THE MEANING OF WORK

Satisfaction, Alienation, Stress

JOB SATISFACTION

- Typically measured in North America through surveys

  - Standard question:

    - "**All in all, how satisfied are you with your job?**"

- Concerns:

  - Percentage of satisfied depends on response categories

  - Behaviours may be a more valid measure (e.g., strikes, quitting, absenteeism)

  - More probing questions on specific facets of job may be needed

GENERAL TRENDS: JOB SATISFACTION

- **Older workers more satisfied than younger workers**

- Individualistic and structural explanations

  - Aging effect

  - Cohort

  - Life-cycle effect

  - Job effect

  - Self-selection

- A U-shaped relationship between age and job satisfaction?

GENERAL TRENDS: JOB SATISFACTION

- **Little difference between men and women in self-reported job satisfaction**

- Women socialized to expect fewer intrinsic and extrinsic rewards?
  - Women satisfied with lower-quality jobs?

- Types of jobs women hold and roles women have outside the workplace are important
  - Gender differences in work orientations not as significant

GENERAL TRENDS: JOB SATISFACTION

- **Higher education = better job = more satisfaction?**

  - A human capital explanation

- **Better educated workers with higher expectations regarding careers?**

- **Job satisfaction "somewhat higher" for highly educated Canadian workers**

  - BUT high- and low-educated blue-collar workers in same job report similar satisfaction

- **Underemployment, job insecurity impact job satisfaction?**

LINKING REWARDS, ORIENTATIONS, SATISFACTION

- **Most satisfying conditions?**

  - Take into account: pay, benefits, promotion opportunities, job security, autonomy, skill use, satisfying social relationships, work organization features, job task design characteristics

- **Frederick Herzberg: extrinsic and intrinsic rewards**

  - Hygiene factors: e.g., pay, supervisory style

  - Motivators: e.g., opportunity to develop skills, make decisions

- **e.g., Arne Kalleberg's six dimensions of work**

  - Fit or mismatch matters

CONSEQUENCES OF (DIS)SATISFACTION

- **Why do people stay in "bad" jobs?**

  - Pay, hours, location, coworkers …

  - Difficulty finding another job

- Rationalizing coming in late, calling in sick

- Overt acts of defiance

  - e.g., destruction, theft of company property, drug/alcohol use

- Satisfaction and productivity?

  - Weak relationship

  - Why?

ALIENATION

- **Alienation:** "human condition resulting from an absence of fulfilling work"

- Marx's structural analysis

  - Alienation from product, others involved in labour process, activity of work, themselves

  - "Condition of **objective** powerlessness"

  - Assumptions

    - Workers have no control over condition of work

    - Alienation traced to organization of work under capitalism

    - Alienation exists even if workers don't recognize it

OBJECTIVE VS. SUBJECTIVE ALIENATION

- Marxism: objective alienation irrespective of workers' subjective feelings

  - Depends on basic assumptions about human needs and the realistic possibility of satisfying them

    (a society in which we all can 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, cowherd, or critic" (M&E, *The German Ideology*, p.169)

- Industrial Sociologists: subjective *feeling* of being 'alienated'

  - Empirically variable and measurable

SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL VARIANTS OF ALIENATION

- Melvin Seeman

  - "emphasized *workers' feelings* of **powerlessness**, **meaninglessness**, **social isolation**, **self-estrangement**, and **normlessness**" (p. 445 of text)

  - Self-identity and mental health

- Sources of alienation

  - Technologies

  - Bureaucracies

  - Modern mass society

- Alienation or job dissatisfaction?

BLAUNER: *ALIENATION & FREEDOM*

- **Emphasis on powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, self-estrangement**

- **Technology as major determinant**

  - Skill, tasks, and control

  - Decline in alienation with fewer mass-production settings

  - Increase in freedom to choose work
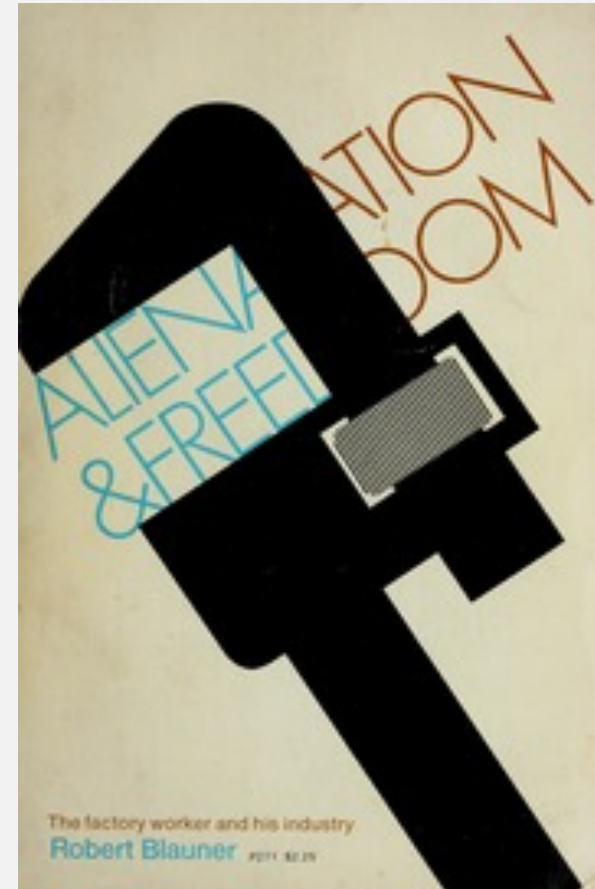
ALIENATION & FREEDOM

