

UNITED WISDOM

The scale of the work and the scale of one’s life

Freedom and Action

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

The scale of the work and the scale of one’s life

Epigraph

> *everything future is uncertain: live now straightway.*

Seneca, Of the Shortness of Life, IX, Aubrey Stewart translation, 1889. A short self-contained clause.

What this article is about

A large proposal can seem to answer the question of development: if work is more needed, it should become bigger. Yet expansion changes time, roles, and promises already embedded in human lives. This article concerns an ordinary adult choice about work's scale, considering income, duties, and others' involvement. We follow a hypothetical workshop owner offered an order for a network of spaces. He must decide whether he wants a different organization of activity and can actually support it. Maintaining size also has consequences; growth is not inherently mistaken. Different texts by Seneca, Epictetus, and Aristotle help clarify time's cost, the limits of usefulness, and reasons for a chosen volume. Historical arguments replace neither financial calculations nor contracts or specialist procedures. Our practical question is narrower: what changes in participants' available lives if a proposal is accepted, reduced, or refused, and which conditions are still merely assumed?

I. A larger order contains different work

Ilya owns a small workshop making wooden fittings for public spaces. In this hypothetical scene, a client offers an order for an entire network of small rooms. Previously the workshop handled one space at a time, while Ilya discussed designs, helped apprentices, and checked difficult joints himself. The new order looks like recognition of quality: people want the work in many places. Yet it changes more than the number of objects. Deliveries must be coordinated, different contacts answered, and several sites' schedules maintained. Ilya must assess a different organization of work, rather than mentally multiply a familiar working day by the number of rooms.

The attraction of growth can conceal a change of role. Ilya enjoys working with his hands, but expansion would shift much of his time to management and discussion. This is not inherently worse: leading people and enabling coordinated work can be meaningful too. The question is whether he wants that role and what responsible performance requires. He cannot promise

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

both the former personal involvement in every detail and the new volume without actual conditions supporting them. The name “my workshop” would remain, while his way of being present would change. It is precisely this change that needs to become the subject of the decision.

The first discussion therefore concerns how the order is organized. What repeats unchanged, and what must be decided separately? Which duties belong to the workshop and which remain with the sites? Who can receive decision-making authority, and who accepts completed work? These are ordinary organizational questions, not a profitability calculation or specialist contract advice. Such calculations and legal terms need appropriate information and expertise. Our concern is the boundary itself: until responsibilities are known, the order's size does not describe the owner's personal responsibility. An attractive overall proposal can conceal tasks that cannot honestly be included in the former quality promise.

The workers are not an available reserve of greater scale either. One apprentice wants to learn complex joints, another agreed to particular working days, and an experienced craftsperson handles one component. Former participation does not imply consent to a new schedule or role. Ilya can explain that a proposal has arrived and ask about conditions for possible involvement. He should not present expansion as an already settled collective decision. The client awaits an answer, but that expectation does not turn workers' silence into consent. Work becomes larger through actual organization, rather than a leader's promise of others' readiness.

II. Necessity and opportunity raise different questions

Expansion from necessity differs from expansion by preference. The current volume may fail to cover essential workshop expenses, making additional income genuinely necessary. Alternatively, work may already be sustainable while novelty or visibility makes the offer attractive. Both situations are legitimate, but raise different questions. In the first, available ways to secure necessities matter; we should not portray the choice as wholly free. In the second, desired forms of activity can be compared more extensively. Calling every wish for income a pursuit of others' approval loses sight of real need. Calling every expansion necessary removes the opportunity to discuss desire honestly.

Ilya can record what he knows about present conditions without substituting a financial forecast. There are accepted orders, existing obligations to people, and expenses that cannot simply be cancelled. Unknowns include payment terms for the new work, the distribution of additional costs, and the ability to meet deadlines. A single figure for future revenue does not answer these questions. We are not proposing to calculate profitability through a philosophical rule. We propose that assumed profitability should not be treated as an established reason for

consent. Missing information remains missing even when a proposal is impressive and accompanied by sincere praise.

