

Work as Key to the Social Question

The Great Social and Economic Transformations and the Subjective Dimension of Work



A Challenge for Business Enterprises: Introducing the Primacy of the Subjective Meaning of Work in Work Organization

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Abstract

Theories on work organization underlie a certain epistemology approach and a particular vision of man and his work. This paper attempts to explore these elements within current theories on work organization and to study whether or not they are compatible with Catholic Social Teaching and, more specifically, with the doctrine of *Laborem exercens*. Then we present some bases for organizing work in business in a proper way.

For these purposes, first it is reviewed the teaching of the Encyclical *Laborem exercens* and other relevant pontifical texts to present the vision of man and his work and ethical principles for work organization. Then it makes a brief survey on the most influential theories on work organization. We analyze to what extent these theories consider the subject of work and the primacy of the subjective meaning of work over the objective one. Finally it is discussed how work organization would be possible by maintaining the primacy of the subjective meaning of work and at the same time including business requirements for work organization.

Introduction

One notable conceptual contribution of the Encyclical *Laborem exercens* (LE), published by John Paul II in 1981, is the distinction between the subjective and objective meaning of work and the primacy of the former over the latter. That is an anthropological and ethical approach, which calls for a proper work organization.

Work organization has deserved a lot of attention, especially over the last century, since work is a key element of business. In fact a lot of theories on work organization have been proposed.

Within business, work is organized to attain definite objectives. One of them is undoubtedly to achieve efficient production, and overall profits. The first theories on work organization proposed at the beginning of the twentieth century paid exclusive attention to this objective. They sought by all means to maximize productivity and profits and hardly anything else. However, a long time ago work organization, both in theory and in practice, took into account other relevant objectives, apart from productivity. Among them are: quality of the product, service coming from work, customer and employee satisfaction, learning acquired by the worker and the organization and motivation of workers for continuing with the task and for co-operating to achieve the company's goals. All that is closely related to middle and long term profits, but it is also associated with the subject of work.

The general purpose of work organization is to try to influence work in order to achieve some improvements in the performance of work. Every theory on work organization underlies a certain epistemology approach with a particular vision of man and society, which are more or less connected to ethical theories. Then the question arises, asking to what extent current theories on work organization include or could include Catholic Social Teachings and, more specifically, the teachings of *Laborem exercens*. Our purpose here is to explore this question and to present some bases for organizing work in business taking into account both LE teachings and business needs.

In order to achieve this purpose, this paper first reviews the teaching of the Encyclical *Laborem exercens* and other relevant pontifical texts to present the vision of man and his work and ethical principles for work organization. Then it makes a brief survey on the most influential theories on work organization. We analyze to what extent these theories consider the subject of work and the primacy of the subjective meaning of work over the objective one. Finally it is discussed how work organization would be possible by maintaining the primacy of the subjective meaning of work and at the same time including business requirements for work organization.

Primacy of the subjective meaning of work

Laborem exercens stress that the work process needs persons, as the efficient cause, and persons are not mere instruments. On the contrary, each person is “a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realization. As a person, man is therefore the subject of work.” (LE 6,2).

Apart from work outputs, a set of inner effects is produced within the subject of work.

The worker experiences fatigue, emotional tension, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, learns how to work and acquires skills. But that is not all. Work develops or increases the humanity of the person who works or, on the contrary, his or her humanity is degraded as a consequence of this work. John Paul II emphasizes it and points out that this is just to fulfill the calling to be a person:

“As a person he (man) works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfill the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity.” (LE 6,2)

From this text some crucial questions arise. First, why and how work serves to develop the humanity of those who work. To explain that it is necessary to realize the capacity of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of transcendence of the human being. The worker, as a person, has the capacity to be aware of the human meaning of this work by recognizing how his or her work affects those who receive the consequences of it. Moreover, he or she is capable of freely giving him or herself and entering into communion with other persons [1].

At work a person can know if what he or she does is fair and if this work gives a real service to people or if it produces some damage. Knowing that this work is really good and being willing to carry it out for the sake of people, and ultimately for the sake of God, is what develops the worker's humanity. On the contrary, “when man does not recognize in himself and in others the value and grandeur of the human person, he effectively deprives himself of the possibility of benefiting from his humanity and of entering into that relationship of solidarity and communion with others for which God created him. Indeed, it is through the free gift of self that man truly finds himself.” (CA 41,3).

Catholic social teaching, especially since the Second Vatican Council (Const. *Gaudium et spes*), stresses the sense of vocation of the human existence, the calling to be a person in a full sense, and above that the calling to sanctity, which includes human fulfillment. Both human fulfillment and sanctity need an attitude of service and self-giving to others [2].

