

SOCI 425

Industrial Sociology I

**Session Five: The Nature of Work and its
Centrality in the Life of Man**

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Session Overview

❑ Overview

- Human beings by nature work to enable them to survive or live. This session focuses on the nature of work and its centrality in the lives of people.

❑ **Objective:** At the end of the lecture, the student will be able to;

- Distinguish between Work and Recreation;
- Distinguish the Orthodox and Modern Views of Work;
- Identify the Reasons why People Work;
- Explain the Importance and Centrality of Work;
- Identify the Reasons for Work Avoidance.

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in this session are as follows:

- Topic One: Work and Recreation: Definitions and Differences
- Topic Two: Orthodox and Modern Views of Work
- Topic Three: Reasons why People Work
- Topic Four: Importance and Centrality of Work
- Topic Five: Reasons for Work Avoidance

Topic One: Work and Recreation: Definitions and Differences

- Work is not only necessary for the preservation of life but it also offers certain social and psychological satisfaction to the human being;
- The social organizations of work and technology at a given stage of history determine the nature of society;
- Including its degree of social inequality, and set the stage for the next level of development;

Work and Recreation: Definitions and Differences Cont.

- The nature of work as well as the social organization of work differed from one historical era to the other;
- From hunting and gathering societies to settled agricultural, feudal system;
- Merchant capitalism, factory system, mass production and post-industrial society.

Work and Recreation: Definitions and Differences Cont.

- Some authors believe that work cannot be defined whiles for others they do not see the need to define work since it is an aspect of man;
- The Economists defines it as “one of the major factors of production consisting of manual;
- Or mental application for which wages, salaries or professional fees are received”;

Work and Recreation: Definitions and Differences Cont.

- The famous Anthropologist Raymond Firth defines it as “an income producing activity;
- Or a purposeful activity involving the use of energy at some sacrifice of pleasure or leisure;
- The Oxford Dictionary defines work as “an expenditure of energy, striving or application of effort to some purpose”.

Work and Recreation: Differences.

- All the above definitions do not appear to be quite accurate since sometimes men work without effort or do not get any income from their work;
- However, an activity peculiar to work is essentially centred on the **Object**;
- **Sociologically therefore, work is a human activity directed to an object.**
- Whether the activity is useful, pleasurable, and painful or implies the use of energy or not, is quite immaterial;

Work and Recreation: Differences Cont.

- What is essential to the working activity is it being addressed to an object distinct from both the subject and agent and from the activity itself;
- The difference between work and recreation or play can be perceived clearly when their external activity is the same;
- The characteristic feature of work therefore is **the concentration on the object to be achieved** which in a sense guides and coordinates the activities of the agent;

Work and Recreation: Differences Cont.

- **Recreation or play on the contrary is only concerned with the subject or agent** who is the reason or justification for its existence;
- Work can therefore be defined as **“a human transitive activity existing for the sake of its object on which society acts as its norm and destination”**;
- Society therefore sets in general the demand, norms and conditions of work and the fact that work is objective;
- And related to society offers a fertile ground for sociological enquiry especially in industry.

Topic: Orthodox and Modern Views on Work

- The orthodox view of work accepts the Old Testament belief that;
- Physical labour is a curse imposed on man as punishment for his sins and that the sensible man labours solely in order to keep himself and his family alive and to make a living;
- As a result of this, the natural dislike for work is inherent in man;
- Therefore when it comes to the motivation of work, **“the carrot and stick hypothesis is used”**;

Orthodox and Modern Views on Work Cont.

- This hypothesis asserts that the main positive incentive is money, and the main negative incentive is the fear of unemployment;
- Hence, though there is the carrot (money), man would not work until the stick (fear of unemployment) is used;
- In other words, man must always be compelled or threatened with punishment to be able to work.

Orthodox and Modern Views on Work: Cont.

