Chp. 16: Work & its organisation

- **Overview**
  - Taylorism & reactions to Taylorism
    - Work organisation, technology & group behaviour
    - Socio-technical systems & Tavistock Institute
    - Work designs & employee motivation
  - Workplace reform & partnership in New Zealand
    - Work organisation & employee influence
  - New patterns of employment
    - Entrepreneurial workers

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"Amongst the long-standing aspects of workplace issues and practices that have had a crucial impact on employment relations are those associated with the nature of the work tasks that employees perform, the ways in which those tasks are organised and managed, and the impacts on work and organisations of changes in technology." (p. 457).

Thus, this chapter has links to other chapters: theories about labour markets (9 & 15), management approaches (11), unions, job control, demarcation (12), EEO (8), employee participation (17).

Four major types of reactions to Taylorism are discussed: (a) ways of making work more meaningful for employees, (b) group behaviour and employee resistance to Taylorism, (c) the links between skills, job design and technology, (d) employee influence on work tasks and decision making.

Workplace reform is a particular approach to work organisation and the new patterns of employment shows that there are many other approaches. In particular, it is questioned whether the rise in atypical employment – of which entrepreneurial workers are just one – will undermine the attempts to overcome Taylorist methods and move towards workplace reform/"learning organisations" with an emphasis on quality of work life & continuous upskilling & education (think of call centres, fast food, retail jobs).

Taylorism

- Taylorism: scientific principles applied to management & work processes
- Consequences or hallmarks:
  - job fragmentation & standardisation
  - Separation of planning & doing of work tasks
- Efficient systems with high productivity
  - Ideas spread beyond assembly lines
  - Based on control & 'economic man' ideas

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"Taylor argued that there were four underlying principles of scientific management" (p. 459). (a) there is a 'science' of work; (b) workers should be selected and trained according to scientific principles; (c) the task of management: the science of work and the practice of scientifically selected and trained workers should be brought together; (d) the constant and intimate co-operation of management and workers is important. See pp 458-61 for more details.

It is asserted that: standardised work methods in service industries are influenced by Taylorism & "the thinking behind these practices also influenced many small and medium-sized organisations." (p. 459). Are these assertions correct & can you provide some current examples?

Control is an important issue with Taylorism. Management can predict or plan production or services and this provides cost controls. More direct work control was normally obtained through middle/line management.

Taylorism provided a major leap in production output & this allowed the introduction of substantial higher wages & other employee benefits in connection with Taylorist systems. Questions of efficiency & productivity in the short- & long-term are often at the core of the debates about work structure & organisation.

Reactions to Taylorism

- **Adjustments to overcome negatives**
  - Higher pay & increased job control
- **Work organisation: focus on employee needs & group behaviour**
  - Human relations school & workplace reform
- **Managerial strategic choice**
  - Pro-active management & range of choices

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remaining chapter being dedicated to a detailed discusssion of these reactions.

"adjustments to Taylorism started fairly early since the negative outcomes associated with boring, dead-end jobs quickly created a number of problems." /…./ "above-market pay, influencing employee behaviour and more sophisticated ways of controlling work behaviour." (p. 460).

Advocates of employee needs & group behaviour probably presented "a more definite case for adjusting work organisation than could be justified by their empirical research. Arguments could be put forward for both other interpretations and other management approaches." (460).

"the notion of managerial choice has often resulted in two new dimensions: it has promoted different blends of Taylorist adjustments and human relations and raised expectations that a proactive management approach will be taken." (p. 461). These 'blends' can vary across employee groups within an organisation & there is often a degree of experimentation. The notion of a proactive management approach has become very important in the last decade and it is crucial in the notion of Strategic HRM.

New Taylorist systems

- **Key Q: is there a task-centred approach to job design (engineering approach)?**
  - "minimise the impact of the individual employee on the work process" (p. 462)
- **Unions demands: influence on work organisation or just pay & limited job control?**
- **Labour Market: full employment, turnover, new aspirations by workforce**
  - Impact of new technology & production techniques

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There are two 'situations' associated with a task-centred approach. First, a situation where employees have no or little influence on their work and work processes. Second, where employees have some influence on their immediate work processes but with no input otherwise into managerial decision-making. The second situation moves towards post-fordist production systems.

