STRATEGIES FOR EXITING THE SQUIRREL CAGE

John Stutz and Erica Mintzer
Tellus Institute

July 2005
In *The Overworked American*, Juliet Schor used the term “squirrel cage” to describe the endless pursuit of material wealth by Americans.\(^1\) The term connotes an image of an animal working as hard as it can, yet going nowhere. In our paper, *Affluence and Well-Being*, we demonstrated with indicators that affluence does not indefinitely raise personal and social well-being. Beyond a threshold of wealth, working harder to acquire more will not make us better off. Like a squirrel in a cage, we are trapped in a cycle of work and spend, which will exhaust us and lead us nowhere.

This paper examines the causes of, and possible solutions for, overwork. Section 1 describes the characteristics of the squirrel cage. Section 2 presents explanations for how we became trapped, and Section 3 examines possible avenues of escape.

### I. The Squirrel Cage

Most Americans need only look at their own lives to realize that overwork has reached epidemic proportions. As people spend longer hours in gainful employment, there is less time to enjoy the personal aspects of life. This section illustrates that the burden of work has increased steadily since the 1950s and the time stress experienced by many people is a widespread phenomenon.

#### Longer Hours

An important indicator for measuring the well-being of a society is the number of hours spent in paid labor. Presumably, as societies become better off, members must work less, and have more leisure time. Contrary to popular perception, however, paid labor time has not decreased historically. Juliet Schor compares annual hours of work by time period from 1200 to 1988. Her findings are presented in Figure 1. Interestingly, our current time spent in paid labor is similar to that spent by workers in the Middle Ages. Although standards of material wealth have increased enormously since the Middle Ages, we have not made any gains in terms of time.

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Figure 1. Annual Hours Since the 13th Century

Table 1 presents historical data that suggest that, since 1969, the burden of work in the US has increased substantially for people at nearly every economic level.

2 Ibid., p. 45.
Table 1. Average Weeks Worked Per Year by Income Quintile, 1969-2000, Married Individuals with Children, Head of Household Age 25-54

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>First fifth</th>
<th>Second fifth</th>
<th>Third fifth</th>
<th>Fourth fifth</th>
<th>Top fifth</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% change  
1969-2000 14.0% 31.3% 25.2% 17.5% -4.9% 14.9%

Table 1 shows that families have shouldered increasing burdens of work, which explains the “time crunch” experienced by many Americans. More time spent in paid labor means less time for household work, childcare, and leisure.

A large part of the increasing family workload is due to the entrance of women into the workforce, without corresponding decreases in hours for men. Figure 2 shows the increase in married women’s participation in the labor force since the 1950s. Because women tend to remain primary caretakers in the home while at the same time gaining responsibility in the workplace, the time crunch is felt slightly more by women than by men.

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4 Ibid.
Less Satisfaction

Not only are Americans working more, they are also enjoying it less. For people over age 30, the trend towards lower reported job satisfaction is considerable. Table 2 presents results of a survey in which Americans were asked, “On the whole, how satisfied are you with the work you do – would you say you are very satisfied, moderately satisfied, a little dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?”

Table 2. Percentage of Americans Over 30 Very Satisfied with Work (1970s-1990s)\(^5\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. How Did We Become Caged?

Why are Americans working more and more hours with less satisfaction? The reasons for overwork include psychological, cultural, economic, and institutional incentives. In our metaphor, each bar of the cage enclosing the squirrel represents a different dimension of the forces that encourage us to work too much. This section presents a framework for categorizing the causes of overwork.

Personal Psychology

Work fulfills a function much larger than simply providing basic needs. The simple question, “What do you do?” illustrates the extent to which our work defines our personal identity. For example, after fighting for and obtaining access to high-level jobs, women’s sense of identity and role in society has shifted. Men, having experienced a drop in wages and the loss of their role as primary family breadwinner, have gone through identity crises in recent decades. Because great meaning is attached to work, the motivation is often more than simply money.

Rising burdens of work are related to rising levels of consumption.\(^6\) As with work, consumption patterns contribute to personal identity. In his discussion of “consumption as meaning,” Tim Jackson notes that commodities possess important symbolic properties.\(^7\) The car, the classic example, is associated with “social status,

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sexual success, personal power, freedom, and creativity.”

