

Sociology, Work and Industry

Fifth edition

Work

- Sometimes 'work' is conceptualised very narrowly as activities which people do for a wage, salary or fee. At other times it is conceptualised so broadly that almost any expenditure of effort is seen as a form of 'work'.
- We can usefully compromise here by regarding **work as the carrying out of tasks which enable people to make a living within the social and economic context in which they are located.**
- Note that 'making a living' refers here to much more than earning money.

Sociology

- Sociology is the study of the relationships which develop between human beings as they organise themselves and are organised by others in societies and how these patterns influence and are influenced by the actions and interactions of people and how they make sense of their lives and identities.
- Sociology's defining characteristic is that it *ultimately relates whatever it studies back to the way society as a whole is organised*.
- To the sociologist, no social action, at however mundane a level, takes place in a social vacuum. It is always linked back to the wider culture, social structure and processes of the society in which it takes place.

Chapter 1

Sociology's roots and purposes

- Sociology emerged historically as a critical reflection on the massive social changes coming about with industrialisation and the growth of capitalism.
- It was an attempt to come to terms intellectually with the destabilisation brought about by
 - The Reformation's questioning of church authority,
 - The Enlightenment's subjecting social institutions to rational and critical scrutiny,
 - The disruptions and new ways of life brought into being by the Industrial Revolution and the influence of the French Revolution.

Sociology's continuing importance

- Social, industrial and global changes require a rational, critical and scientific scrutiny in the 21st century as much as they did in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- Sociology can play a key role in *informing* the choices which are made in modern societies with regard to the future of work.
- Research will not *predict* the future of work but it can provide the members of democratic societies with valuable information and insights to enrich political and practical decision-making processes.

Chapter 1

Realist and interpretivist social science methodologies

Insert Table 1.1

Choosing a theoretical and methodological position

- A variety of different theoretical perspectives and methodological preferences is available to the sociological analyst of work and industry.
- The individual researcher/ analyst can draw on concepts and ideas from across the range of available resources but must ensure that the overall approach they take has internal conceptual consistency and methodological integrity .
- This is to adopt a strategy of *pragmatic pluralism*.

The Durkheim/ systems strand in the sociology of work and industry

- Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was one of the creators of the discipline of sociology and his thinking emphasises the structural and 'communal' aspects of societies and their division of labour.
- Consistent with Durkheim's approach are the mid-twentieth century 'Human Relations' and 'systems-thinking' industrial sociologies and the late 20th century advocacy of 'strong' corporate cultures.

Chapter 2 **The interactionist strand in the sociology of work and industry**

Members of the Chicago School of sociology have made a distinctive contribution to the sociology of work and organisations,

- Theoretically, with the *symbolic interactionist* view of organisations as *negotiated orders* and
- Empirically, with their emphasis on field studies and detailed analyses of work and occupational activity, especially ‘dirty work’ activities.

The Weber/-interpretivist strand in the sociology of work and industry

- Max Weber (1864-1920) created some of the main foundations of modern sociology, attempting a balance between considerations of processes at a historical/societal level and processes of interpretation and action at the individual level. He analysed the processes of rationalisation underlying modernisation and noted the unintended consequences of aspects of this, especially with regard to bureaucratisation.
- The interpretive emphasis in the Weberian tradition inspired the sociology of work tradition of analysing 'orientations to work' and is seen in more institutional-level analyses of social-construction-of-reality processes.

The Marxian strand in the sociology of work and industry

- Marx's analytical work has been a major input to sociological thinking providing an analysis of the key characteristics of capitalist societies and of the tendency of the class-based nature and the contradictions of capitalism to bring about its eventual collapse.
- In contemporary industrial sociology a focus on the *labour processes* at the heart of capitalist functioning has produced important debates, theoretical refinements and empirical studies of work activities and organisational processes.

Chapter 2 **The poststructuralist and postmodern strand in the sociology of work and industry**

- Poststructural and postmodern ideas (which are closely related but are not necessarily the same thing) replace sociology's traditional concern with structures and systems with an emphasis on language and 'texts' and the role of these in *bringing into being* those patterns which were previously given a degree of solidity and, sometimes, causal power, by sociologists.
- Human subjectivities are also seen as facets of language, or 'discursive', processes and not as arising from any kind of 'sovereign' or 'essential' self within the identities of persons.

A language-sensitive sociology of work and organisation

- Poststructuralism has played an invaluable role in bringing language and the idea of multiple *discourses* to the centre of the sociology of work and organisation. However, the tendency of this strand of thought to refuse to see a social world beyond the 'texts' that people write and speak, makes it unacceptable to many sociologists.
- One way of learning from poststructuralist thinking, without adopting all its assumptions, is to bring the concept of *discourse* into the sociology of work as a device to examine that level of social reality which mediates between 'culture' at the global and societal level and the social interactions and interpretive actions of individual and groups at the organisational level. People's working lives are influenced by a wide range of different work-related discourses rather than by the norms and values of a single overarching culture.