Alienation related to skill because:

- **Unskilled Workers (e.g. automobile assembly line workers):**

Job Attributes
- Little control over product
- Little control over work process
- No sense of pride in skills or final product
- Little social interaction with co-workers

Market Attributes
- Easily replaceable, no security
- Strong competition for jobs
- Conflictual relations with management

An Assembly Line of the Ford Motor Company

Source: https://corporate.ford.com/company/history.html

ALIENATION & FREEDOM

- **Skilled Workers (e.g. printers):**
  - **Job Attributes**
    - High degree of control over process
    - Strong sense of skill and accomplishment
    - Strong sense of community with co-workers
    - Relatively good relations with management

  - **Market Attributes**
    - High job security because not easily replaceable
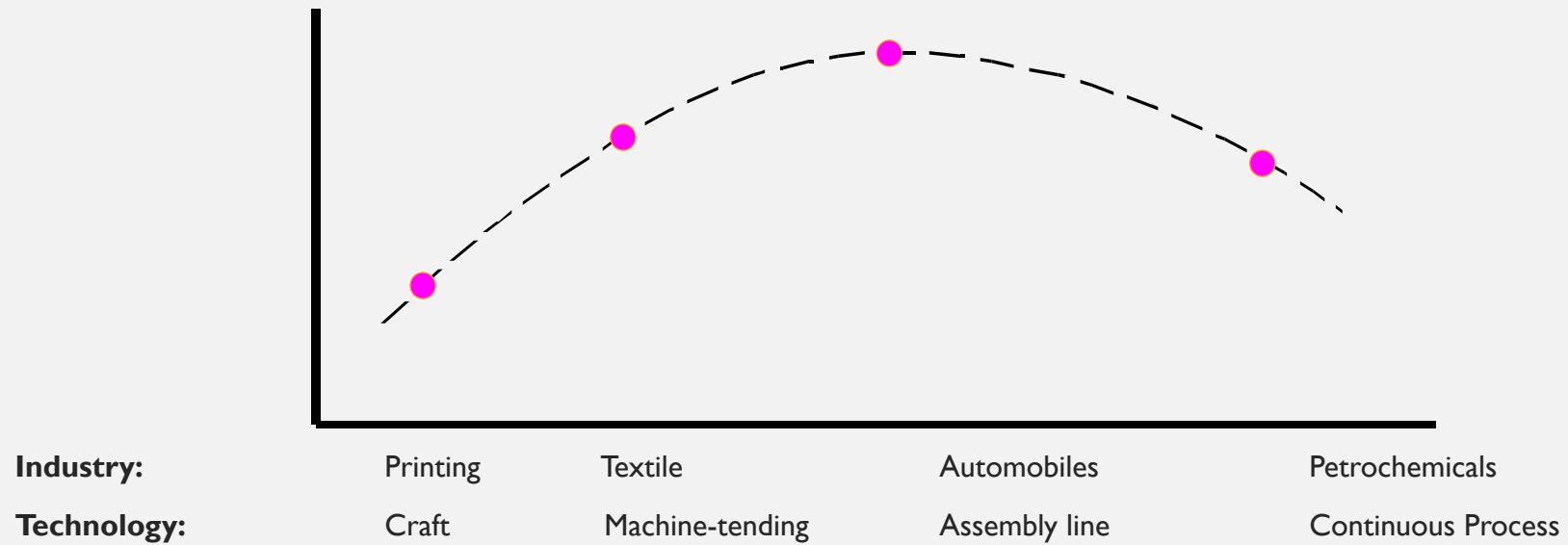   - Strong unions

Source: http://www.kwls.org/

BLAUNER: *ALIENATION & FREEDOM*

- Blauner's Hypothesis:

  - Technology/work organization $\rightarrow$ Skill level $\rightarrow$ subjective sense of alienation

- Empirical surprises:

  - (Southern) textile factories

  - Petrochemical process industry

BLAUNER'S INVERTED 'U'

Industry: Printing   Textile   Automobiles   Petrochemicals

Technology: Craft   Machine-tending   Assembly line   Continuous Process

SENNETT: *THE CORROSION OF CHARACTER*

- **Loss of order, stability, and routine**

  - Restructuring, flexibility, reliance on nonstandard workers

- **Loss of individual identities**

  - Conflict between character and experience

  - "Who in society needs me?"