Defining identity according to patterns of work and consumption has the potential to become psychologically destructive. John Ehrenfeld asserts that our consumptive habits are addictions that hide the root causes of unsustainability. Tim Kasser documents the destructive nature of materialistic values on our psyches. If materialistic values are unhealthy, then why do humans work excessive hours to pursue material goals? Recent research suggests that people cannot accurately predict how happy or unhappy an experience will make them. In their research on forecasting errors, Gilbert, Kahneman, Loewenstein and Wilson found that people overestimate the intensity and duration of emotional reactions to future events. Accordingly, people assume that acquiring a higher level of affluence will bring more and longer-lasting happiness than it actually does, driving them to produce and consume ever-increasing amounts.

### Social Norms

The bars of the squirrel cage also have a social dimension. Fred Hirsch asserts that the value of goods and services depends on their use in society, not just on their fulfillment of individual needs. For example, parents pursue a good education for their children in order to give them an advantage; a good education is valuable partly because it distinguishes the consumer from other people. However, as Hirsch points out, we cannot all have “superior” educations. The overall well-being of a society cannot increase if individuals pursue affluence in order to raise their position over others. If an individual succeeds in improving his or her relative position, another individual will be worse-off. Because material wealth is associated with relative position in society, individuals will continue to pursue wealth even if absolute levels are sufficient.

When levels of affluence increase, the standard considered necessary to be “well-off” simply rises. Figure 3 presents the results of a Gallup Poll in the US that asked, over many years, “What is the smallest amount of money a family of four needs to get along in this community?”

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8 Ibid. p. 13.
9 Ehrenfield, John R. “Searching for Sustainability: No quick fix.” Personal communication. April 2004
13 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
From 1950 to 1986, the perception of real income required to be well-off rose consistently with actual real income. People set goals for affluence by comparing their status with societal norms and what they recently achieved. Even though affluence has increased tremendously, the gap between what we desire and what we have remains. As a result, people stay on the treadmill of overwork.

**Economic and Institutional Incentives**

It is misguided to blame individuals for excessive work and consumption habits, because economic and institutional structures reinforce such behavior. In this section, we examine the external forces that make up the bars of the squirrel cage.

**Less Job Security**

The employer-employee relationship has changed drastically in recent decades. Whereas, previously, employees were expected to work for the same company for most or all of their working lives, employment is currently much more fluid. Table 3 presents the median years that men and women stayed at a particular job in 1983 and 1998.

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Table 3. Median Years of Job Tenure, US 1983, 1998\textsuperscript{15}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While job tenure for women remained fairly steady from 1983 to 1998, job tenure for men decreased significantly. Job security has diminished in favor of flexibility, which is illustrated by the increasing prevalence of alternative work arrangements such as contracting and temporary employment.\textsuperscript{16} Robert Reich explains that job insecurity encourages people to “make hay when the sun shines”; people will work longer hours when work is available, in order to compensate for possible dry periods in the future.\textsuperscript{17}

Eileen Appelbaum describes the shift from the breadwinner-homemaker model of employment to the unencumbered worker-devalued caregiver model.\textsuperscript{18} Whereas government and business policies used to ensure that men were granted sufficient wages, job stability, and benefits to support a family, this is no longer true since women have entered the workforce. Now, employment benefits reflect the fact that both men and women are expected to work, and caregiving is devalued. Individuals do not receive sufficient wages and benefits to support an entire family, nor are hours flexible enough to allow part-time work. Demographic shifts in the workforce, without accompanying shifts in labor policy, have led to the proliferation of “time stress.”

Decline of Union Power

Juliet Schor documents the history of the labor union fight for shorter hours.\textsuperscript{19} The struggle for shorter hours in the US began as early as the 1780s, when unionized artisans and craftsmen organized for a ten-hour day. Women factory workers joined the push for a ten-hour day in the 1840s, motivated by a desire for more leisure time. The second stage of the fight began after the Civil War, when workers began a fifty-year struggle for an eight-hour day. In the 1930s, unions pushed for a thirty-hour workweek, hoping that reducing the number of hours per worker would solve the unemployment problem. The proposal, however, was met with severe opposition from business interests, since full employment decreases the “employment rent” of workers; high unemployment makes it easier for businesses to recruit workers, and serves as an incentive for the employed to work harder to retain their jobs. After World War II, business opposition and rising consumerism effectively ended the fight for shorter hours.


