

6. Division or Specialization of Labour

Objective

At the end of this chapter, students should be able to explain the term **division of labour** its features, advantages and disadvantages and the limits to division of labour.

6.1 Meaning of Division of Labour

In the traditional or indigenous economy or society, it means trusting a worker with one specific trade.

Consequently, one man is a blacksmith and another a goldsmith; one is a bricklayer, while another is a carpenter, and another a painter.

In modern economy, specialization or division of labour means a lot more. It means putting a worker to only one of the many intricate stages of production processes that are necessary to complete production of a single product. As a result, on the production processes of a single product, there are many specialist workers, each concerned with a particular stage of the production process.

6.2 Essential Features of Division of Labour

- (a) Use of machines;
 - (b) Mass production;
 - (c) Quality and price of products;
 - (d) Standardization of products;
 - (e) Specialization.
- (a) **The use of machines:** The invention as well as the use of machines has revolutionized the volume of production attainable within given operational processes. Even within our own economic environment, it can be observed that farmers who are able to make use of modern farm machinery are more productive than those traditional farmers who hold on tenaciously to the use of crude implements like hoes and cutlasses. Also, engineers who use modern machinery are more successful than those who do not.
- (b) **Mass production:** One essential feature of a modern division of labour is mass production. Since a specialist worker, aided by the use of modern machines, concentrates on only one aspect of the production processes, production as well as productivity is on the increase.
- (c) **Quality and price of products:** As a result of mass production, unit cost is less and selling price is consequently lower than would have been the case.
- (d) **Standardization of products:** Mass production is possible because products are of uniform standards in size, form and quality. The production machines are designed to produce goods of equal standards and quality.
- (e) **Specialization:** Specialization is limiting one's talents, skills, etc. to a particular business of production or service or production process or production activity according to one's choice, interest, ability, training, education, etc. This occurs in different ways, the examples of which include:
- One man engaging in one job only, such as one man as a tailor another as a farmer;
 - One man working in only one aspect out of a number of production processes, e.g. in assembly plant;

- One region, or state or country specializing in the production of one type of goods or the other. For instance, the northern states of Nigeria specialize in animal products and groundnuts; while the southern states specialize in the production of cocoa, palm produce and natural petroleum oil products.

This type of specialization is caused by the difference in the natural resources with which each nation or part of a nation is endowed.

6.3 Advantages of Division or Specialization of Labour

The advantages of division of labour can be stated as follows:

- (i) **Emergence of specialists:** Division of labour brings about the existence of workers each of whom concentrates on a part of the total production process. Each person therefore is an expert on his own job.
- (ii) **Increased production and wealth:** Since each worker concentrates on one production process, he becomes skilful and more efficient. As a result, production (amount produced) and productivity (efficient performance) will be on the increase. This in turn leads to an increase in the wealth of the nation.
- (iii) **Savings in time:** There is no longer the need for a worker to change from one job to another, or even to change tools since he uses the same tools all the time. In modern car assembly factories, it is the assembly machines that pass the products of one section, as raw materials, to the next section; while the workers themselves stay put in their own sections. More time is therefore concentrated on actual production.
- (iv) **Savings in capital:** It gives room for savings on capital expenditure on tools, since it is no longer necessary for each worker to have a complete set of tools to be used for the whole production process. Each worker simply has tools necessary for the single production process in which he is engaged.
- (v) **Savings in human efforts:** Human physical exertion has been replaced by the use of machines operated on all forms of power. Production, therefore, has become less physically exhausting.
- (vi) **Standardization of products:** Standardization means producing units that are identical and this enables any faulty products to be easily detected and promptly replaced.
- (vii) **Mass production and lower unit price:** the cumulative effect of using machinery to produce standardized goods is large-scale production. This, coupled with savings on labour, time and capital expenditures, as mentioned above, has the net effect of reducing unit production cost, which all things being equal can be passed on to consumers in form of lower prices which again can lead to expansion of market for the same products.
- (viii) **Fostering development of machinery:** The fact that by division of labour, a task is broken down to a series of very simple operations to be carried out mechanically, is in itself an encouragement to the development of new machinery to handle specific tasks, e.g. washing bottles, filling them, etc in a beverage plant.

6.4 Disadvantages of Division or Specialization of Labour

In spite of the advantages of division of labour or specialization as mentioned above, it has the following disadvantages:

- (i) **Monotony:** The repetition of operation of one production process by a worker renders work monotonous, tiring and uninteresting.
- (ii) **Structural unemployment:** Narrow specialization results in a worker getting skilled only in a small part of a number of production processes necessary to complete a production. Once there is

no more demand for his kind of skill, the worker becomes unemployed even when there are plenty of vacancies for other types of skills.