Union demands differ considerably across different countries with a distinct difference between Anglo-American and European approaches, see chp. 17. It is also heavily influenced by the market power of unions & their members. In NZ, the emphasis has been on pay and, in a few industries, on job control. Unions have generally avoided to be involved in wider work organisations & managerial decision-making issues. However, the rise of workplace reform started a different approach (see pp 474-485 & 510-514).

In a situation with full employment, recruitment & retention become major cost issues. Especially if high turnover can't be avoided through pay rises. Even with less the full employment, changing social norms mean that Taylorist systems need to be adjusted. This may imply changes to the production systems with a growing the interest in making social relationships at work more appealing. Finally, new technology has opened for more flexible production techniques (post-Fordism) but is also facilitated control of work efforts in office & service work (eg. call centres, fast food, outsourcing)

New Taylorist systems II

⊕ The shift from Fordism to post-Fordism
  ▪ "allow some degree of flexible production using new technologies to expand the range of products *without modifying the tight managerial control structures.*" (p. 462)
  ▪ Impact of Japanese production approach
    • Overcoming individualism of Taylorism
    • Overcoming task-orientated approach to job design?
    • Similar to 'lean production' (see tables 16.2 & 16.3)?

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The shift from Fordism to post-Fordism was influenced by shifts in technology, social norms, theoretical understanding of work. Thus, the previous 2 overheads link with the next 2 overheads.

From the 1970s onwards, the meteoric rise of Japan as a major industrial power with an emphasis on cheap, high quality products prompted Western observers to take note & analyse Japanese production approaches.

"Post-Fordism – or flexible specialisation – occurs when these flexible workers with multiple skills are engaged in production systems that depend upom teamwork rather than on isolated individuals." (Grint, 1991: 297).

Japanese production techniques were based on team-working, continual fine-tuning of production designs & techniques & with in-built quality checks through Total Quality Management (TQM). This overcame the atomistic Taylorist approach, with employee interaction & task-level decision-making (see tables 16.2 & 16.3 for hallmarks).

Western implementations lacked the specific Japanese cultural & structural context & it could also take several forms which could be close to 'lean production' or in-between Modern STSD & 'lean production' (see table 16.2)

Group behaviour

- **Hawthorne experiments & work groups**
  - Groups norms have an influence but this may vary across settings & have many meanings
  - Leads to Human Relations School
    - Workers as 'social man' & 'groupish'
    - Supporting group/team & then org. commitment
- **Tavistock Inst. & socio-technical systems**
  - Choices & design 'space' re: use of technology
  - Joint optimisation of technical & social systems

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The well-known Hawthorne experiments (see p. 467) and the subsequent human relation school have focussed on social & group behaviour. These theories have had a lasting impact on Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, HRM theories and workplace reform.

The Tavistock Institute promoted new forms of work design and in particular, autonomous work groups. The key features of the 'Tavistock approach' are presented on p. 465. The relationship between technology and the organisation of work was seen as dynamic and working two ways. There are organisational choices: "several ways of organising work tasks are available, some of which will have beneficial results for employees in terms of social and psychological satisfaction, and some of which will have deleterious results." (p. 465).

While joint optimisation is recommended it is also acknowledged that it may be difficult to reconcile different criteria and values.

Work structures & job design

- Herzberg's hygiene & motivation factors
  - Work itself as a motivator: focus on control, choice, responsibility & skill requirements/use
  - Work satisfaction as a goal in itself
- The 'affluent worker' studies
  - Mix of motives/motivation & external factors
- Labour process theory
  - Emphasis on deskilling is too one-dimensional
  - Development of detailed studies of work processes

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Herzberg's model is a further development of the studies mentioned on the previous overhead. Work as a motivator – intrinsic satisfaction – is a key feature (see fig. 16.1) . This prompted many job enrichment programmes in the 1960s, especially in Europe, with an emphasis on employee control & job content (see pp 468-469).

The 'human relations'/groupish/work as motivator theories were countered by two approaches around 1970: the 'affluent worker' studies & labour process theory. The 'affluent worker' studies moved the focus from job to non-work aspects and allowed for a variety of influences on workers' orientations to work. It was suggested that an instrumental orientation to work could be on the rise.

Labour process theory – initially associated with the work of Braverman – prompted detailed study of labour processes/work organisation. Technological change was said to arise from a desire of employers to increase control over the labour process by de-skilling work (p. 471). This basic tenet has since been abandoned but the importance of detailed studies of work organisation has lead to numerous research projects. For example, a current focal point is work organisation in call-centres or work on 'emotional' or 'aesthetic' labour.