- The Modern view of work through research has shown that the Orthodox view of work is incorrect;
- The Modern view however argues that work is an essential part of human life since it is that aspect of life which gives man **status** and **binds him to society**;
- Ordinarily, men and women like their work and at most periods of history have always done so;

Orthodox and Modern Views on Work: Cont.

- When they do not like work, the fault lies in the psychological and social conditions of the work rather than in the worker;
- Unemployment is therefore a powerful incentive and feared by men because it cuts a person off his or her society.

Topic Three: Reasons Why People Work.

- Research conducted on why people work help us to realize that men work for a wide range of motives;
- Among which ones education, tradition and culture play an important role;
- A man may work because he needs money to feed his family,
- Others with millions of cedis may work because he likes the power and social status doing a job brings;
- For instance, some aboriginals of Ecuador accepted work in the mines because they came to know that miners wear sandals;

Reasons Why People Work Cont.

- One of the most popular and deep rooted ideas on this question is that men work for the sake of money either mostly or exclusively;
- However, J.A.C. Brown (Social Psychologist) argued that;
- “the belief that money is the sole or even the most important of several motives why people work is so foolish that;
- Anyone who holds these opinion is rendered incapable of understanding either industry or industrial worker”;

Reasons Why People Work Cont.

- It is however true that in subsistence economy where people can hardly make ends meet;
- Money is of paramount importance hence, and in this case it is a motivating factor why people work;
- However, when the situation improves and money becomes sufficient or abundant and the law of diminishing returns sets in, money loses its importance as an incentive;
- Various researches done in western societies, money hardly ever attain the first place in the list of incentives proposed;
- Rather, job security, opportunity for promotion, good working conditions etc. usually fill the first place;

Reasons Why People Work Cont.

- In a study conducted in Calcutta in India in the early 50s by C.H. Ganguli about what makes a job desirable;
- The group of lowest paid workers shows opportunities for promotion first and adequate earnings – second;
- The middle paid workers group who were in the majority preferred adequate earnings first and job security second;
- The best paid work group which was in the minority chose job security first, opportunity for promotion second;
- Good working condition third while adequate earning occupied the fourth place.

Reasons Why People Work Cont.

- The monistic theory tried to explain behaviour in terms of single motive (money);
- This is hardly the case since man's behaviour at any time is guided by multiplicity of factors;
- The role that work plays in the life of a man can easily be seen in the event of unemployment;

Reasons Why People Work Cont.

- Men dread unemployment not merely because it means loss of money but it also means loss of “**face**”;
- To find oneself without work or function in society and without the **social connections** and hopes rooted in work is like experiencing the withering away of one’s very life;
- Many studies show that unemployment is extremely traumatic for jobless individuals and their families.

Topic Four: Importance and Centrality of Work

- Work takes on an overriding importance in people's lives, tending to overshadow family and community attachments that prevailed in previous periods;
- In post industrial society, work has become a “master status” determining a person's overall position in society and his or her sense of identity;
- Retirement, access to health care, and social status are all attached to one's employment positions;

Importance and Centrality of Work Cont.

- Being committed to one's profession or to one's organization provides;
- A meaningful orientation to work for a significant portion of the labour force in post industrial society;
- Marie Jahoda (1982) identified some of the latent functions of work people miss if they lose their jobs;
- While the manifest function of work is, primarily, maintaining or improving one's standard of living;
- The latent (less obvious) function contributes to an individual's personal wellbeing;

Importance and Centrality of Work Cont.

- ❑ Firstly, Work can provide experiences of creativity and mastery, and can foster a sense of purpose;
 - It can be self-fulfilling, although, clearly, some jobs offer much less fulfilment than others;
 - When hit by unemployment, an individual loses these personal rewards;
 - This was illustrated by a banker with 14 months of unemployment:
 - *“I feel like I’m wasting time. I feel like I’m not accomplishing anything. I don’t really feel like I’m contributing to the marriage, to society, or anything like that”;*

Importance and Centrality of Work Cont.