- **Attributed to new forms of work organization, less stable divisions of labour**

  - NOT capitalist relations of production

JOB STRESS

- **Work-related stress**

  - Physical and mental symptoms

  - Difficult to measure independent of job dissatisfaction

- **Burnout**: individual unable to cope with job

- **Stressors**

  - Objective situations (e.g., noisy work environment)

  - Events (e.g., dispute with supervisor)

- **"an individually experienced negative reaction to a job or work environment"**

JOB STRESS: GENERAL TRENDS

- **Key Stressors…**

  - Job insecurity, exposure to health and safety hazards, working in physically uncomfortable setting, shift work, long hours

  - Organizational restructuring, new management approaches (e.g., Ontario nurses)

  - Supervisors, bullying in the office

  - Sexual harassment and forms of discrimination

- **Consequences include…**

  - physical reactions, mental health

DEMAND-CONTROL MODEL

- **Job demands and worker control**

  - Stressors = job demands

- **Active and passive jobs**

  - Active: high decision-making potential

  - Passive: low decision-making potential

→ High psychological demands + high control = less stress

→ High psychological demands + low control = stress (+ potential for physical and psychological ill health)

DEMAND–CONTROL MODEL OF STRESS

Control

HIGH

Low strain

High strain
High Demand,
Low Control

LOW

LOW ← Demands → HIGH
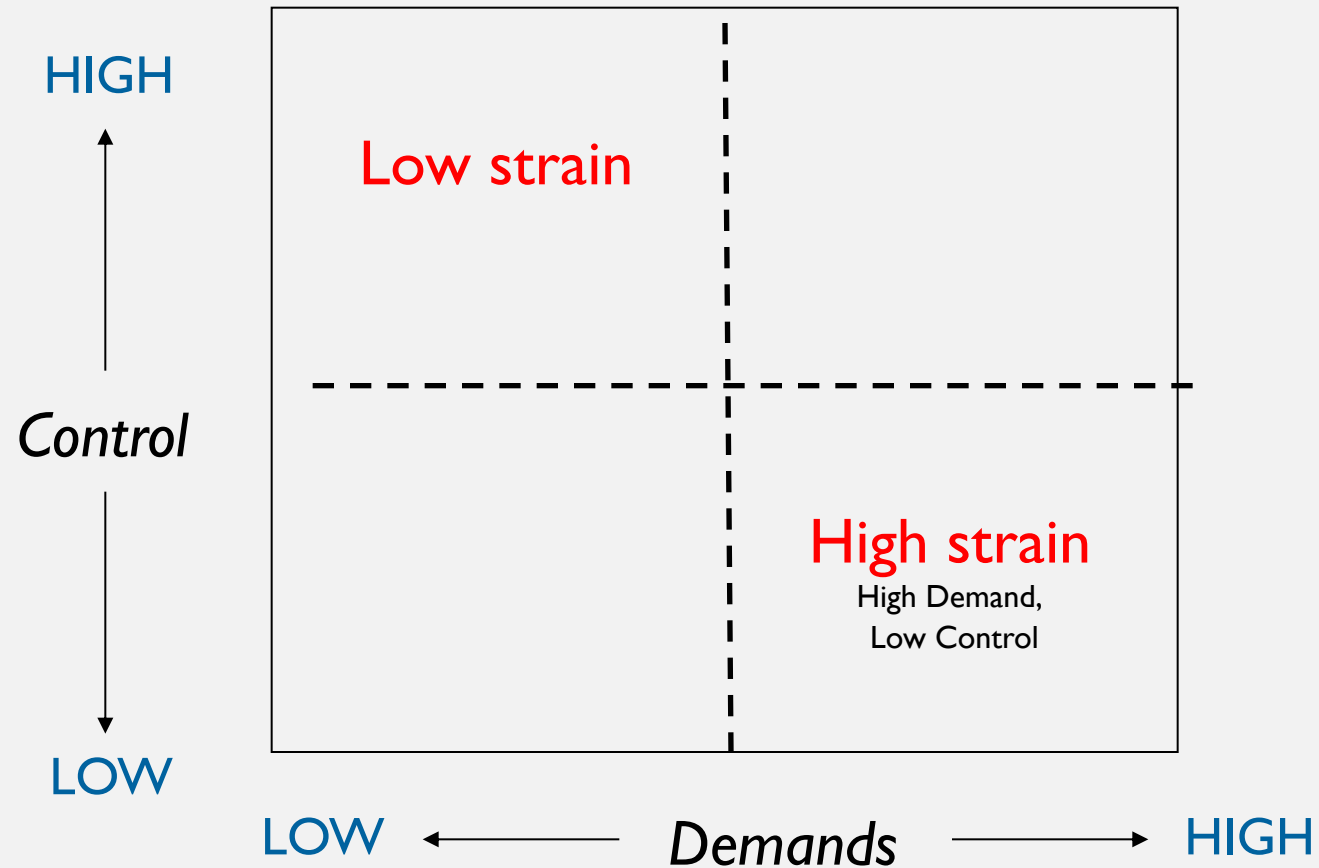
Source: R. Karasek, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1979

PERSON-ENVIRONMENT FIT MODEL

- "… **stress results when there is a significant gap between an individual's needs and abilities and what the job offers, allows, or demands** (Johnson 1989)." (p. 454)
  - e.g., stress and burnout among social workers and teachers

- **Considers work orientations**
  - Individualistic focus