
KNOWLEDGE WORKERS' ERA- WHAT HAS CHANGED?

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Abstract

Since centuries, the ways of doing work are changing. From agrarian economies to industrialisation, from industrialization to services, from service to the knowledge economy. The transition though seems to be slow, has changed the way we work. Knowledge workers is the worker class that is the fastest growing in the whole world. We can interpret that an era of knowledge worker has arrived. With it, new viewpoint has come how the work is being looked at. Earlier the workers' contribution used to be computed in terms of physical output, now it is measured in terms of quality first. We know, the mental work, the thinking part of a work is neither observable nor measurable in quantitative terms. What a worker does is determined by the knowledge worker himself. They possess knowledge as the only means of their productive output. In addition, they determine methods to use and processes to follow. This paper tries to explore what a knowledge worker is, what is his value addition in work, whether the way work is being done has changed and if yes, in what magnitude. The following paragraphs will throw light on each of these focal areas to understand and explore how the new knowledge worker has impacted the workplace and find the extent to which the impact has catapulted into a widespread change.

Key words: knowledge, worker, era, change, economies

Knowledge Worker-The Concept

'Knowledge worker' is one who is said to think for earning a livelihood. A knowledge worker is a worker who knows how to allocate knowledge to its productive use. Knowledge workers are understood to be the ones who acquire, who manipulate, who interpret and who apply knowledge to their work. They perform multidisciplinary, complex and unpredictable work. Knowledge workers process the information and use it with their expertise in varied areas. Knowledge workers solve problems, generate ideas, and sometimes create new products too. They usually work with flexibility and autonomy, creativity and innovation. They enjoy the authority to take decisions in selection of methods of doing work. Knowledge workers focus on their mental worth instead of physical strength. Their ideas are their assets. Sometimes, they are also called knowledge entrepreneurs.

Knowledge Worker- Adding the Value

Knowledge workers add value to their work. They add value to their organizations with their capabilities to apply knowledge in their area of work. Whatever, work is assigned to them, they put their efforts to first extract the relevant information relating to their work, and then use that information to productive use at their workplace. This information when applied in such a manner

becomes knowledge for the organization. Knowledge workers follow a routine and patterns in their working field. But, they may deviate from the normal working hours as against others who follow a set pattern of work. To them, quality is prime in their work. They do give much importance to quantity or output. Knowledge workers look for challenges in work. Solving problems in an innovative way keeps them satisfied. They stay innovative on a continuous basis. They take charge of opportunities in work and move forward to take benefit. The knowledge workers help the business enterprise increase productivity. Thus, businesses have increasingly recognized that for productivity to increase contribution of its worker, especially the knowledge workers shall be the key. Times have turned so much that a new era has arrived, an era of knowledge workers. What does that mean? Does it mean manual workers are no longer productive or useful? Does that mean manual workers are of no use any more? Does that mean they have stopped being productive, quantitatively or qualitatively? Probably the answer is no. At the same, it is equally true that the way of doing work has changed and changed in entirety. This change is caused by the new existence of knowledge worker, irrespective of the type or the size of the business.

Knowledge Workers' Era - Setting the Trend

As productivity is the main concern of every successful corporation, its workers are expected to be productive. Not only in terms of measurable output, but also, in terms of quality. Knowledge workers bring quality in their work. Quality is their main focus, not because they are being told to do so, but because it is their essential nature to be qualitative. Work now is more of a thinking function than being physical or manual. Knowledge worker is the largest section of the workforce in all businesses. We can interpret that an era of knowledge worker has arrived. With it, new viewpoint has come how the work is being looked at. Earlier the workers' contribution used to be computed in terms of physical output, now it is measured in terms of quality first. We know, the mental work, the thinking part of a work is neither observable nor measurable in quantitative terms.

What a worker does is determined by the knowledge worker himself. They possess knowledge as the only means of their productive output. In addition, they determine methods to use and processes to follow. While the routine or manual worker used machines and instruments in their work, knowledge worker uses his mind and intellect. They work in teams expect respect for their work done, likes feedback about their work, happy with limited physical space to work from, enjoy their own mental space. They get encouraged/motivated by achieving in work. Mostly, they are self-motivated and see reward in job and work. Monetary encouragement or going up in their careers don't motivate them much. They seek and value support from others.

