

Decent Work and Career Development

Professor Ishbel McWha-Hermann



UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Business School

CDI Scotland Student Conference

25 Feb 2026



Housekeeping



UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Business School

- This session is being recorded
- If you are happy to do so please turn on your camera and your microphone – I want to hear from you!
- Questions are welcome – please put these in the questions tab where possible and keep the chat for comments

About me...

Professor Ishbel McWha-Hermann

Personal Chair of Work and Organisational Psychology

Deputy Director, Academic of MBA Programmes

Email: Ishbel.McWha@ed.ac.uk

- PhD Psychology (Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand)

Research interests

- HR policies and practices of international NGOs
- Organisational justice
- Fairness and reward in international work contexts
- Social justice and diversity
- Intergroup relations and teamwork (including the role of power)



UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Business School



Overview



UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Business School

- Institutional considerations of good/fair/decent work
 - The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals
 - Decent Work
 - Fair Work
 - CIPD Job Quality
- Decent work and Careers – how can we think about it?
- Open discussion

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Business School

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Decent Work

What is Decent Work?



Secure Employment



Fair wages



Safe working conditions



Social protection



Social Dialogue



Labour Rights and Standards

<http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

Global Drive for Fair and Decent Work



UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Business School

Decent Work is work which meets fundamental needs for material well-being, economic security, equal opportunities, and scope for human development

--International Labour Organization--

Fair work is work that offers all individuals an effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect. It balances the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers. It generates benefits for individuals, organisations and society.

--The Fair Work Convention--

By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

--United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG8.5)--

“Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and for his family an existence worthy of human dignity.”

--Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 23 Sec. 3--

The Fair Work Dimensions

Fair work is work that offers all individuals an effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect. It balances the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers. It generates benefits for individuals, organisations and society.



Effective voice

For individuals, the opportunity to have an effective voice is crucially important. Having a say at work is consistent with the broader suite of rights available to citizens in democratic societies.

[Read More](#)



Opportunity

It is a reasonable aspiration to want work that is fair – and for fair work to be available to everyone. Fair opportunity allows people to access work and employment and is a crucial dimension of fair work.

[Read More](#)



Security

Security of income can contribute to greater individual and family stability and promote more effective financial planning, including investment in pensions.

[Read More](#)



Fulfilment

Fulfilment can also arise from positive and supportive workplace relationships that promote a sense of belonging and this overlaps strongly with respect as a dimension of fair work.

[Read More](#)



Respect

Respect at work enhances individual health, safety and wellbeing. Dignified treatment can protect workers from workplace related illness and injury and create an environment free from bullying and harassment.

[Read More](#)

CIPD: Job Quality and 'good work'



UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Business School

- is fairly rewarded
- gives people the means to securely make a living
- gives opportunities to develop skills and a career, and ideally provides a sense of fulfilment
- provides a supportive environment with constructive relationships
- allows for work-life balance
- enables staff to be physically and mentally healthy
- gives employees the voice and choice they need to shape their working lives
- should be accessible to all

Social Justice and Career Development



UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Business School

- Overemphasis on individuals and microsystems
- Need to focus on *structural* sources of injustice
- Five marginalising conditions:
 - Group bias
 - Forced movement of people
 - Poverty
 - Unemployment
 - Lack of decent work



ELSEVIER

Journal of Vocational Behavior

Volume 126, April 2021, 103492



Social justice and career development: Progress, problems, and possibilities ☆

Ellen Hawley McWhirter ^a , Ishbel McWha-Hermann ^{b 1}

Show more

Add to Mendeley Share Cite

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103492> ↗

Get rights and content ↗

Example: Living Wages

- Shift from purely economic to include a psychological focus
- Key benefits for individuals
 - Income – for family to live
 - Take part in society
 - Rest & recovery
 - Be more productive in current role
 - Achieve their potential
 - Having choices



EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF WORK AND ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
2020, AHEAD-OF-PRINT, 1-16
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2020.1838604>

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group

“Money’s too tight (to mention)”: a review and psychological synthesis of living wage research

Rosalind H. Searle  and Ishbel McWha-Hermann 

Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom University of Edinburgh Business School, Edinburgh, UK