So, work serves to develop the humanity of the worker if this work is fair and is carried out with a sense of service, that is to say, to help the real needs of people who receive the effects of this work. Then, work becomes a human good, that is to say, something that develops persons in their humanity. To some extent they become “more a human being”:

“Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity—because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes “more a human being”.” (LE 9,3)

It is understood that the Pope is talking about an honest work, which is made with good intention, since “a morally good act requires the goodness of the object, of the end, and of

the circumstances together.” [3]

So, work serves to develop the humanity of man (or woman) but, what is more, it must serve this purpose, because the calling to be a person is for all human life and work is an important part of it. In other words, every worker has the responsibility to become good as a man through his work.

Apparently, developing oneself through work only concerns each individual worker. Choosing an honest work and working with good intentions are questions for the subject of work, but what about those who have the power to organize other people’s work?

First of all, those who organize work have to take into consideration the dignity of work, since work comes directly from a person. That is why, work has a moral connotation:

“... there is no doubt—you can read in LE—that human work has an ethical value of its own, which clearly and directly remains linked to the fact that the one who carries it out is a person, a conscious and free subject, that is to say a subject that decides about himself (...) The sources of the dignity of work are to be sought primarily in the subjective dimension, not in the objective one.” (LE 6,3)

That implies the obligation of respecting work, all kinds of work, and respecting human rights in the context of work. (LE, 6,6 and 16ff). However, if the human rights are understood in a narrow sense, the work organization will hardly catch the real implications of the Encyclical on human work. As it has been explained previously, work has to contribute to those who work increasing in humanity. That is more important than production and the whole objective meaning of work, because the latter is something while increasing in humanity is related to people. Then an ethical principle can be formulated. John Paul II himself presents this principle. Here are his words:

“ ... the primary basis of the value of work is man himself, who is its subject. This leads immediately to a very important conclusion of an ethical nature: however true it may be that man is destined for work and called to it, in the first place work is "for man" and not man "for work". Through this conclusion one rightly comes to recognize the pre-eminence of the subjective meaning of work over the objective one.” (LE 6,3)

When the worker or the work organization doesn’t take into account that work is “for man” then alienation takes place. This concept is not always understood in its genuine meaning due probably to the influence of Marx. According to Marx, alienation derives solely from the sphere of relationships of production and ownership and comes systematically from the capitalist bourgeois societies. John Paul II criticizes this misconception of alienation in Marx’s writings, and presents alienation as “the loss of the authentic meaning of life” (CA 41,2), which can exist in working.

Alienation takes place in work—adds the Pontiff- “when it is organized so as to ensure maximum returns and profits with no concern whether the worker, through his own labor, grows or diminishes as a person, either through increased sharing in a genuinely supportive community or through increased isolation in a maze of relationships marked by destructive competitiveness and estrangement, in which he is considered only a means and not an end.” (CA 41,2)

In my view, from these teachings three major ethical requirements can be stated in order to achieve a proper work organization:

1. The work itself has to be honest. The product and the sale conditions have to be fair.
2. Work organization has to respect the dignity of work and human rights, avoiding whatever that considers people as a mere instrument of production. [4]
3. Work organization has to foster human development as much as possible, even giving to the subjective dimension preeminence over the objective dimension.

Law usually reinforces the first requirement at least in industrialized countries, although in practice it is not always applied correctly, while some developing countries are still far from accomplishing it. The second requirement is in danger when it “gives prime importance to the objective dimension of work, while the subjective dimension—everything in direct or indirect relationship with the subject of work—remains on a secondary level.” (LE 7,3). Regarding the latter requirement, I am afraid it is more a challenge than a reality in the business world.

In order to integrate these requirements in business we have to know work organization theories and not to forget that business is within a competitive system and the outputs have to be appropriate.

A brief overview of work organization theories

In my view all theories on work organization presented up to now fall into one of the following categories:

- *External controls and constraints.* Work is organized either by proposing a series of rules and procedures to enhance outputs or by allowing an organization to adapt to external conditions and requirements (environment, technology, laws, social pressure, etc.) which are real constraints and for some authors determinants of work organization.
- *People's satisfaction.* Here the stress is put on motivating workers in order to get

their co-operation and even their commitment to achieve the manager's or the organization's goals or to retain customers.

- *Organizational culture*. In this third group, a special emphasis is placed on sharing beliefs, values, and practices which foster work itself and the outputs of work.

From the late eighteenth-century and to the beginning of the twentieth-century individual entrepreneurs dominated organizations and owner managers and work organizations were very simple. There is not much concern about how management could affect the way of working and productivity. The managers' attitudes towards workers, especially when labor problems erupted, were coercion and sometimes paternalism. *Coercion* was a way of external control, which included verbal reprehensions, fines, beatings or dismissals. *Paternalism* provided smooth working conditions and concern for matters like health, training and dwelling (Pollard, 1965). Coercion looked for results through *external control* while paternalism was focused on *satisfaction* as a means of persuasion or sometimes as a way of humanizing the working and living conditions of workers. This latter approach, to some extent, is a form of what later has been called *organizational culture*. So, from the very beginning of modern business enterprises the seed of these three categories can be perceived.

