



The Golden Egg

A Worker's Resolve



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A look at the job interview as a process facilitative of the employment relationship's unequal nature.

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Your Contact Information:

rik

+27693500697

Itumotsamai@gmail.com

<https://itumotsamai.wixsite.com/rik-site>

The Job Interview

Core to the message of this piece is the inequality inherent in our socio-economic system; that is, our monetary trading system upon which our social interactions are based. With reference to my 'failed' career, this imbalance has stuck out to me; take the job interview for instance: a meeting for which I have been pushing to get an invite just to escape my daily condemnation, is exemplary to it. My evolved, more self-representative ambition fuels this reluctance to fully accept that to which I seek to escape – an opportunity for renewed acceptance by those closest to me – an interview – a job. Do not misunderstand me; I believe in working and working hard; I will get back in the labour market, on which side, employer/employee, I am not sure but overcome my close circle's disdain I must if I am to survive. My discomfort with the job interview is its structure's inherent pricing of my value, not through negotiation, relative to that of my employer.

Consider its structure: a meeting between an employer and employee whose main purpose is the evaluation of the latter. Yes, we are often told that the employee must also prepare questions to ask the interviewer/panel as in a reverse-interview situation, but he/she is allowed to conduct his/her reverse-evaluation 'at the end' of that meeting. Not to mention that the employer has discretion over how, not he/she, but they/it is represented at this meeting: an individual or a panel; however, the employee is required to attend alone and has no ability to be accompanied anyone else.

To attend this meeting, the employee is expected to jump many a hoop beginning with submitting his/her curriculum vitae (CV) and/completing application forms; the employer, however, simply expects the employee to rely on readily available public information, e.g., its websites and products sold in the marketplace; sources whose information isn't all that useful in informing the employee on the factors relevant to the employer's working environment. William H. Macey and Benjamin Schneider, in their paper on the "The Meaning of Employee Engagement" (I will explore the meaning of employee engagement shortly), highlight the Gallup Research Program's deduction that there are 12 key working conditions necessary to facilitate an employee's engagement in his/her work but that without management that is, itself, engaged and effective in materializing these conditions, all efforts to increase work performance in an organization's workforce is moot. My point here being – just as the employer requires an employee's personal, professional and historical information to make a judgment on his/her suitability for not only the open position but also the organization's

culture, the employee requires information on, e.g., the circumstances in which the position was opened (why its previous occupant vacated it) and personal, professional and historical information on the would-be direct superior to him/her should he/she be hired.

The Employer's Legally backed Social Authority

Granted, there are websites available where workers can evaluate their experiences working for various employers and this information is useful mainly in helping the applicant discern the nature of an organization's cultural environment. However, I believe it does not go far enough since those 'reviews' rarely name-names regarding any criticism given; so yes, workers may name their superiors when showering their employers with praise on these websites but seem more reluctant to do so when criticizing them. Why? Employees are requested references by their employers who will then call these references for an honest 3rd party review of the employee's degree of engagement but, to answer my question, employees, when reviewing their experience of their employment relationship, avoid being nonchalant for fear of victimization from future employers in accordance with an implicit agreement amongst them not to employ anyone that challenges their 'authority'/power.

Employees should, for example, be able to gain access to information on their direct would-be supervisor in order to make a judgement on the suitability of the organization's work environment to his/her affective and psychological temperament; this inclusive of contact details for the position's previous occupant (if there is one) to contact as a reference. They should be able to name their direct supervisors when critiquing their employment experience for the market to assess and price-in as their value is so done via employers' discussions with their references (i.e., previous employers and/direct supervisors). However, the employee is expected not to request the same type of information as is requested from him/her; in fact, any employee who brings forward his/her terms of negotiation/employment will be regarded negatively as unprofessional/insubordinate by employers; that information is considered as such that the employee must not access. The employer may set its terms of negotiation and/employment but those of the employee are regarded to be set by 'the market', effectively turning the job interview into a briefing session for the employee - not a negotiation. As such, the employee is thus degraded to being a pawn exposed to coercive exploitation rather than an equal partner in a business relationship.

This expectation used to regulate the conduct and value of the employee is what amounts to the power/ authority of the employer; it is what John W. Budd and Devasheesh Bhawe in their ResearchGate paper titled “The Employment Relationship” would call “the social contract” as it pertains to the impact of social norms on the employment relationship. Otherwise called ‘the invisible hand of the market’, these social norms are quite powerful in shaping expectations on stakeholders of the employment relationship; this because non/participation in the market comes at a cost. For the employee, the cost of not having a job and that of finding one; for the employer, the cost of not employing great talent and that of finding it. These costs serve to make more valuable the employment relationship since both the employee and employer have incurred costs to undertake it. However, given that, unlike the employee, the employer has more organized resources, the cost it incurs is minor relative to that incurred by the employee.

As such, the employee is thus considered, by social standards, as more dependent on (thus as less valuable than) the employer than vice-versa. This shows in the fact that the social contract, in layering additional terms and conditions atop those already stipulated in the employer-devised employment contract, applies only to the employee. So, the employee is expected to give more of him/herself to the employment relationship than the employer as is demonstrated by the previously mentioned unequal access to information.

Considering social norms as people’s realm of existence, most employees do not consider the employment inequality (inequality between employee and employer) as a problem even for themselves. They consider it a natural status quo in that their upbringing within this social contract has had them internalize the inequality wherein it becomes a part of their psyche. Thus, when participating in the labour market, it is not so much these social norms that directly impact expectations on the employment relationship; the employee him/herself becomes the tool of his/her disempowerment in that he/she devalues his/her labour and psychologically willingly binds him/herself to these ‘additional’ socially expected obligations – the “psychological contract”, as his/her way of meeting the exchange price of the employer’s value.

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