



Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation in the Contemporary World: Re-evaluating Its Relevance

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Abstract : This paper re-evaluates Karl Marx's theory of alienation, articulated initially in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, as a robust and enduring framework for understanding contemporary social ills. It demonstrates how the four dimensions of alienation—from product, activity, species-being, and fellow humans—continue to manifest in evolving capitalist structures, particularly within digital labour, the gig economy, and consumer culture. The analysis extends beyond Marx's industrial focus and explores how these phenomena are not merely subjective feelings but objective structures inherent to modern capitalism. By intersecting Marx's framework with other critical theories, the paper highlights the systemic nature of contemporary alienation. It concludes by emphasizing Marx's continued analytical power for understanding present challenges and their implications for informing practices aimed at societal transformation.

IndexTerms – Karl Marx, Alienation, Digital Capitalism, Consumerism, Dehumanization.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of alienation, a prominent term in twentieth-century social theory, refers to the fragmentation of entities that inherently belong together. The profound influence of the concept stems largely from Karl Marx's works, particularly the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which were first published in 1930ⁱ. According to Marx, alienation was not merely a subjective feeling of powerlessness; rather, it constituted an objective structure of experience. This phenomenon, intrinsic to capitalist society, is essential to capitalism's very existence.

Though significant societal transformations have taken place since Marx's time, including technological advancements and the emergence of new economic models, the underlying mechanisms of alienation persist and manifest in increasingly complex forms. This paper explores the continued significance of Marx's concept of alienation in understanding the complexities of contemporary capitalism. Through a critical re-examination of Marx's foundational framework, this paper highlights its continued analytical utility in understanding modern challenges. The centrality of alienation in Marx's thought is a recurring theme in scholarly literature, highlighting its importance as a critical framework for analysing the social consequences of capitalist production. This suggests that any comprehensive critique of contemporary capitalism must necessarily engage with the theory of alienation, as it describes the inherent structural reality of experience within this economic system.

I. The Foundations of Marx's Theory of Alienation

A. Philosophical Lineage: Hegel, Feuerbach, and the Genesis of Alienation

Marx's theory of alienation was deeply rooted in the philosophical traditions of his predecessors, most notably Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbachⁱⁱ. Hegel employed terms like *Entäußerung* (self-externalization) and *Entfremdung* (estrangement) to describe the Spirit's process of objectification, where it differentiates itself into various objects. In Hegel's view, alienation also referred to humanity's inability to recognize its essence within the Absolute, resulting in a state of "unhappy consciousness." He believed that modern state institutions, such as family, civil society, and the political state, could facilitate individual self-fulfilment, potentially overcoming objective alienation. However, subjective alienation, characterized by individuals feeling disconnected, persisted.

Marx reworked Hegel's concepts, grounding alienation in material reality. He rooted alienation and *Gattungswesen* (human species-essence) in concrete material conditions, rather than abstract spirituality. With regard to the pervasive subjective alienation in society, Marx took a stance contrary to Hegel and observed that the modern state had failed to overcome objective alienation.

Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of Christianity significantly influenced Marx's thought, particularly the idea that humans alienate themselves by projecting their best qualities onto an imaginary deity. Feuerbach argued that this projection leads to the suppression of the essential human characteristics and qualities. Marx built upon this concept, applying it to the capitalist system. He observed that in capitalism, people similarly alienate themselves through their labour, as their creative efforts and products become controlled by external forces. This shift in perspective from philosophical abstractions to the materialistic world emphasized the importance of socio-economic conditions in shaping human experience.

B. The Fourfold Alienation: From Product, Activity, Species-Being, and Fellow Humans

In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx analysed alienation as a multifaceted phenomenon with four interconnected dimensions. These dimensions collectively illustrate the profound estrangement experienced by workers.

