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Current Research on the Quality of Working Life
La qualité de vie dans le milieu de travail

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See table of contents

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Article abstract

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SOME OLD AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

Humanitarian interest in conditions of work goes back well beyond the middle of the 19th Century. Public sympathies for the underprivileged worker were aroused by the novels of Dickens, of Hugo, and of Upton Sinclair ; by the more systematic accounts of Engels, Le Play, Mayhew, Booth, and Riis. The commitment of governments to curbing at least the worst examples of substandard industrial employment, and to the publication of statistics of working conditions in order to establish the trends in current practice began prior to the turn of the Century [1]. The humanitarian interest in what has become known as the « quality of working life », is, therefore, long established. What is there, then, about the current concern that is different ?

It is something of a paradox that just when real wages, hours, vacations, and holidays have reached a level that would have been considered unattainable a few generations ago, and when mechanization has all but eliminated the really heavy and dangerous work, a great many workers or potential workers apparently find prevailing working conditions unsatisfactory. This is apparently true not only of factory labour, but of white collar workers as well,

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* Paper presented at the Canadian Industrial Relations Research Institute annual meeting, Kingston, 1973.

[1] The Canada Department of Labour began publishing statistics on wages and hours of labour almost as soon as it was formed in 1900.

736

extending up into middle management [2]. A number of very influential studies have appeared recently, purporting to document this situation.

Work in America prepared for the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, but published by the M.I.T. press, apparently because of the controversial nature of the work, paints a discouraging picture of maladjustment in work organizations, and of damage done to human material by the industrial machine. This book assembles a great deal of fragmentary material about work, which constitutes both the strength of the work and its weakness. It attempts to document the unsatisfactory work situation of many groups within the population : the young, the old, women, racial minorities, the blue collar worker, the middle manager, and so on. It cites studies demonstrating the baneful effects of unsatisfying work on physical and mental health. It points to the catastrophic effects of unemployment in a society where one gains both a living and social respectability through working. In conclusion, the study recommends that more should be done to humanize work, to educate the population so that it can cope with a changing working environment, and to control unemployment.

Where Have All the Robots Gone ? by Harold Sheppard and Neal Herrick has also gained a good deal of publicity recently. This book deals primarily with the « blue collar blues » phenomenon : the allegedly profound alienation of white blue collar workers in the U.S. This study finds what it looks for in the way of blue collar alienation, as well as a good deal of disenchantment with unions and the political establishment [3].

There has also been a certain amount of interest in management circles in the possibility of re-structuring work in order to combat certain growing industrial problems : absenteeism, pilferage, sabotage, accidents resulting from inattention, alcoholism, drug addiction, etc. Not that the problems are necessarily of crisis proportion, but the interest of a number of corporations in work re-structuring suggests that *someone* sees themselves as faced with problems. A number of schools of thought have grown up in the work re-structuring field, around such people as Eric Trist

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[2] See *Work in America*, p. 40.

[3] Seashore (1971) analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Labor's Working Conditions Survey and found no evidence to support the hypothesis that there is great alienation among older blue collar workers-or, for that matter within any demographic group .

at the University of Pennsylvania and Louis E. Davis at U.C.L.A. which have challenged old assumptions about the inmutability of the technical and human organization of factories and other work places. A small number of well publicized examples of total system re-design of work activities for the purpose of making jobs more interesting and eliminating unnecessary supervision has also attracted considerable interest.

The study of psychological factors affecting productivity apparently had its root in the observation that human imperfections appeared to be impeding the perfect operations of rationally designed industrial systems. Thus, in the 1920's, there were many studies of the effects of lighting, heating, fatigue, and monotony on industrial productivity [4]. The classical studies at the Chicago plant of the Western Electric Company in the late 20's and early 30's introduced the world to the « Hawthorne Effect » and the informal work group [5]. It was discovered that singling a group out for an industrial experiment may have a beneficial effect on morale and productivity, whatever the nature of the experiment. It was also discovered that there was a good deal of limitation of output in spite of incentive payment systems, and that informal group pressures operated to enforce conformity to informally determined standards.

The Hawthorne studies gave rise to the « human relations in industry » movement which stressed the social needs of the worker and the beneficial effects of a more sympathetic, « nurturant » type of supervision.

Large scale research into worker attitudes began in the middle 30's, the pioneering work being *Job Satisfaction* by Robert Hoppock. After a lowering of activity in this field during the late depression and war years, there was a considerable profusion of job satisfaction studies. Until about 20 years ago, it was generally assumed that increasing the happiness of workers must automatically increase their productivity. More recent studies of job satisfaction have called this assumption into question [6].

The study of occupationally linked diseases is one of the oldest fields of preventive medicine. A large part of this work has concerned itself with various kinds of poisoning which may occur through contact with industrial materials. While the more subtle effects of various kinds of work on mental and physical health have long been suspected, it was

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4 FRIEDMANN (1964).

5 ROETHLISBERGER and DICKSON (1939).

6 ATHANASIOU (1969) reviews the literature on job attitude and performance.

generally assumed that these would in time be minimized by shorter hours, more holidays, earlier retirement, and the use of machines for heavy work. Recent experience appears to cast a certain amount of doubt upon this assumption [7].

THE CURRENT CHANGE IN OUTLOOK

The recent public concern with the non-economic aspects of life may be tending to move the sociologist and psychologist a little nearer to centre stage. The high priority projects of government — urban problems, disadvantaged minorities, youth culture, and public safety tend to fall outside the traditional sphere of interest of the economist. Available statistical series, related primarily to economic and administrative concerns, provides little guidance for dealing with these problems [8].

Industrial sociology and psychology may have lived down the « manipulative » reputation that the old « Human Relations School » eventually acquired. This may be in part because corporations are now on the defensive. Stigmatized as « merchants of death » and polluters of the environment, they are seeking ways to increase the credibility of their commitment to a better society (and, incidentally, to do business with a U.S. Government that is to some degree politically responsive to quality of life issues). In addition, there is increasing corporate realization of the investment that they make in personnel, with a concomitant recognition that it is necessary to optimize such things as training costs, costs due to products defects, sick leave costs, and so forth along with industrial output. This means, that, while the quality of work life may not exactly be regarded by the employer as an end in itself, the social scientist working for corporate employers might not have as difficult a time now as at some periods in the past in coming to terms with his social conscience.

VIEWPOINTS ON THE QUALITY OF WORK LIFE

The phrase « quality of life » is very much in the popular language, and tends to be used quite loosely. For this individual at least it conjures up images of dead fish and muggings in Central Park.

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7 See Chapter 5 of *Work in America*.

8 *Toward a Social Report,* (p. 95),one of the early documents of the « social indicators » movement.

As we have seen, there is a certain affinity between our current concern with the quality of working life and the older interest in working conditions and labour standards. But the latter embodied primarily the public point of view on what was good for the worker. As used in the professional literature, the quality of work life appears to encompass a number of points of view. An analogy from the field of nutrition may assist us here. In this field, good or bad nutrition is defined in terms of its consequences for healthy development. It is quite clear that an individual's attitude towards his diet is a poor guide to the quality of his nutrition : the things people like to eat and drink cause obesity, hardening of the arteries, and fatty degeneration of the liver. At the same time, one cannot ignore attitudes. In modern penology, the latter-day equivalent to a bread and water diet as a punitive measure is the so-called monotonous diet. Hospitals have also found that a certain amount of variety and interest in the menu is beneficial for patients.