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{19} Schor, *The Overworked American, op. cit.*, p. 79-82.
Because of the decline of the union voice, employers demanded longer hours and greater work effort. Wages declined, while number of work hours soared.

Greater Inequality

From 1975-1992, income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, increased by 10 percent in the US (Figure 4). A consequence of rising inequality is that it makes more of a difference to be at the top than at the bottom. “Fear of falling” is a strong motivation for those nearer the top to work, because there is more to lose. For those at the bottom, the reward for working exceptionally hard is also great, if it means moving up the income ladder. In the 1950s, when pay was more uniform and dependent on length of service with a company, there was less incentive to work harder for a promotion.

People in the lower socioeconomic classes must work long hours in order to make ends meet. However, people in the upper classes have also experienced a rise in working hours, even if their hourly wages have grown. One reason for this phenomenon is that as income increases, “not working” becomes more expensive. Taking time for leisure or other personal tasks means foregoing high hourly wages. This is particularly true among women who recently have gained education and access to high-level jobs. Although they may prefer to attend to caretaking responsibilities, doing so could mean missing out on economic power and the respect it earns. In addition, hard work is necessary to retain one’s income; losing a job could mean sliding down the steep socioeconomic slope.\textsuperscript{20}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure4.png}
\caption{Affluence and Income Inequality in the US 1967-1992\textsuperscript{21,22}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{20} Reich, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 111-131.
The Interplay of Forces

In this section, we have outlined psychological, social, institutional and economic forces that lead to excessive work. Separating the forces into these categories can be misleading, however, because there is obvious interplay among them. Institutional and economic structures are instrumental in shaping cultural norms. Psychological responses are shaped by both cultural norms and an individual’s relationships to other people. Policy decisions are a direct expression of the values of a society. Consequently, it is important to consider all dimensions when examining the root causes of, and ultimately the solutions to, overwork.

III. Avenues of Escape

Because excessive work is due to a complex web of psychological, social, and institutional forces, responses must address the multidimensionality of the problem. For example, an individual’s choice to work and consume less may relieve time stress for that person, but it will not confront greater forces. The individual still must contend with cultural norms and economic structures that favor overwork. Conversely, changing institutional structures will not successfully relieve us from overwork unless our personal identity and social norms are decoupled from current patterns of work and consumption. Even though no single response will solve the “whole problem,” it is necessary to combat each of the drivers of overwork. This section presents avenues for escaping the squirrel cage by confronting each of the bars in our framework: psychological, social, economic and institutional.

Personal Choice

Because of “rising baselines,” in which more is always better, it is difficult to sit back and enjoy what we already have. This section outlines personal strategies for “slowing down.” Many individuals, having experienced the stress of a high-paced lifestyle, have opted for less work, and thus, less material wealth. This section documents successful cases of people increasing their well-being by choosing to work and consume less.

Downshifting

Recognizing the negative impacts of overwork on quality of life, a growing number of individuals are choosing to forego high-paying, high-stress jobs in favor of more leisure time. In The Overspent American, Juliet Schor describes “downshifters” as individuals that are “opting out of excessive consumerism, choosing to have more leisure and balance in their schedules, a slower pace of life, more time with their kids, more
meaningful work, and daily lives that line up squarely with their deepest values.” Schor conducted a survey of downshifting in the US, and found that 19 percent of Americans had voluntarily made a long-term change in their lives that resulted in earning less money. There is no “typical” downshifter; they cannot be easily characterized by gender, education level, income, race, marital status, or age. Reasons for downshifting also varied, but the most common response (31%) was, “Wanted more time, less stress, and more balance in my life.” Table 4 shows that although attitudes differed about the results of their downshift, most people were happy about the change.

| I’m happy about the change, and I don’t miss the extra income very much. | 28% |
| I’m happy about the change, but I miss the extra income. | 35% |
| Losing the income was a real hardship, but I’m still happy about the change. | 19% |
| I’m unhappy about the change. | 15% |

Small Living Space

In the US, there is an increasing trend towards bigger and bigger houses, based on the idea that house size is coupled with well-being. However, some people have recognized that big houses do not necessarily make us well-off; big houses mean more cleaning effort, higher utility bills, and even discomfort. Sarah Susanka’s *The Not So Big House* suggests that the comfort of a home is not necessarily correlated with its size. Susanka stresses the importance of “cozy” spaces designed to fit our way of life. By thinking creatively, we can design spaces that are comfortable, beautiful, practical, and, consequently, less materially intensive. Additionally, there is increasing appreciation for living space that is clutter-free; too much furniture and other belongings can be overwhelming, crowded, and difficult to maintain.