1. **Alienation from the product of labour:** In a capitalist society, the product created by the worker's labour is immediately lost to the producer. That was why Marx stated that "objectification becomes the loss of the object." The more the worker produces, the more impoverished they become, as the product confronts them as an alien, hostile power that dominates and enslaves them. A contemporary illustration of this is low-wage workers producing consumer goods, such as electronics or clothing, that they can never really afford or enjoyⁱⁱⁱ.
2. **Alienation from the activity of labour:** Labor under capitalism becomes forced and involuntary, essential to the worker's essential being. It is not a freely chosen activity for self-expression or self-development; instead, it is performed merely as a means of earning a wage for survival. This compelled activity, Marx argued, "mortifies his body and ruins his mind^{iv}," leading to self-denial rather than self-fulfilment. The worker loses control over their own life-activity, as external forces direct it—be it a foreman, an engineer, the head office, or the impersonal demands of the market. This fundamental separation divides life into alien work and a compensatory "leisure" time. Here, activity gains a negative connotation and is often equated with compulsion.
3. **Alienation from one's species-being (Gattungswesen):** This dimension represents a profound loss of human essence. Marx argued that humans, unlike animals, are inherently creative, conscious, and social producers. They are capable of free and conscious activity that transcends immediate physical needs. Capitalism, however, perverts this essential human nature by reducing labour to a mere instrument for individual existence and subsistence, denying the opportunity for free, conscious, and creative activity.
4. **Alienation from fellow human beings:** This form of alienation is intrinsically linked to the other three. Alienated labour estranges individuals from themselves and from others as well. Social ties become fragmented and hostile. Individuals are conditioned to perceive others primarily as means to their own particular ends. This fosters competition rather than collaboration as it is a direct consequence of a system that prioritizes private ownership and profit over communal well-being.

Marx's concept of "species-being" and his assertion that alienation denies human essence reveal that his critique is rooted in a vision of human flourishing. He contends that capitalism distorts human nature, stifles creativity, autonomy, and self-realization. This normative perspective implies that a just society would prioritize human well-being and allow individuals to actualize their potential.

His notion that the four forms of alienation constitute a "single total reality" emphasizes their interconnectedness. The loss of control over products, labour, and human essence is causally linked, creating a self-reinforcing cycle. This systemic unity suggests that addressing alienation as an isolated system without challenging the underlying capitalist structure is futile. True human emancipation requires a holistic transformation of the system.

C. Objective Structure vs. Subjective Experience: Alienation as a Systemic Reality

Marx distinguished between subjective alienation (personal feelings of disconnection) and objective alienation (a systemic condition inherent to capitalism). Marx focused on the objective structure that arises from systemic forces that stifle human development and creativity. It's a structural issue, not a personal attitude. This objective alienation gives rise to subjective feelings of meaninglessness and worthlessness. Notably, Marx argued that both workers and capitalists are trapped in this system, albeit in different ways: workers through forced labour and capitalists through the relentless pursuit of profit.

Thus, Marx envisioned unalienated labour as freely chosen, meaningful, and fulfilling, where individuals realize themselves through their work, contribute to the well-being of others, and receive communal recognition. He emphasizes that alienation stems from capitalist social relations, not from the nature of work itself.

In stark contrast to this alienated reality, Marx envisioned unalienated or meaningful productive activity as freely chosen, involving genuine self-realization, intended to satisfy the needs of others, and appropriately appreciated by the community.¹⁵ This distinction underscores that alienation is not an inherent aspect of work itself, but a specific outcome of capitalist social relations.

II. Contemporary Manifestations of Alienation

Marx's theory of alienation, while rooted in the industrial capitalism of his time, provides a powerful lens through which to analyse contemporary forms of estrangement. This article contends that modern capitalist structures, characterized by rapid technological advancement, evolving labour markets, and pervasive consumer culture, present new and often more subtle manifestations of alienation.

A. Digital Capitalism and Labour: Algorithmic Control, Commodification of Data, and the Illusion of Autonomy

The rise of digital capitalism has led to a new form of exploitation, like digital labour, where workers are subject to algorithmic control and false autonomy^v. Social media platforms commodify personal experiences, relationships, and emotions, transforming them into products for consumption. This fuels alienation, as users seek validation through likes and comments, sacrificing genuine connections for superficial approval^{vi}.

