# The Mind Workers and How to Manage Them

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## Abstract

*This paper covers how the content of knowledge work has evolved during the last six decades, resulting in an increase in the role of psyche in its execution, and then combines it with the contextual changes in all types of work that have been brought about by the work-from-home modality due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as this work is also motivated by the mind of the operator—introducing the term mind workers. Observing the importance of autonomy in the performance of both these job categories that cover almost all organizational work, in this paper, This paper covers the role of manager in improving the work performance though better management. Finally, the directions for further research in this area are also provided.*

## 1.The Mind Workers

It was sixty-two years ago when Peter Ferdinand Drucker coined the word "Knowledge Work" to explain the work that needed knowledge rather than skill to get executed. This brought the knowledge worker on the center stage of the organizational world and Drucker devoted his life and career to write hundreds of works promoting this new breed of workers and why to treat them using kids gloves. The knowledge workers ruled the world for the last more than a half century and became the most sought after workers by the corporations and played a crucial role in development and advancement of life through technology. Competitive organizations went around the world seeking these workers who possessed the cutting-edge scientific and technical knowledge for the emerging work that needed these talents to compete and enhance their productivity and innovation by relooking the products, services, and processes they deployed. Acquiring and managing these workers became an integral part of managing an organization.

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## 2.The Types of Mind Workers

The knowledge work changed the competitiveness rules and, slowly and slowly, over these years, the knowledge workers replaced the skilled workers not by taking their jobs but by annihilating their jobs one-by-one. Now, we are coming to a new breed of workers who are not skilled workers because they do not have skills. They are also not really knowledge workers because they are typically too young to be any expert. These workers have just one thing-- a mind that is determined, set on a dream, a zeal to achieve it and, they let their psyche rule them. Their psyche garners their inexhaustible energy by the pseudo-psychosomatic processes that bring stress and tension, to relieve which they work endlessly to succeed. This is how they gather their insights on the unusual goals, not previously sought. They dream, build ambition, work incessantly, do not accept failure, and don't stop until success comes to them. They come as crazy researchers in search of truth, weird entrepreneurs, unbounded managers, dreamy inventors, dizzy designers, and even plane simple workers.

They are not crazy or psychosomatic but behave in their own unique way, typically, not understood by others. Apple Inc., a company that primarily thrives on design, used the word "*Crazy*" and *as* "*square peg in round hole*" (in, other words, unfit—but admired them) to describe them and openly advertised to welcome the character. These workers have their own mind and allow their psyche to rule them. One can find them in all organizations in different roles. In some organizations, there are a few of them; in others, they rule the workplace.

We call them *the mind workers* and want to understand them better to learn how to manage them for their integration *as-is* in the organization for the mutual benefit of all-- for themselves, the organization, the society, the country, and the world. Managers can reach them through their mind, and work to find a way to deal with their mind than through any other sensory means or processes.

***The Mind Workers of the First Kind***. As the corporate reshuffle from traditional workers to knowledge workers was happening in the organizations during these last six decades, we also realized that the demand for the knowledge work content, slowly and slowly, started to put a special emphasis on the mind, since mind drives all types of knowledge, especially the type that makes the tacit component of the human knowledge—the most precious possession of any employee that comes to work. It comes with him and leaves out the door as the employee steps out from the workplace. The manager has no control over it. He can't take it; he can't force it; he can't

see it. It can only be of benefit to the company if the employee wants to use it for the purpose by sharing, applying, and turning it into what we know as the explicit knowledge that becomes part of the organizational capital. Nevertheless, it will happen only if the employee so desires. It is for these reasons that this knowledge is most valued by the organizations. Therefore, organizations reward these employees heavily. It is controlled by their mind. That is why these are truly the mind workers.