Workplace reform I

- Alternative & pro-active empl. Strategies
  - Table 16.1 shows black-&-white approaches
- WR ideas have been around for a while & they can be found in different theories
  - New technology, functional flexibility, high-trust/high wage mana. styles, strategic unionism
- WR in NZ was seldom defined precisely
  - See Enderwick's elements & definition (p. 476)

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The notion of strategic choice has been associated with a rise in pro-active managerial decision-making in ER (see chp. 11). Table 9.1 is based on "the necessity of understanding the linkages and interactions between the institutional structures and practices of employment relations on the one hand and, on the other, the market environment that influences employer strategies with regard to new technology." (p. 473). This distinction is often used when discussing employer strategies in the 1990s in NZ. However, compare also with the notions of flexibility & the flexible firm in chapter 15.

Workplace reform was prompted by a search for new strategies in the 1990s & the underlying theories cover several discussed in this book (see pp 475-6). Several of theories can be found in chapters 11, 12, 15 and 17 though work organisation themes constitute a major element.

Enderwick's definition covers most elements, though it misses the element of employee influence (see p. 476).

Workplace reform II

- ● Search for new strategies & ideas
  - ■ Starts prior to ECA: exports, costs & quality
- ● Impact of Scandinavian, Japanese & Anglo-American reform initiatives
- ● Strategic unionism coincides with WR
  - ■ Partnership unionism at workplace level
  - ■ Workplace conferences in Australia & NZ

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Many of the best-known examples of workplace reform started before the ECA 1991. The interest was prompted by the increased competitiveness associated with an open economy but it was also in line with changes in many other OECD countries. There is a distinct bias towards manufacturing type of organisations.

The Japanese & Anglo-American inspiration was mainly promoted by employers while the Scandinavian aspects were promoted by unions. The initial drive for workplace reform came from Australia where it coincided with the adoption of strategic unionism (pp. 346-7). This made the European influence strong and gave rise to an emphasis on employee influence and union participation.

The distinction between workplace reform and the 'cheap labour' approach of the ECA – see Douglas quote on p. 347 – indicates why the post-1999 Labour-led governments supported collaboration, workplace partnerships and industry strategies.

Workplace reform III

- Scandinavian: Networks/clusters & with an emphasis on processes & democratisation
  - Employee participation is promoted
  - STSD with social embeddedness (table 16.2)
- Japan: lean production methods (table 16.3)
  - Often implemented in piecemeal fashion
- Impact of HRM & flexibility (table 16.3)
  - Overseas ownership, business schools, ECA

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The importance given to nation- or industry-wide clusters has a slightly different dimension than Porter's famous ideas as it relies more on collaboration than competition.

The emphasis on employee participation as an integrated part of Scandinavian workplace reform indicates the bias in workplace reform attempts in NZ where there is little interest, apparently also from employees, in policy-related participation (see also chp 17).

There appears to be some similarities between tables 16.2 & 16.3, though the introduction of Low wage & HRM in table 16.3 adds further dimensions. These black-&-white differentiations indicate the variety of choices, with some managers having a preference for a particular combination.

The problem with Japanese production methods is that they rely on particular organisational settings and social norms and they are seldom implemented in a holistic fashion in Western organisations. Lean production is often the best approach found in Western organisations. It is also problematic that the two tables appear to focus mainly on manufacturing. What is the impact on services?

Workplace reform IV

- Rise & fall of workplace reform
  - Small band of dedicated organisations
  - Insufficient support: state, employers & unions
    - Why the limited interest of 'mainstream' org.?
- Limited progression of employee influence
  - Ryan: 'low road' dominates over 'high road'
    - Legislative rights & structures as drivers of norms
  - Embedding task-related participation is crucial

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While workplace reform examples are well-known NZ companies there were only a few & most of these have since disappeared or been taken over. Workplace NZ, the main promoter of WR, went into 'hibernation' in 1998.

Mainstream organisations appear to prefer other choices (see tables 16.2 & 16.3).

While this is clearly linked to employer/manager choices, it was also influenced by the 'free-market' context in the 1990s. With little state & employer interest, the weakened unions could not 'drive' the WR agenda.

See the distinction between the 'low' & 'high road' on p. 482. It is suggested that legislative employee participation structures are necessary to enhance workplace reform further. This suggestion is clearly influenced by the 'European approach' and in particular, European Works Councils (see chp. 17).

