

Business English News 33 – Modern Employment Practices

Discussion Questions

1. What is the current job situation in your country? Are there many job opportunities?
2. What advice would you give to a new graduate looking for work?
3. What solutions would you suggest for your job market to help improve it in the near future?

Transcript

The world quietly passed a significant **milestone** recently – the global **jobless** total **surpassed** 200 million people, according to a study by the UN. To **put that into perspective**, that's 30 million more without work than **at the height of** the recession in 2008. As CBC News reports, these figures could have **grave implications** for the future:

This is a **shocker** on its own, but even more **ominous** is the growing **precariousness** of the job situation for those that have them. According to the study, the **overwhelming majority** of people on the planet struggle with temporary work, informal or illegal jobs, **long spells** of unemployment and unpaid **family work**. In other words, most are caught in a **disadvantageous spiral** where **exploitation** is a real risk.

In the UK, employers are using **controversial zero-hour contracts** which **stipulate** that workers must be available for work but have no guaranteed paid hours each week. As one union leader puts it, economic recovery is at risk if the current trends continue:

We cannot build a secure recovery **off the back** of zero-hour contracts and weaker **employment rights**. If we don't create more **decent** jobs, **inequality** will continue to **soar** and the economy risks **running out of steam**.

As graduates begin to enter the **workforce**, job experience becomes a **priority**. **On the surface**, **internships** seem like a **logical option**, though this too has become an additional step on an increasingly **wobbly career ladder**. The Guardian explains:

Supporters of internships say they offer companies an extra **stage** for **vetting** new employees and provide graduates with valuable experience. On the other hand, internships – especially when unpaid – are just an easy way for businesses to exploit **desperate job seekers** in a **tight employment market**. Some companies are now even charging interns for the pleasure of working for them.

But it's not only about the lack of **job stability** or experience. This rise in the '**precariat**' may lead to a lost generation of youths. As a report carried out by the United Way in Toronto suggests, this uncertain future has far-reaching effects:

Precarious work leads not only to **poverty** but also an increase in welfare and mental health issues. If left **unchecked**, the **social consequences** of these changes in our labor market will not only affect the ability of people to build **stable** and **fulfilling** lives, but it will threaten our region's capacity to develop a competitive workforce.

In China, a shift toward the **trades**, rather than competing to **gain** admission to a top university has begun among this year's 7.5mil **grads**. As the South China Morning Post explains, this has led the government to **rethink** its approach:

Unless one has graduated from an **elite university**, employment prospects are uncertain. Yet, graduates of **vocational colleges** land jobs **readily**. In this context, Beijing is considering **rebalancing** its mix and may convert 600 universities to **refocus** on vocational education.

At the United Nations International Labor Organization, Mr. Guy Ryder, recently **called** for a global debate on the future of work. Moving forward, one can only hope for a change to the **status quo**:

The issues of jobs, equity, sustainability of **human security**, **labor mobility**, **social dialogue** and much more that need to be **tackled** in a future of work **initiative** are almost **by definition** the key policy issues of our time; issues that governments and social partners everywhere are **grappling with**.

A recent study by the IMF concluded that **income inequality** is harming economies worldwide, calling it the "**defining challenge** of our time." The study **drew attention to** global inequality, dismissed "**trickle-down**" **economics**, and urged governments to target policies toward the bottom 20 percent of their citizens, stating:

More **lax** hiring and firing **regulations**, lower **minimum wages relative to** the **median wage**, and **less prevalent collective bargaining** and trade unions are associated with higher market inequality. If the **income share** of the top 20% increases, then GDP growth actually declines, suggesting that the benefits do not trickle down. In contrast, an increase in the income share of the bottom 20% is associated with higher GDP growth.

