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Sociology International Journal

Review Article

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Imaginary social configurations of work through history and their effects on professionals' practice and health

Abstract

The characteristics of stability and predictability, typical of the industrial society in the exponential era, are insecurity and uncertainty. Because of this, the formation systems must be characterized by their flexibility and adaptability to the job markets. The goal behind this presentation is to discuss the imaginary configuration of work in history and the impact produced by their changes on professionals' health and formation. This article is the outcome of the analysis of data gathered in various research pieces that used methodological triangulation and is based on data recovered through quantity-quality techniques describing the labor markets and the determination of the most suitable modes in the formal, no formal and informal educational systems with the aim of favoring human development in conditions of equity and personal fulfillment. We operate in the intersection between economy, psychology, sociology and health sciences. We seek to arrive at conclusions that can provide an insight into what is known as a society of complexity. Our aim is to provide a detailed description of the social characteristics based on interpersonal relationships in the light of the socio-historical comprehension of how the job markets have evolved mostly over the last century and a half. The key in a human society signaled by inequity and lack of opportunities for more than one thousand million people is to provide knowledge so that the national states can make well-informed decisions geared to improving the quality and efficacy of formation in all the educational levels.

Volume 3 Issue 1 - 2019

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Received: September 07, 2017 | **Published:** January 07, 2019

Introduction

Imaginary social configurations of work through history and their effects on professionals' practice and health

An issue that has not been discussed at length is whether work, as an imaginary social configuration, has been steady throughout human history. Our answer to this query is that is has not. Work has not had the same meaning and to substantiate this opinion we resorted to the history of the organizations of human societies and the influence exerted by work on them. The importance of this debate lies in that the practice of professionals in the field of work, in terms of human development, has been heavily influenced by the socio-historical domain. In the first place, we will examine the different imaginary social configurations in different socio-historical moments and then we will try to analyse the importance of such changes on professional practices. When analyzing the literature that explores the history of work in the human society, the very first discussion refers to whether all societies have been societies characterized by work or at least societies in which work fulfilled a central function in the social articulation.

As Medá[1] maintains not always human societies have been societies in which work had a key role. There existed primitive societies in which the most important activities were sports, hunting, and if work had some importance, that consisted of a worship element. When primitive people cultivated crops, they did so with extreme care so as to pay homage to their gods; in this sense, we can say that in the human history there have been societies without work. In the ancient world, work was equated to a devalued activity, following ancient philosophers' criterion, as work operated with corrupt elements, it corrupted its performers (of course this referred to slaves' work, unworthy of a citizen). In other socio-historical formations, the main activity revolved around religion and war. In the middle ages, about half the days of the year were devoted to reflection and religious worship. Those were days we would now call religious holidays. Religion was, as we see it, the key element in the social articulation and everyday life was conditioned by religious precepts. It is just in the modern world that work as an abstract configuration, begins to rise in importance. Such importance is linked with the need a growing class, the bourgeoisie, which for its growth required free work. Gradually, workers stopped being part of the familiar domain of patrons to become free citizens that sold their work force.

Around XVI and XVII centuries, liberal thinkers begin to debate about the importance of work in the human society. One of these thinkers, Smith,[2] will argue with physiocrats, who believed that the wealth of nations stems from production and national work. It is there where the meaning of work as central to society began to be discussed. On several occasions, Bonantini et al.,[3] it has been said that capitalism is a socio-economic system which was not created overnight, nor was it transformed in a dominant mode of production due to the magic effect of a revolution. The French revolution is the moment in which the mature capitalism takes over power to deepen the bourgeois superstructure of dominance and to overthrow the "ancient régimen", but capitalism had began developing many centuries before, as in fact, forms of capitalist relations can be found in the ancient world.

The triumphant capitalism in the French revolution period is the manufacturing industrial capitalism that participates in the free market concurrence, to which manufacturers go to exchange their products for money. It is not surprising that in those first moments of industrial capitalism the first professionals interested in studying inner

relations of the production world should appear. To cite a few, we can mention, besides,[2] Ricardo[4] and the classical economists, different professionals that from fields as different from that of economy, made their contribution to this topic. Among them, Angelo Mosso (1846-1910), who published "The Laws of Fatigue"[5] and "The Physical and Intellectual Fatigue" (1894). Jules Marey (1830-1904), published, in turn, in 1894 "The Study of Movement", Emil Kraepelin (1856-1926), in 1905 published an important paper that refers directly to Psychology, "The Psychology of Work", Wilhem Wundt (1832-1920) founded the Laboratory of Leipzig, with which Psychology rose to the status of a science. It is the moment of the industrial revolution and mass-production of industry that starts to have a clear manufacturing streak. This supposes the need to deepen the case studies so that new techniques directed at motivation and organization of production could be developed. We witness the emergence of other fields of use of medicine, Psychology, Sociology and economy as disciplines genuinely interested in work's conditions and environment. In this sense, we consider it is worth illustrating what has been stated above through a very important author, Mustemberg, who argued that humans' will was not part of conscience and that the only volitional experience that has in its introspections are established thanks to physiological responses (joints, muscular contractions). Mustemberg devised his book in three main parts that were defined according to his understanding of the link between man and work.

a) Part 1: he developed the staff selection as he tried to determine the best possible man to do each job.

b) Part 2: he analysed how man can manage to do the best possible job thus pinpointing the factors that affect efficiency.

c) Part 3: he tackled issues related to commercialization, sales, and publicity to achieve the best possible effects in the commercialization of products.