However, a stark contrast exists between traditional industrial labour and digital labour. In industrial settings, workers are aware of their labour's value, whereas in digital labour's "ambient production," the value generated is often obscured^{vii}, leaving users unaware of their data's full worth. This hidden nature of alienation doesn't diminish its structural significance. It enables the digital platforms to profit from users' unconscious production of value.

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly Large Language Models (LLMs), marks a new stage in labour objectification and mechanization. These systems embody "dead labour," converting human knowledge and data into commodities controlled by capital. AI's tendency to "hallucinate" or produce false information reveals the consequences of machines embodying human knowledge. They are a testimony to the Hegelian Marxian truth^{viii}, where machines objectify human knowledge. When exploited for profit, these systems alienate the very humans whose data and labour form their foundation.

Contemporary forms of alienation, particularly in digital and gig economies, represent a deepening and diffusion of alienation beyond traditional industrial settings, often making it less visible or overtly coercive. This evolution is characterized by:

- Subtle coercion through technology: Modern capitalism's algorithmic control and "false freedom" imply a more pervasive form of coercion embedded within technological systems rather than overt physical compulsion.
- Unaware value creation: The "ambient production" of data means individuals are often unaware of the value they are creating and from which they are alienated.
- Commodification of identity and relationships: Social media transforms personal interactions and identity into marketable products, extending alienation into previously non-economic spheres.
- Diffusion into personal lives: Alienation seeps into personal relationships, self-perception, and subjective experience, affecting individuals more comprehensively.
- Deepening impact on individuals: This form of alienation affects individuals' sense of self, making it a more profound, though often less consciously felt, reality.

Table 1: Comparison of Alienation in Industrial vs. Digital Labor

Dimension of Alienation	Industrial Labour (Marx's Original Context)	Digital Labour (Contemporary Context)
From Product	Tangible physical product owned by a capitalist; the worker loses control and ownership.	Intangible data, content, and identity owned by platforms; value extracted from user-generated content.
From Activity	Forced, repetitive, physically/mentally debilitating activity; dictated by capitalism.	Apparent voluntary activity subject to algorithmic control; "false freedom" and hidden labour.
From Species-Being	The worker is reduced to a machine-like cog, self-denial, and human creativity is suppressed.	Identity commodified; constant validation-seeking; emotional labour; authenticity eroded.
From Fellow Humans	Direct class division; overt competition among workers.	Platform-mediated isolation, lack of a geographical centre for collective action, and social ties become transactional.
Overall Nature of Exploitation/Control	Direct, visible exploitation through wage-labour; surplus value extracted from physical goods.	Exploitation is often concealed through "ambient production"; value is extracted from data, attention, and user engagement/use-value.

B. The Gig Economy: Precarity, Disconnection, and the Fragmented Workforce

The gig economy embodies novel forms of alienation, marked by intensified precarity, unstable income, and a fundamental disconnection from traditional employment frameworks. Gig workers frequently encounter structural barriers that hinder their ability to collectivize and negotiate better working conditions^{ix}. The absence of a physical workspace and personal connection with the company exacerbates this issue, rendering collective interaction and solidarity challenging.

The gig economy's business model often deliberately fosters workforce fragmentation, maintaining workers' powerlessness and suppressing wages. The supposed flexibility of gig work can be deceptive, as workers are often subject to algorithmic rules and platform nudges that limit their autonomy.

Algorithmic control plays a significant role in moderating job autonomy, directly contributing to work alienation and diminishing workers' volition and self-control. Furthermore, despite providing essential services, many gig workers struggle to earn a living wage, often receiving compensation below the minimum wage. This economic vulnerability, combined with systemic barriers to collective action, perpetuates a profound sense of powerlessness and estrangement among gig workers.

C. Consumerism and the Commodification of Identity: Seeking Fulfilment in Acquisition

In today's consumerist society, people's sense of self is increasingly defined by their purchasing power rather than their inherent worth. This reduction of identity to material possessions and buying power fosters a deep-seated desire for fulfilment through acquisition^x. However, this pursuit of satisfaction through goods and services often leads to a sense of hollowness and disconnection.