Similarly for work [9]. The perspective of the individual worker is too narrow, his information too limited, and his capacity for self-deception too great to rely on him completely for an adequate account of the quality of his work. The worker applying radium paint to watch dials may be satisfied, the miner weighted down with safety equipment may be dissatisfied, and so forth. Furthermore, other viewpoints are relevant. The employer's concern with maximizing production and minimizing work stoppages may not be completely irrelevant to the worker's interests in the long run. And finally, there are the interests of government in economic stability and development, public health, public order and security, and the welfare of consumers. These three perspectives : those of the worker, the employer, and the government or society all appear relevant to the notion of quality of working life.

The idea of quality of working life appears to require a time dimension also. What a particular job means to you depends a lot on where you have come from, where you are going, and what stage you are at in your career or working life. A wage that seems adequate for an unmarried younger worker with prospects will look different to a somewhat older worker who has acquired a number of dependents and appears to be going nowhere. Whether one's working conditions include a pension plan is perhaps less important than whether, given the way in which the labour market works, the worker has a reasonable chance of ultimately drawing a pension.

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[9] Many of the ideas in the rest of this section derive from SEASHORE (1973).

Finally, from the standpoint of the society and probably that of the worker himself, one ought to evaluate the quality of a worker's job in terms of its relationship to the rest of his life : his family relationships, his leisure time pursuits, his community activities and his behaviour as a citizen. It is at least arguable that work that makes unreasonable demands on the worker's time and energies is to that extent sub-standard, considering the other issues that are at stake. Here, however, our forefathers admonishions that « nobody ever died from hard work » and « the devil finds work for idle hands » probably still interfere with our attaining a balanced assessment of this problem. In the remainder of this paper the topics of job satisfaction, alienation, and experiments in work humanization will be discussed. Finally, there will be a look ahead at future prospects and some concluding observations on implications for labour and government.

JOB SATISFACTION AND THE QUALITY OF WORK LIFE

It follows from what has been said that the worker's report of his job satisfaction provides a less-than-satisfactory basis for assessing the quality of his work life. Nevertheless, a consideration of current research into the quality of working life must begin with the job satisfaction literature, for the simple reason that this is where the bulk of research activity has been directed over the years. Hoppock published a book on job satisfaction in 1935, and, between 1946 and 1958, he sum-marized 406 studies of job satisfaction in the « Personnel and Guidance Journal ». Interest in this research area continues, and there may by now be as many as 4,000 items in the literature of the subject.

The measures of job satisfaction in this literature [10] are directed either towards a global feeling of well-being (or lack of it) in relation to one's work, or towards particular aspects of the job, the work environ-ment, or personnel practices. They refer to the present in relation to the past, the anticipated future, one's hopes or expectations, and, in relation to the presence or absence of particular items, the importance one attri-butes to them [11]. The questions may be relatively simple and unsophis-

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[10] ROBINSON et al. (1969) provides descriptions of the content and operating characteristics of some of the more satisfactory job satisfaction scales. See also LAROUCHE et al. (1973).

[11] A synoptic account of the various measures is provided by WANONS and LAWLER (1972).

ticated such as « taking into consideration all the things about your job,
how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with it? » [12] to indirect approaches
such as « is there any other work you would rather do ? » or « would
you work if you didn't have to to earn a living » [13] or (and this is found
to be one of the most useful questions for discriminating between different
groups of people) « if you had it to do all over again would you go into
the same type of work ? » [14] One of the best established, most useful, and
most thoroughly tested measures is the « Job Description Index » of
Patricia C. Smith and her associates [15]. This scale has a check-list format.
One can find in the literature of job satisfaction examples of practically
every test format known to psychology including self-anchoring scales,
forced choice, semantic differential, and many different types of Likert
scales.

Over the years, almost regardless of the method used and practically
regardless of the population studied, job satisfaction studies have tended
to show a number of remarkably similar results. Most people report
themselves as being « fairly satisfied » with their jobs, and those reporting
themselves as dissatisfied usually run to between 10 and 15 per cent of
the population studied, seldom going over 20 per cent [16]. In one sense
these results are interesting, but if the percentages of satisfied and dissa-
tisfied workers were in fact invariant it would make the continued interest
of psychologists in job satisfaction studies somewhat difficult to under-
stand. It should be noted that these results referred to are in response to
reasonably direct questioning about immediate situations. The use of
more indirect questioning and a longer time-perspective tends to bring
out differences in the proportion of satisfied and unsatisfied workers [17],
by age, by education, and socio-economic status. These results suggest
that the scales may offer possibilities for pinpointing the work problems
of different groups of workers.

Various explanations have been offered to explain the apparent bias
towards satisfaction suggested by so much of the literature. Wilensky
(1964) considered that it might indicate a social desirability bias in the

[12] GURIN et al. (1960).

[13] MORSE and WEISS (1965).

[14] BLAUNER (1960).

[15] SMITH et al. (1969).

[16] KAHN (1972).

[17] WILENSKY (1964).

responses of workers. Traditionally Americans have wanted to appear to be boosters rather than knockers, and it may appear more socially respectable to be reasonably contented with one's lot. Blauner (1965) suggests the possibility that egodefence mechanisms may be at work. A worker's whole identity is so bound up in his job and field of work, that to complain about the job may be to call into question everything that one stands for. In any event, the « myth of the happy worker » has to some extent been created by some of the less sophisticated job satisfaction surveys.

Various analyses of the background factors affecting job satisfaction have been carried out over the years. Hoppock, in his early study of a Pennsylvania community, discovered the occupational prestige differential in job satisfaction that has stood up remarkably well over the years. In the heyday of the Human Relations approach there was considerable investigation of the effect on job satisfaction of the size of the work group, acceptance of the worker by the group, and the amount of inter-action the worker has with his work group. These studies are summarized by Vroom (1964). In general the integration of the worker into his work group appears to contribute to job satisfaction.

There have also been many studies of the effects of different types of supervision. High worker satisfaction is associated with employee-centred styles of supervision. (Kahn-1972).

Pay and benefits and promotional opportunities have received their share of scrutiny, with ambiguous results. Not that these matters are not important, but workers expectations shift, and remuneration can be looked at from a multiplicity of perspectives — as a livelihood, a reward, a just or unjust return, etc. [18]

The satisfaction to be obtained from a job that interests and chal-lenges the worker and utilizes his skills has been stressed by Herzberg and others. A number of studies indicate that this relationship (i.e. between challenging work and job satisfaction) is more pronounced for workers at higher levels on the occupational prestige scales [17] and a study by Turner and Lawrence suggests that the relationship may hold better, for example, for rural Protestant workers than for urban Catholic workers. Most recently, attention has shifted to questions of the worker's

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[18] CENTERS and BUGENTHAL (1966).

autonomy and his ability to plan his activities and rearrange his schedule, a research interest that has been stimulated by the apparently growing impatience of the younger generation with authoritarian work regimes.

The recent Working Conditions Survey [19] carried out by the Survey Research Centre of the University of Michigan on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor indicated that 50 per cent of the total variance of a measure of global job satisfaction can be « explained » by a small list of working conditions items. [20] These working conditions were described by the respondents rather than obtained independently.