- ❑ Secondly, Work provides regularly shared experiences and often enjoyable interactions with co-workers;
- When the job is gone, so are such personally satisfying routines;
- An unemployed person quickly comes to miss these social rewards, and may also find that relationships away from work are no longer the same;
- Such feelings are expressed in the following way by an unemployed teacher:
 - *The whole feeling that I had... was that nobody really understood where I was, what I was going through, what I cared about, what important to me. Because I was no longer about my job as a teacher, in fact I wasn't talking about my job as anything. I had a strong sense of not fitting in.*

Importance and Centrality of Work Cont.

- In addition, work structures time as individuals who have lost their jobs frequently find that their days seem not only empty, but disorienting;
- A divorced mother of a four-year-old, living with her own mother to make ends meet, explains:
 - *If you went to work, at least you're coming home in the evening. When I'm home all day... I get confused. My whole metabolism is gone crazy, because it's, like coming back from... where I have been. Or I have gone and I am still waiting to come home.*

Importance and Centrality of Work Cont.

- ❑ Furthermore, being unemployed often require that one seeks financial assistance,
- Sometimes from family members, but more often through government agencies;
- Dealing with the bureaucracy can be frustrating and more problematic, receiving social assistance carries a great deal of stigma;

Importance and Centrality of Work Cont.

- As former factory worker, the mother of two small children explains:
 - *When I went down there, I felt that I just stuck right out. I thought, “Oh, my God, people think I am on welfare... You used to think it’s those people who are on welfare, now you discover you’re one of these people.*
- These glimpses into the lives of unemployed people reflect the importance and centrality of work in our society as a potential source of self-fulfilment and social integration.

Topic Five: Reasons for Work Avoidance.

- Although work is a universal activity, it does not follow that it is always pleasant as there are people who avoid work;
- The avoidance of work is not inherent in the human being but rather due to the following factors:
 - **The Inherent Difficulty of Work itself;**
 - **The Contemporary Concentration of Men, Capital and Technology in Industry tends to obliterate (destroy) the Individual;**
 - **The Peculiar Historical Conditions in which Modern Industry originated:**

Reasons for Work Avoidance Cont.

➤ The Inherent Difficulty of Work itself:

- It is obvious that as work is directed towards an object as demanded by the needs or rules of society;
- As such the attainment of this object is not always easy and sometimes entails some serious difficulties;
- Hence the avoidance work due to the inherent difficulty of work itself.

Reasons for Work Avoidance Cont.

- **The Contemporary Concentration of Men, Capital and Technology in Industry tends to obliterate (destroy) the Individual:**
 - In this case, modern industries tends to lay emphasis on specialization and division of labour with the predominance of machines;
 - This makes the worker feel that his identity is being lost due to the fragmentation of work;
 - In other words, each man feels accountable for a single operation or a tiny aspect of it making work monotonous leading to avoidance.

Reasons for Work Avoidance Cont.

- **The Peculiar Historical Conditions in which Modern Industry originated:**
- The historical circumstances surrounding the birth of industry also cause work avoidance;
- At the beginning of the industrial revolution, the worker who once could dispose of his own farm and sell the products of their labour were forced to join new factories;
- As a result, the worker became a “victim of triple divorce” namely:

Reasons for Work Avoidance Cont.

- As a result, the worker became a “**Victim of Triple Divorce**” namely:
 - ❖ Divorce from the management of the home industry in which he previously worked;
 - ❖ Divorce from the ownership of the means of production;
 - ❖ Divorce from the marketing or ultimate disposition of the products of his hands.

Reading List

- Refer to students to relevant text/chapter or reading materials you will make available on Sakai
- Miller and Form (1964). **Industrial Sociology: The Sociology of Work Organization**. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Parker, R. S et al (2005). **The Sociology of Industry**. Sixth Edition. London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Mayo, G.E. (1945). **The Social Problems of Industrial Civilization**. Harvard University Press.

Sample Questions

- Apart from money, identify and discuss any five reasons why people work.