The Frankfurt School's theorists, such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, shed light on how mass culture pacifies the populace. Consumerism creates a false sense of fulfilment, masking underlying feelings of alienation and disconnection from meaningful relationships and experiences. It distracts the individual from systemic inequalities. Marx himself expressed a paradoxical view that "each act of consumption eats away at the soul" by transforming relationships between people into relationships between things. He termed this process as commodity fetishism.

The commodification of human experience and identity represents a critical evolution of Marx's concept of alienation from the product, indicating a more profound penetration of capitalist logic into the human essence. As we have already seen, Marx's concept of alienation from the product primarily focused on tangible goods produced by labour. But contemporary analysis demonstrates that under advanced capitalism, "identity," "personal experiences," "friendships," and "emotions" are increasingly transformed into "products to be consumed by others. This is a qualitative shift from merely alienating the *output* of labour to alienating the *very essence* of human being and social interaction.

This phenomenon represents a profound shift in the nature of alienation, where individuals' very essence and humanity are affected. As people seek validation through social media and measure their self-worth by their purchasing power, their subjective experience becomes a product to be consumed and exploited.

D. Automation and Artificial Intelligence: Deskilling and Disempowerment

The rapid advancement of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) poses a significant threat to human labour, leading to widespread deskilling and disempowerment of workers^{xi}. From a Marxist perspective, machinery, when integrated into capitalist production, confronts the worker as a calcified piece of knowledge. Technology embodies collective knowledge and social intelligence, which is then used to dominate labour. This represents a privatization and commodification of the "general intellect," where human knowledge and processes are transformed into data that can be exploited for profit.

As AI becomes increasingly integrated into production, it further entrenches the alienation of workers. While historical analyses like that of Ricardo have expressed concerns about technological unemployment, Marx's framework suggested that capitalism would continuously create new job opportunities. However, the contemporary reality highlights the ongoing tension between technological advancement and its impact on the quality and availability of human work. As machines and algorithms increasingly perform tasks that were previously the domain of humans, it raises fundamental questions about the future of work, the distribution of wealth, and the human cost of technological progress.

E. Organizational Dehumanization in Modern Workplaces

In modern workplaces, employees often experience organizational dehumanization^{xii}, feeling reduced to mere objects or tools to achieve organizational goals. This phenomenon is deeply rooted in capitalist systems, where the pursuit of profit and productivity takes precedence over employee well-being and personal subjectivity.

This concept echoes Max Weber's idea of bureaucracy as an "iron cage," where rigid rules and norms lead to impersonal interactions and a sense of disconnection from one's actions. In such systems, individuals are trapped, and their humanity is often sacrificed for the sake of efficiency and productivity. The consequences of organizational dehumanization can be profound, leading to feelings of estrangement, demotivation, and disempowerment among employees.

F. Social and Personal Estrangement: Loneliness, Identity Crises, and the Experience of Aging

Alienation has expanded beyond its economic roots, now encompassing various forms of social and personal disconnection in modern life. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the growing prevalence of loneliness and isolation among vulnerable populations, such as the elderly. The loss of social connections due to retirement, the death of peers, and physical limitations can lead to decreased social networks and feelings of disconnection. Furthermore, the transition from active work life to retirement, where work is often central to an individual's identity and self-worth, can precipitate a loss of purpose and identity.

Economic marginalization in old age, resulting from inadequate pensions or savings, can exacerbate feelings of estrangement and financial insecurity. The societal emphasis on youth and beauty propagated through media and cinema can also intensify self-alienation among older adults. In the workplace, alienation continues to manifest as a sense of disconnection from one's job, colleagues, or organization due to poor working conditions, lack of recognition, conflicting values, or meaningless work. These forms of alienation underscore the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the human experience and the importance of fostering connections, purpose, and meaning in life.