Organisational consequences

- More attractive employer
 - Improving talent pool
- Employees want to stay –
 - Retention improved
 - Sickiness & absence reduced
- Change focus from firefighting - recruitment
- To future focus – building capability of workforce
- Increased levels of ideas & innovation
- Reduced levels of sabotage/theft & waste



“Work-first” policies don’t work

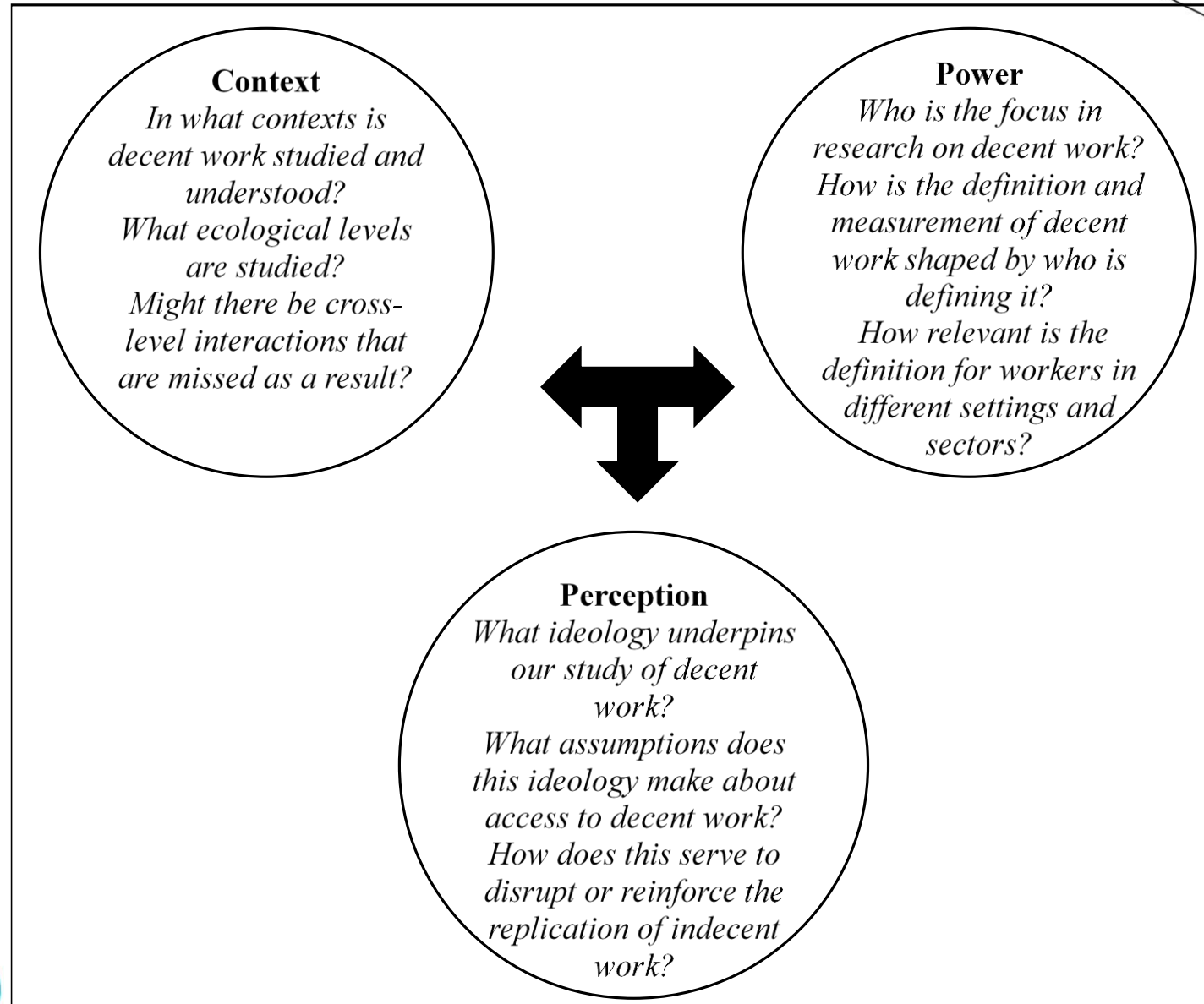


- More than 1 in 5 Scots are currently living in poverty, struggling to survive on incomes that fall below what they need.
- This includes 1 in every 4 children in Scotland.
- Rates are higher for those from minority ethnic backgrounds, single parent households, those with a disabled family member.
- Poor quality jobs perpetuate the existing levels of poverty – “in-work poverty”.

