

AI, work and the work life balance

Mr Musk went well beyond what is likely to happen with the introduction of more Artificial Intelligence when he said it is the end of work. The process will create new and additional jobs in AI activities. Many of the current jobs continue, with AI as a computer assistant to the employee. New things will be possible. The automated factory did not make everyone redundant and the arrival of computers did not end the office. It does however, open up an important debate about what is work and how much of it we need to do and what we want to do.

The debate is usually arranged around the simple division of work and life. I find this odd, as work is part of life and not all the life part of this division is freedom or fun. Some seem to think the route to a happy life is to minimise the hours of formal paid work, with movements to work fewer days and or fewer hours. The issue then is how are the hours spent that have been spared if this is successful.

I think it better to divide time up into four blocks each week. There is the one third spent in bed and sleeping. Not much ability or need to change that. There is the time spent in paid employment. There is the time spent in work within the home and family. There is true leisure time when you can watch a movie or play a game. The relative amounts of each of these is flexible and changes over time. More chores time is needed with children in the home. More leisure time comes when retired. It also varies with income and those with money to spare after the basics have more options for leisure and pleasure as well as more flexibility to buy in goods and services they need.

Some people like their paid work. It is what defines them, gives them interests and energy. They seek more work and expand their hours, using the extra money to have more help with the chores and services they need in their lives. Some people dislike their paid work so they look for ways to minimise its impact, and often take up unpaid work at home to supplement as often not liking your work goes with less pay. Be paid less and decorate your own home, be paid more and hire a painter. Being paid less certainly goes with less working hours as you wish to minimise them. Some see that it is not work as a whole they do not like, but the bad job they have got. They look for promotion, training, or major job change so they can find something they do want to do. When people retire some recreate features of their old job and do them for free. Some extend the range of work they do in the home instead. Many hobbies are other people's work.

All jobs have features that annoy, but so do many leisure activities. I dislike the journey to work now so many Councils have wrecked the roads, created more jams and try to ensnare more motorists into offences against massively multiplied rules. I do work from home more to raise my productivity and cut down the wasted hours fuming about road works and road closures. I also dislike the travel for a week end break or holiday because that can be even more vexatious as it is a longer journey. A holiday is to many people the pleasurable aim from working more, but if the hotel is bad, the weather

poor and the visitor attractions closed or sub par the holiday ceases to be that delight that makes everything else worthwhile.

Each one of us chooses a different balance of these uses of our time, and each one of us has constrained choices by what we can afford and what others will let us do. We can all strive to improve or change in ways which expand our choices. There is no simple work/life balance, and no early move to replace us all by computers and robots.