While enough has been done, there is still very little available on how to manage them by some proven theory. Management research should be focusing on how to train their mind. For the managers, it should be how to control the mind of these specialized knowledge workers so that their goals and efforts fall in line with what the organization aspires and desires. There is no other way to have their knowledge put to the company use. Because they use their mind to do their job, we call these workers *The Mind Workers of The First Kind* because their work behavior is controlled and guided by their minds. They have impacted the work content.

*The Mind Workers of the Second Kind.* For the last two years, the spread of COVID-19 has changed the work context and forced its redefinition, in fact, has dawned a new paradigm of work that has evolved a new work behavior—what we know as "working from home," and a new model of supervision that has basically no supervision. It has been applied to workers at almost all levels of the hierarchy, starting right from the board and CEO to the clerical jobs. This has forced into action an organizational model that the knowledge work researchers had been asking for a long time—give employees the freedom of schedule, method, equipment, attire, body posture when working, and a supervision as needed-- by the worker, etc. What is surprising is that the productivity went up, the satisfaction from work went up, and the rate of retention went up. The evidence of its success is that neither organizations nor employees want to revert to the old model. It applies to all organizations from the multinational corporations to the mama-papa-stores, and the big name knowledge organizations that were so conducive to the worker comforts for getting higher performance. Working from home brought all these freedoms as a blessing in disguise of an otherwise such a horrific pandemic upon the population of this century.

The consequence of working from home was that the role of mind at work was highlighted—became even more pronounced. Workers from home had only their mind controlling them. Managers were left to assess the performance only objectively, on a long-term basis, which is what the researchers of managing knowledge work had been advocating for a long time. People have

been cherishing to have a job of this kind. Because these workers are really guided by their mind, not because of the job content, but because of the work environment context, these workers also become mind workers but of a different kind from the knowledge workers I defined above. Therefore, I call them *The Mind Workers of The Second Kind*.

**3.The Newer Jobs**

Because of the embedding of the technology in all kinds of contemporary jobs and the technicization of all work and tools, knowledge content in work has been steadily increasing, and, we expect this trend to continue to pick up speed until such time that almost all work is turned into knowledge work. Now, we need to add to this the new work context imposed by the COVID-19 from which there is no turning back pandemic or no pandemic. The work from home or away from the workplace will continue. Consequently, we get a job that is heavily ruled by mind and managers have to take it seriously.

This is not a forecast of a distant future; this is happening now by the force of the nature and will become organizational norm by the middle of this decade. While this is the dawning reality, many managers, in many industries, in all parts of the world, still manage their organizations by dicta. This is why, in this paper, I argue that, this way of managing is the wrong approach for managing the mind workers. This applies to the case of both the workers and the organizations. In fact, poor or wrong management would remain hidden until such a time that the company gets at the point of failure. I make a case to all managers, at all ranks, to steadily move away from the management style of dicta or authority and, instead, pass the power to manage to the workers to whose job the power pertains. If that is not possible because of the technical or legal constraints, then, this power should be delegated to the individual in the rank order who is at the nearest level to the job.

While in this paper, I continue to use the words knowledge worker and traditional worker, the difference between these two terms is so momentously disappearing in favor of the term just "worker" because all jobs now require specialized knowledge rather than just skills to get executed. Sixty-two years after its coinage by Peter Ferdinand Drucker, the term knowledge work is losing its distinction because no work in a contemporary organization can be performed without some specialized knowledge—not skill. Additionally, because of the prevalence of the work-from-home workers performing all kinds of jobs, no worker can be managed by the traditional techniques and practices rooted in the command-and-control model. The workers need to be set free not for their benefit but for the wellbeing of the organization.

