your careers  
as:

\_\_\_ Independent Agent/Contractor (Barley &  
Kunda reading)?

\_\_\_ Working for a corporation/other  
organization as an employee?

# Knowledge Work: Key Success Factors

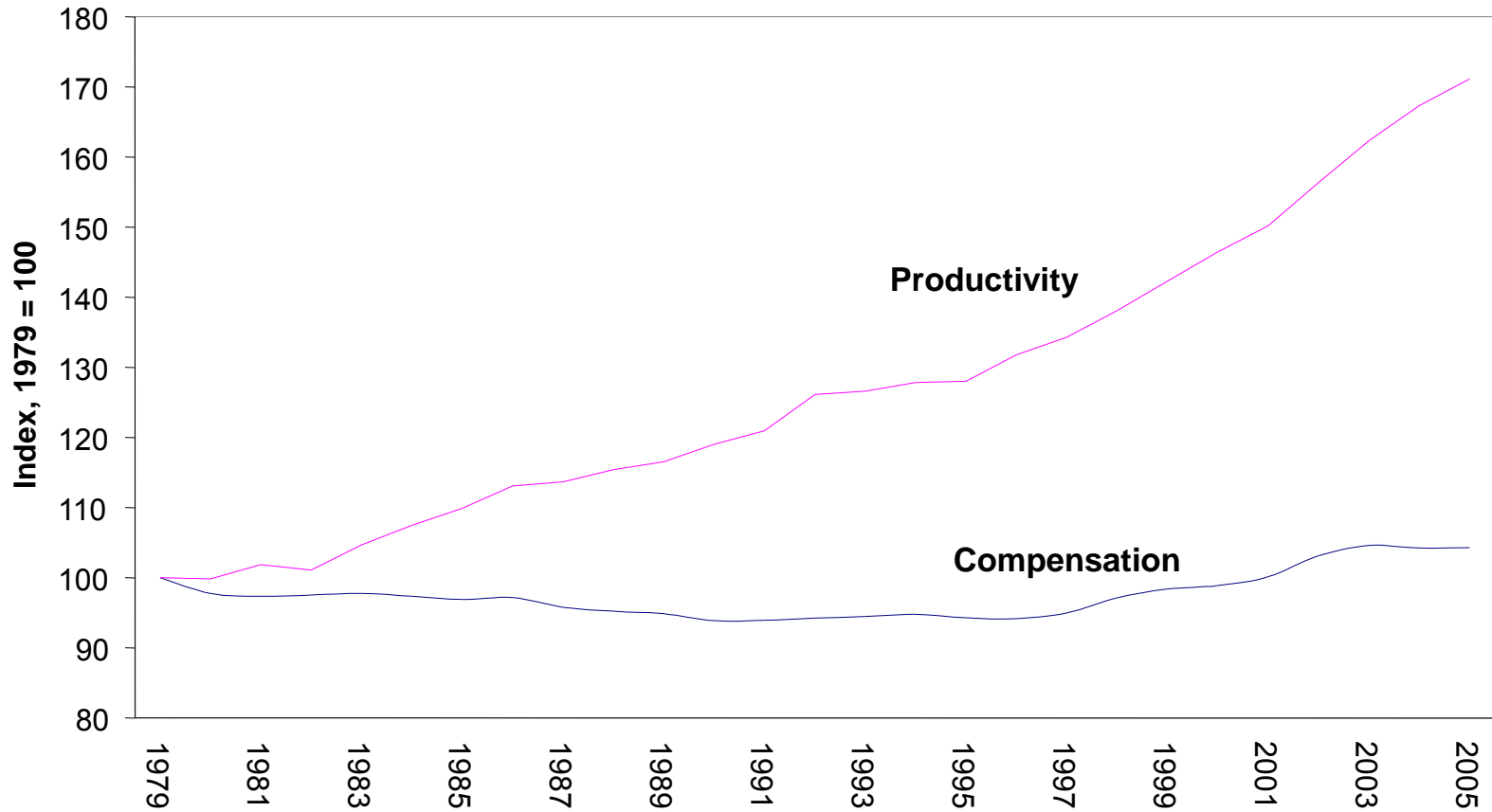
- Personal Factors
  - Human capital--Technical, analytic, behavioral skills
  - Social capital—ability to create networks, organizational settings to put knowledge to work
- External/Institutional Factors
  - Great educational institutions—
    - Primary schools through universities
    - Life long learning institutions
    - Knowledge transfer—organizational learning
  - Intellectual property rights
  - Knowledge based work systems
  - International labor standards!
  - Next generation unions & professional assns.?

# Summing Up

- The Good News:
  - - Your technical & social/organizational skills will be in high demand
    - Much more variety, choice, freedom in how, where, and even when to work than prior generations
    - Work and workers have changed, but institutions have not (fast enough to keep up)
- The Bad News:
  - The erosion of the social contract might constrain your prospects, and the prospects for many others in the labor force for fair and rewarding work, careers, and family lives

# The U.S. Picture: A Broken Social Contract

Figure B-1 Productivity growth and the compensation of production workers, 1979-2005



Source: BLS



# Your Challenge

What actions are *you* going to take on your own, in your organization, or in your community to craft a new social contract that works for you and for others?

# Team Discussions & Deliverables

Discuss and then Post Summary:

1. What do you want from your work & careers that:
  - (a) Is the same as what your parents/grandparents wanted?
  - (b) Is different?
2. What do you need to do to achieve your goals?
3. What do you need to do to assure ***all others*** in the labor force can achieve their work & career goals?

# Some Team Project Ideas

- BP Disaster: What should MIT learn from it and are we doing so?
- Merging multiple transportation agencies into the new MassDOT
- MIT and Haiti: what should MIT be doing and how are we organizing ourselves ?
- Institute-wide Planning Task Force Report: How are implementation plans moving?

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