

Compte rendu

Ouvrage recensé :

The Quality of Working Life in Western and Eastern Europe, by Cary L. Cooper and Enid Memford, (eds), Westport, Greenwood Press, 1979, 348 pp.

par Alexander J. Matejko

Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations, vol. 36, n° 1, 1981, p. 285-288.

Pour citer ce compte rendu, utiliser l'adresse suivante :

URI: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/029145ar>

DOI: 10.7202/029145ar

Note : les règles d'écriture des références bibliographiques peuvent varier selon les différents domaines du savoir.

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter à l'URI <https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche. Érudit offre des services d'édition numérique de documents scientifiques depuis 1998.

Pour communiquer avec les responsables d'Érudit : info@erudit.org

true, management would ignore the grievance machinery and speed-up the line anytime market conditions and competitive relations deemed it advantageous. Secondly, by his own choosing, he sacrifices "rich ethnographic data" he collected "for the sake of excursions into theorizing" (p. xiv). But what makes this study important is precisely the shop floor data. Therefore, I feel that a large part of the uniqueness in this study is left behind to our disadvantage.

To conclude, the 1980's present the student of industrial sociology with unique and controversial problems that demand attention. Declining productivity, high labor turnover rates, persistent inflation, highly volatile domestic and international product markets, a more heterogenous and younger labor force with significantly different expectations from older workers, rapidly changing industrial relations systems such as the new Quality of Worklife Programs and joint union-company political actions like the recent UAW-Chrysler Corporation bail-out project, and the introduction of new technologies that are drastically changing the work environment require us to grapple with the labor question whether our role is in policy formation or job reform. Before we can do either requires extensive knowledge about what the man and woman working in our mines, mills, and factories need and demand. Thus, participant observation studies such as Burawoy's are an important first step in this direction. While his study raises certain problems and leaves many questions unanswered, it requires an ambitious and farsighted research project such as this one to engage in meaningful and fruitful debate about these issues and possibly lead in the direction of a theory of the labor process. For that, we welcome this book with open arms, and pens and notepads ready.

Craig A. ZABALA

University of California
U.S. Department of Labor

The Quality of Working Life in Western and Eastern Europe, by Cary L. Cooper and Enid Memford, (eds), Westport, Greenwood Press, 1979, 348 pp.

The European experience in the QWL field is of a growing importance and therefore the review of it in the book here under consideration should be of some use. The authors of contributions into the book are European specialists in the field, and they really know what they talk about.

The contributions from public funds to the QWL projects have grown very considerably during the 1970's. The scope of the QWL projects has gone much beyond the original focus mainly on the assembly lines of the automobile industry. Now there is already a very considerable number of people actively involved in the QWL field; they consist of managers, trade unionists, ergonomists, social scientists, economists, accountants, representants of various interest groups, etc.

According to A.T.M. Wilson, there is a problem of finding common language between representants of differing interests and orientations. In order to promote industrial participation, the promotors themselves have to secure mutual tolerance and acceptance. The growing governmental involvement in industrial relations, so evident for example in Sweden, contributes to the necessity of a team approach in the QWL field. In addition, there are in the modern world several important forces that support the humanisation of work: the conviction of humanisers, the ecological limits of growth, the increasing rates of structural unemployment, the increase in educational opportunities, the higher standard of living, the increasing research and concern for moral comfort, the necessity to share power and responsibility with trade unions. One of the questions is how much the humanisers will find common language with the objects of their effort. As G. Hofstede says, "For alienated workers to shift their values in the direction of those of humanisers, will first have to start to shift theirs in the directions of those of the alienated workers" (p. 34).

The manufacturing system design of such a kind that human needs would be acknowledged, plays a major role in the quality of working life. In the article by T. Lupton, I. Tanner and T. Schnelle, there are several examples of a design applied particularly to vehicles and consumer durables. Philips is a pioneer in the re-structuring of light engineering work.

