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Doing Things with “Work”

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We often equate work with paid employment and formal work organizations. Yet the term “work” is not just used in this way. Work is used to express a normative judgement about an activity or organization. It is a term used to split good activities and organizations from bad ones. As such it is a term that that can be used to reframe material and financial problems, to manage role conflicts across different settings, to complete identity projects and to provide organization to structured social interactions. To illustrate the ways that people use “work” to do these things, the paper presents in-depth interview data with semi-professional creative workers. The analysis identifies the apparently contrasting discourses of good and bad work that seem to exist in equilibrium for these workers.

Nick Ellis is Professor of Marketing Management at Durham University in the North East of England. He joined Durham in June 2011. His work focuses on inter-organizational relationships and identity construction in business-to-business (B2B) contexts. He explores marketing and purchasing management, industrial networks, supply chain ethics and entrepreneurship. His broadly interpretivist research approach embraces marketing and organization studies, with publications in leading journals across both disciplines. He has written a sole-authored book on B2B marketing and a co-authored text on critical marketing. Prior to joining Durham, he worked at the University of Leicester where he was Director of Postgraduate Studies. He also worked for several years with the HMV retail group in sales, marketing and purchasing.