Industrial capitalism

- The most useful way to characterise the basic modern form of social organisation is as *industrial capitalism*.
- In industrial capitalist societies, large-scale or complex machinery and associated technique is widely applied to the pursuit of economic efficiency on a basis whereby the capacity for work of the members of some groups is sold to others who control and organise it in such a way that the latter groups maintain relative advantage with regard to those resources which are scarce and generally valued.

Key historical transitions

- A classic sociological way of characterising the key transition is that of Tönnies in which there is a shift from
 - community (*Gemeinschaft*) which is small-scale, intimate and stable; rural; religious and traditional TO
 - association or society (*Gesellschaft*) which is large-scale, individualised, dynamic; urban; scientific and rational.
- Weber focuses on the process of rationalisation whereby decisions and actions are subjected to constant calculative scrutiny. This produces a continuous drive towards change.
- Marx observes the transition from a social division of labour to a technical one.

Technology and organisations

- Sociologically, technology is most usefully understood to be the tools, machines and control devices used to carry out tasks and the principles, techniques and reasoning which accompanies them.
- Because technologies are much more than the 'hardware' that organisations use, technologies and work organisations must be seen as closely interrelated with each continually influencing changes in the other.

Post- this and post- that

- Sociologists have used a range of ways of characterising contemporary or emergent forms of social organisation, such as
 - *Post-industrial society*, in which the centrally important resource is knowledge, service work has largely replaced manufacturing employment and knowledge-based occupations play a privileged role,
 - *Post-Fordism* - a pattern of industrial organisation and employment policy in which skilled and trusted labour is used continuously to develop and customise products for small markets,
 - *Postmodernity* – in which activities across the globe are reshaped with trends towards both globalisation and more localised activity. A greater plurality of interest groups appears, 'image' and consumption play a key role in people's consciousness with pleasure replacing the old emphasis on work as a virtue in its own right. Work organisations become much more decentralised and people's experience within them changes.

Service work in modern societies

Although 'advanced' industrial societies can be seen as moving from manufacturing into service work, care has to be taken, sociologically, not to exaggerate the differences between manufacturing and service work. For example:

- industrial manufacturing principles of mechanisation, rationalisation and routinisation are famously applied to fast-food service work, as well as to banking, retailing and other service work,
- high-skill service-like work is often done in so-called manufacturing contexts whilst low-skill manufacturing-like work occurs within so-called service settings such as shops.

Globalisation

- Sociologically it is most helpful to use a broad characterisation of 'globalisation'.
- Hence we can see it as *a trend in which the economic, political and cultural activities of people in different countries increasingly influence each other and become interdependent.*
- The form and content of this trend is highly debatable and it is important to note the ideological ways in which different *discourses* of globalisation are used.

Chapter 4 Organisations and organisation identities

- *Work organisations* are work arrangements involving relationships, understandings and processes in which people are employed, or their services otherwise engaged, to complete tasks undertaken in the organisation's name.
- An organisation's *identity* is the understanding of what that organisation 'is' or 'is like' which is shared by various parties who have dealings with that organisation.
- One element within this broad corporate identity is the 'formal identity' manifested in the organisation's registered trading name(s) and legal status.
- Another element is the informal 'good name' or 'bad name' that encourages or discourages people's involvement with the organisation.

Chapter 4 Official and unofficial aspects of organisations in their societal context

Insert Fig 4.1

Chapter 4 **Bureaucracy: in a 'pure' or ideal type bureaucracy**

- every operating rule and procedure would be formally written down
- tasks would be divided up and allocated to people with the formally certified expertise to carry them out
- activities would be controlled and coordinated by officials organised in a hierarchy of authority
- all communications and commands would pass up or down this hierarchy without missing out any steps
- posts would always be filled, and promotions achieved, by the best qualified people
- office-holders' posts would constitute their only employment and the level of their salary would reflect their level in the hierarchy
- posts could not become the property or private territory of the office-holder; the officer's authority deriving from their appointed office and not from their person
- all decisions and judgements would be made impersonally and neutrally – without emotion, personal preference or prejudice

Chapter 4 **Bureaucracy's strengths and weaknesses**

- Bureaucracy is vital to the organising of complex activities, helping to achieve both effectiveness and fairness.
- BUT the means chosen in organisations to achieve certain ends - and bureaucratic procedures especially - have the tendency to undermine or defeat the very ends for which they have been adopted.
- This relates to a fundamental tension whereby people accept a degree of control but always insist, to some extent, on doing things 'their own way', a way that will not necessarily fit in with organisational priorities.