III. Intersecting Perspectives and Critiques of Alienation

Marx's theory of alienation, while foundational, exists within a broader landscape of critical social thought that offers complementary, and sometimes contrasting, perspectives on modern societal ills.

A. Durkheim's Anomie: The Breakdown of Social Solidarity

Émile Durkheim's concept of anomie^{xiii} refers to a state of normlessness and crisis in social cohesion, arising from the weakening of social norms and moral regulation. Rapid societal changes and the extensive division of labour in industrial societies often trigger this phenomenon. Both Durkheim and Marx identified a shared feature of modernity: a fundamental "breakdown of the social itself" and an "absence of a social and moral setting" that affects individuals' self-respect and opportunities for collaboration. Both observed the disruptive effects of industrial society and the growth of capitalism.

Durkheim's analysis highlights the tension between mechanical solidarity, which is based on homogeneity and shared values, and organic solidarity, which is based on interdependence and specialization. When moral regulation fails, organic solidarity can give way to anomie. It is characterized by a breakdown in social ties and a sense of disconnection among individuals.

In contrast to Marx, who focused on the alienating effects of capitalism and the loss of human potential, Durkheim's concern was the erosion of social solidarity and moral ties. By examining the relationship between the individual and society, Durkheim's concept of anomie remains a valuable framework for understanding the consequences of social change and the importance of social integration.

B. Weber's Rationalization: The "Iron Cage" of Bureaucracy

Max Weber argued that the increasing dominance of formalistic rationality, characterized by efficiency, calculability, and predictability, is the primary driver of alienation in modern society. This rationalization process permeates all aspects of life, leading to the entrapment of individuals within a bureaucratic "iron cage" of rules and regulations. Weber contended that this advancement in formal rationality comes at the expense of substantive rationality, which includes the pursuit of diverse human goals, such as a happy family life.

A key distinction between Weber and Marx lies in their identification of the root cause of alienation. Weber saw rationalization as the primary source, whereas Marx attributed it to private property and the capitalist system. Weber's perspective challenges Marx's view that a classless society without private property would eliminate alienation, as he believed that bureaucratic rules and formalistic rationality would persist even in a socialist society.

C. Foucault's Power/Knowledge: Disciplinary Society and Subjective Formation

Michel Foucault's analysis of power was a radical departure from traditional understandings. He views power as productive, diffused, and embodied in discourse, knowledge, and "regimes of truth"^{xiv}. According to Foucault, power constitutes individuals, shaping their thoughts, actions, and identities. For him, power is not just something external that acts upon people; rather, it is a complex network of forces that shape and form individuals. Individuals or institutions do not just wield power; instead, it flows through society, influencing how people think, act, and understand themselves. Thus, modern society operates through "disciplinary power," where individuals self-discipline and conform to societal norms through subtle mechanisms of surveillance and internalized expectations.

Foucault's work can be seen as parallel to the concept of alienation, although he doesn't use the term in the same way as Marx. Instead, Foucault's analysis highlights how individuals become estranged from their authentic selves or lose control over their subjectivity due to the pervasive influence of power relations and dominant ideologies. His work suggests that alienation can occur even in the absence of overt economic exploitation, through the subtle mechanisms of power that shape individuals' perceptions of reality.

D. The Frankfurt School and Post-Marxist Debates: Reification, Mass Culture, and the Human Nature Controversy

The Frankfurt School, a group of influential critical theorists, reinterpreted and expanded Marxian concepts to understand modern society. Key figures like Georg Lukács, Erich Fromm, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Jürgen Habermas contributed to a nuanced understanding of alienation.

Georg Lukács introduced the concept of 'reification' (*Verdinglichung*)^{xv} as an extension of Marx's commodity fetishism, where social relations take on the character of things, and human labour appears objective and dominant, governed by external laws. In a reified society, human labour and relationships are reduced to commodities, stripped of their subjective and personal aspects. Here, social

interactions are determined by market forces, and human labour is reduced to a quantifiable, exchangeable commodity, rather than a creative expression of individuality.