In Nicomachean Ethics I.7, Aristotle distinguishes instrumental ends from things chosen for themselves and considers the good as activity in a life. This is an ancient normative context, not a workshop owner's manual. It supports a limited question here: what is the larger volume for? Income can support work and relationships, and more orders may offer an interesting task. But “more” does not itself describe the good obtained. If Ilya can name only a greater external size, discussion has not yet reached the life and activity that this size is meant to make possible.

The answer need not be exalted. Ilya wants reliable pay for the team, time for difficult details, or useful rooms available in more places. These reasons may conflict. More orders can reduce time for precisely the work he values; management can support income while requiring different preparation. Distinguishing ends reveals the conflict before consent, rather than discovering it as a personal failure after starting. External size cannot decide which exchange suits Ilya. Refusing one proposal also says nothing by itself about his willingness to meet the team's needs through other available means.

III. The same decision cannot add more time

In Of the Shortness of Life VIII–IX, Seneca draws attention to time given away as if it cost nothing and life continually deferred to the future. The text sharply judges busyness and a privileged Roman social world. It does not authorize treating paid work, care, or imposed burdens as wasted time. A narrower point matters for the workshop: new work costs time within an existing life. Consent to growth does not itself create time. Ilya must redistribute it, obtain actual assistance, or acknowledge that the desired volume is currently unavailable.

The new order's plan should be read alongside an ordinary week. This is not a demand to schedule every hour, but a way to notice meetings, craft work, teaching, travel, and previously promised participation at home. Some activities can move without major loss; some need discussion; others cannot honestly be counted as available. Loved ones' time does not appear simply because Ilya becomes busy. If he formerly handled part of a shared task, someone must compensate for his absence. This question does not make family an opponent of work. It brings actual participants into discussion, with plans that should not automatically disappear before a larger order.

A temporary formula is tempting: give everything to growth now, and life will become easier later. Sometimes a bounded period of greater work genuinely has a clear purpose and agreed end. But when the end is described only as “later,” the promise is hard to check. What must happen for the burden to decrease? Who takes particular tasks? What establishes the future

workload? If answers depend on people not yet consulted, they do not constitute a secured plan. Seneca's criticism of postponement prompts these questions; it proves neither that every intense period is mistaken nor that rest is immediately available.

Ilya can retain a concrete part of the present whose conditions growth should not destroy: certain teaching days and agreed participation in a household task, for example. These boundaries are not universal; another person has different duties and possibilities. How they are accounted for matters. A boundary existing only in the owner's imagination protects neither his time nor another person's plan. It must appear in an accessible allocation of work. If the new order does not fit, acknowledging the conflict directly is more useful than hoping undefined future organization will remove today's contradiction by itself.

IV. Being useful does not require impossible promises

In Encheiridion XXIV, Epictetus discusses usefulness to friends and the city alongside maintaining fidelity and modesty. His Stoic treatment of external goods is strict and does not cancel contemporary needs for material support. Ilya's relevant boundary separates wanting to help from promising every kind of benefit at any price. He may wish to extend access to good work without accepting a volume that requires false accounts of capacity or others' involvement without consent. Usefulness is not measured solely by the number of rooms. How work is secured and which relationships support it matter too.

Ilya has already promised to examine a difficult joint with an apprentice. If the larger order takes that time, he cannot assume participation in a substantial project automatically benefits the apprentice more. It may offer valuable experience, but that requires discussion: what task will the apprentice receive, who can answer questions, and will learning conditions remain? The work might instead involve repetitive execution while the promised discussion never happens. A large project can be useful without fulfilling this particular promise. That promise needs another way of being fulfilled or honest renegotiation. The work's overall significance does not establish every particular benefit.