Peter F. Drucker says, "Don't assume there are mind readers at work"

Knowledge workers are achievement-oriented. To them, relationships and other such matters are not so important. They get motivated by the achievement of quality in their work. They have the highest-order needs as against the traditional workers. Manifold dimensions define the work of knowledge worker, makes it unique and different from others, and help knowledge worker to achieve the desired results. He makes it very clear to himself what results to be attained, which job he is expected to be in, what is time frame to finish the assigned tasks, who will provide the desired support, who will coordinate, what are the tools to measure his performance; though he believes in self-control, what learning opportunities he might get at his workplace or from his superiors. This is not all. Knowledge worker does ponder upon and gets an idea about the barriers and obstacle, limitations and restrictions in deliverance of results.

Knowledge worker seeks for autonomy and flexibility in his work assignment-in processes, in systems, in procedures and in decision-making. The one concern that shall be kept in mind that the tasks /activities assigned shall be challenging to him. He may then reflect upon if the necessary support is available to him. What, where, when, who, how? answers to these questions must be elicited first before assigning the job to the knowledge worker.

Thus, at the workplace, things are not the same any more. There is a sea change. Change in how jobs are assigned. Change in how tasks are performed. Change in what resources to be provided. Change in how flexible the work can be. Change in which tools to make use of. Change in how much freedom can be extended. Change in providing feedback from time to time. Change in how results are to be measured. Change in assigning value to necessary skills that a worker may possess. Change in measuring the effects on the organization when the workers leave. Change in acknowledging that such a change has arrived. Knowledgeworker era is very much here. Within no time, it's pros and cons will be weighed upon.

Traditional worker, manual worker will diminish in the workforce. The rise of knowledge worker in the absolute and proportionate terms is happening. Corporations are shifting from being industry-based to knowledge-based. 'Knowledge economy' concept and 'Knowledge Worker' concepts never existed before. Importance of knowledge-based jobs is growing. Their numbers are also growing. Their composition is changing. Their compensations levels are growing. They are attaining more value in businesses. Mind-based, thought-based, knowledge-based work seem to be very important for success. Though difficult to monitor, almost impossible to observe if a knowledge worker is using his mind at a particular point of time, the role of knowledge will not diminish. In the technological times, anyone and everyone can learn or acquire information from anywhere, anytime. Assimilation of information results into creation of knowledge. Knowledge leads to better ways of doing work, providing quality in work, saving time, reducing wasteful activities, improving work

environment. Therefore, knowledge-based jobs are becoming more popular and growing big. People manning these jobs are getting high salaries. They occupy premium positions in the hierarchy.

Peter F. Drucker predicted long back that “information would change the way people work.” He also predicted that “rather than generating value through physical labour with their muscles- they would do it with their minds.”

In his book, Management Challenges for the 21st Century, Peter F. Drucker propounded that “the most valuable assets of the 20th-century company were its production equipment. The most valuable asset of the 21st-century institution, whether business or non-business, will be its knowledge workers and their productivity.”

Drucker also proposed that “while MANAGING ONESELF- the new realities and their demands require a reversal of policies that have worked well for the last century and even more, a change in the MINDSET of organizations as well as of individuals.” He further assimilated that “knowledge workers own the means of production. It is the knowledge between their ears. And it is a totally portable and enormous capital asset. Because knowledge workers own their means of production, they are mobile. Manual workers need the job much more than the job needs them. It may still not be true for all knowledge workers that the organization needs them more than they need the organization. But for most of them it is a symbiotic relationship in which they need each other in equal measure.”

This connotes that knowledge workers are ‘workers of the future’. And the workplace is not the same any more. It is this new class of workers who will help transform businesses. Businesses are experiencing new expectations from its workforce, more freedom, more flexibility, more resources, more money, more respect, but in return what is assured is quality in work, better work-culture, less managing, lesser conflicts, better profits, better relationships, more work by individual worker. The transformation is taking place at its own pace bringing good to the corporations. The only major setback is when knowledge worker leaves the organization, he takes with him the most valuable tool of work with himself, ‘the knowledge’.

KNOWLEDGE WORKERS ERA -has arrived-AND EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED.

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