- (iii) **Loss of pride in craftsmanship:** The local wood carver is reputed for his skill and therefore resents the prospect of machines taking over his skill since he cannot claim the pride of production.
- (iv) **Specialization and social discontent:** Specialization creates classes among workers – the skilled and the unskilled. The skilled are the well-remunerated and, therefore, the fairly affluent. The unskilled are low paid and, therefore, relatively impoverished; the gap between the rich and the poor is thus further widened. This is made worse by the fact that, the unskilled are always in the majority, thereby partitioning the society into a large ‘poor’ sector and a smaller ‘rich’ class.
- (v) **Industrial sectionalism:** Once workers are categorized into their narrow specialist classes, each jealously guards his professional skills and class. For instance, no electrical engineer would be allowed on professional ethics to handle a mechanical job, however minor, and however proficient, the electrical engineer is in his capability to handle the task, even in the face of a compelling necessity. Organized group interests have been found to be in head-on collision with community or national interests.
- (vi) **Reduction in varieties of finished products:** The extent to which division of labour leads to standardized products has reduced the range of choices available to consumers drastically.
- (vii) **Business risks:** Since the logical application of division of labour is large scale production, business risks assume a more serious dimension. Where there are vagaries of demand leading to falling demand in certain circumstances, it might not be easy to curtail production to the level of lower demand promptly, and the result might be colossal losses.

6.5 Limits to Division or Specialization of Labour

We shall now examine whether there are no constraints at all in applying the principle of division of labour. In other words, is the principle of specialization applicable in all circumstances? The simple answer is no. This answer is supported by these instances.

- (i) **Indivisibility of a production process:** There are some jobs in which production processes are not divisible and, therefore, have to be completed by one worker at a time. For instance, in driving a motor vehicle, one driver has to start the engine, change the gear, move and control the vehicle in motion. The painting of a picture, the teaching of a topic and the work of a barber are other examples of jobs which, once started, must be completed by the same person who started them. That is, their processes are indivisible.
- (ii) **The size of the market:** Mass production or increased production is a direct product of division of labour; and unless the market is large, the principle of “division of labour” cannot be applied at all times.
- (iii) **Absence of an exchange system or economy:** Specialization presupposes an exchange system. An exchange system exists where one man can satisfy his wants by means of paying in cash or kind for the goods or services of others. Division of labour is irrelevant or cannot be practised in a subsistence economy where everybody attempts to struggle to obtain satisfaction by producing for himself only.

Summary

- Division of labour in a traditional sense means an individual craftsman holding on to his own job, e.g. the tailor or the goldsmith; whereas in the modern sense it is when each worker carries out only a very small but vital stage of the very many intricate production processes. Its features are indicated by the use of machines; specialization leading to mass production and standardization of products among others.

- **Advantages:** development of the specialist; savings in time and human efforts; encouraging research into technological development.
- **Disadvantages:** monotony; sectionalism, narrow specialization leading to structural unemployment; and decline in native craftsmanship.

Revision Questions

A. Essay Questions

- (i) What is division of labour and how is it related to specialization?
 - (ii) In what ways does our traditional local economy respond to the principle of division of labour?
- (i) Mention four essential features of division of labour.
 - (ii) Comment briefly on two only.
- (a) What are the advantages of division of labour?
 - (b) Discuss four disadvantages of division of labour.
- (a) Define the term 'Division of Labour'. (4 marks)
 - (b)
 - (i) Mention and explain Five advantages of Division of Labour. (10 marks)
 - (ii) State Three limitations of Division of Labour. (6 marks)
- (a) Distinguish between 'division of labour' and 'specialization' with an example in each case. (6 marks)
 - (b) Give FIVE advantages and TWO disadvantages of division of labour. (14 marks) [Total mark = 20]

(NECO 2001)

B. Objective Questions

- Which of the following is NOT an advantage of division of labour?
 - A. increase in the salary of workers
 - B. placing one in a job to which he is most suited
 - C. results in large scale production
 - D. results in specialization
 - E. saves times

(NECO 2000)

- A major advantage of specialization and division of labour is that
 - A. time wastage will be minimized
 - B. trade unions will be encouraged
 - C. there will be a ready market for labour
 - D. workers will be adequately rewarded

(UME JAMB 2001)

- Division of labour is limited by
 - A. non-availability of special skills
 - B. the problem of mass production
 - C. the extent of supply
 - D. the extent of the market
 - E. non-availability of money

(WAEC 1992)

4. Specialization is possible as a result of
- A. good roads
 - B. education
 - C. demand for goods
 - D. growth in population
 - E. exchange

(WAEC 1996)

5. Division of labour often results in
- A. a decrease in production
 - B. an increase in production
 - C. waste of time
 - D. uneconomic use of tools
 - E. greater craftsmanship

(WAEC 1997)

6. Which of the following is NOT a disadvantage of specialization and division of labour?
- A. Monotony of task
 - B. Loss of individual craftsmanship
 - C. Bottleneck in production resulting from interdependence
 - D. Standardization is a product of specialization

7. Division of labour can be defined as
- A. breaking the labour force into groups
 - B. a group of people working together
 - C. breaking up an organisation into departments
 - D. breaking labour force into gangs of equal numbers

8. Division of labour almost means the same thing as
- A. standardization
 - B. mechanization
 - C. specialization
 - D. speculation

9. Which of the following is NOT an advantage of division of labour?
- A. Better use of tools or equipment
 - B. Fatigue reduction
 - C. Reduction in production time
 - D. Loss of craftsmanship

10. Division of labour is a MUST for
- A. subsistence economy
 - B. rapid industrialization
 - C. modern or monetary economy
 - D. international trade

Project

Which jobs are available first in your locality, and then across your state, which you would regard as 'indivisible' in nature?