The following basic elements of job design were considered by the authors: the job (rotation, enlargement, enrichment), worker control in the individual worker situations and in the group situations (quality, pace, job methods, inputs to job, outputs from job), worker participation in system design and in system improvement, working conditions (working posture, atmosphere, temperature, noise, materiel handling, components handling). "The design of workplaces is a matter on which those who work, or are going to work there, ought to be consulted, or invited to participate fully; not only because being involved is a source of job-interest and motivation, but also because the worker has much to contribute from his knowledge and experience (...). However, with the exception of Sweden, the incidence of worker participation in job design is relatively low; and with the exception of France, the incidence of individual worker control is relatively low" (pp. 48-49).

J.C. Taylor in his paper deals with the measurement dilemma in the QWL field. He comes, among others, to the conclusion that "participant involvement in measurement is not necessarily technically inferior to measurement carried out by experts" and that "if organizational members have participation in the analysis and measurement for the analysis, it is a short step to have them participate in the evaluation of the case" (pp. 85 and 98).

Measures designed jointly by managers, workers and social scientists stand a better chance of effectively answering several crucial questions dealing with the success and failure of the QWL projects. In order to measure adequately the joint optimisation

of the social and the technical requirements as central aspects of work and organizational design, it is necessary to develop some adequate models. For example, "social systems measurement becomes the mapping of interactions among people in accomplishing the mission of the system. These interactions will frequently span conventional organizational boundaries and will span hierarchical levels (...) A table of relationships can be used as a check-list to determine which relationships are to be used in the definition and attainment of system goals (as defined in the key variances) as well as the support and integration functions. The resulting expectations are cast into behavioural statements and measures which can be easily understood by the system members as well as being more easily communicated to those subsequently evaluating the case" (p. 95).

A.G. Hopwood discusses the economic assessment of the new form of work organization. He makes a distinction between the **operational**, the **systemic** and the **societal** costs and benefits of work reorganization programmes. The societal consequences of work organization are understood by him as those costs and benefits which, although real and significant, are either borne or received by society as a whole rather than the enterprise from which they emanate. For example, the work reorganization project may result in lower personnel requirement for the enterprise but at the same time may contribute to the higher levels of unemployment in society as a whole.

Most of the QWL projects entail higher **investment** costs: it is at least 10 percent for labour-intensive costs and 30 percent for those in capital-intensive areas when doing small-volume assembly in groups rather than on a flow line. There is also possible an additional investment in inventories, the training and consultation costs, as well an "initial dip" in performance.

Among the **operational** consequences, it is necessary to take into consideration the higher wage rates, possible higher running inventories, the possibly higher plant mainte-

nance costs, as well as the higher interest costs on capital if higher investment is needed.

As regards the **benefits** from the work organization programmes they usually appear in reduced operating personnel requirements, improvements stemming from reduction in absenteeism and turnover, possibly lower running inventories, improved quality of output and lower wastage, possibly lower plant maintenance costs, reduced supervisory personnel requirements, reduced overhead cost expenditures, cost reductions stemming from safety improvements, as well as sometimes also possible disinvestment in inventories.

The overall impact on efficiency of resource utilization appears in higher productivity and higher throughput.

The **systemic** benefits of the QWL projects are evident in the greater adaptability to market and production change, greater commitment to change, improved service to customers and other client groups, and greater consonance with social environment. "In conditions of great uncertainty, which many believe to be more prevalent today, the form of work organization itself becomes a strategic resource. Although the benefits are not readily separable and quantifiable in precise economic terms, evidence is starting to suggest that a flexible and responsive organization of work, such as can be created by the emerging approaches, undoubtedly can contribute to the economic viability of the enterprise as a whole" (p. 112).

All remaining contributions in the book deal with the humanisation of the work environment in western Europe as well as in eastern Europe. Mostly, the initiative comes from the top and middle management, and there is a question how to gain the acceptance by the employees. According to the Danish experience, "an autonomous group structure requires considerable stability in its early life to enable it to assimilate management tasks and responsibilities under sheltered conditions. If this stability is not established, the likelihood of success is reduced. However, the opposite

is also true for a group which can develop itself without disturbance may change at a much lower pace than is required by a rapidly developing company" (p. 133).