The same precision applies to loved ones. Ilya may want to provide more opportunities for his family, but they need not agree to every means of obtaining them. A conversation should concern actual changes: occupied evenings, the period's length, owners of shared tasks, and remaining unknowns. This does not mean every personal work choice requires permission from everyone nearby. But where a decision changes a shared promise or assumes someone else's additional labour, their participation must be voluntary and discussed. Intending to do good does not replace that conversation or justify describing disagreement in advance as ingratitude.

An honest account of capacity may disappoint the client. Ilya cannot deliver the whole volume by the desired date or preserve former personal involvement without reorganizing work. That is no reason to present wishes as available capacity. He can offer another date, a particular part, or a different sequence if feasible, and may still be refused. Neither an ancient text nor careful discussion guarantees suitable terms. Their role here is limited: prevent attractive usefulness from justifying an unreliable promise. A boundary preserves the meaning of consent only when it can be communicated and the consequences of respecting it acknowledged.

V. Scale has several dimensions

A workshop can increase its scale in different ways. More rooms need not require more workers if dates are distributed differently; more workers need not mean Ilya personally answers for every decision. None of these possibilities should be treated as fact without checking conditions. Distinguish object count, location count, simultaneous work, task diversity, and management. Two batches of identical parts in different months may be organizationally easier than one small batch with numerous approvals. These are hypothetical examples, not an assessment of actual productivity. They show why one external measure seldom describes the entire change in life and responsibility.

Partial expansion may fit better than choosing between the current size and the whole network. Ilya could propose one room, a defined type of fitting, or work distributed among independent makers. A smaller volume is not automatically more honest, however. If one room is the prototype for the network, its responsibility may remain considerable. If others are needed, their capacity and consent must be established separately. A small label does not cancel a large duty, and partnership creates no assistance out of nothing. Each form should be described through actual actions and relationships requiring support, rather than a general feeling of moderation.

Quality can also improve at the same quantity. Ilya could make installation more accessible, clarify documentation, or teach the team to check a particular joint independently. This is not a concealed way of declaring every refusal to expand correct. Sometimes a task genuinely needs more volume, and keeping the quantity will not satisfy the client. Still, development need not always increase visible production. Work can become more precise, reliable, or intelligible to participants. These changes matter only in relation to a concrete need. “Quality” should not provide attractive cover for an undelivered promised result or unwillingness to discuss actual limits.

In transferring some management, Ilya should examine his future role. Who can decide without him? Where is his expertise needed, and where does he habitually confirm everything personally? Transferring a job title is insufficient if the worker lacks information or every action

still needs the owner's permission. Full transfer may also be impossible: agreed duties and qualification requirements remain. This article establishes no management procedure. It suggests including real authority and available support in the scale decision. Otherwise the promised relief becomes another project that Ilya must constantly manage on top of the former workload.

VI. A trial must preserve the option to stop

Where conditions are insufficiently known, a limited trial of organization can be discussed: one specified room or a preliminary conversation about technical requirements in our example. A trial belongs only to an ordinary safe task and does not replace required professional procedures. Workers and clients should not become material for an undisclosed experiment. Participants need to understand the question, promised work, and what the result cannot establish. If Ilya is merely exploring a possibility, he cannot tell others the network is already committed. A preparatory action must retain its own small scope rather than silently opening the entire project.

The trial needs a question connected with the decision. Could approval of certain details be transferred to another craftsperson using available documentation, for example? The answer does not establish expansion's overall profitability or capacity for every future order. It concerns this role under these conditions. Ilya may find the materials intelligible while the worker needs more time for independent work. He may discover the question was mistaken: the obstacle lies with the site rather than the team. Information is useful only if it can be acknowledged. If every outcome is called confirmation of expansion in advance, the trial no longer helps him choose.

Record the trial's boundaries before starting: accepted scope, discussion date, who may stop participating, and what happens to promised work. Stopping does not permit leaving performed work unpaid or omitting necessary handover. It means trial participation does not automatically authorize expansion. If the client requires an immediate full commitment, that is another proposal and needs assessing as such. If a worker agreed to one stage, the next needs discussion too. A small trial retains meaning only when its boundary remains effective after a good result, rather than disappearing with the first praise.