The behavioural consequences of job satisfaction are far from straightforward. A bit of reflection should make it clear that the linkage between attitudes and behaviours must be mediated by concrete situations, by perceptions of existing alternatives, of risks, and of constraints. Therefore job dissatisfaction can never be a sufficient explanation of a given action. Moreover, feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction inspire different behavioural tendencies in different people. In particular, there is no reason to suppose that the simple fact of satisfaction should be related to high productivity – on the contrary, the fact that one is not pushed for high production might be a source of satisfaction to particular people in particular situations. At the same time, it is a matter of observation that under certain special circumstances high satisfaction and high productivity can go hand in hand. One such circumstance is where the worker is, in some meaningful sense, working for himself : either on his own account, to build a career, a reputation, learn something that is significant to him, or produce a product that is uniquely identifiable with himself. A general conclusion that may be drawn from the work motivation literature is that people produce best when they view production as instrumental to the achievement of their goals — whether these goals be money, position, or the approval of fellow workers. [21]

The methodology of studies relating job satisfaction to productivity has often not been beyond reproach. Either insufficient account is taken of the fact that, at most, a proportion of workers in any establishment have any real control over their own production, or quantity of output is examined without considering quality, or supervisors ratings with a

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[19] Survey Research Center (1971).

[20] SEASHORE (1973).

[21] VROOM (1969), LAWLER (1971), WILSON (1973).

presumably large arbitrary component used. Or — and this is probably the main shortcoming that will be overcome in the research of the immediate future — an inadequate model is used. Seashore has suggested that a model adequate enough to give useful predictions of work behaviour might contain as many as 40 variables. [22]

There have been some studies of the relationship between job satisfaction and physical and mental health. In the first place (and this is really based on only one study — the Duke Longitudinal Study of Ageing) high job satisfaction appears to be a fairly good predictor of longevity. [23] Furthermore, job dissatisfaction and certain working conditions some of which tend to be associated with job dissatisfaction have been shown to be risk factors in heart disease, peptic ulcers, and rheumatic diseases. [24] The main work-related factor associated with heart diseases appears to be occupational stress, which may include very heavy workloads, responsibility, and conflict or ambiguity in occupational roles. Kornhauser (1965) found job satisfaction to be a key mediating factor in the mental health of blue collar workers, as measured by several carefully validated indices.

WORK AND ALIENATION

Research and writing that has gone on for many years on worker *alienation* has perhaps had less to do with grass-roots feelings of unhappiness on the part of the work force as with the views of intellectuals

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[22] Remarks made at the Symposium on Social Indicators of the Quality of Working Life, Ottawa, March 19-20, 1973. Proceedings to be published.

[23] PALMORE (1971). A certain amount of care must be exercised in interpreting these results. In the first place, when first interviewed the 268 subjects were aged between 60 and 94, so that obviously all were not gainfully employed. (The operant variable may well be the fact of employment itself rather than job satisfaction). Secondly, the job satisfaction scale had, of necessity to be different from those in general use. It consisted of the following six statements to be answered « yes » or « no » : I am happy only when I have definite work to do. I am satisfied with the work I now do. I do better work now than ever before. I can no longer do any kind of useful work. I have no work to look forward to. I get badly flustered when I have to hurry to work. Scores on this scale showed an r of .26 with the Longevity Quotient, which was the number of years of survival of the individual after his first examination as part of the study divided by the mean life expectancy corresponding to his age at the time. This correlation was higher (though not much higher) than those for factors such as an index of general physical functions (.21) or the presence or absence of cardiovascular disease ($-.22$).

[24] *Work in America.*

on how workers ought to feel. Nevertheless, the recent rise in intellectual attainments of the population and of new life styles among the young may have increased the relevance of such studies.

The notion that one ought to achieve joy in work, that work ought to in some sense express one's inner being, probably dates back no farther than to the Renaissance. [25] Before, as well as for most people since, work has been regarded as a necessary evil, a means of getting a living, obtaining social status, accumulating wealth. That work should be an end in itself is an idea that artists and scholars have always found reasonable, but others have been less positive on the subject.

The idea of alienation begins as a broad philosophical concept in the writings of Hegel. Here alienation (Entfremdung) is the perception of the apparently external, objective, phenomenal nature of the world. For Hegel, consciousness emancipates itself from alienation by recognizing these apparent externalities as a projection of consciousness itself.

While affirming the objective reality of the external world, Marx applies the term « alienation » to various forces interfering with the oneness of man with himself, with humanity, and with the products of his labour. The obvious villain of the piece is the institution of capital which makes the products of man's labour an independent force regulating human activity. The man-shaped world thus becomes man's master.

The following much-quoted passage illustrates Marx's position :

> « What constitutes the alienation of labour? First, that the work is *external* to the worker, that it is not part of his nature; and that, consequently, he does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker, therefore, feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, *forced labour*. It is not satisfaction of a need, but only a *means* for satisfying other needs. Its alien character is clearly shown by the fact that as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion it is avoided like the plague . . . .
> We arrive at the result that man (the worker) feels himself to be freely active only in his animal function-eating, drinking, and pro-

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25 TILGER (1958) quotes Leonardo da Vinci, Giordano Bruno, and Tommasso Campanella on the subject.

creating, or at most also in his dwelling and in personal adornment-
while in his human functions he is reduced to an animal. The animal
becomes human and the human animal. » [26]

The worker alienation theme has been pursued by humanists and
social scientists ever since Marx. Some writers stressed the fragmentation
and hence the monotony and meaninglessness of tasks [27] while others
called attention to the lack of control of certain industrial workers over
the pacing of their activities together with the trivial nature of the
activities themselves. [28] Alienation has been variously operationalized,
two recent definitions being those of Seeman and Wilensky. Seeman
notes that different approaches to the notion of alienation usually employ
one or more of conceptualized feeling of (1) powerlessness (2) mean-
inglessness (3) normlesness (4) social isolation, and (5) self-estrange-
ment. [29] Susman (1972) provides the following descriptions of the latter
two concepts in relation to work situations :

> *Isolation* — the worker feels no sense of belonging in the work
> situation and is unable to identify with the organization and its
> goals.
> *Self-estrangement* — the worker lacks a present-time involve-
> ment in work ; it is a means toward future considerations rather
> than an end in itself.

Wilensky (1964) stresses the degree of fit between the self of the
worker's desires and ambitions and the kind of person he is required to

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[26] AVINERI (1968). He takes the quotation from *Karl Marx, Early Writings,*
trans. T.B. Bottomore. London, 1963.

[27] FRIEDMANN (1964B).

[28] BLAUNER (1964), MEISSNER (1969).

[29] SEEMAN (1959) confines his use of the term *alienation* to perceptions of
broad social and cultural issues : the individual's rejection of commonly held
cultural values and consequent feeling of isolation ; his expectation that socially
disapproved means will be required to achieve socially desirable ends ; his per-
ception that he does not understand the broad social forces that affect his life
and the expectation that his fate will in the end be controlled by these mysterious
external factors rather than by his own actions. Seeman's object was to keep the
concept distinct from social disorganization on the one hand and personal malad-
justment on the other.

To make the concept meaningful in the work context requires, however, its
application to a much narrower range of worker perceptions and expectations.
Seeman (1967) defines alienated work simply as work that is not intrinsically
satisfying, and relates this logically to the broader concept of « alienation as self-
estrangement ».

be in the performance of his occupational tasks. [30] Discrepancies between ideal and actual were measured in Wilensky's study for qualities of sociability, conscientiousness, intelligence, independence, and ambition. He found few differences between the low and high ends of the occupational prestige scale, as well as considerable variation within strata of the scale. Engineers, as a group, showed up as being highly alienated, and there were differences between engineers according to the type of company they were working for.