Naturally, these changes will take time, but the concern is that not enough is being done to stop this move into **uncharted waters**. As the Huffington Post concludes:

Unemployment is the **fuel** for **social unrest** and even **revolution**. Today's so-called "jobless recovery" is not something that GDP growth or further improvements in the **business cycle** can change. Growing unemployment is not **cyclical**; it's **secular** and **structural**. No one knows how to fix this **unprecedented** situation.

Vocabulary

Milestone: An important mark or result; "The Supreme Court's decision on Obamacare will stand as a milestone in its 226-year history."

Jobless: Those who are unemployed or without a job.

To surpass: To exceed or be superior to; "China's GDP is expected to surpass the USA by 2025."

To put something into perspective: To compare with something similar to give a clearer, more accurate idea; "You can put your worries into perspective when you realise how many people in the world are so much worse off than you."

At the height of something: The top or peak of a situation; "She was at the height of her career when she suddenly decided to go back to university to study law."

Grave: Serious, severe, or critical; "Economists have taken a very grave view of the future of the financial markets."

Implication: Future effect or repercussion; "The implication of Greece leaving the Euro is completely uncertain; nobody knows what will happen!"

Shocker: Something that surprises; "It's a shocker, for sure. None of us thought we'd be laid off today."

Ominous: Pessimistic or unpromising; "I don't have such an ominous view of the future. I think things will improve quite quickly."

Precariousness/Precarious: Instability unpredictability, or uncertain; "We didn't realize how precarious the situation was for our business until it was too late."

Overwhelming majority: The clear majority; "An overwhelming majority of us voted for the new labour agreement. It was nearly 75% in favor."

Long spells: Extended periods; "After long spells without a reply, Stefano finally had 4 companies call him for an interview."

Family work: Working for your own family in a shop or agriculture. This work may be unpaid, or low paid, and unregistered.

Disadvantageous: Lacking an advantage or benefit; "The new employment scheme is disadvantageous to both women and new graduates. We need to correct it immediately."

Spiral: a progressive rise or fall of prices, wages, etc., each responding to an upward or downward stimulus provided by a previous one; "If Greece returns to the Drachma, they may face an inflationary spiral, where prices will rise significantly."

Exploitation: Treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work; "His refusal to pay his staff minimum wage was absolutely exploitation in my opinion."

Controversial: Something that is subject to controversy or prolonged public debate; "It's a controversial decision, but it's impossible to make all of the people happy all of the time."

Zero-hour contracts: Also known as casual contracts, zero-hour contracts allow employers to hire staff with no guarantee of work.

To stipulate: To require or demand; "The terms of our agreement stipulate that we must charge a flat rate for this kind of work."

Off the back of: To use something as support, or immediately following; "The change in policy comes off the back the old CEO being replaced."

Employment rights: Federal and/or state laws that, over time, have established various rules that govern the employer-employee relationship.

Decent: Reasonable, acceptable, or rational; "Dean was offered a decent salary and work conditions in a different sector, so he decided to try something new."

Inequality: Disparity, disproportion, or imbalance; "The OECD has asked for financial sector reforms to fight inequality and lift economic growth in developed nations."

To soar: Increase rapidly and substantially; "Apple's profits have soared since they developed the iPhone."

To run out of steam: To lose momentum and fail; "Toward the end of the meeting, Alberto seemed to run out of steam, leaving us with no summary or conclusion."

Workforce: All the people working or available to work, as in a nation, company, industry, or on a project.

Priority: The most urgent or important thing that must be done; "Our priority is to increase profits for the shareholders, plain and simple."

On the surface: Superficially, to all outward appearances; "On the surface, it seems like a good plan. If we check the details though, there are some big problems."

Internship: A temporary position with an emphasis on on-the-job training rather than merely employment, and it can be paid or unpaid.

Logical option: A choice or decision that makes (the most) sense.

Wobbly: Unstable, uncertain, or unsure; "The Shanghai stock index has been very wobbly over the last 3 months, see huge drops and huge gains."

Career ladder: The progression from entry level positions to higher levels of pay, skill, responsibility, or authority.