Chapter 4 Contingencies and managerial choices in shaping organisational structures and cultures

Insert Fig. 4.2

Chapter 4

Micropolitics and their inevitability

- The fact that organisations are structured into hierarchies and into sub-units makes micropolitics inevitable.
- Organisational hierarchies function not only as organisational control devices but are also competitive career ladders for managerial employees. Organisational officials/ managers thus tend both to cooperate with each other and to compete with each other for advancement.
- This competition occurs in the context of considerable ambiguity and uncertainty, all of which creates opportunities for competitive power behaviours.

The logic of corporate management

- The logic of corporate management is one of managements shaping exchange relationships between the organisation and a variety of 'parties' or constituencies with which it is connected.
- Those running organisations have to satisfy the demands of the constituencies, inside and outside the organisation, so that continued support in terms of resources such as labour, custom, investment, supplies and legal approval is obtained and the organisation enabled to survive into the long term.

Two types of flexibility

Flexibility for long-term adaptability

- The ability to make rapid and effective innovations through the use of job designs and employment policies that encourage people to use their discretion and work in new ways for the sake of the organisation – as circumstances require.
- This fits with *indirect control* work design principles and high trust relationships.

Flexibility for short-term predictability

- The ability to make rapid changes through the use of job designs and employment policies that allow staff to be easily recruited and trained or easily laid off – as circumstances require.
- This fits with *direct control* work design principles and low trust relationships.

Chapter 5 **High commitment and low commitment employment (HR) strategies**

Low commitment HR strategies

- Lean towards a 'hire and fire' style, in which labour is acquired at the point when it is immediately needed and the employee is allocated to tasks for which they need very little training, with the employment being terminated as soon as those tasks have been completed.
- The relationship between employer and employee is very much a calculatingly instrumental one and contact between managers and workers very much at 'arms-length'.

High commitment HR strategies

- Involve the employer seeking a much closer relationship with employees in which workers become psychologically or emotionally involved with the enterprise.
- The employer is likely to offer employees opportunities for personal and career development within their employment, which is expected to continue over a longer-term period and potentially to cover a variety of different tasks.

Chapter 5 Choices and constraints in the shaping of organisational human resourcing practices

Insert Fig 5.1

Chapter 5 Direct and indirect approaches in the pursuit of managerial control

Insert table 5.2

Chapter 5 **Direct and indirect work design principles**

Insert table 5.3

Occupations

- Membership of an occupation involves engagement on a regular basis in a part or the whole of a range of work tasks which are identified under a particular heading or title by both those carrying out these tasks and by a wider public.
- At the level of society, occupational patterns are closely related to class, status, gender and ethnic inequalities.
- At the level of occupational membership there are implications
 - *collectively* when there is the possibility of the people engaged in a particular occupation acting jointly, through trade union or 'professional' mobilisation, to defend or further shared interests,
 - *individually* in terms of how they enter that kind of work, learn how to do the tasks associated with it and advance their careers within their selected type of work activity.

Standard and non-standard employment

Standard employment

Employment in which the contract between the employer and employee is understood to be one in which the employee is likely to stay with the employer over the long term at a particular location, putting in a working day and week which is normal for that industry and receiving regular pay and the protection of pension and sick pay benefits.

Non-standard employment

Employment in which contracts between employers and employees are short-term and unstable with the worker taking part-time, temporary and, sometimes, multiple jobs – the work sometimes being at home rather than in an organisationally located workplace and there being little by way of employment benefits.

Chapter 6 **Work outside employment**

- Although we tend to see work in society as largely connected to engagement of the individual with an employer, there is also
 - Self-employed work,
 - Paid work in the informal economy: legal or illegal activities which are done for gain but are not officially 'declared' for such purposes as taxation, social security or employment law compliance,
 - Domestic labour: household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, shopping and looking after dependent young, old or sick members of the household,
 - Voluntary work: unpaid involvement in organised work tasks which benefit members of society beyond (although possibly including) immediate relatives.

Chapter 6 **Gender, inequality and occupational segregation**

- *Horizontal gender segregation* occurs across occupations and is the tendency for male and female work to be separated into types of occupational activity e.g. where nurses are predominantly women and soldiers are predominantly men.
- *Vertical gender segregation* occurs within occupations where there is gender differentiation in who takes the higher level and who takes the lower level jobs e.g. where HR (Human Resource) staff are largely women and HR directors are largely men.

