

# Principles of Sociology

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# Principles of Sociology

## 9th Session

**Sociology of Work: The social organization of work and the experience of employment and unemployment**

## ● **Types of Work**

- The word *work* refers to the carrying out of tasks requiring the expenditure of mental and physical effort. Work aims at the satisfaction of human needs/desires through the production of goods and services.
- **Occupation**, or job, is the paid work, namely the work that is done in exchange for a regular wage or salary.
- **Non-paid labour**, such as housework, contributes largely to the satisfaction of individuals' needs and to the reproduction of family and, in general, of society.
- Another type of work is **voluntary work** that is carried out in charity and non-governmental organizations.
- **Informal work** refers to the human effort that is unfolded in the domain of informal economy, namely outside the sphere of regular employment. The payment for this type of work maybe money or goods or/and services.
- The informal economy includes not only 'hidden' cash transactions, but also many forms of self-provisioning, which people carry on inside and outside the home.

# **The social organization of work**

## ● **From pre-modern to modern organization of work**

- Human societies are largely based on historically specific economic systems.
- The economic system is defined by the mode of organization of work/productive activity.
- Pre-modern societies are often characterized by a relatively simple division of labour, self-sufficiency and craftsmanship.
- The spatial division between workplace and household did not exist.
- In modern, industrialized societies, we find the separation of work and home.
- Factories owned by entrepreneurs became the focal points of massive production of goods.
- Traditional artisan work was replaced by machinery and equipment concentrated within factories.
- People lose their craftsmanship and relegated to unskilled labourers who had to 'follow' the machinery's functions and pace.
- The historical transfer of human labour to new industrial settings signaled a new type of organization of work, that was characterized by strict control and discipline, in order that productivity to be achieved.
- A highly complex division of labour is typical of modern societies, as work has become divided into an enormous number of different occupations in which people specialize.
- This extended and intricate division of labour means a high degree of economic interdependence.

## ● **Views on modern division of labour**

- Adam Smith, one of the founders of modern economics, identified advantages that the division of labour provides in terms of increasing productivity.
- Karl Marx claimed that the division of labour alienates human beings from their work, as they are devoid of the control over their effort.
- Industrial production is a type of work that is dull, monotonous and uninteresting.
- For Marx, alienation refers to the feelings of indifference or/and hostility to work, as laborers have the sense that they lose themselves in work, namely they do not have the ability to 'express' their creativity.
- According to Emile Durkheim, the specialization of roles would strengthen social solidarity within modern communities.
- In modern era, people would be linked together through their mutual dependency. Solidarity would be enhanced through multidirectional relationships of production and consumption.

**From Taylorism-Fordism**

**to**

**Post-fordism**

## ● Taylorism

- Taylorism refers to the ‘scientific management’ of work.
- F.W. Taylor (1865-1915) developed a theoretical model about productivity and efficiency, and a method for the achievements of these goals.
- Taylor’s method consists of the detailed study of industrial processes and the breaking of work down into simple operations that could be precisely timed and organized.
- Taylor's *time-and-motion study* had three goals:
  - **a)** increase of employees’ productivity/maximization of industrial output.
  - **b)** control and discipline of labourers
  - **c)** transfer of workers’ knowledge of production processes to the industry’s managers and employers.
- Taylorism has been widely associated with the deskilling, degradation and firm control of labour.

- **Fordism**

- The principles of Taylorism were appropriated by the industrialist Henry Ford (1863-1947).
- Ford introduced and implemented a new productive method, the *assembly line*.
- This method aimed at speed, precision and simplicity of production operations, and also at massive industrial output.
- Ford realized that mass production requires mass markets, namely mass-produced commodities have to be accompanied by a massive demand for them.
- Beyond technological innovations, Ford focus on the ‘shaping’ of working-class lifestyle, by raising wages to US\$5 for an eight-hour day and providing lessons about ‘proper’ daily habits to his workers.

- The term *Fordism* denotes:
  - **a)** the system of mass production associated with mass markets.
  - **b)** post-Second World War capitalist production relations (full time and secure jobs, powerful unionization, formal negotiation and collective agreements between firms and unions).
- Some Industrial Sociologists designate four major negative characteristics of fordist production system:
  - **1)** expensive equipment
  - **2)** strict surveillance of employees- hierarchical management
  - **3)** low-trust
  - **4)** high degree of discontent and intensified conflicts.