The major tenet of his theory, applied to the study of work, can be summarized as consisting of developing the most adequate worker who cando the best possible job that leads to the best expected results. Throughout XX century, in general, the social sciences and the field of work responded to the industrial capitalism's demands and embarked on a quest of the best conditions to enhance workers' performance. In this sense, Frederick Taylor (1911) and OCT's publications are well known. These papers foregrounded worker's feelings thanks to Elton Mayo, motivational case studies by Herzberg,[6] Mc Gregor, Morse y Lorsch, Argyris, Schein, just to name only a few. Just a quarter of a century ago, with the advent of ICTs, investigators that participate in the field of work practice felt themselves compelled to develop creativity to meet the challenges that the excessive frenetic technological development entailed.

When considering a few significant data, it is worth observing the exponential growth of the service sector over the industrial. This sector between 1070 and 2000 decreased its participation in the total employed work force from 34 to 17%. New forms of organizing production unknown until that day appeared. Among these new forms, teleworkers together with more flexible ways of organizing the daily tasks such as the Google example, multiplied the telecommunications and robotic uses in organizations and, most importantly, the model of the expected worker was transformed. While at the beginning of the XX century workers were expected to have few competences, now it is clear that workers should have levels of formation that involve technological, automated systems, languages, etc. But also, investigators have diversified our domains of intervention, from the factory as a unit of analysis we have reached the domain with development of programs of local development which implied new work techniques such as the implementation of centers of local development, multiple uses workshops, enterprises to be, etc. An element that cannot be disregarded is the need to work both in the factory and the territory pursuing the objective of developing the psychological and physical wellbeing and the concern with workers' suffering in the course of work. And we are also professionally updated in the field of work with a myriad of measure techniques, standardized tests, group techniques, etc., which allow us to be more accurate and have a wider reach in the intervention projects. But, unfortunately, technological advances are unstoppable and at every moment we find that new technologies keep changing the organization of work more quickly than ever. This compels us to be part of a process that demands constant updating and the development of new theoretical and practical works directed at intervening in the field of work.

Social sciences professionals must bear in mind that the core of our work is plan for uncertainty, a world where complexity, besides being more and more intricate, is different each day. We all know how the communicational and productive reality has changed in companies. Today the universalization of communications on cell phones and the chance of communicating with faraway places in real time have become the norm. Capitalism has extended so greatly that it has erased cultural barriers and business practices have extended globally, however, in the same scenario, we find multiple fragmentations that respond to interests and needs that are typical of each territory. It is vital that to act we bear in mind the universal, particular and peculiar, which makes our practice an enormous challenge. Today's world bears little resemblance to that world people who were children in the 50s or 60s knew, and those whose youth and adulthood developed in the 60s, 70s and 80s.

This shows us the challenge the shifting reality makes us face, today's world has little to do with the world that is currently developing and which will be today's world in the 30s, 40s or 50s in the XXI century. Through only one example we can show more clearly what is being said. 3 D technologies-that today have only incipiently developed, according to experts in the following 20 or 30 years not only are bound to change daily life but also will change the occupational and organizational structure of the world. In the future, many manufactures that big corporations produce today will be produced domestically through the 3D printing. This means that textiles, auto parts, medical prosthesis will be made through this technology. We live in what has been called "The exponential Era" and the professional fields such as Medicine, Law, Psychology, Economy and Sociology are being deeply influenced by the changes in production. Descriptive studies show that these professions will suffer the impact of specialization and will have to adjust to the requirements that the technological society now imposes. For example, even today we find in internet reliable information about illnesses' diagnoses and many of the topics over which lawyers or economists used to counsel can now be solved through on line forms. On the other hand, professionals are also victims of job uncertainty and of the changes that take place in the labor market. Sennet[7,8] describes magnificently the paces and job practices that the new professionals are subject to as well as the costs on their health and on their family and social relationships. In this scenario, it is difficult to imagine what our future world will be, but in this lies the interest of investigation work and the chance of putting our creativity so as to sketch our future possible reality, and from this outline we have to begin to formulate theories and social intervention techniques.[9–14]

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The auhtor declares there is no conflict of interest.

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