### 4.Managing the Mind Workers

When it comes to managing them, these workers have been unique in the sense of how much they differ from the traditional workers, even when they perform traditional work like we observed in the case of the mind workers of the second kind. They are also different from the knowledge workers, as generally known through the standard definition of knowledge work. Traditionally, a worker's motivation has been driven by money. He did what he was told and performed as long as he got paid at the end of completing what he was directed to do. And, as long as he followed the directions in executing his job, he met his obligation, irrespective of the job outcomes. Therefore, their motivation had been to complete the job following the directions and get paid. Most of these jobs are in a controlled work environment, such as a factory, warehouse, hospital, legal agencies, etc. Typically, there has been no motivation for these workers to make decisions differently from the given direction, such as a police officer deciding to use a lethal weapon when he is operating without his life coming under any threat. Compare it to a soldier in war whose life is at stake when he is deciding about the use of his gun against his belligerent enemy on the other end. His biggest motivator is to save his life, not follow the directions in executing his job and get paid. Because the tasks of such workers are structured, mechanical, mundane, and repetitive, they will not qualify as knowledge workers; however, if they operate under the conditions "work from home," they become the workers of the mind of the second kind. These jobs are designed to maximize output quantity of the satisfactory quality in a given time unit.

However, over the several years, an increasing number of organizations have changed their transformation processes to the ones that require jobs which demand specialized knowledge and appropriate intellectual capabilities rooted in science and technology for transforming the organizational products, services, and processes. These workers need their mind to perform their jobs and therefore are controlled by their minds. What to talk of their managers and the organization, these workers themselves may find it very difficult to control their mind. Their motivation requires appeasing their mind rather than the means to please their senses. Their managers have to find nontraditional means to achieve this because the mind motivators have been drastically different from the motivator of the senses, typically derived from the objects that could be exchanged for money. That is why the money became the biggest motivator of such workers that we knew as the traditional workers.

While traditional workers' motivators have usually been monetary and operating by clear, well-understood instructions; these new workers—the workers of the mind or intellect—often value things such as the work quality, work/life balance, job flexibility, work support from colleagues, understanding and appreciation of their managers, and personal advancement opportunities. In short, these workers value their work for reasons that revolve around the satisfaction derived from fulfillment, professional accomplishment, and happiness, rather than mere compensation and fulfillment of the routine. A recent study by Vinas-Bardolet, Torrent-Sellens, and Guillen-Royoof of the 27 European countries that appeared in the *Journal of the Knowledge Economy* of April, 2018 found that job satisfaction often correlates directly with the social support, autonomy, and the ability to influence organization's decisions. Therefore, management must carefully determine the optimum ways to manage these workers to ensure their satisfaction, as this should influence their minds which in turn will directly result in the improved output from them—the output that could have the potential to transform the organization, and achieve its goals long and hard, such as the disruptive innovation.

A key area of focus for organizational leaders who determine how to manage these workers lies in the understanding and reinventing of the administration of the authority within the organization because, typically, the mind of these workers responds negatively to the authority (defined as the extrinsically motivated behavioral stimuli). The negativity in this context does not convey aggressivity or contempt but becomes a reason of the reduced quality of their output, a lack of initiation to digress from their routine and to engage in search of the solutions to the organization's presenting problems that could give birth to the thought that results in higher productivity and innovation. What should not surprise us is that all this happens subconsciously—even the workers themselves might not be aware of its occurrence. It is a failure that they themselves might not know. This is what makes the job of their managers more difficult. The answer to the management of these workers that should more effectively deploy them in the organization lies in the use of the reduced or no authority at all, i.e., no direct or effective infringement upon their freedom and autonomy, which might cause their decreased job affiliation which results in a work behavior that is disconnected and disjoint from the team objectives and organizational goals, i.e., operating as if they have no belongingness to their work—what to talk about them owning their job—a behavior that is most encouraged by the organizations.

This paper is focused on how managers can achieve the above objective by putting light on the management approaches that should work. What is important to emphasize here is that these approaches are important even for the organizations that belong in the public, governmental, or military sectors of the society because the tasks in them are also becoming more intellectual and demand more real-time knowledge, not only from the senior managers but from all employees engaged in the execution of task.