In order to be comfortable in small living spaces, our notions of privacy may need to evolve. It is common in the US for individual family members to have large bedrooms, so they can have their own “space.” Effective common space, however, may yield greater rewards. The benefits of human interaction are important, and they can be cultivated or discouraged through the proportions of a house or apartment.

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Changing Social Norms

Human behavior is shaped by social norms, since people compare themselves to what everyone around them deems desirable. This section describes strategies for countering rising cultural norms of work and material wealth.

The Voluntary Simplicity Movement

Downshifters, when forced to make a choice between time and money, chose the former. The assumption, however, is that downshifters would choose both income and time if it were possible. The voluntary simplicity movement (VSM) differs from typical downshifting because it views material wealth beyond that which is absolutely necessary as clutter, and therefore detrimental to personal well-being. Because a sense of personal worth is decoupled from spending, the detrimental psychological effects of materialism are avoided.

A key aspect of members of the VSM is that they have found a reference group for which a low-cost lifestyle is socially acceptable. The fact that voluntary simplicity is a “movement.” rather than simply an individual’s choice, means that participants have created a culture that does not rely on psychologically damaging rising baselines of material wealth.

Confronting Advertising

Advertising is instrumental in shaping norms of material wealth; indeed, the self-professed goal of advertising is to increase the gap between what individuals have and what they desire. The dissatisfaction that results from this gap drives people to make purchases to increase their well-being. Confronting the world of advertising, then, is an effective strategy for changing the social norms that drive overwork.

One option for confronting advertising is to regulate it. For example, Kasser suggests declaring “advertising-free zones” in places such as schools, roadways, and public spaces. In Norway, no advertising targeted at children under age 12 is allowed. Regulations such as these would reduce the power that advertisers have in shaping cultural norms.

Another tactic for countering the effects of advertising is to employ similar marketing strategies to promote non-consumerist values. The Adbusters Media Foundation’s “subvertisements” create a cognitive dissonance that alerts us to the power that ads have in defining our mental environment. For example, the billboard character “Joe Chemo” is a pale camel lying on a hospital bed hooked up to an intravenous line; the

25 Schor, The Overspent American, op. cit., p. 139.
26 Schor, The Overworked American, op. cit., p. 120.
cartoon parodies familiar cigarette ads, revealing the “uncool” side of the product. Adbusters is also active in securing media space for public use; currently, mass media ownership is dominated by the corporate sector. Due to the power of mass media on our psyches, reclaiming public access is instrumental in reshaping social norms.

Community Responses

The principle of subsidiarity maintains that problems should be solved at the most local level possible. Accordingly, global problems need global frameworks for working towards a solution. Problems that can be solved in diverse ways at local levels should be approached in that manner. In this section, we examine communities that have responded to issues of overwork at the local level, and we discuss ways to proliferate such approaches.

Social Capital

In his bestselling book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam documents the decline of civic participation in the US since the 1950s. Putnam’s premise is that there is value in connections between individuals (“social capital”), just as there is value in human, economic, and natural capital. In his follow-up book, *Better Together*, with Lewis Feldstein, Putnam documents case studies in which social capital has been successfully cultivated with positive results. For example, branch libraries in Chicago serve as multi-purpose community centers that are able to bridge socio-economic divisions and revitalize deteriorating communities.

Social capital is a clear example of decoupling affluence and well-being; it requires no material input and yet leads to increased quality of life. The satisfaction that humans derive from interpersonal relationships can be cultivated through the strategies described in the conclusion of *Better Together*, such as using urban planning, local media, and technology as mechanisms for bringing people together. Notably, the other examples in this section tend to cultivate social capital.