The concept of alienation has been applied to broader social contexts in order to explain the behaviour of « counter-culture » youth [31] and racial minorities. As noted, the definition of the concept varies considerably from study to study. The sociological idea that appears to be common to a considerable number of versions of the concept of alienation is the rejection, active or passive, of one or more of one's social roles. [32] Active rejection may take various forms : rebellion ; the adoption of another role, i.e. a deviant or eccentric life-style ; attempts to change the contents of one's role involving possibly persuasion, possibly conflicts with others with whom one is in significant role relationships. Passive rejection may involve « going through the motions » performing one's roles, that is, without much personal involvement ; or evasion of those role obligations the individual finds to be most onerous. There is a large literature on passive role rejection in industrial settings. [33]

Blauner (1964) had the following to say about the limitations of the concept of alienation :

> « The theory of alienation has been and continues to be a fruitful perspective on the world of work, but it must be pointed out that it is a limited perspective. With all its social-psychological subtleties, it does not fully comprehend the complexities and ambiguities of the inner meaning of work to the individual. As a polemic, it therefore condemns too much, and as a vision, promises too much.
>
> Because it ignores what may be called the bipolar or two-sided ambivalence of work, alienation theory cannot totally explain the

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[30] This seems to relate closely to the self-estrangement definition of alienation.

[31] KENISTON (1965).

[32] This does not fit too well with the notion of alienation as powerlessness, except perhaps where the latter is a consequence of social isolation. For completeness one might add to rejection of roles the alternative of poor or incomplete *definition* of roles.

[33] For example DUBIN (1956), CHINOY (1955).

relationship between work and human happiness. For even the most alienated work is never totally unpleasant, never completely rejected by the worker. Necessity and force is never the whole story. The very worst jobs are rarely only means to exist but often become ends in themselves in some regard. »

Although the alienated worker must often be a dissatisfied worker, the issues are logically and probably empirically distinct. Worker alienation has clearly been with our civilization since the beginning of the industrial revolution. From the standpoint of organizations, i. e. the employer, alienation becomes significant only when so widespread as to make it difficult to recruit workers for key positions. Supervisory positions do not typically require a higher technical performance than non-supervisory positions. What they require is « good behaviour » : interiorization of the demands of one's work role, and acceptance of the norms and objectives of the organization insofar as the latter are explicit. As for the rank and file, from the employer's point of view (or so goes the premise of much of current personnel administration) they can be as alienated as they like provided, in regard to their work roles, their alienation takes on passive forms. Essentially, what many of the proponents of work humanization, including the authors of *Where Have All the Robots Gone ?* and *Work in America* have been saying is that there is a growing tendency for alienation to assume active forms of expression. The evidence does not appear very substantial to date — there are allegations of increasing violence, sabotage, pilferage, absenteeism, alcoholism, drug addiction. As previously noted there has been enough to cause concern for a certain number of employers. There are also indications of a small but consistent tendency for alienated workers to endorse extremist political movements, if one may so designate, for example, the movement in support of the Presidential candidacy of George Wallace. [34] Meissner (1972) discovered tendencies for workers in the more alienating types of industrial work situation (lack of discretion in work, of ability to move around, of chances for social interaction) to participate somewhat less than other workers in community activities and to seek the type of leisure time activities that did not require interpersonal skills (such as religious participation, TV watching). On the other hand, findings of Seeman (1967) in a study of Swedish workers do not support commonly held generalizations about the relationship between work alienation and political and social attitudes.

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[34] SHEPPARD and HERRICK (1972).

SOCIAL EXPERIMENTS AT THE WORK PLACE

The last decade has seen a revival of interest on the part of social scientists in what used to be known as social reform. In the industrial relations field this trend has resulted in considerable interest and participation in a new wave of « socio-technical » experiments that have been taking place in industry. Much of this work has been influenced by the work of Eric Trist and his associates in the British Coal Mining industries. [35]

These experiments have in common a more-or-less thoroughgoing systems approach to work re-design. There have always been ample instances of the introduction of isolated gimmicks to improve productivity, increase motivation, and permit the utilization of special groups of workers. These measures have included various kinds of incentive pay plans, various devices for improving communications and encouraging consultation within the establishment, and the peripheral re-design of plant equipment to accommodate human needs and limitations. In many of these earlier efforts the technological and economic requirements of the firm were taken as exogenous variables. That is to say, for every industrial ouptput there was the « one best way » preached by Gilbreth, of achieving it, and the economic interest of the employer demanded that this way be adopted. The work of Louis E. Davis, an industrial engineer in recent years with the Business School of U.C.L.A., and of others, has tended to destroy myths about the immutability of technology, and has promoted a search for new ways of doing things that will be more satisfactory for the human beings involved. [36] Davis has also been a proponent of the « total accounting » approach to the evaluation of changes in work systems : the inclusion of all of the costs and all of the benefits of the change over a proper time span, as distinct from the use of short-run productivity as the sole criterion.

The emphasis of Trist and his associates of the « socio-technical systems » school has been on the joint optimization of the social and technical aspects of work system. [37] Lip service has always been given to the idea that it is easier to adapt the structural aspects of the environment to people than it is to adapt people to environments. The pro-

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35 WILSON (1973), TRIST et al. (1963).

36 DAVIS (1966).

37 TRIST (1968).

position has now began to be taken seriously in the design efforts of workers in this school.

Experiments have had multiple objectives, befitting a total systems approach. They attempt to deal simultaneously with many of the factors revealed by the job satisfaction and work motivation literature discussed above as being crucial for worker satisfaction. The following objectives appear to be characteristic of these new experiments :

(a) In the technical sphere there are the now traditional ergonomic concerns together with the attempt to create more interesting and challenging jobs and to facilitate, to whatever degree is appropriate, the interaction of workers.

(b) Most of the experiments encourage workers to plan ahead, make decisions, and assume responsibility. This may involve the formation of autonomous or semi-autonomous work groups, with the replacement of supervisors by « group leaders » of a more democratic stripe. It may involve having rank and file workers doing some of the technical design work, the scheduling of production, and the scheduling of individual work activities (to take account of worker preferences as well as technical and economic requirements). Inspection, clean-up, and maintenance activities are typically built into either the individual job or the tasks of the work group. To relieve monotony and provide more flexibility in scheduling work activities job rotation is typically practiced.

(c) In at least one recent experiment [38] drastic steps have been taken to provide a more equalitarian environment. The design of the plant did away with many status symbols such as separate entrances, parking lot spaces, cafeterias.

(d) There are often far-reaching efforts to improve communications and consultation. Discussion of the economic prospects of the company, new technology, etc. feeds back into the planning activities of the autonomous work group. American experiments emphasize the involvement of the individual worker rather than, or in addition to, his representatives. European experiences tend more toward consultation with trade union representatives.

