



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in 2018:
Progresses, Setbacks or New Challenges?
MONTREAL, 16 – 18, 2018

STREAM 9

Work, remuneration and social protection as enablers of a dignified existence

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Submissions to the conference can be in the form of long abstracts (up to 1500 words), developmental papers (3000-5000 words, including references) or full papers (8000 to 10000 words including references) by the deadline of **April 30th 2018**.

Submissions should be made via the EDI website: <https://www.edi-conference.org/index.php>

“Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself [sic] and his [sic] family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.”

United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNUDHR) (1948, article 23(3))

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the UNUDHR. In this stream, we take this as an occasion to reflect on the degree to which individuals around the world can claim the right spelled out in article 23(3) of the UNUDHR. We invite especially empirical, but also conceptual papers, which shed light on the links between work, remuneration and human dignity.

We invite presenters to engage critically with the proposition that mainstream discourse has moved away from the goal of work and remuneration as enablers of human dignity. Instead, at least implicitly, work and thus organisational initiatives – serve to create maximum wealth for select individuals and organisations. In this way, money has become a value in itself rather than being a means to an end. This thinking is expressed, for example, in societies’ prosperity being measured by financial indicators (e.g. growth domestic product), and companies’ success is measured in profits. In line with this thinking, economic growth is seen as the path to inclusive prosperity, with greater participation in the labour

market thus being the key to socio-economic upliftment. Hence, what is said to matter is *that* employment is created, not as much what the employment conditions look like. In her recent opinion piece, for example, Cilliers (2017) expresses this sentiment when cautioning against a highly political labour movement which only protects those *already* in employment but hinders overall employment growth. This implicitly legitimises poor labour practices, widening wage gaps between lowest and highest paid workers and increasing inequality, at the expense of enabling dignified lives. According to poverty trap theorists, people in very low-income employment are trapped in their circumstances as their income cannot create sustainable livelihoods (Carr, Parker, Arrowsmith, Watters & Jones, 2016). By having to rely on loans to cover basic needs or to cover unexpected expenses, income becomes negative over time, thus effectively making low-income earners poorer *because* they work (Maleka, 2016). An increase in labour participation rates without considering what this employment looks like *can* thus create even less sustainable livelihoods and decrease the potential for human dignity expressed in people's quality of life and work life.

We, however, still know little about the links between pay, and everyday quality of life and work-life, especially at the lower tail of wage and income distributions (Bergman & Jean, 2015). Quality of life and work-life are anchored fundamentally in everyday human experiences, not in financial indicators (Lefkowitz, 2016), but nowhere in the research literature are people's own everyday experiences, their qualities of life and work life, linked to income (Gloss, Carr, Reichman, Abdul-Nasiru & Osterleisch, 2017).

With its understanding of human behaviour, of people at work and a strong research foundation Organisational Psychology is ideally placed to contribute to a fresh, transdisciplinary approach to the link between employment and human dignity by incorporating psychological insights into this traditionally economically driven debate, and through this move individuals' wellbeing back into the centre. In the long run, organisational psychology may thus contribute to developing more accurate and realistic economic models resulting in more effective and just economic policy (Morsen & Schapiro, 2017). In order to bring together the knowledge generated in this area across the world to date, this stream is interested in but not limited to papers which address the following questions:

Is it possible to determine a living wage threshold, i.e. a wage level above which an existence with human dignity is possible, by focusing on psychological rather than economic indicators?

- What is it that people require at work in order to prosper at work and in life?
- What does decent work entail at the lower ends of the wage spectrum?
- What does the quality of life and work-life mean for different individuals?



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- What is the meaning of work for people in different income strata in different cultures?
- What alternatives to employment are there which allow for dignified lives, given the threats to employment brought about by the fourth industrial revolution (e.g. universal basic income)?

References

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