In France, where organizational change has provided opportunities for employee participations, go-slows and strikes, which are a result of shop floor conflict, have decreased a great deal. The class consciousness of blue collar workers remains unchanged, and the same is valid for their trade union loyalty, but the creation of several multi-skilled groups have made the workers more satisfied, as well as has opened more promotion opportunities for them.

According to the Dutch experience from Philips, "job design without participative decision making represents a contradiction in terms" (p. 205).

In Italy there is a growing tendency to apply the labour-saving technologies but at the same time there is also a progress towards giving employees more autonomy within the frame work of work groups.

In Norway, there is growing tendency to combine all three elements: an emphasis on participation, a focus on the workplace, and the requirement that workers plan and carry out organizational change (p. 249).

In Sweden, the central collective agreements on participation have become the platform of developing various co-determination projects based on the joint management-union action.

The experience from the east European countries also shows that it is possible to increase the socio-economic effectiveness of work groups by opening enough room for a group analysis of joint problems of the members, encouraging their collective initiative and providing an adequate consultation. In Czechoslovakia, this approach "has substantially and meaningfully increased the effectiveness and the quality of organizational behaviour and work activities of the work group leader and all its members, effectiveness of the work group as a whole, significantly improved its relationship, co-ordina-

tion and co-operation with other work groups and substantially contributed to increasing the effectiveness of the organization as a whole" (p. 287).

In the Hungarian research within the QWL field, the emphasis was given to the coincidence between the management interest and workers' interest. "The co-ordination of interest requires negotiation and bargaining between the two groups. Through power-orientated participation, it is possible to gain an understanding of different interests and to work out a mutually acceptable compromise (...) Considerable progress can only be expected when we no longer see job and power-oriented participation as mutually exclusive, but as preconditions for each other. The long-term commitment of workers to participation can only be guaranteed in this way" (pp. 324-325).

In Yugoslavia, workers co-operate with each other within the framework of "associated labour" which denotes the activities performed with socially-owned resources and organized on the principles of self-management.

In Europe there is an evident progress in the recognition by management as well as by unions of the need to improve working conditions and job satisfaction among their employees. The work humanisation experiments gain in importance particularly in these societies where the mutual relations between management and unions remain relatively peaceful and there is enough room for joint projects.

In North America it would be possible to learn much from the western European experience, but there are some factors which have to be considered as serious obstacles. First of all, the North American trade unions insist in taking distance from management and not involving themselves in co-determination. This is due, among others, to the fact that the unions have been traditionally pushed into an insecure position and they react accordingly. Secondly, the position of top management in the North American societies still remains much stronger than in several west European

countries and the management people are extremely sensitive about their prerogatives. Thirdly, the preoccupation of managers with manipulatory public relation techniques diverts the attention of the business circles from humanisation to advertising and window-dressing.

The preoccupation of both unions and management with power and money (profit) as two basic values of the market-oriented modern society leaves little room for a genuine humanisation. On the other hand, the limits of growth — more and more evident in North America — create an objective demand of humanisation as a partial answer to several growing internal contradictions of mass society.

It is difficult to imagine a successful quality of working life movement without the sincere acknowledgement of the socio/moral and cultural background of it. We have to change not only the techniques of organizing work and placing people on the jobs, but also the basic assumptions upon which modern management is based. For the managers to make "a good deal" with the employees is not enough to gain their trust and loyalty. The major weakness of the book here under review is the omission of management philosophy. Humanisation in order to be successful has to become well located within such a world view which fit to the changing circumstances. The socio-technical considerations become uprooted when treated in isolation from the moral premises.

Alexander J. MATEJKO

University of Alberta

Les clauses d'ancienneté et l'arbitrage des griefs, par Claude Vézina, Ottawa, Collection des travaux de la Faculté de droit de l'Université d'Ottawa, éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1979, 125 pp.

D'une analyse jurisprudentielle somme toute bien articulée, l'auteur tend à conclure qu'«**On assiste, quoique de façon lente, à une reformulation des clauses d'ancienneté. On**