(e) Most of these experiments require some kind of special measures in the area of pay determination. This is because the job enrichment

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[38] The General Foods pet food plant. WALTON (1972A).

aspects of the experiments lead to less specialized work and of lowering of occupational distinctions. Job rotation also contributes to this blurring of distinctions. But people still require incentives, and there will always be individual differences in how effectively people work. One approach that has been adopted in several cases has been to determine pay scales by the number of jobs that an individual has proven himself able to perform, rather than by the occupation he happens to be working in at a given moment. This is obviously not going to be satisfactory to everyone, but it appears to have worked reasonably well in some situations.

(f) Most of the experiments have taken place in operations that were in deep trouble and productivity gains were there to be made. No doubt it will take a long time to run out of such situations but a stage may be visualized when there would be a trade-off between short run productivity and enhanced worker satisfaction.

A number of these experiments have received considerable attention in the business administration journals, and it is not intended to provide a detailed discussion here. It may, however, be useful to provide a brief reference to a few of the better known examples.

One of the most publicized experiments concerns a U.S. pet food plant built by General Foods towards the end of 1970 [39]. It includes about all of the design features previously referred to : autonomous work groups, support functions integrated into regular job activities, job enrichment, job mobility and rewards for learning, facilitative leadership, « managerial » decision information for operators, self-government for the plant community, and a physical environment that does away with many status symbols and facilitates the social interaction of workers.

The job enrichment of janitorial workers jobs was undertaken by Texas Instruments in the U.S. [40] After two years it was discovered that the quality of cleaning services had improved substantially, turnover had dropped remarkably from 100 per cent per quarter to under 10 per cent, and the personnel required for cleaning was nearly cut in half.

The Saab-Scandia Automobile Manufacturing Company opened a plant in January 1972 in which seven assembly groups have replaced the

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[39] WALTON (1972A).
[40] WILSON (1973).

continuous production line, and assembly work within each group is not controlled mechanically. [41] Automobile production line jobs have of course the reputation of being the most alienating jobs in modern industry, and the management of the company hoped that the new system would be less sensitive to disruption than production lines, and also that its ability to recruit workers and reduce absenteeism and turn-over would be enhanced. The Company has made other less revolutionary experiments in job restructuring in its other plants.

Volvo, another Swedish automobile company, has also departed from the traditional assembly line in one of its new plants.

One of the few experiments that has attained a fair size is one at Norsk Hydro, the largest manufacturing organization in Norway. The scheme was planned by a joint action group which included shop stewards and experienced operators, and involved the re-design of jobs (1) to provide some modest challenge at each level, (2) with some overlap (for mutual assistance and teaching), (3) incorporating at least a small element of maintenance as well as operation, and (4), with job rotation pay and extra qualification pay for mastery of additional jobs. [42]

A sheltered experiment involving an autonomous work group has been carried out at the Arvida Refinery of the Aluminum Company of Canada. [43]

It is a little difficult to generalize about the results of these experiments. Generally speaking, after a period of trial and error, they have tended to live up to management's expectations. Cost effectiveness has tended to improve through the elimination of supervision and maintenance and through the saving of recruitment and training costs. In many cases actual worker productivity has improved and staff requirements have been consequently lowered. Turnover rates have usually dropped, making it permissible to infer from what is known about the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover that worker satisfaction has increased.

A lesson coming out of the experiments is that very detailed analysis and planning is required and it has been found desirable to have a good deal of worker input into this planning. The new version of employee

[41] WALTON (1972A).

[42] WILSON (1973).

[43] ARCHER (1972).

relationships may be incompatible with the management style of the existing supervisory staff. Indeed, some middle management may be threatened with elimination should the experiment prove successful. There will always be a minority of workers who do not consider group pressures an improvement over the foreman's orders. Ambitious individuals may dislike the new basis for pay determination. Finally, a sheltered experiment may become too successful too quickly resulting, for example, in upsetting the pay relativities of the larger establishment in which it is located. The most effective procedure appears to be to start with analysis and planning, keep the initial sheltered experiments small, and modify and expand, depending on what experience teaches (Walton, 1973).

There are a number of distinct advantages to this experimental approach to improving the quality of working life. In the first place it seems to work reasonably well in many cases, the workers involved usually show heightened effectiveness and improved morale, the people involved in planning have a sense of tangible accomplishment even though there are usually only small numbers of workers involved, and successful experiments have a myth-destroying power that can snowball. From the standpoint of research these experiments permit before-and-after comparisons to be made with even some limited possibility for the control of factors involved. Finally, in an activist era it enables social scientists and managers to feel they are in tune with the times.

The experiments have some drawbacks from the standpoint of accumulating solid knowledge about the quality of work life and how to improve it. In the first place, it is very difficult to generalize from these small isolated cases. Typically the sheltered experiments, even where deemed successful, do not tend to be considered exportable very far, even within the same plant. As may be seen from the sketchy descriptions of the experiments that have been given, many changes are usually made simultaneously, which creates the possibility, indeed the very high probability, that effects, whether good or bad, will be attributed to the wrong causes. It is also sometimes hard to avoid thinking that perhaps the Hawthorne Effect has struck again.

NEXT STEPS IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

What has been so far has tended to emphasize the potential usefulness of measures of job satisfaction and alienation as social indicators. But, as also emphasized, these measures cannot stand alone. They must
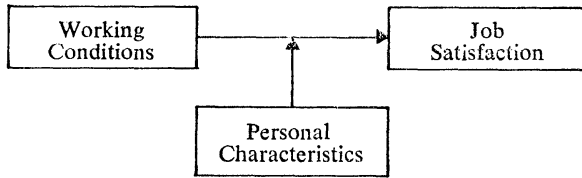
SOURCE: Stanley E. Seashore, *Job Satisfaction as an Indication of The Quality of Employment*. Ottawa, Labour Canada, 1973. Offset.
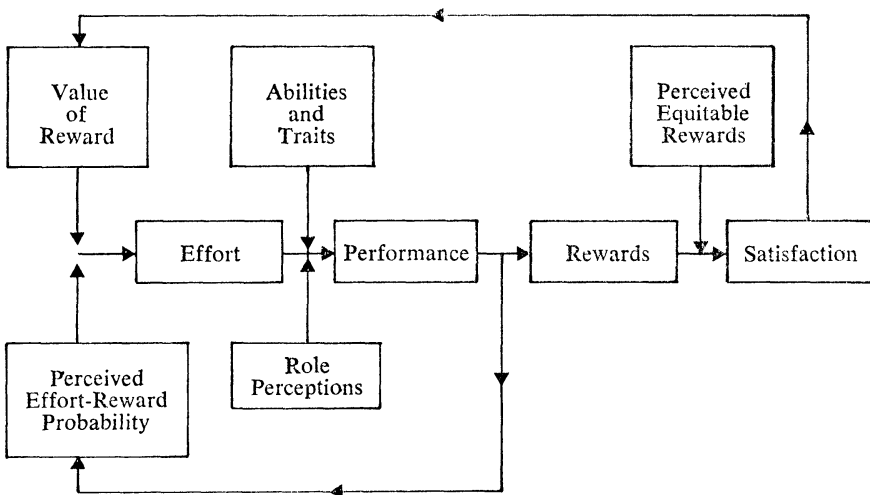
SOURCE: From SCHWAB and CUMMINGS (1970) after Porter & Lawler (1968).
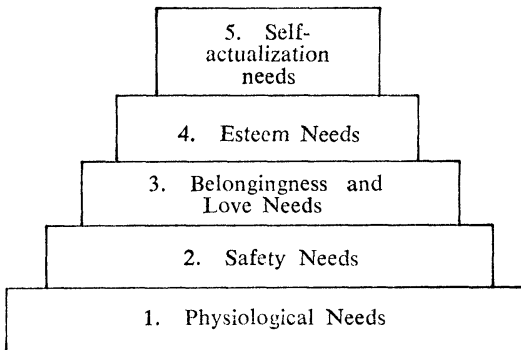
SOURCE: The Maslow needs - hierarchy, after Larouche and Delorme (1972).

be related to a time frame, to other aspects of worker's lives, and to other issues such as the long-term health of workers, and the productivity of work organizations.

