

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



*Improving Productivity and the Quality of Work Life*, by  
Thomas G. Cummings and Edmond S. Molloy, New York, Prager  
Public., 1977, pp. XVI, plus 305 pp., ISBN 0-03-022601-5.

Alexander J. Matejko

Volume 37, numéro 3, 1982

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/029292ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/029292ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Matejko, A. J. (1982). Compte rendu de [*Improving Productivity and the Quality of Work Life*, by Thomas G. Cummings and Edmond S. Molloy, New York, Prager Public., 1977, pp. XVI, plus 305 pp., ISBN 0-03-022601-5.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 37(3), 715–717.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/029292ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 1982

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

Érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

des préoccupations plus ou moins directement reliées à la qualité de la vie au travail.

On y retrouve entre autre un exposé sur la pertinence de la rémunération comme tentative d'amélioration de la qualité de la vie au travail. Notant le manque d'originalité des diverses formules de rémunération, Roland Thériault remarque également le peu de remise en question accordée en pratique aux modes d'implantation et d'application des formules traditionnelles. Cette lacune justifie en partie chez certains individus, leur perception de la rémunération comme une de leurs principales sources d'insatisfaction au travail. Selon l'auteur, des implications pratiques telles la détermination des salaires et la délimitation des avantages sociaux constitueront pour les travailleurs des effets motivateurs ayant une influence directe sur leur qualité de vie au travail et, par le fait même, sur le rendement fourni au travail.

Par ailleurs, Maurice Lemelin insiste sur le rôle joué par les syndicats dans la défense et la promotion des intérêts de leurs membres. Selon l'auteur, les syndicats se doivent de trouver des réponses aux besoins croissants reliés à l'aliénation des travailleurs ainsi que réagir vis-à-vis des pressions exercées à l'endroit de nouvelles formes d'organisation du travail. En mettant l'emphase sur des revendications d'ordre économique telles les salaires et les avantages sociaux, les syndicats contribueront à l'amélioration des conditions de travail et par extension à une meilleure qualité de vie au travail.

Puis, Maurice Boisvert examine les relations conceptuelles ou empiriques existant entre la productivité et l'organisation du travail. Suggérant tout au cours de l'exposé des pistes de réflexions et d'actions ultérieures, l'auteur, à partir de diverses théories, présente les principales conceptions des notions de productivité et l'organisation du travail.

Finalement, la troisième partie de l'ouvrage intéressera particulièrement le lecteur soucieux d'être informé sur des tentatives concrètes d'amélioration de la qualité de la vie au travail. Une dizaine d'expériences té-

moignent des efforts déployés par certaines entreprises québécoises, attentives aux besoins et au bien-être de leurs employés.

Lucie VÉZINA

Québec

**Improving Productivity and the Quality of Work Life**, by Thomas G. Cummings and Edmond S. Molloy, New York, Prager Public., 1977, pp. XVI, plus 305 pp., ISBN 0-03-022601-5.

This is one of the best currently existing overviews of applied research in the field of work life quality, based on more than 60 experiments and case studies. The strategies reviewed in this book are treated by the authors as guidelines applicable to specific circumstances only when the whole variety of local contingencies are taken into consideration.

**Autonomous work groups** are suitable when work tasks constitute a self-completing whole and there is enough room for the group members to develop their collective initiative. **Job restructuring** makes sense only when the new jobs will be better than the previous ones. **Participative management** has to be based on mutual trust relationships. **Organization-wide change** has to take into consideration the unavoidable transformation of power relationships. **Behavior modification** may be productive only when the behaviour of people really counts in productivity. **Flexible working hours** make sense in some working situations and not in others. **Participation of employees** in savings achieved due to the better performance (Scanlon plans and others) are appropriate when there is a clear relationship between the contributions of workers and the cost of output (pp. 287-88). "Given the contingencies that arise in the situation, it seems highly unlikely that we will ever have all the necessary understanding to guarantee success in a particular setting" (p. 291). "Although many of the approaches to work improvement seem relatively robust in their generalizability, the existence of contingencies makes it impossible to recommend to all organizations the use of a particular strat-

egy. The large number of possible contingent factors, the variety of organizational contexts, and potential changes over time in the relevance of specific contingencies make it highly unlikely that success in one setting will be appropriate to the other contexts. This argues against the popular desire to simply transplant carbon copies of the experiments into one's own organization. Rather, the data point to a contingency approach that tailors the strategy to fit the specific context" (pp. 279-80).

This declaration against a one-best approach to work improvement is the most important conclusion of the book. The authors argue that "Current knowledge is insufficient to formulate a blueprint for success in most organizations" (p. 280). They suggest an experimental stance that recognizes the **contingencies** existing in a given situation and tailors the change programme to fit the needs and complexities of the organization. It should be more important to solve organizational problems than to demonstrate the efficacy of particular solutions.