Ilya may discover that the larger scale suits him better. Management may prove interesting, workers may want new roles, and the distribution of deadlines may be acceptable. This possibility is consistent with our subject. Consent rests on defined conditions rather than a demand always to prefer smallness. He may find the opposite: the role change removes the involvement for which the workshop was created. A negative result does not make preparation pointless. It grounds refusal, another form, or a different way of securing necessities. One

trial's outcome never promises that all future difficulties are known or further decisions need no attention.

VII. Keeping the present size also has consequences

Keeping the current size is also a choice. Ilya might forgo income available under suitable conditions. The team might seek development for which the workshop no longer has room. Demand might require change despite the owner's preference for familiarity. These consequences do not make refusal wrong in advance, but deserve the same attention as growth's cost. Small work is not free merely because it is small. It may depend on one client, undefined promises, or the owner's indefinite availability. The question of life's scale begins with actual conditions, rather than a romantic contrast between a cosy workshop and a soulless large enterprise.

If a worker wants another role, respecting Ilya's boundaries does not cancel that person's independent choice. Someone may seek a larger setting, new experience, or different income. Ilya may decline to turn the workshop into a network; the worker may decline to remain in its existing arrangement out of gratitude. Discussion becomes substantive by naming handover possibilities, dates, and unknowns. This cannot guarantee an easy departure. It avoids turning an owner's right to maintain size into a demand that every participant keep their former life. Autonomy does not end with the person whose limits receive the most discussion.

Fear of missing the only chance also needs examination. A proposal may genuinely have a deadline, and no one promises another opportunity. Sometimes uncertainty is exaggerated into certainty that refusal closes the path forever. Ilya should invent neither future success nor final loss. He can name the known response date, a concrete consequence of refusal, and the area lacking information. Honest uncertainty keeps a decision difficult while making it more precise. A choice does not become irresponsible simply because someone cannot prove which option will be best under every future circumstance.

In Encheiridion XXV, Epictetus illustrates the price of social preference through a purchase. A person misses an external good because they have not paid a particular price. This image should become neither an accusation against people facing injustice nor advice to buy approval. A narrower question remains for Ilya: what is retained when he refuses the larger order's terms? Not guaranteed happiness, but a concrete resource: time, a chosen role, or the possibility of fulfilling an existing promise. He also acknowledges what was not obtained. Recording both sides reveals an exchange without requiring one side to be wholly valuable and the other worthless.

VIII. A decision must fit the participants’ lives

After the conversations, Ilya returns to the proposal with a more precise account. He knows what expansion means for this order, which duties change, who agreed, and where terms remain unknown. He might offer part of the network, accept the whole with another organization, or refuse. The decision should not rest solely on “balance” when no one knows its concrete actions. The team needs to know what changes from a particular date and which promises remain. The client needs the accepted result. Ilya needs to know which activity he now chooses and on what grounds.

Proportion does not necessarily mean equal shares of time among every area of life. A particular pursuit occupies more space in one period and less in another. Necessity, agreement, and possible revision matter. A temporary focus on the order needs known terms, rather than a promise that everyone will automatically be satisfied afterward. Keeping the former work should not be declared a final answer to every future need either. Participants' lives change. A suitable scale exists in a particular situation and needs attention to new facts, rather than defence of an established size merely for consistency.

After deciding, Ilya can ask what ordinary day the chosen form will make possible. The answer includes work, relationships, available rest, and duties that wishes cannot cancel. The day need not be easy. It should at least be describable without assuming endless personal readiness and free assistance from others. If every part relies on an unknown person eventually taking over, the plan needs clarification. If terms are genuinely agreed, Ilya can accept demanding work as his choice without treating strain as proof either of special worth or of inevitable error.

