Analysis of Engagement between Ethics and Return-to-Work Discourses in Respective Academic Literature

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Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the support of the Wolb-Pack
Background Information
Return-to-Work (RTW) Process
Where professionals assists clients to recover and integrate back to work after they acquire impairments

(The Government of Canada, n.d)
Professionals try to support clients back to where they worked before acquiring an injury.

- Requires coordination between various professionals to agree on accommodations such as modified work hours, workstation modifications (Saunders, MacEachen, & Nedelec, 2015).
Implication for People with Disabilities

- Employment is a relevant topic for disability communities and disability management professionals
  - Yet, the participation rate of people with disabilities in employment is much lower than for the general population (U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2018)
- What social barriers exist for returning to work as an “ideal objective”?
In the United States...

### HOUSEHOLD DATA

**Table A-6. Employment status of the civilian population by sex, age, and disability status, not seasonally adjusted**

[Numbers in thousands]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment status, sex, and age</th>
<th>Persons with a disability</th>
<th>Persons with no disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL, 16 years and over</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian noninstitutional population</td>
<td>30,612</td>
<td>30,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian labor force</td>
<td>6,166</td>
<td>6,337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation rate</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>5,509</td>
<td>5,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment-population ratio</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in labor force</td>
<td>24,447</td>
<td>23,970</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2018)
Ethics

A discourse on what individuals and societies ought to do and ought not to do

(Wolbring, 2012)

Ethicists should examine whether opportunities to access and reach social equity are maintained in the real world

(Sherwin, 2011)
How Ethicists Can Guide Others

- **Ethics concepts, principles, and theories**
  - Conceptual terminology (e.g., autonomy, consequentialism)

- **Applied ethics fields**
  - How other fields can ethically act (e.g., bioethics and medicine)
“We [ethicists] lack the appropriate intellectual tools for promoting deep moral change in our society...”

(Sherwin, 2011)
Automation
Will Robots reduce the number of employment positions available for people with disabilities? (Wolbring, 2016)

Alternative Occupations
What other jobs might be available to clients if RTW is not an option? (Saunders et al., 2015)

Universal Basic Income (UBI)
Could a new, widespread source of income reduce the need to be employed? (Straubhaar, 2017)
Methods
Conceptual Engagement

“...The special attention, interest, and exploration or questioning of a term or phrase that goes beyond a simple mention or fact about the term or phrase.”

(Lisitza & Wolbring, 2016, p. 4 of 22)
Selection of Databases (EBSCO all, Scopus, Web of Science)

Selection of Keywords (“Back to work”, “return to work”, n = 33 ethics terms)

Scoping Review Approach in Peer-Reviewed Academic Literature

Our Approach
Results
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Total amount of Search Results in</th>
<th>Total number of articles downloaded</th>
<th>Downloaded articles that contained conceptual engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n = 13 Ethics Concepts in RTW Literature</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>ND (not determined)</td>
<td>ND [not downloaded]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bioethics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethic*</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist ethics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philoso*</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>2953</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maleficence</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health Ethics</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### n = 20 ethics theories in RTW Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Total amount of Search Results</th>
<th>Total number of articles downloaded</th>
<th>Downloaded articles that contained conceptual engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care Ethics</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deontology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalitarianism</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialism</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following ethics theories generated no results:
- Consequentialism, cultural relativism, deontology, female care based ethics, individual relativism, moral relativism, psychological altruism, psychological hedonism, rights theory, Samuel Pufendorf, WD Ross, virtue ethics, virtue theory, utilitarianism
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total number of articles downloaded for qualitative analysis after removal of duplicates</th>
<th>Downloaded articles that contained conceptual engagement between ethics and RTW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Return to work” or “back to work” in journals with “ethic*” in their titles</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 (article also represented in Table 1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative Analysis Results

- Downloaded \( n = 147 \) articles from RTW–related literature
  - Only \( n = 41 \) articles (28%) demonstrated conceptual engagement of ethics concepts
- Downloaded \( n = 4 \) articles from ethics literature
  - Only \( n = 1 \) (25%) article demonstrated conceptual engagement of RTW
Implications
Given Sherwin (2011)’s views, ethicists could study RTW to examine how both discourses can promote social equity and vice versa.

Our Findings

RTW academic literature less so engages with ethics theories compared to ethics concepts.

Ethics literature minimally engages with RTW.
People with disabilities might benefit from RTW and disability management professionals developing a *coherent, systemic* response to future employment trends using ethics guidance.

However, if disability management experts, RTW professionals, and ethicists do conceptually collaborate, it has to involve a people with disabilities’ rights approach to ethics – *with a social model of disability frame of thinking.*

- Ex. Consequentialism – should we deem certain acts unethical due to *consequences* for people with disabilities?
Study Limitations

**Grey Literature**
We did not study grey literature

**Conceptual Engagement**
We did not examine cases where authors did not explicitly mention an ethics term or RTW rather than “finding work”

**Qualitative Analysis**
We did not analyze articles from most search combinations with more than n = 100 search results
Neither authors have any conflicts of interest to declare.


Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

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Thank You!

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