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## **“Real” work in the new capitalism**

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Can work in the new capitalism be meaningful? Drawing on recent qualitative research, this paper explores Boltanski and Chiapello’s (1999) argument that to effectively motivate workers, the new spirit of capitalism must link personal gains to the common good. As well as allowing for autonomy and the potential for selfrealisation, in order to inspire committed engagement from employees, jobs must be perceived to be “making a difference” to society. The paper draws on in-depth interviews with Australians from a range of occupations. It considers whether the interviewee’s enthusiasm for their work is connected to a perception that their work provides a meaningful contribution to society. It highlights the experiences of two highly paid professional women struggling to justify their involvement in the capitalist enterprise because their work does not seem to be producing any significant benefit to others; their work does not seem “real” and is therefore not fulfilling. The paper then considers these experiences in relation to perceptions of work and authenticity. It concludes that the pursuit of authenticity is not necessarily a narcissistic endeavour, and allows some individuals to work through questions of personal ethics and social justice, thereby mobilising critique of capitalism.