The scale of work and a person's life meet through actions, time, roles, and actual consent. Large work can fit a life under suitable arrangements; small work can occupy it entirely. This article therefore offers no general cult of reduction and no promise that a reasonable conversation removes difficult exchanges. It proposes noticing the exchange before it becomes unfulfillable promises. Ilya remains responsible for chosen work without measuring personal worth by the number of rooms. A useful size concerns what can actually be done, who needs it, and the life participants consent to support in doing it.

What this means in practice

Name one concrete proposal to expand work. Describe what increases: quantity, simultaneous activity, diversity, management, or responsibility to others. Do not treat future revenue as established income; specialist financial and contractual questions need appropriate information and consideration.

Record three existing commitments affected by the change. For each, identify what needs rescheduling, transfer, or renegotiation. Ask before assuming assistance: present participation does not establish availability at a new volume. Discussion with family or team should not become a demand for approval.

Consider available forms: the full volume, a part, another organization, and retaining present work. For each, name one obtained result, one cost, and one unknown dependency. These lines do not calculate the best option. They reveal what needs learning before a promise and accepting afterward.

If a bounded safe trial is suitable, define its question, scope, consenting participants, and discussion date. Separately record the further volume it does not promise. Retain required professional procedures. The result may support a possibility, reveal a limitation, or leave the question open; do not call all three confirmation of expansion.

Describe the decision through available actions: what I accept, what I decline, whom I tell and when, and which earlier promise I complete. Identify a new fact that would require reconsideration. Describe an ordinary day under the chosen form. If it assumes invisible endless assistance, revisit the terms. This practice guarantees neither income, ease, nor everyone's agreement. It helps describe a personal choice and its boundaries more honestly.

Key quotation

> *Whatever you can, if you maintain at the same time your fidelity and modesty.*

Epictetus, Encheiridion, XXIV, George Long translation; an answer to the question about one’s place in the city.

Connections between traditions

Context	Working distinction	Limit
Seneca, Of the Shortness of Life, VIII–IX	New work's object and time within an existing life	Not accusing paid work or care of being waste
Epictetus, Encheiridion, XXIV–XXV	Benefit, social preference's price, and fidelity	Not abandoning material support or excusing injustice
Aristotle, I.7	More means and the good for which they are chosen	Neither a financial forecast nor a compulsory modern hierarchy of ends

These contexts offer distinct historical grounds for questions. The workshop decision remains an editorial application with separate conditions, not one ancient management technology.

Primary sources

1. Seneca. Of the Shortness of Life, VIII–IX; I–III were also read. Aubrey Stewart translation in Minor Dialogues Together with the Dialogue on Clemency, George Bell and Sons, London, 1889; Project Gutenberg 64576. The specified continuous sections were read, not the whole dialogue. The epigraph is a short clause from IX, with our own Russian rendering. Privileged Roman circumstances and harsh judgments of busyness do not become accusations against work, care, or imposed burdens.

2. Epictetus, transmitted by Arrian. Encheiridion, XXIV–XXV; XIX–XXV were read continuously. George Long translation in A Selection from the Discourses of Epictetus With the Encheiridion, Project Gutenberg 10661. A particular print edition and date are not established here. The key quotation comes from XXIV, with our own Russian rendering of the named English text. Material support and unjust exclusion are not declared irrelevant; the price image is not advice to buy approval.

3. Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics, Book I, I.7 and adjacent passages. W. D. Ross translation, Internet Classics Archive; the particular print edition is not established. The section was read completely. This article paraphrases the distinction between means and ends and contains no literal quotation from this source. The ancient normative hierarchy is not imposed as a modern workshop management rule.

The scene is hypothetical and the practice an original editorial proposal. These texts establish neither exercise efficacy nor an economic outcome. Historical text, translation, and apparatus have distinct rights conditions; worldwide clearance is not asserted. No raw-source import or vectorization was performed.

Tags

scale, work, life, workshop, growth, choice, time, responsibility, commitments, consent, autonomy, team, family, learning, role, management, usefulness, income, limits, handover, organization, development, quality, trial, uncertainty, Seneca, Epictetus, Aristotle, ethics, practical reflection

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.