**5.Feed Their Mind for the Psychic Energy**

Their managers have to be constantly focused on how to motivate their mind -- feed their psyche for them to operate. It has to be done very subjectively and selectively. As a rule, all management techniques and practices that have their origin in the worker-management relationship that goes as far back as the turn of the twentieth century that consisted of employing authority from management and expecting obedience from these mind workers should be eschewed. Even output planning, decision-making and control should, by design, be left out for the workers to perform by themselves. The manager should be careful when leading them as this could have unintended consequence if leading is not what they needed. To them leadership or direction or path-guidance could connote control and would stupefy their mind, having a negative effect on their psyche that would expend their motor function. The extrinsic motivators are likely to interfere with the worker's natural chemistry and would take away their intrinsic motivation that makes them choose and engage in critical thinking to solve what they find to be the problems surrounding their work. To keep their autonomy functional and mind energized, the manager's role would be to create an environment that lets them identify, select, and assume the tasks and problems that they would like to address and absolve. They benefit most from the availability of autonomy and their consciousness of its presence because that will derive for their mind the freedom to function. This drives their mind, builds ambition, generates passion and motivation, and becomes the attribution of higher performance and success. It is the success that feeds their psyche, generates new energy and causes a psychic process to exist that results in the inexhaustible mental and motor energy which will eliminate the need for the physical energy which has to be kicked in and would have a short life because this process operates at a physical level, in contrast to the energy generated at a psychic level which is perpetual. This is how the mind workers lose fear and tread the uncharted

waters, identify the unobserved phenomena, and engage in the creation that results in disruptive innovation.

Collaborative gestures or welcomed feedbacks would add to the performance and innovation of the mind workers; however, it is possible that there is a very thin line between what feedback is welcome and what is not or, even worse, this line may quickly reverse the course of welcome or unwelcome. The manager has to be very conscious of this and cease the feedback at the first sign of the reversal. He should not go even slightly along the course that makes his input unwanted or an interference in the autonomy of the mind worker because the end goal of the manager or the organization is to harvest the most, best quality performance off the mind of these workers. A success at this style of management will cause the mind worker to flourish, take new initiatives and result in the organization to reap the benefits at all levels to solve all problems from top to bottom that did not even seem to exist.

**6.The Role of Manager**

It is very important that managers know how to manage the mind workers and be willing to incessantly adjust their style and switch it on a contingent basis. While we would say that most managers, for the benefit of the organization, would be prepared to play their part, others may need counseling or motivators to learn the more productive ways to manage and let perform the mind workers. The organizations should understand that those managers who have learned, practiced, and succeeded by managing with authority will find it hard to abdicate that style and subscribe to the new approach of the letting-it-go style or sharing their prerogative with their employees. Shedding their authoritative style will make them feel insecure and dysfunctional that would need training and counseling to be effective. The senior management support will be essential for the whole initiative of making the organization skim the benefit of the mind of the workers.

**6.1 Facilitate Collaboration for Mind Workers.** Manager should encourage collaboration because it increases the sharing and exchange of ideas that enhance the chances of success by necessitating the communication of thoughts. Collaboration takes a special significance because of the remote work modality that we expect to continue. Also, manager through collaboration can bring in diversity and empowerment to some employees by bringing them together in collaboration for codesigning which may also promote healthy competition. In many organizational initiatives, collaboration becomes essential to enhance the chances of success of a project, especially the ones engaged for innovation. In such cases, as a manager, when one realizes that the work in which the

mind worker is engaged is excessively complex and could make use of some interdependence, offer collaboration and execute if it is welcome but back off if it is spurned with a conveyance that the manager's offer is open whenever needed. Allow him the choice to pick the individual or individuals for the collaboration.

Collaboration by its genesis demands the shunning of authority on the part of all involved. Therefore, the manager should observe that the erosion of all authoritarianism should occur as soon as the collaboration is enacted. This will avoid hinderance to work output of the collaboration.