Local Currency Networks

Local currencies serve as a means of exchange within a clearly defined local community, and are not convertible into any other currency. Local currency networks draw upon a self-reliant, democratic, and environmentally friendly ethic in order to reduce the scale of economic life. For example, the Ithaca HOURS currency can be used to patronize 1,500 local businesses. The basic unit of currency, the HOUR, is equivalent to $10, or one hour of work. Labor that is paid for with HOURS, then, receives at least

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double the local minimum wage. HOURS enable shoppers to afford premium prices for locally-crafted goods and locally-grown organic food, thereby encouraging production of such high-quality goods. Other benefits include the interaction and community pride that results from local exchange.32

Local currency networks encourage creativity, local skills, and initiative. Money becomes “re-politicized” by revealing the connections that exist between producers, consumers, and the resources that are necessary for producing goods. Work and consumption become expressions of community belonging, instead of expressions of individualism. As a result, the “rat race” that leads to overwork is replaced by a desire to provide for the needs of a community.

The slogan “Think Globally, Act Locally” that is tied to the local currency movement is a reminder that individuals identify with communities at several different scales. Local currency encourages identification with a local community, but it does not eliminate identification globally. Local currency advocates recognize the value of participating in multiple currency networks, since it allows people to identify with communities of various scales.

**Slow Food**

Slow Food originated in Italy in 1986, and has since developed into an international movement. The movement uses food as a medium to slow down the pace of life and emphasize the value of local culture, home hospitality, good taste, and environmental sustainability.33 Table 5 presents the guiding principles of Slow Food USA.34

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Table 5. Guiding Principles of Slow Food USA

**Sustainability**
- recognizing the interdependence of people with one another and with our environment
- caring for the land and protecting biodiversity for today’s communities and future generations
- promoting pure food that is local, seasonal and organically grown

**Cultural Diversity**
- recognizing food as a language that expresses cultural diversity
- preserving the myriad traditions of the table
- cultivating and reinvigorating a sense of community and place

**Pleasure and Quality in Everyday Life**
- celebrating the diverse expressions of our earth's bounty
- appreciating and encouraging creativity, passion and beauty
- respecting and supporting artisans who grow, produce, market, prepare and serve wholesome food

**Inclusiveness**
- following democratic principles in a spirit of sharing and service
- educating members and others about Slow Food's mission
- dedicating ourselves to local cooperation and global collaboration

**Authenticity and Integrity**
- insuring our values are embodied by all staff, board members and convivium leaders
- manifesting these values in all of our events, projects and publications
- committing ourselves to partnerships with like-minded individuals and organizations

The “push” for Slow Food comes from the harried lifestyles for which the fast food epidemic has become an unhealthy symptom and a cause. The “pull” of Slow Food is simply taste: the pleasure derived from savoring locally-harvested, seasonal, and thoughtfully prepared foods is viewed to be greater than that gained from gobbling down a Big Mac. Other benefits of Slow Food are more environmentally sustainable agricultural techniques, healthier eating, preservation of local cultures and flavor, and the community-building aspects of sharing food.

**Public Space**

The concept of appropriate space can be extended to the sphere of urban planning. Effective public space, as illustrated in Putnam’s example of Chicago branch libraries, yields great benefits to communities. Parks provide spaces for interaction with neighbors, exercise, beauty, and recreation. There are clear environmental and social benefits from putting resources into common spaces instead of isolated, individual lawns and backyards, and from leaving open space instead of building on empty lots. Effective public transportation, as well, can be used to increase public interaction, save commute time, and conserve valuable space.

The way public spaces are designed is important. *A Pattern Language*, by Christopher Alexander, describes design concepts that improve our surroundings based
on proportion and orientation, not material intensity.\textsuperscript{35} Prioritizing high-quality, public spaces is a way to increase personal and social well-being in a manner decoupled from material wealth.

\textbf{Institutional Change}

Downshifters and VSMers take individual actions in order to break what Schor calls the cycle of work and spend. However, societal pressure for overwork is so strong that it is difficult to expect most individuals to take such a leap.\textsuperscript{36} In this section, we examine institutional changes that could realign incentives so that people work a healthy number of hours and place higher value on unpaid caretaking responsibilities.

\textit{Shared Work-Valued Care}

Eileen Appelbaum proposes a shift to a shared work-valued care model of labor, in which work is distributed evenly through families and society and caretaking is prioritized.\textsuperscript{37} In such a system, both men and women would have ample opportunity to work a reasonable number of hours at paid labor and also spend time attending to caretaking responsibilities. At a societal level, work would be evenly distributed, effectively ending unemployment and overwork. The policy decisions described in this section would encourage such a shift.