Stage: Platform, area, or environment; "The stage was set for critical negotiations between Greece and the Troika."

To vet: make a careful and critical examination/analysis of someone or something; "Presidential nominees spend a considerable amount of time vetting their vice presidential candidates."

Desperate: Without hope, or willing to sacrifice greatly to achieve something; "Dexter spoke to the HR manager was desperate to get some help solving the conflict with his co-worker."

Job seeker: Someone who is actively looking for a job.

Tight: Competitive or without much ability to move; "The competition for the head trainer role will be really tight; a number of really qualified people have applied."

Employment market: Where employers look and compete for workers and in which workers look and compete for employment; "The longer people have been unemployed, the harder it is for them to compete in the labour market."

Job stability: Having employment that is secure and is unlikely to change.

Precariat: A combination of the words "precarious" and "proletariat", meaning those who are trapped in precarious lives with neither material nor psychological welfare.

Poverty: The state of being extremely poor; "Millions of families worldwide are living in poverty."

Unchecked: Not controlled or not prevented from happening; "How did these problems go unchecked for so long?"

Social consequences: The impact of an event or action on a social environment.

Stable: Resistant to sudden change or deterioration; "A stable economy is the aim of every government."

Fulfilling: Gratifying, satisfying, or enjoyable; "Although I find my job very fulfilling, I'm always looking for ways to continue to grow both personally and professionally."

Trades (professions): A job requiring manual skills and special training or education; "Trades such as electricians and plumbers are needed in almost every aspect of society."

To gain: To obtain, achieve, or secure; "After I spent 3 hours on the phone with the IT department, I was finally able to gain access to the company intranet."

Grad: Graduate, someone who has completed a course or program; "In North America, many university grads take a year off to travel."

To rethink: To reconsider, reassess, or reexamine; "With oil prices so low, we needed to rethink our business plan for this year."

Elite university: A university with an extremely high level of instruction or reputation; also known as a 'top university' or 'key university'.

Vocational college: A higher-level learning institution that specializes in teaching technical or trades skills.

To land: To win or secure; "We landed a huge new project with Samsung last week!"

Readily: Promptly, quickly, or easily; "With technology readily available to many people, communication has changed significantly in the last 10 years."

To rebalance: To return something to balance; "We used the profits to rebalance our portfolio with about 55% US stocks, 20% foreign, and 25% bonds and cash."

To refocus: To change the emphasis or direction of one's attention; "I know she has some personal troubles right now, but Sheila needs to refocus her attention on her work."

To call for: To request or ask for; "A meeting will be called for the end of the month in order to discuss a potential merge with another marketing firm."

Status quo: The current situation or the way things are now.

Human security: providing stability and safety for the citizens of a country.

Labor mobility: The ease with which workers are able to change job or work in different economies.

Social dialogue: Communication among members of a society intended to bring change or raise awareness to a certain cause.

To tackle: To try to deal with or solve a problem or issue; "The new president says that he'll tackle the national debt over his four-year term."

Initiative: The readiness or ability to begin action; "The young worker showed a lot of initiative in making an important decision that was required while his boss was unavailable."

By definition: Because of the nature of someone or something.

To grapple with: To try hard to understand a difficult idea or to solve a difficult problem; "The government continued to grapple with the issue of public transport."

Income inequality: The extent to which income is distributed in an uneven manner among a population.

Defining challenge of our time: A difficult task or obstacle that makes that period unique.

To draw attention to: To bring someone's focus or attention to something; "I would like to draw your attention to the data on the bottom of the screen."

Trickle-down economics: The theory that economic benefits provided to upper income level earners will help society as a whole by providing wealth for lower income earners and creating jobs.

Lax regulation: Policy that is not strict or severe.

Minimum wage: The lowest wage (usually hourly) permitted by law; "In the US, the minimum wage is \$7.25/hr for all states."

Relative to: In comparison with; "Relative to its size and population, the state of Oregon has a huge number of start-ups."