- JRF - Poverty in Scotland 2024



The Context-Power-Perception Framework: The importance of Critical Thinking



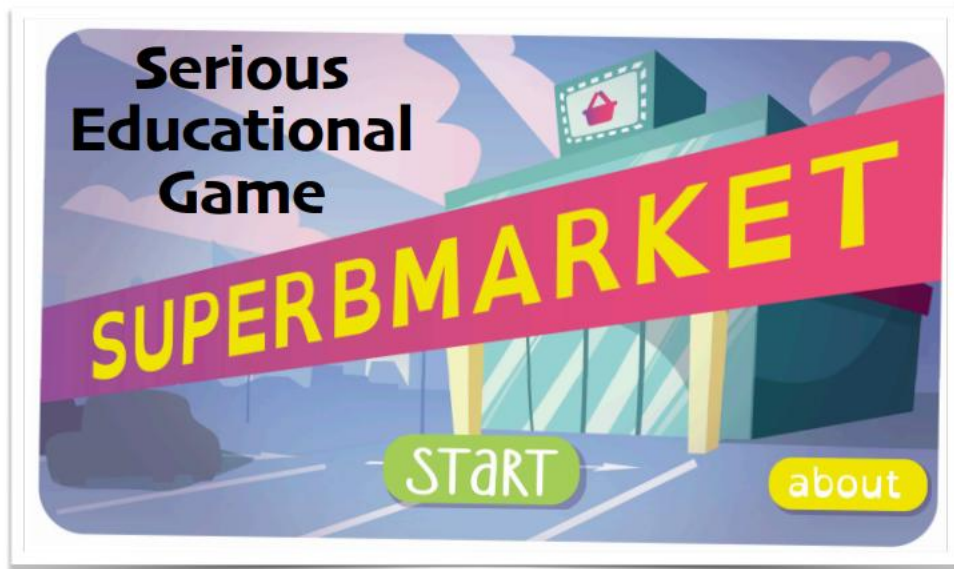
Source: McWha-Hermann & McWhirter, in press

<https://www.eawopimpact.org/decent-work>



ANIMATION Living Wage | EAWOPii

EAWOP Impact Incubator
82 subscribers
Subscribe



Each part comes with an instructor overview and a player worksheet.

We recommend playing the game in sequential order.

Part 1 focuses on personal reflection related to playing the

SuperbMarket draws on the science concerning the living wage and decent work.

It explores connections between job quality, employee identity, organisational commitment, fairness, and trust.

Use SuperbMarket for teaching, for learning, for information.



Who earn a living wage are able to work smarter they are less depleted through not having to rely on multiple jobs to support them and their families and by being able to afford to relax and to actively enjoy their time. As a result, they are less stressed about work.

Higher wages result in people feeling happier in their work, their well-being is improved. As a result, they need to take time off for ill-health, their new leisure time leaves them in mind and in body, they have downtime which restores them leaving them able to be more productive.

As a result of all of these things people start to become more confident, and so they are willing to try new things and to develop their skills further.

Being paid a living wage not only improves a worker's physical and mental health, it brings benefits to their employing organisation, to their family and to society.

Research* has revealed that being paid a living wage is an important means of building resilience, especially post pandemic to workers, families and society. Paying a living wage means workers can focus their effort on one main employer so they are more likely to upskill, resulting in easier upward mobility, better productivity and improved job satisfaction.

Thank you! Any questions?

Key websites:

- www.project-fair.business-school.ed.ac.uk
- www.eawopimpact.org/
- Feel free to connect with me on LinkedIn or get in touch via email (lshbel.mcwha@ed.ac.uk)