\textit{Legislating Shorter Hours}

In the last few decades, the Netherlands has made several policy decisions in favor of allowing workers to adjust hours worked. The Central Agreement of 1973, in response to high unemployment, set the goal of reaching a 40-hour workweek and 25 days paid annual vacation by 1975. In the 1980s, a severe economic recession caused unemployment to rise, leading to the 1982 Wassenar Agreement signed by employers, unions and government. The goal was to redistribute existing employment by reducing average weekly hours from 40 to 38. Between 1994 and 1997, many sectors of the economy negotiated a 36-hour workweek. Depending on the sector, working time reduction could be traded for flexibility, reduced premiums for working non-standard hours, working overtime, preservation of employment and/or wage moderation. In the year 2000, the Working Hours Adjustment Act gave employees the right to request shorter or longer hours. The employer must grant the employee’s request unless it


\textsuperscript{36} See Michael Maniates’ \textit{In Search of Consumptive Resistance} in Princen et al., \textit{Confronting Consumption}, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002, for a discussion of how the voluntary simplicity movement avoids confronting institutional arrangements that encourage overwork.

conflicts with “weighty company interests.” The Hours Adjustment Act clearly gave workers the advantage in negotiating hours with employers.\textsuperscript{38}

The result of policies in the Netherlands is that average contractual full-time working hours have strongly decreased in the last 50 years.\textsuperscript{39} However, studies show that, of workers that expressed desire to work fewer hours in the 1990s, only 15-20 percent realized fewer hours two years later. Barriers to reducing hours, such as income consequences, resistance from employers, company culture, and fear of diminishing career opportunities remain. Although policy changes are partly effective in improving the ability of workers to reduce hours, they are insufficient insofar as cultural norms and economic incentives for overwork persist.

\textit{Socialized Benefits}

Employment-based benefits, such as health insurance, serve as an incentive for employers to hire fewer employees, with longer hours. Socialized health insurance would relieve the pressure on employers to hire only full-time workers, and make it easier for workers to work part-time.\textsuperscript{40} Other benefits, such as maternal and paternal leave, sufficient and flexible vacation time, and flexible hours, can contribute to worker well-being.

\textit{Business Solutions}

The advantages to workers of reducing hours are clear; working less means more time for leisure and caretaking responsibilities. A societal benefit of a shorter workweek is a decline in unemployment, since chronic unemployment is linked to long hours.\textsuperscript{41} Additionally, businesses might benefit from rises in productivity, as workers are more satisfied and less tired at work. In addition, companies that make sincere efforts to improve the balance between work and personal life have an advantage in recruiting quality employees.

Because of these benefits to business, some companies have designed policies that allow flexibility of hours, generous paid vacation, and family leave. If such benefits are valued as much as salary, then economic incentives will have shifted from encouraging material gain to promoting more time for leisure and caretaking responsibilities. In response to hours reduction policies in the Netherlands, companies instituted job-sharing programs, through which job responsibilities are shared between two or more individuals.\textsuperscript{42}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[39] \textit{Ibid}.
\item[40] Schor, \textit{The Overworked American}, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 66-68.
\item[41] \textit{Ibid}.
\item[42] Baaijens and Schippers, \textit{op. cit.}
\end{footnotes}
IV. Conclusion

We have demonstrated that overwork and over-consumption are detrimental to human well-being. This is the “push” that exhorts us to make personal and social decisions that will limit rising baselines of affluence. There are also countless “pulls” that encourage us to cultivate the many aspects of well-being—community, security, spiritual growth, creativity, sense of place—in stead of focusing on materialistic goals.

Our overview of the causes of, and solutions for, overwork suggests that the problem must be tackled from a variety of angles. Personally, we can choose to slow down the pace of life, emphasize quality over quantity of goods, and prioritize relationships with place, family and community. Communities can choose to cultivate spaces and opportunities for healthy interaction and care for the local and global environment. As a society, we can create policies, economic incentives and institutional structures that value these aspects of life, which are currently not counted as economically valuable. Clearly, such changes require examination of our values and creative thinking about ways to express them. The examples we have presented illustrate successful confrontations with overwork, utilizing a variety of approaches. There are countless more success stories. By situating this variety of solutions within a larger framework for change, we can channel our efforts towards a common goal.