Chapter 6 **Occupational identity, culture and ideology**

There are three dimensions of how a particular type of work is understood and evaluated :

- **Occupational identity:** The broad understanding in a society of what activities occur within a particular occupation and what contribution that occupation makes to society.
- **Occupational culture:** A more developed version of the publicly available occupational identity which is used *within* the occupation to provide ideas, values, norms, procedures and artefacts to shape occupational activities and enable members to value the work that they do.
- **Occupational ideology:** an expression of an occupational identity devised by an occupational group, or by its spokespersons, to legitimate the pursuit of the group members' common occupationally-related interests.

Professions

- Sociologists have generally, but not completely, moved away from classifying certain occupations as 'professions' and others as 'non-professions' towards examining the occupational strategy of professionalisation.
- *Professionalisation* is a process followed by certain occupations to increase their members' status, relative autonomy, rewards and influence through such activities as setting up a professional body to control entry and practice, establishing codes of conduct, making claims of a altruism and a key role in serving the community.

Chapter 7 Intrinsic and extrinsic work satisfactions: a continuum

Insert Fig. 7.2

Chapter 7 **Orientations & implicit contracts**

WORK ORIENTATION

- The meaning individuals attach to their work which predisposes them both to think and act in particular ways with regard to that work.
- There is an *initial orientation* at the point of entry to work and this is liable to change as circumstances and interests change within the continuing employment relationship.

IMPLICIT CONTRACT

- The tacit agreement between an employing organisation and the employed individual about what the employee will 'put in' to the job and the rewards and benefits for which this will be exchanged.
- The individual's perception of the implicit contract is an element in their orientation to work.

Chapter 7 The individual's perceived implicit contract at the centre of their work orientation

Insert Fig. 7.4

Chapter 7 **Identity, self-identity and social-identity**

- A person's identity is a notion of who or what that person is – in relation to others.
- It defines in what ways the individual is like other people and in what ways they differ from other people.
- It has
 - a *self-identity* component which is the individual's own notion of who they are: to be a sane and effective social actor every individual must maintain some coherence and consistency in their sense of who they are,
 - a *social-identity* component which draws upon the cultural discursive or institutional notion of who or what any individual might be.

Identity work

- This is the mutually constitutive process whereby a person strives to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of self-identity and to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieux in which they live.
- Identity work brings together inward/ internal self-reflection and the outward/ external engagement with the various social-identities which they can draw upon as 'discursive resources' in the process of presenting themselves to others.

Emotion

- *Feelings* are bodily felt sensations which relate to a person's psychological state.
- *Emotions* are the way these sensations are made sense of with reference to culture, either privately or socially.
- *Emotional labour* is that element of certain kinds of work activity in which the worker is required to display certain emotions in order to complete work tasks in the way required by an employer .

Conflict: two levels

- Sociologically, conflict can be seen as occurring at two levels:
- Conflict *at the level of interests* exists where there is a difference between different parties (employers and employees, say, or workers and customers) over desired outcomes,
- Conflict *at the level of behaviour* comes about when parties seeking different outcomes either directly clash over those differences and engage in open dispute or indirectly express their differences through such gestures as acting destructively or co-operating in a sullen or grudging manner.

Chapter 8 **Frames of reference for the analysis of conflict and work**

- The *unitary* framework assumes a fundamentally common interest between all of those operating in the workplace or in society at large.
- The *pluralist* view recognises a variety of interests but sees these as more or less balancing each other out in practice.
- The *radical* perspective recognises the basic inequalities and power differentials characterising industrial capitalist society and relates work conflicts back to these structural patterns.

Chapter 8 The implicit contract between employer and employee in its societal and economic context

Insert Fig 8.1

Chapter 8 **Collective bargaining and trade unions**

- *Collective bargaining* is method of agreeing work conditions and rewards through processes of negotiation between employer representatives and the representatives of collectively organised employees – typically trade unions.
- *Trade unions* are associations of employees formed to improve their ability to negotiate working conditions and rewards with employers and, sometimes, to represent common interests within the political sphere beyond the workplace.

Organisational mischief

- *Organisational mischief* : activities which are not officially 'meant to happen' in organisations.
- Activities like fiddling, practical joking, sabotage and workplace sexual activity
 - tend to challenge dominant modes of operating in organisations,
 - help people both to further and defend their interests,
 - enable people to protect their personal notions of 'self'.
- Managers and non-managers alike engage in organisational mischief.

Sexuality and humour

- Sexuality and humour play important roles in the 'underlife' of work organisations.
- They represent aspects of humanity (including the 'animal' aspects of humanity) that are especially unsusceptible to corporate or managerial control.
- Humour enables people both to challenge and adjust to organisational controls.
- Humour helps people control their lives generally and cope with the existential threats to sanity and a sense of order.