In light of teams & functional flexibility becoming more part of mainstream ER, it was unsurprising that the ERA coincided with an attempt kick-start workplace reform/partnership in NZ. Another interesting development has been the inclusion of statutory OHS representatives in medium and larger organisations as part of occupational safety & health legislation (see chp. 7).

Workplace partnership

- Based on similar ideas to workplace reform but supported by government
  - Originally promoted in the public sector
  - Partnership Resource Centre
    - Works with consultants to promote partnership
    - Establishes exemplary workplace changes
- Strong Anglo-American interest
  - British debate indicates that partnerships have failed to be broadly established

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While there are similar ideas behind workplace partnership as workplace reform, there are also some important differences. "The concept of workplace partnership appears to have a much stronger Anglo-American influence, partly from insights associated with strategic unionism, integrated bargaining and mutual gains theory and partly from examples set by the British and Irish attempts to promote workplace partnership." (p. 484). There is also less focus on manufacturing (and the Japanese model) and more interest in service delivery and quality.

The website of the Partnership Resource Centre has several examples of the workplace changes which has been implemented in collaboration with employers and unions. It is also interesting that the work of the Partnership Resource Centre has much similarity with work done by the Workplace Productivity Working Group (see p. 451).

Interestingly, the Partnership Resource Centre has had its funding continued under the National-led government which may indicate that 'soft' government intervention – recommendations, demonstration case studies and funding – in favour of workplace reform changes will be an enduring part of New Zealand's employment relations.

New patterns of employment

- Fig 16.2: are new patterns defined by these criteria of contractual stability & costs?
  - Can vary across & within employee groups
    - Overlooks employee reactions & expectations
  - Criteria are influenced by national norms
- What does the 4 ideal types contribute?
  - Aspects of ER of new patterns – see table 16.5
  - Links to debates in other chapters are important
    - Flexibility, ER regulations, management & union strategies

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This should be questioned and other alternatives considered: "Our proposition is that these new employment patterns /…./ are defined by (a) the degree to which employing organisations treat labour as an investment rather than a cost, and (b) the degree of contractual stability…" (p. 220).

The different treatment of employee groups – see management styles (chp 11) – implies that one should be cautious when empirical trends are considered. Employees can also influence these practices and the same approach/style can be interpreted in different ways (eg. see 'new career' discussions).

Another angle is the 'converging divergences' of practices found by Katz & Darbishire – see pp 215-216 – which highlights the influence of national institutional and legislative norms and bargaining patterns.

The four ideal types in fig 9.2 can be used to evaluate/discuss ER approaches which need to take into account management thinking, organisational context, employee & union approach. See for example, the union role – strategic unionism at the level of the firm' (p. 221) – or the attitude to training and development in the 'participative worker', compared to the other ideal types.

Table 9.6 provides some ER aspects of the new division of labour. These aspects show the variety of influences and indicate the 'space' of choice and conflicts. Do you understand the links to other theoretical discussions?

Entrepreneurial workers

- New concept but fashionable job situations
  - Debates: which 'drivers' & what are outcomes?
    - Limited research of entrep. workers' experiences
- Voluntary or involuntary entrep. worker?
- Attitudes & success factors (table 9.7)
  - Often shifting over time & can be internal inconsistent ('you can too much of something')
- Can entrepreneurial workers be aligned with org. trust & commitment, constant upskilling & 'worker' protection?

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Only recently have the two notions entrepreneur & worker been combined; now entrepreneurship is used about both employees – eg. problem-solving teams or employee suggestions – and (the entrepreneurial) career & self-development by some people in the labour market.

The issues of 'drivers', outcomes & voluntary/involuntary are often connected, though with variety across the labour market and with individual reaction patterns. The rise in EWs in NZ coincided with high unemployment, restructuring & occupational shifts and thus, many started as reluctant or involuntary EWs as they were either pushed out their traditional job or were faced with few job opportunities. They may later become voluntary EWs if they had success or felt that this type of employment relationship suited them.

Attitudes are interesting because our lack of knowledge of EW experiences and they are often inconsistent – advantages & disadvantages may co-exist for the individual EW – and they are often unstable. Labour market changes, job life cycles & individual circumstances may influence attitudes & shifts out of EW status. For example, there can be abrupt changes in success (work can suddenly 'dry up') or a shift in contractual status into a traditional job situation. For some EWs this may just be a particular stage of their job life and they will change later in life.