The question how to fit the organizational strategies to the specific situations is particularly important from the perspective of the authors of the book here under review. Data gathering is also important as a feedback mechanism to guide the change program. The following guidelines for the collection of valid, long term information are suggested by the authors:

1. Assess whether and to what extent the changes were actually implemented in a given work-improvement experiment;
2. Use multiple measures of variables instead of employing only single measures;
3. Use unobtrusive measures where possible;
4. Avoid changes in the calibration of measurement instruments;
5. Use control groups where possible;
6. Avoid extreme bias in the choice of experimental groups;
7. Use statistical tests to compare measurements in order to avoid the change being simply a matter of chance;
8. Collect time series data;
9. Protect the experiment against a multitude of extraneous conditions that make interpretation of results ambiguous;
10. Record all occurrences that might plausibly qualify the findings.

The analysis of experiments included in the book is oriented by the authors towards three goals. The first of them is the **identification of action levers** that would furnish a rational basis for making organizational changes. The second is the **knowledge of contingencies** that would point to those factors upon which successful results are dependent. The third goal is to understand **change processes** and gain enough know-how to implement a strategy effectively (p. 3). Action levers are those factors that are manipulated or changed in the experiments: pay/reward systems, autonomy/discretion, support, training, organizational structure, technical/physical conditions, task variety, information/feedback, interpersonal/group processes. These action levers are usually studied in terms of their impact on costs, productivity, quality, withdrawal of people from work/absenteeism, labour turnover, and their attitudes.

Most of the chapters deal with the work-improvement experiments on specific subjects: autonomous work groups, alienation at work and various designs to overcome it, the strategy of job restructuring, the process of job enrichment, theory and change strategy of participative management, participative decision making in a hospital situation, implementation of organization-wide change, improving patient care through organizational changes in the mental hospital, organizational behavior modification, behavioral contingency management training, a strategy for implementing flexible working hours, the Scanlon plan.

The message of this whole analysis is that the change programs in order to be successful have to be planned with great caution. Different combinations of action levers, when changed according to particular theories and implementation strategies, seem to

produce positive results. The existence of contingencies, those factors upon which positive outcomes are dependent, appears to be pervasive. The method of implementing the change strategy is critical if the action levers are to be changed as intended (p. 278).

It is almost impossible to foresee all possible factors that may affect the change program. The basic question is how to make general prescriptions for work-improvement responsive to specific situations. "Lack of complete knowledge about contingencies and change processes makes it difficult to specify precisely under what conditions a particular strategy is likely to be successful or to know how to carry out a change program effectively. Without such understanding, it is difficult to devise a work-improvement program assured of success in a particular context" (p. 279).

This reasoning based on an in-depth analysis of many work-improvement experiments shows the limited application of general schemes when applied across the organizational and national boundaries. In the field of organizational theory there is still not enough recognition how careful we should be when trying to understand the organizational phenomena taken from the whole variety of circumstances. Even more restraint is badly needed in the formulation of organizational policies on the basis of foreign experience. The book here under review is particularly useful in this respect.

**Alexander J. MATEJKO**

University of Alberta

**Sharing the Work: An Analysis of the Issues in Worksharing and Jobsharing**, by Noah Meltz, Frank Reid and Gerald S. Swatz, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1981, 90 pp.

The continuing problem of high unemployment throughout most of the Western industrialized world has led to an increasingly vigorous search for solutions outside the tra-

ditional realm of government macroeconomic policy. Changing the pattern of working time in order to increase the total number of employment opportunities, is one strategy which is receiving growing amounts of attention on both sides of the Atlantic. This book contributes some worthwhile points to a debate which has so far generated more heat than light.

**Sharing the Work** considers the merits of two modifications to working time practice: the introduction of temporary short-time working as an alternative to layoffs, and the development of jobsharing opportunities. The authors' aim in writing the book was 'to create a theoretical model that could be used to assess the feasibility of worksharing and jobsharing in the Canadian labour market, and to outline possible changes in government policy to facilitate such practices' (p. vii).

This objective sets the plan of the book. The early chapters are devoted to developing simple models which seek to determine the effects of these changes to working time, on the costs and supply of labour. Whilst costs are seen to rise in the short term as a result of worksharing (due to employers' increased contributions to unemployment insurance, pension schemes, etc.) the authors argue that this will be offset by lower costs of re-hire and training (in the case of temporary short-time working) and by gains in productivity and manpower flexibility (in the case of jobsharing). On the question of labour supply, the authors use indifference curves to show people's potential willingness (particularly females, and younger and older workers) to forego additional income in order to enjoy greater leisure time. Following this, a series of collective agreements are examined in order to identify the type of industry most likely to include a worksharing provision in their agreement; those industries employing a large proportion of full-time female workers are identified as ones particularly likely to include a short-time working provision within their agreements.