The most pressing need at the moment, both for the development of social indicators and for the employment of job satisfaction measures for diagnostic purposes in work place situations, is a sufficiently broad theory. Such a theory would, on the one hand link environmental and personality factors to job saisfaction, and, on the other, job satisfaction to various kinds of behavioural outcome.

On the next page some schematics of constructs and theories that have been used in this field. Seashore (1973) has noted that, although, no one would defend the adequacy of the formulation in Figure 1 for the explanation of anything, its heuristic value cannot be denied. Most of what we know, and most of what we are likely to know in the near future about job satisfaction, comes from the systematic testing of various aspects of this model.

Porter and Lawler (1965) give a formulation for the relationship between incentives, work satisfaction, and job performance (Figure 2). It is interesting to note that in this model the feed-back process can take place without there being any job satisfaction or satisfaction with rewards.

The Maslow hierarchy of human (or at least North American human) needs (Figure 3) has been influential in the field of job satis-faction measurement both as a source of personality variables for studies, and as an explanation of why features of the job itself may be more motivationally salient now than in the past.

There has been a great deal of radical empiricism in the field of job satisfaction measurement. It seems likely, and the recent Canada Department of Labour Symposium showed a certain amount of conver-gence of opinion on this, that future progress in this field may be dependent on the development of more useful models and theories. The likelihood is that these will be considerably more complex than those used in the past.

In regard to the socio-technical experiments, it is much too early yet to say how much they are likely to add to our knowledge of the quality of working life. In any event, they will undoubtedly continue for

reasons having nothing to do with research needs : practical people will be faced with practical problems and will look for the methods nearest at hand to solve them. Because of the research opportunities that they represent, they will undoubtedly be followed closely by social scientists.

UNIONS CONFRONT THE QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE

In principle, there is every reason to expect that trade unions would be in the forefront of those working to improve the quality of work life. In fact, many European unions have been concerned with these issues and have worked actively to promote research and improvement. [44] There are reasons, however, why unions, especially in North America, have difficulties with quality of work life issues.

In the first place, assessing the quality of work life, which usually involves a survey by a social scientist or the plant personnel department, poses a threat to the role of the union as spokesman for the workers. Secondly, collective agreements tend to lock a bargaining unit into a particular set of work rules and job specifications. Changes may require departures from the agreement which, in an atmosphere of somewhat less than wholehearted trust, may be regarded as the thin edge of the wedge. Thirdly, unions tend to share with management the idea that what workers primarily require from their work is material benefits. Unions have tended historically to de-emphasize the more individualistic needs and concerns of workers — for status, mobility, or autonomy. In the past, these have been the needs which have weakened labour solidarity in times of crisis. Rather, trade unions have stressed collective improvements in the relationship between work input and material return, with possibly an underlying skepticism about the ultimate potentialities for the humanization of industrial work. The strategy of the labour movement in North America has been overwhelmingly to provide workers with the leisure and resources to build satisfying lives for themselves outside the work place. [45] The paper delivered by William Winpisinger of the Machinists Union at the recent IRRA meeting in Toronto has

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[44] DELAMOTTE (1972).

[45] A possible harbinger of future disagreements between unionized workers and their leaders over quality of life issues is the current debate over the « compressed work week ». Many North American workers seem to favour the idea in principle, even if it means going back to the 10 hour day. Union leaders, having fought for the 8 hour day are understandably unwilling to relinquish it.

already become something of a classic statement of the union position
in this respect « give workers the money » says Winpisinger, « and they
will take care of the quality of their own lives themselves. » [46]

Quality of work life problems tend to arise in small work groups
whose voices must inevitably be weak when a bargaining position is being
constructed. Even where these issues find their way into a set of bar-
gaining demands, there is a strong tendency for work humanization pro-
posals to get traded away for money, especially during inflationary
periods. Thus, when a trade unionist says that there is no problem or
that the problem has been blown out of proportion, he may simply be
registering his observation that workers are not willing to give up cents
per hour in order to achieve these goals.

There is another problem, primarily ideological in nature, which,
while it may not actually prevent work humanization from occuring,
must often cast a pall over negotiations. This relates to the labour move-
ment's historic concern over exploitation, expressed in a determination
that no productivity gains shall accrue to management without it being
taxed for the benefit of the workers. Unions are often suspicious that in
proposing a change in work procedures, management may be trying to
« pull a fast one ». This, as Delamotte points out, can make European
communist unions quite intractable on the subject, though even here some
variation in ideological position is possible.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

At a recent Symposium on Social Indicators of the Quality of
Working Life sponsored by the Canada Department of Labour, certain
concerns emerged as to whether it was a proper function of government
to monitor in any sort of systematic way the subjective aspects of the
quality of working life. A variety of reasons for such concern were cited-
privacy, the « big brother » aspects, and doubt over whether it would be
possible ultimately for governments to mount programs in this area.

On the other hand, one can expect general agreement to the propo-
sition that the quality of working life itself should be even more of an
object of legitimate interest and concern to governments now than in the
past. Recent research has shown that the quality of working life apparently

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[46] WINPISINGER (1973).

has definite implications for public health and welfare, and manpower policy, both areas of major government concern. Research into this area could well have implications for government activity in the fields of minimum labour standards, and industrial relations policy as well.

Whether it would be appropriate for Canadian governments to develop active proprams in this area, as the U.S. Department of Labor is apparently about to do, whether it should confine itself primarily to acting as a catalyst in subsidizing efforts in the private sector, or whether an even less active type of involvement is more appropriate is something that will no doubt be worked out in the fairly near future. One thing is certain : it is a field of research and practice that no government nowadays can afford to ignore.

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La qualité de la vie dans le milieu de travail

On s'intéresse à la qualité de la vie en milieu de travail depuis au-delà d'un siècle. Pour s'en convaincre, il suffit de rappeler les noms de Victor Hugo, de Charles Dickens, d'Upton Sinclair, d'Engels, de Le Play, de Mayhew. Avant le commencement du XXe siècle, les gouvernements avaient essayé de faire disparaître les abus les plus révoltants.

Il est cependant paradoxal que, au moment où les salaires, la durée du travail, les vacances et les congés payés se sont améliorés à un point qu'on aurait considéré inaccessible il y a quelques générations et au moment où la machine a éliminé en bonne partie le travail pénible et dangereux, il se trouve autant de salariés qui ne soient pas satisfaits de leurs conditions de vie. Et ceci est vrai non seulement du travail en usine, mais également des emplois de bureau. Une étude récente publiée aux États-Unis met en lumière le mécontentement de plusieurs catégories de travailleurs : jeunes ouvriers, personnes âgées, personnel féminin, minorités raciales, cols bleus, cadres intermédiaires, etc. Des enquêtes font ressortir les effets pernicieux d'un travail peu satisfaisant sur la santé physique et mentale, les effets catastrophiques du chômage dans une société où la considération sociale s'acquiert par le travail.