## ● **Post-fordism**

- The term *post-fordism* refers to the introduction and expansion of flexible practices in a number of spheres, including product development, marketing, production techniques, management style, the working environment, employee involvement.
- Sociologists tend to use this term in order to point out the abandonment of the principles of Fordism, and the starting of a new era of capitalist production method and working relations.
- Organizational and technological innovations aim at market demands for diverse, customized products.
- The *organizational innovations* include group production, problem-solving teams, multi-tasking and niche marketing.
- The *technological-production innovations* refer to the high-tech, multi-functional machinery that can produce mass-customized products.
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## ● **Reorganization of work in post-fordist production system**

- The assembly line has been replaced by group production.
- Instead of carrying out repetitive, dull tasks, workers are called to collaborate in teams.
- The basic goal of this organizational method is to offer workers opportunities for developing their creativity and skills, and reinforcing the sense of autonomy, self-esteem and pride.
- Criticism against this managerial strategy holds the argument that even if direct managerial authority is less obvious in a team process, other forms of control exist, such as supervision by other team workers.

- **From mass-produced commodities to mass-customized commodities**
- The new worldwide method of flexible production relies largely on computer-aided design.
- The radical change results from the gradual abandonment of fordist production system that was capable of producing mass products (all the same) for mass markets.
- Fordist assembly line could not produce small orders of goods specialized in terms of individual consumers' demands.
- The new technologies enable the large-scale production of goods designed for particular customers.
- These production techniques support a new type of inventory management, that is called 'just-in-time'.
- Internet technology supports the almost direct transfer of information among consumers, suppliers and manufacturers.

- **Two basic points of critique of post-fordism argument:**
- Some sociologists claim that mass customization substantially creates the illusion of choice.
- Instead of post-fordism proponents, some commentators advocate that we do not encounter with a wholesale transformation, but with the integration of some modifications into traditional Fordist techniques.
- These analysts support that we are actually experiencing a period of ‘neo-Fordism’ .

**Changing Occupational structure  
and  
the new divisions of labour**

- **Changes in occupational structure**

- Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the occupational structure of western industrialized societies has undergone radical transformations.
- At the start of the twentieth century, the prevalent type of work was blue-collar manufacturing job.
- Service sector has been enlarged since the 1970s, so sociologists talk about ‘tertiarization’ of the economy.
- Three basic reasons for this economic transformation are:
  - **a)** the introduction of informational technology in industry
  - **b)** the rise of manufacturing industry in the Far East
  - **c)** the rise of outsourcing method

- **General traits of the new global division of labour**

- **Formal/protected and informal/defenceless employment**

- From a global perspective, we find different employment patterns.
- In the *western, developed countries*, the formal paid employment sector includes the majority of jobs.
- Employment laws ensure the protection of the working hours, health, safety and political rights of workers.
- The informal ('black', 'parallel') economy consists of the domain in which migrant workers attempt to earn their livings in order to survive.
- In the *developing countries*, the informal economy is the sector in which most people are working. Their working experience is characterized by cheap wages, strict surveillance and enervating work ('sweatshops').
- This global division of labour means that most of the goods produced with low cost are sold to the relatively rich workers in the industrialized countries.

- During the past 20 or 30 years, the outsourcing method has enabled giant manufacturers to find cheap and legally unprotected workforce in developing countries.
- Clothing and computer system manufacturers assign the task of production to other contractors in developing countries.
- These contractors try to be economically 'attractive' to western manufacturers by rising their productivity and decreasing production costs.
- Competition has resulted in a global 'race to the bottom', in which retailers and manufacturers will move to any country where they can pay the lowest wages possible.

- **Gender division of labour: The ‘feminization’ of the workforce**

- Women's participation in the paid labour force has risen more or less continuously over the last century.
- One of the major reason of this change was the labour shortage experienced during the war years, when women undertook many jobs that previously were deemed as exclusively male one.
- According to Giddens, the gap in economic activity rates between men and women have been closing in recent decades mainly due to:
  - 1) The mechanization of many domestic tasks
  - 2) Economic pressures on the household
  - 3) Changes in household structure (high rates of singlehood, a growth in lone-mother households)
  - 4) The drive for equality and personal fulfillment

- **Occupational gender segregation**

- Occupational gender segregation refers to the fact that men and women are concentrated in different types of jobs, based on prevailing understandings of what is appropriate 'male' and 'female' work.
- Occupational segregation has both vertical and horizontal components.
- *Vertical segregation* refers to the tendency for women to be concentrated in jobs with little authority and room for advancement, while men occupy more powerful and influential positions.
- *Horizontal segregation* refers to the tendency for men and women to occupy different categories of job.
- Reports from the UK suggest that three-quarters of the working female population are engaged in part-time, low-paid work: clerical, cleaning, cashiering and catering.
- This occupational pattern is repeated in many other developed economies.