**6.2 How Much Management Intervention?** The primary objective of management is to maintain the mind workers' happiness and satisfaction. This may require constructive interventions at a frequency and duration that are considered helpful by them. When it comes to intervention, remember that you hired the smartest people, now why do you second guess your decision. On top of that, there are no scientific tools and techniques available to constructively assess their performance and suggest means for improvement. The fear is that their evaluations will be so much off the reality that it could hurt the organization on both ends—defusing the initiative of those who take on long, ambitious projects, and over-evaluating those who avoid risky tasks. Therefore, it is better to let the mind workers evaluate their performance themselves and management only suggest the ways for them to improve or enhance their performance. For the management, it will be better not to take their assessments seriously for major decisions. The best is to employ one clearly understood metric as a broad indicator of how they are doing, and for them to know. When the organization intervenes to assess the state of performance, then, it must get involved in its improvement with financial and nonfinancial resources. Otherwise, assessment is a worthless exercise, not recommended.

**6.3 Looking After the Intellect and Happiness**

Extrinsic motivators, such as the rewards and recognitions, actually interfere with the motivation for mind work and take away the intrinsic motivation that is self-controlled and self-administered by the mind worker himself. Manager should so design the work and work environment for the mind worker such that they can always draw the intrinsic motivation from the work and work contexts such as their customers, suppliers, colleagues, etc. Filter out the extrinsic motivators as far as possible. Because unlike the intrinsic motivators, the extrinsic motivators are short-lived and do not work for too long. To be able to have a fully self-controlled motivation system, mind workers should have only the intrinsic motivators of the social, intellectual, and psychological

kinds. The organization may allow rare output rewards that are uniquely different from the frequent, expected monetary compensation awards. as I said previously, the mind workers appreciate other rewards such as the personal advancement opportunities, organizational support for their initiatives, and the ability to exercise their influence in organizational decisions. Most mind workers are seriously engaged in other pursuits relating to their commitments and extraneous responsibilities, as they take them all seriously. This makes them maintain a work/life balance that may require freedom in their schedules and assignment selection.

## 6.4 Positive intervention

Perhaps the most difficult area for management to balance is the extent of intervention in worker's work. Although authority should not be utilized, it differs from intervention. Managers should maintain a supportive attitude; however, this does not always mean practicing a completely absent management style. In some situations, managerial intervention can actually increase the mind worker's productivity, so long as it is conducted in a collaborative and supportive fashion. If a knowledge worker is relatively struggling with his productivity and innovation, which, surprisingly, is not less common than expected, then, the supportive intervention of management can decrease issues creating hurdles for the employee and would increase productivity without reducing autonomy and the desire to take independent initiatives.

## 7.Conclusion

This paper relates the observations made about the change in the content of knowledge work over the last six decades and combines it with the change in the context of the work brought on due to the work-from-home modality caused by COVID-19 for the last about two years, and studies the evolution of work and connects it to the increased role of mind in achieving the goals of the organizations, both for the mundane, repetitive jobs consisting of the standard operational tasks, and the jobs of the higher order with heavy content of knowledge and intellectual activities. It is further observed that in the performance of both these job categories that constitute almost all the organizational work, the performance has been mostly positively impacted. Drawing on these facts, this paper has focused on understanding and modeling the management of these workers for an effective performance. It focuses on managing the psyche and autonomy that have both become the prime movers of performance. It covers how to intervene work while maintaining autonomy, job affiliation, happiness, and assessment of the mind workers. I also cover how managers should change their modus operandi to fit these changes because the failure to acknowledge these facts

and continuing with the authoritative behavior will cause employee exodus and organizational failure. Since this work is conceptual, there is a need to take these proposals further by engaging in the scientific research on these topics. It may include, first, research into the evolution of the work basket of the knowledge workers since the inception of the term knowledge work and knowledge worker. Next, I see the need to investigate the connecting of the mind in the execution of work-from-home to validate its inclusion in the class of mind work. Research needs to prove the role of autonomy in the performance of work-from-home modality. Lastly, I believe that each of the recommendations made in this work for improving performance need to be tested by the further research.