De même, dans les cercles d'employeurs, on cherche à trouver des moyens d'humaniser le milieu de travail afin d'éliminer certains maux : absentéisme, chapardage, sabottage, accidents, alcoolisme, usage des stupéfiants. Il y a déjà plus d'un demi-siècle qu'on se penche sur la question et qu'on étudie les effets de la lumière, de la chaleur, du bruit, de la fatigue, de la monotonie sur la productivité des travailleurs. La satisfaction au travail a fait le sujet d'enquêtes de plus en plus approfondies. Pendant longtemps, on a pensé que plus l'ouvrier était heureux à son travail, plus il y avait de chance que la productivité soit meilleure. Des études récentes ont mis en doute cette hypothèse optimiste. On a également cru que des heures de travail plus courtes, des congés plus nombreux et des vacances prolongées contribueraient à hausser le niveau de la santé physique et mentale des travailleurs. Les expériences récentes tendent à démontrer que l'objectif recherché n'a pas été atteint.

Il n'est donc pas surprenant que sociologues et psychologues se tournent d'un autre côté et qu'ils imputent à d'autres causes comme l'aménagement urbain, les contraintes sociales, par exemple, le phénomène moderne du manque de satisfaction au travail, toutes choses qui échappent à l'esprit des économistes et des hommes d'affaires. Ceux-ci sont maintenant sur la défensive. Stigmatisés comme des « marchands de mort » et des destructeurs de l'environnement, ils cherchent à découvrir des moyens de convaincre le public de leur désir sincère de promouvoir une société meilleure. Ceci signifie que, même si les employeurs ne considèrent pas la qualité de la vie au travail comme une fin en soi, ils prêtent une attention plus grande aux propos des sociologues.

LA QUALITÉ DE LA VIE

L'expression « qualité de la vie » n'a pas un sens très précis. Elle évoque l'image du poisson mort sur la plage aussi bien que la masse de béton au coeur de la ville. Cependant, il y a une certaine affinité entre l'attention que nous portons à la qualité de la vie en milieu de travail et l'intérêt que nous manifestons pour les vieilles notions de conditions et de normes de travail. Cette nouvelle expression semble se prêter à bien des interprétations différentes : le mineur qui se sent bien inconfortable au fond du puits, l'employeur qui veut par là accroître la production et réduire les arrêts de travail au minimum, l'État qui recherche la stabilité et le développement économiques, la santé et la sécurité publiques ainsi que le bien-être des consommateurs. On se trouve donc pour ainsi dire en présence de trois perspectives bien différentes devant le concept de la qualité de la vie en milieu de travail.

Cette notion de « la qualité de la vie » en milieu de travail a également une dimension d'ordre temporel, c'est-à-dire qu'elle peut varier pour un même individu selon ses origines, ses obligations personnelles, le stade de sa carrière professionnelle. Ainsi, ce qui convient au jeune homme dont l'intérêt est tourné vers l'avenir ne sourit pas nécessairement au travailleur d'âge mûr qui doit pourvoir à la vie de plusieurs rejetons et qui ne nourrit plus guère de rêves.

Enfin, la qualité de la vie en milieu de travail doit également s'évaluer en tenant compte des autres aspects de la vie du travailleur : sa situation familiale, l'organisation de ses loisirs, son activité sociale, ses convictions politiques.

LA SATISFACTION AU TRAVAIL

C'est en considérant toutes ces dimensions de la vie humaine qu'il faut aborder la question de la satisfaction au travail. À ce propos, l'auteur commence par faire une revue de la littérature sur ce sujet, littérature qui est déjà fort volumineuse. Les méthodes d'étude de la satisfaction au travail sont orientées vers la connaissance du sentiment global de satisfaction ou d'insatisfaction au travail ou vers un aspect particulier du travail comme l'environnement ou la conduite personnelle, par exemple. D'autre part, elles peuvent s'intéresser aux expériences passées ou aux aspirations du travailleur. Parfois, la méthode consistera dans des questions assez simples du genre de celles-ci : « Aimez-vous ou détestez-vous votre emploi ? » « Y a-t-il un autre genre de travail que vous aimeriez faire ? » ou « Travailleriez-vous si vous n'aviez pas besoin de gagner votre vie ? » Parfois il s'agit d'un ensemble de questions très compliquées.

Au cours des années, sans tenir compte de la méthode utilisée ni du caractère des personnes interviewées, les études sur la satisfaction au travail indiquent une certaine uniformité. La plupart des personnes interrogées se déclarent satisfaites, alors que de dix à vingt pour cent donnent un autre son de cloche. Si les résultats sont intéressants, il n'en reste pas moins que les psychologues ont souvent de la difficulté à les interpréter. La formule du questionnaire indirect, plus raffinée, laisse voir certaines différences dans le pourcentage des travailleurs satisfaits et insatisfaits quand on les analyse en fonction de l'âge, du degré d'instruction et du statut économique des travailleurs.

De tout ceci, il ressort diverses constatations. L'américain traditionnel est plutôt un bluffer qu'un revendicateur : le degré de respectabilité sociale lui importe plus que le bonheur. La personnalité du travailleur est tellement reliée à son emploi et à son milieu de travail que se plaindre de son travail, c'est remettre en question toute sa vie. Le mythe du travailleur heureux semble avoir été créé dans une certaine mesure par des formes d'enquête trop simplistes.

Des études ont démontrée que l'intégration de l'employé dans le milieu semble favoriser la satisfaction au travail. La façon dont le travailleur est dirigé, le salaire les avantages d'appoint et les chances d'avancement donnent des résultats assez ambigus. Ces questions sont sans doute importantes mais le travailleur peut les considérer, la rémunération par exemple, bien des points de vue différents : comme gagne-pain, comme récompense, comme compensation juste pour son activité.

D'autre part, on ne peut pas tirer de conclusions de la satisfaction ou de l'insatisfaction au travail sur le comportement des individus placés devant des situations concrètes. L'insatisfaction au travail ne peut être une explication suffisante de l'attitude du travailleur qui a posé un geste précis. Selon les individus, le sentiment de satisfaction ou d'insatisfaction inspire des comportements fort variés. Parfois la satisfaction au travail peut être un stimulant pour la productivité, mais le phénomène inverse peut aussi se produire. D'une façon générale, toutefois, on peut conclure que les gens travaillent mieux et davantage lorsque leur activité est conforme à la réalisation de leurs aspirations profondes qu'il s'agisse d'argent, de statut social ou de prestige. C'est pourquoi, pour apprécier valablement le comportement du travailleur, il faut recourir à une quarantaine de variables.

On a aussi fait des études sur la satisfaction au travail en rapport avec l'état de santé physique et mentale des travailleurs. Dans ce cas, on est arrivé à la conclusion qu'il y avait une relation évidente entre la longévité et la satisfaction. Plus le travailleur est insatisfait, plus il est exposé aux maladies du cœur, de l'estomac et à des affections rhumatismales.