# Unemployment and Insecurity

## ● **Benefits of employment**

- *1) Money*
- *2) Development of individual skills*
- *3) Variety*
- *4) Temporal structure*
- *5) Social contacts*
- *6) Personal identity and self-esteem*

## ● **The phenomenon of job insecurity**

- In recent decades, we have noticed a gradual transition from the working culture of ‘job for life’ to a ‘hire-and-fire’ culture.
- An increasing number of workers lose the sense of a secure work position and role.
- The model of a secure career with one employer is always dwindled.
- This experience of job insecurity is not confined solely to blue-collar/manufacturing workers but affects also white-collar jobs (professional and managerial workers: ‘the insecure middle’).
- The basic reasons for this experience of job insecurity are:
  - **a)** corporate mergers
  - **b)** corporate ‘downsizings’
  - **c)** allocation of western businesses’ production departments into developing countries, mainly in Southern Asia.
  - **d)** widespread introduction of information technology

## ● **Impacts of job insecurity**

- **a)** The torturous and continuous fear of redundancy
- **b)** Anxieties about the transformation of work itself, and the augmentation of working duties.
- **c)** The quality and standard of workers' personal lives:
  - People's mental and physical health deteriorate due to prolonged job insecurity.
  - The stressful experience in workplace is transferred into the home and family relations.

## ● Unemployment

- Rates of unemployment have fluctuated considerably over the course of this century.
- In the western capitalist economies, unemployment reached a peak during the economic depression of the early 1930s, with some countries experiencing 20 per cent of the labour force out of work.
- According to J. M Keynes, the unemployment is the outcome of insufficient purchasing power, as production is not stimulated and fewer workers are needed.
- Keynes advocated government monetary and fiscal programs designed to create new jobs and increase the level of demand in an economy.
- Until the 1970s, Keynesian economic policies seem to be successful as economic growth was more or less continuous.
- During the 1970s and '80s, though, unemployment rates proved more difficult to control and Keynesianism was largely abandoned as a means of trying to regulate economic activity.
- Neoliberal policies started to be implemented in U.S.A and Britain, and elsewhere.
- In 2006, the global unemployment rates were historically high at around 6.3 per cent or some 200 million.

- The unemployment rates differ along the age, gender, social class, education, race, ethnicity lines.
- Young people aged 15-24 made up 44 per cent of the unemployed population.
- Just 45.9 percent of women over the age of 15 were working compared to 74 percent of men.
- On average, ethnic minorities do not only present higher unemployment rates than whites, but also higher rates of long-term unemployment than the rest of the population.
- There is diversity in unemployment rates among ethnic minority groups.
- There is an strong correlation between the level of qualification with the unemployment rate (*the higher the level of qualification, the lower the unemployment rate*).
- Social class and unemployment rates are correlated (*Those people whose fathers were from upper social classes experienced the lowest rates of unemployment. Those whose fathers were in the lowest social class, or who were raised by lone mothers, had the highest rates of unemployment*).

## ● **The experience of unemployment**

- The state of being without job consists of an extremely harsh experience, that can be very disturbing to those accustomed to having secure jobs.
- The direct impact of unemployment is the loss of access to income sources.
- The degree of social protection provided by welfare state determines largely the chances and the standard of living under this condition.

- **The *emotional effects* of unemployment**
- The emotional stages through which unemployed persons pass: *shock-optimism-depression-pessimism-resignation*.
- The social effects refer to the undermining of social relations and slackening of social ties, due to trends of individual's withdrawal, isolation and passivity.
- Social class defines the experience of unemployment.
- For those at the lower socioeconomic strata, the consequences of unemployment may be felt mostly financially.
- Middle-class individuals seem to find unemployment devastating mainly in terms of their social, rather than their financial, status.

# ● Bibliography

- A. Giddens & P.W. Sutton, *Sociology*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, Polity Press, Cambridge 2009.