Median wage: The boundary between what the highest 50% of earners are paid and what the lowest 50% of earners are paid.

Less prevalent: Very common in a particular place or among a particular group; "This negative trend is less prevalent among the smaller companies in our sector."

Collective bargaining: A group that negotiates contracts and work conditions between an employer and their employees.

Income share: The proportion of income that a certain group receives compared to everyone else.

Uncharted waters: A situation that is not familiar and may be dangerous; "If Greece leaves the EU, the global financial markets will see itself in uncharted waters."

Fuel: The cause of an event or situation, or what can cause it to become bigger or more serious; "Increased investment in business is the fuel for economic recovery."

Social unrest: The state of when the normal social order becomes disrupted; rebellion, revolt, riots can all be considered forms of social unrest.

Revolution: The sudden, sometimes violent, overthrow of an existing system.

Business cycle: The changes in economic activity that an economy experiences over a period of time.

Cyclical: Recurrent, or occurring in cycles; "The cyclical nature of Christmas decorations means we only see these shops for a short period."

Secular: Related to things that are not religious, spiritual, or sacred.

Structural: Related to the existing political or economic structure; "Correcting structural unemployment requires a lot of reforms to a country's economy."

Unprecedented: Something that has never occurred before and is without precedent; "Such an action by a prime minister is unprecedented."

Language Review

A. Collocations

Make collocations from this lesson by matching words from each column below.

1. Long	A. Inequality	
2. Logical	B. Mobility	
3. Collective	C. Consequences	
4. Social	D. Option	
5. Business	E. Spells	
6. Income	F. Waters	
7. Uncharted	G. Cycle	
8. Labor	H. Bargaining	

B. Review Quiz

1. "The only _____ in the contract is that we must give them 60 days notice if we want to change providers."
 - a. gravity
 - b. controversy
 - c. stipulation
 - d. fulfillment
2. "What we need is a series of _____ reforms, not just simple policy changes."
 - a. Social
 - b. Shocker
 - c. Secular
 - d. Structural
3. "The head of FIFA has been _____ in a very complex scandal that is sure to damage the entire organization."
 - a. Exploited
 - b. Implicated
 - c. Prioritized
 - d. Stabilized
4. Which of the following scenarios would most likely occur after long-term unemployment in an economy?
 - a. Social unrest begins
 - b. Social dialogue reduced
 - c. Business cycle adjusted
 - d. Minimum wage changed

5. Which of the following expressions is synonymous with "at a first glance"?
- Off the back of
 - On the surface
 - At the height of
 - Out of steam
6. Given the situation, the entire financial model needs to be _____; there's just too much inequality today.
- Rethink
 - Rethinks
 - Rethought
 - Rethinking
7. "It's an ominous sign when we see these exchange rates _____ out of control like this."
- Spirals
 - Spiraled
 - Spiral
 - Spiraling
8. Which of the following terms is frequently used in a football/soccer context?
- Soar
 - Tackle
 - Surpass
 - Wobble
9. "I've been _____ with this problem for months, and the only solution I can see is reducing our team by about 30 people."
- Grappling
 - Stipulating
 - Refocusing
 - Gaining
10. "Profits have _____ in slowly, but we're still in start-up mode, so we know it will take time to develop the business."
- Cycled
 - Fueled
 - Unchecked
 - Trickled

Answers

A. Collocations

1. Long	A. Inequality	Long Spells
2. Logical	B. Mobility	Logical Option
3. Collective	C. Consequences	Collective Bargaining
4. Social	D. Option	Social Consequences
5. Business	E. Spells	Business Cycle
6. Income	F. Waters	Income Inequality
7. Uncharted	G. Cycle	Uncharted Waters
8. Labor	H. Bargaining	Labor Mobility

B. Review Quiz

1/c, 2/d, 3/b, 4/a, 5/b, 6/c, 7/d, 8/b, 9/a, 10/d

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

Launch Quiz