

SOC295 Course Summary

Topic 1: Modernity and Work

Why do Work and Employment Matter?

While there are many reasons why work and employment matter, in essence, the fundamental structures and the very base of working societies emerge from the roles work and employment play in integrating and differentiating societies. Integration defines how individuals participate in and contribute to the production of societies and differentiation refers to both individuals' and societies' responses to the tasks and challenges by developing more specialised structures, including the division of labour. In defining how societies are established, their dynamics and interaction and its intrinsic structure, work and employment are examples of these key sociological concepts in its importance to society.

In maintaining the perspective of a sociological understanding, encompassing social interaction, interpretive understanding and individual and society, the sociological timeline helps to show how society over time is structurally influenced by social change. In a premodern working society, Plato identifies that the division of labour is a source of individuality and reciprocity and exchange. Aristotle developed the familial division of labour, emphasising that social economies are moulded by the interaction and connection of people with different skills in different locations, creating three tiers; a gendered division of labour, the formation of a united, self-sufficing village and the establishment of a state existence. Finally, the rise of modernity forms a social division of labour, in which Durkheim and Smith point out that a more autonomic society becomes every increasingly more dependent on its reciprocity.

Beck (2000) illustrates three models that maintain the relation between work and freedom and work and political action. While in Ancient Greece, the Greek Polis relates the concept of freedom to freedom from work, modernity embeds work as the core mechanism of integration of contemporary societies. Work and employment is associated with achievement not political freedom, with status and also with income and necessity. She reintroduces the paradox of a work-centred society with "work the centre of society which everything and everyone revolve and take their bearings and on the other hand, everything is done to eliminate as much work as possible (Beck 2000: 14).

As such, one of the primary characteristics of contemporary work societies is the division of labour, in which it not only divides us for efficiency, but integrates society into a socially and systemically cohesive unit.

Reference: Beck U. (2000) *The Brave New World of Work*, Pp. 10-16, Polity Press: Cambridge

Topic 2: Work and Capitalism

Why do we work?

In essence, we work for the satisfaction of needs. As Karl Marx addresses, “life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The production of means to satisfy these needs [is] the production of material life itself,” (1970:48). Marx emphasises that while basic needs of survival must initially be satisfied, capitalist expansion causes humanity’s needs to extend towards satisfaction in new areas of life, including education, childcare and healthcare. Across the sociological timeline, a mode of production describes the ways a society organises the satisfaction of needs throughout history.

Colin Clark identified an economy as a mixture of primary, secondary and tertiary sectors and throughout the premodern period, the work society was characterised by both the slave and feudal modes of production. Agriculture in this case, was the dominant economic sphere of production. The commodification of the workforce as slaves allowed labour to be exchanged as a mobile commodity, easily trained, while the feudal mode of production created a system of serfdom, tying the peasants; the majority workforce, to the land they worked on. As hierarchical dependencies drove military expansion and conquest, feudalism deprived peasants of political rights and authority. As such, premodern societies were defined by the mode of production in which output had immediate satisfaction.

Modernity and industrialisation encouraged the development of the capitalist mode of production. Comprised of economic expansion and the growing utilisation of resources like oil and coal, the nation-state emerged as the sector for economic activity. While importantly, capitalism in creating a competitive labour market, diverged from the feudalistic safety of guaranteed work. The growth of technology led to an “increased efficiency of exploitation” of knowledge and finance (Elster p, 285), with the market mechanism creating a society coordinating the satisfaction of needs in the production for profits. Society shifted towards manufacturing and mass production and then towards a greater demand for services, while ever expanding commodification created a shift from social to system integration. For instance, the rise of the take away industry demonstrated norms negotiated in the household to values based on convenience and affordability.

Bell (1973) helps to illustrate the five primary components characterising the post-industrial society. Services have become the dominant economic sector, with the labour force shifting from agricultural production. The change in occupation distribution has allowed the workforce to transition from blue collar to white collar work. Economic forecasting has in itself become an economic resource in enabling new forms of control. Furthermore, post-industrial society is centred around knowledge and innovation, with greater demand for skill in the labour force and a rising number of tertiary qualifications becoming apparent.

References: Bell D. (1973) *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, pp. 12-32, Basic Books: New York.