LE SENTIMENT D'ALIÉNATION

Au problème de la satisfaction au travail est intimement lié celui de l'aliénation par le travail. Les conditions mêmes de la vie moderne ont accru la pertinence des études sur cette question. L'idée selon laquelle le travail est en quelque sorte l'extériorisation de l'être ne remonte pas au-delà de la Renaissance. Auparavant, et c'est encore vrai pour le commun, le travail était ressenti comme un mal nécessaire, un moyen de gagner sa vie, de se donner un *standing* social et d'amasser des richesses. Cependant, savants et artistes ont toujours trouvé que le travail était une fin en soi. L'idée d'aliénation a été élevée au titre de concept philosophique par Hégel. Marx a appliqué le terme « aliénation » aux forces diverses qui tendent à briser l'unité de l'homme en le séparant du produit de son travail. C'est ainsi que l'institution du capital est devenue une force indépendante qui est régulatrice de l'activité humaine.

Ce thème de l'aliénation de l'homme par le travail a toujours été vivace depuis Marx parmi les humanistes et les sociologues. Certains mettent l'accent sur la fragmentation, donc la monotonie des tâches, tandis que d'autres se sont surtout penchés sur l'impuissance des travailleurs à fixer eux-mêmes le rythme de leur activité. On

a aussi recouru au concept d'aliénation pour expliquer le comportement « anti-culture » de la jeunesse et des minorités raciales.

Par ailleurs, la définition du concept d'aliénation varie considérablement d'un auteur à l'autre. D'une façon générale, on peut retenir que l'aliénation consiste dans le rejet, actif ou passif, d'un ou de plusieurs des rôles sociaux que l'homme doit tenir. Le rejet actif revêt plusieurs formes : la rébellion, le choix d'un rôle nouveau, c'est-à-dire d'adoption d'un style de vie déviant et excentrique, le combat pour modifier ce rôle, soit par persuation, soit par la lutte ouverte. Quant au rejet passif, il consiste soit à éviter systématiquement de s'engager personnellement, soit à fuir les responsabilités qui sont les plus onéreuses.

Il faut distinguer l'aliénation de l'insatisfaction au travail. Le travailleur se veut aliéné depuis les débuts de l'ère industrielle. Pour la société, pour l'employeur principalement, l'aliénation ne devient sensible et significative qu'au moment où elle est suffisamment généralisée pour rendre difficile le recrutement des travailleurs pour occuper les postes-clés. Par exemple, les fonctions de cadres exigent pas plus de connaissances techniques que les postes d'ouvriers, mais elles exigent un « bon comportement », c'est-à-dire l'acceptation des normes et des objectifs de l'entreprise. Pour ce qui est du travailleur du rang, cela n'a pas d'importance qu'il se sente aliéné dans la mesure où leur sentiment d'aliénation demeure passif. Cependant, les tenants de l'humanisation du travail remarquent que l'aliénation a tendance à prendre des formes actives et à s'extérioriser dans le milieu de travail par l'augmentation de la violence, du sabotage, de l'absentéisme, du chapardage, de l'alcoolisme et des stupéfiants. Elle s'extériorise aussi par la participation des travailleurs aux mouvements politiques extrémistes, par le rejet de toutes formes d'activités communautaires et par la recherche d'un type de loisirs qui exclut les relations interpersonnelles.

LA LUTTE CONTRE L'ALIÉNATION PAR LE TRAVAIL

Pour contrecarrer l'aliénation, les spécialistes ont préconisé des réformes sociales. Dans le domaine des relations professionnelles, celles-ci ont soulevé un intérêt considérable et la mise en train de nombre d'expériences socio-techniques visant à accroître la productivité, à augmenter la motivation au travail et à former des groupes spéciaux de travailleurs : systèmes de primes au rendement variées, réaménagement des lieux de travail, installation de dispositifs favorisant les communications et les consultations entre les employés.

On peut dire que ces expériences visent les buts suivants : chercher à créer des emplois plus intéressants et à favoriser l'interaction entre les employés ; développer le sens de la responsabilité chez les travailleurs ; établir une ambiance et un environnement plus égalitaire ; faciliter la communication et la consultation entre les différents groupes d'employés; adopter certaines mesures spéciales concernant le mode de rémunération du travail.

L'auteur donne ensuite certains exemples concrets où de bons résultats ont été obtenus. Dans une usine de la compagnie General Foods, on a, par exemple, formé des groupes de travail autonomes, ajouté des activités de soutien au travail de production, valorisé certains postes de travail, etc. Dans certaines fabriques d'automobiles, on a remplacé la production à la chaîne traditionnelle par des groupes d'assembleurs.

Il est difficile de donner une appréciation globale de ces expériences. Toutefois, après une période de tâtonnement, elles semblent répondre aux attentes des employeurs. Il y a plusieurs avantages dans cette façon expérimentale d'améliorer la qualité de la vie en milieu de travail. L'efficacité et le moral des travailleurs s'améliorent. En ce qui concerne la recherche, cette façon de procéder permet de faire des comparaisons valables. Elle permet aussi de constater si les sociologues ont erré dans leur appréciation de l'état d'esprit des travailleurs. Par ailleurs, ces expériences ne permettent pas de conclure à coup sûr qu'elles ont contribué à accroître les connaissances au sujet de la qualité de la vie ni à découvrir des moyens efficaces et certains de l'améliorer. Ces expériences ne sont pas non plus facilement exportables. Il se peut aussi, en en considérant les résultats, bons ou mauvais, qu'on ne saisisse pas les causes véritables.

Dans le domaine de la recherche, dans quelle voie, compte tenu de ce qui a été accompli jusqu'ici, faut-il s'engager ? Ce qui semble presser le plus, c'est de mettre au point une théorie générale valable. Les méthodes de mesure de la satisfaction au travail ont été jusqu'à maintenant trop empiriques. Les nouvelles formules devront être plus complexes, s'appuyer sur de nombreuses variables.

L'ATTITUDE DES SYNDICATS ET LE RÔLE DE L'ÉTAT

Un des phénomènes les plus paradoxaux en Amérique du Nord, c'est que les syndicats attachent assez peu d'attention aux efforts qui sont faits pour améliorer la qualité de la vie en milieu de travail alors que l'on pourrait naturellement penser qu'ils devraient être à l'avant-garde de ce mouvement. À quoi attribuer cette attitude ? L'auteur en voit la raison d'abord dans le fait que les dirigeants syndicaux craignent de perdre leur emprise auprès des travailleurs. D'autre part, les conventions collectives de travail tendent à enfermer dans la négociation des règlements d'atelier et des spécifications d'emploi. Troisièmement, les syndicats mettent toujours l'accent sur les gains matériels et sur les questions d'argent, en particulier dans les périodes d'inflation. Enfin, les syndicats considèrent que toute tentative en vue d'améliorer le milieu de travail est un moyen pour les employeurs de s'assurer une part plus grande des profits obtenus par l'accroissement de la productivité.

En ce qui concerne l'État, on est enclin à se demander si c'est bien la fonction de s'engager systématiquement sur ce terrain. Cependant, les mesures destinées à protéger la santé physique et mentale des travailleurs peuvent l'inciter à se préoccuper de la question. Une chose apparaît certaine : les gouvernements ne peuvent plus ignorer le problème.

En bref, l'auteur s'est efforcé de poser le problème de la qualité de la vie en milieu de travail tant en ce qui concerne le double phénomène de la satisfaction au travail que de l'aliénation par le travail. Son étude constitue une revue à vol d'oiseau fort intéressante qui rappelle les nombreuses études et les expériences concrètes qui ont été effectuées en cette matière, principalement aux États-Unis, depuis une cinquantaine d'années.