Erich Fromm viewed alienation through a psychological lens, defining it as an individual's subjective experience of being subdued by their work products and disconnected from their true self.

As mentioned in section C, Adorno and Horkheimer, in their seminal work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, argued that mass culture serves as a tool for social control, absorbing leisure time and inhibiting critical thought, further entrenching alienation.

Jürgen Habermas expanded on this by describing the "colonization of the lifeworld" by the "system," where instrumental rationality invades the life world. The lifeworld is the realm of human experience where individuals engage in meaningful interactions, share values, and negotiate norms. It is the domain where people seek understanding, mutual understanding, and consensus. The system refers to the economic and administrative spheres, driven by instrumental rationality, efficiency, and profit. When the system colonizes the lifeworld, instrumental rationality and efficiency become the dominant logic, displacing communicative action and shared values. This leads to a loss of meaning, as individuals' experiences and relationships are reduced to mere commodities or instrumental calculations.

A key contention in critical theory revolves around the concept of human nature, particularly in relation to Louis Althusser's critique of essentialism. Althusser argued that Marx's mature work rejected the idea of a universal human essence, viewing it as an ideological construct. According to Althusser, Marx's "sixth Thesis on Feuerbach" marks a break from his earlier humanist views, suggesting that human essence is merely the product of social relations.

However, scholars, like Chris Byron, disagree with this interpretation. They argue that a trans-historical human nature^{xvi} is necessary to explain alienation. This implies that certain fundamental characteristics, needs, or properties define human beings across different cultures, historical periods, and societies. They feel that Marx's sixth thesis can be seen as clarifying, rather than rejecting, the idea of a universal human essence. The notion of trans-historical human nature is crucial because it implies that there is a stable, enduring essence or set of characteristics that can be alienated or distorted under certain social or economic conditions. The opposite of this is the relativistic view, which sees human nature as entirely shaped by historical, cultural, or social factors. A mention of this distinction is crucial here, as it determines whether Marx's theory is universally applicable or historically contingent.

If human nature is purely historical and fluid, the concept of alienation loses its normative force. In contrast, preserving the idea of a trans-historical human nature allows Marx's theory to serve as a basis for a universal call for societal transformation aimed at realizing human potential. This debate has significant implications for understanding the scope and applicability of Marx's critique of alienation.

Despite its widespread influence, Marx's theory of alienation has faced critiques.

Lack of unity: thinkers like Allen Wood argue that Marx's theory encompasses too broad a range of phenomena, making it difficult to define and apply coherently.

Overly broad application: Others contend that the concept has become too vague and empty due to its indiscriminate application.

Flawed assumptions: Some critics argue that Marx's understanding of human nature and consciousness is fundamentally flawed, rendering his concept of alienation untenable.

Despite these criticisms, scholars like Dan Swain argue that alienation remains a relevant and practical concept for understanding the negative consequences of capitalist production. They contend that Marxism provides a valuable framework for analysing and critiquing the root causes of estrangement and disempowerment, and for pursuing a socialist alternative.

Thus, we see that Marx's theory of alienation stands out from other critical theories due to its grounding in the material world. This materialist foundation implies that overcoming alienation requires a fundamental transformation of the economic system, rather than just addressing social or psychological symptoms. This approach emphasizes the need for systemic change, rather than mere reforms or individual adjustments.

IV. Pathways to Overcoming Alienation

Addressing the pervasive nature of alienation in the contemporary world requires a multifaceted approach. It should include systemic transformations and localized initiatives. Various movements and proposed models aim to mitigate or overcome the estrangement inherent in capitalist societies.

A. Worker Cooperatives and the Pursuit of Democratic Ownership

Worker cooperatives^{xvii} are an approach to address inequality, alienation, and community disempowerment by placing ownership and control in the hands of the workers themselves. In these cooperatives, workers set policies, determine wages, and share profits,

promoting a sense of collective belonging and agency. They serve as practical training grounds for workers to participate in decision-making processes. They also often lead to improved working conditions.

B. Universal Basic Income (UBI) as a Mitigating Strategy and Universal Social Engagement

Universal Basic Income (UBI)^{xviii} is a concept gaining traction as a possible solution to various socioeconomic issues. By providing an unconditional income floor to all citizens, UBI aims to mitigate technological unemployment and offer a safety net in a rapidly changing labor market. It could also enhance workers' bargaining power by providing an "exit option" to refuse exploitative work and demand better conditions.

This shift in power dynamics could lead to a redefinition of the balance between government and citizens, empowering individuals with greater economic autonomy. Additionally, UBI holds broader implications for social justice, including the potential to support the redistribution and valuation of unpaid work—which is disproportionately carried out by women—thereby promoting gender equity. By addressing poverty, inequality, and labour market insecurity, UBI has the potential to bring about significant positive change.

UBI can ultimately be taken to the stage of USE (Universal Social Engagement). While UBI provides an unconditional income floor to all citizens, focusing on poverty alleviation and economic security, USE focuses on employment and skill development, providing opportunities for workers to engage in productive work and upskill.

Universal Social Engagement (USE) thus aims to create an ecosystem connecting the supply and demand sides of the labour market. The government's role shifts from employment provider to intermediary, facilitating and regulating the connection between skilled and semi-skilled workers with matching opportunities.

C. Skilling as a Social Security Framework

Skilling programs can serve as a social security framework, empowering workers and mitigating feelings of alienation in the labour force. By providing opportunities for skill development and upskilling, workers can enhance their employability, increase their value in the job market, and reduce their vulnerability to job insecurity. As workers acquire new skills and knowledge, they are more likely to engage in meaningful work that utilizes their abilities, promoting a sense of purpose and fulfilment.

This, in turn, can boost their self-esteem and confidence, enabling them to take ownership of their career development and make informed choices about their professional growth. By investing in skilling programs, governments and organizations can reduce alienation, mitigate its adverse effects, and promote social mobility. A skilled and motivated workforce can drive economic growth and competitiveness, ultimately leading to a more fulfilling and productive work experience.

D. Community Building and Fostering Social Connection

Building community is essential to combating social alienation, loneliness, and isolation. Fostering inclusive communities through intergenerational programmes, community engagement initiatives, and valuing the contributions of older individuals can help integrate vulnerable populations. Therapeutic approaches can also play a role in overcoming negative beliefs and behaviours associated with social isolation. Additionally, community service activities can have a positive impact on adolescents, reducing alienation and improving behaviour. At a grassroots level, involvement in community service activities has demonstrated positive benefits for adolescents, including reduced alienation, improved school behaviour, and better integration into adult society^{xix}.

E. Workplace Reforms: Enhancing Communication, Collaboration, and Professional Development

Within existing organizational structures, specific reforms can be implemented to combat workplace alienation. Recognizing the problem of workplace alienation, encouraging open and honest communication where employees feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas, fostering collaboration and teamwork through shared projects, providing opportunities for professional development, recognizing and rewarding employee contributions, and encouraging social interactions outside of work to build relationships could be some possible steps taken to combat workplace alienation. These reforms aim to create perceptions of powerfulness, meaningfulness, and belonging, ultimately driving self-realization among employees.

Conclusion

Karl Marx's concept of alienation remains remarkably relevant in understanding the complex forms of estrangement that exist in contemporary society. Its analytical power extends to various aspects of modern life, including digital labour, the gig economy, consumer culture, and social isolation. Marx's framework highlights the systemic and objective nature of these issues, revealing that they go beyond individual subjective experiences.

The core dimensions of alienation—separation from product, activity, species-being, and fellow humans—persist across different eras of history, highlighting the theory's enduring relevance. To truly address alienation and achieve human liberation, fundamental systemic transformation is necessary, rather than just relying on individual solutions or superficial reforms.

Future research on alienation could explore new avenues, and interdisciplinary engagement with other critical theories will be crucial in developing a comprehensive understanding of contemporary estrangement. By building on Marx's insights, we can work towards creating a more holistic approach to promoting human flourishing.

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