Throughout the twentieth-century a great number of theories on work organization have been proposed. Each one is quite different from the other, but in spite of that they can be included in the categories mentioned, although every theory, at least implicitly, contains some aspects of the other categories.

External controls and constraints

External control became a crucial tool for work organization in the influential theories of Taylor (1911) and Fayol (1919) in the first decades of the twentieth-century. Fayol presented a set of principles for business organization without paying too much attention to individual workers. Taylor, who developed what he called "Scientific management" was quite different. Each task had to be studied in all its details by engineers and executed in a repetitive way so those workers carried out the engineers' instructions exactly. It was not necessary for workers to think at all. They only had to execute orders. As a reward workers received higher wages.

Taylor assumed that everybody pursued only a narrow rational self-interest, namely money. He also emphasized the progressive development of the worker, but this was a kind of development limited to mechanical operations. This theory increased the productivity a lot, but made work boring and quite hard. So, it is strange that it was very criticized by unions. From an ethical perspective this theory considers a worker as a mere instrument of production and doesn't have any concern for the human capabilities of the worker, except where manual and repetitive skills are concerned. The only incentive given for working is

money.

Much more sophisticated was the theory of Herbert A. Simon (1945, 1960), who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1978. Simon focuses on decision-making. He recognizes that a human being is capable of acting intelligently in making decisions although there are practical limits to human rationality. Some decisions are programmed, that is to say, they are to some extent repetitive and routine or a definite procedure has been worked out to make these decisions. Others are non-programmed decisions. These are made when something new or different is at stake. In order to minimize cost an organization should try to program as many of its decisions as possible. In Simon's time a lot of the decisions were programmed and he thought that with the advances in computer technology the number of programmed decisions would go up dramatically.

One of Simon's interesting points is his disagreement with the traditional view of economists, who assumed that business looked for "maximum profit" and the decision-maker is acting with complete economic rationality. For Simon, the administrators seek an "adequate profit" since they have limited rationality and couldn't search for all possible alternatives.

Simon explicitly declared himself as a follower of positivism. So, he put ethical considerations aside, depending only on the subjective values of the administrator. That is why his proposal for work organization is based exclusively on using external control through programmed decisions.

There are other theories that are indeed different from the previous approaches. They respond to external constraints, but may be included in this category, at least in a border sense. Unlike the preceding theories, where work organization depends a lot on the will of the manager in designing it, these others emphasize impersonal factors. They are focused on social structure, environmental, strategy (understood as an adaptive process) or technology. All of them, even being opposed in some aspects, have a strong bias for managerial discretion in common based on the findings of psychological and sociological sciences.

The starting point of those who focus on *social structure* is the Max Weber work on bureaucracy (1947), where he assumed that organizations are systems of power and their structures depend on a legitimate system of authority. Researchers of the Aston group like Pugh, Hichson et al. (1963, 1968, 1969), Child (1972) and Mansfield (1973), made Weber's bureaucratic elements of social structure operative through statistical variables.

New developments with other approaches were carried out later on. Katz and Kahn (1966) assume the organization to have a series of patterned behaviors which conditioned individuals considerably mainly in large organizations. Greiner (1972) presents an evolutionary model of organizational social structure. He thinks the future of the organization is less determined by outside forces than the organizational history itself.

Giddens (1979, 1984) also centers on social structure, but in a diverse way. He developed a theory assuming a symbolic-interpretative approach. He considered that repeated interactions by human agents are the basis of social structure and at the same time social structure becomes a constraint for human action.

Theories focused on the *environment* are based on an open system theory and sociobiology (Bertalanffy 1956/1076, Ashby 1956, Boulding 1956, Buckley 1967). They consider organizations are complex and dynamic systems open to their environment. One of these theories is the *Contingency Theory*, first developed by Tom Burns and Stalker (1961), coined as such by Paul Lawrence and Jay Lorsch (1967, 1969). They set out to find how organizations do cope with environmental influences. According to these authors there are no universal principles for organizing. The best way to organize is contingent to the nature of the environment.

The *Resource Dependence Theory* by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald R. Salancik (1978) looks at the environment from the resources perspective. They integrate the open system theory with the theory of social constraint. Their findings show that environment is a powerful constraint to organizational action and the organization's survival depends on the ability to acquire and maintain resources. The level of analysis is no longer the organization, but rather organizational ecology. In fact, there is an analogy between biological organisms and human organization survival. They think organizations depend on a network of actors to acquire resources and so they can survive.

Another related theory is the *Population Theory* by Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman (1977, 1984) and H. E. Aldrich (1979). They also assume organizations depend on the environment where they operate, but to such a point that they state the environment selects certain kinds of organizations by eliminating those which can not survive within it.

Finally it is worthwhile mentioning the *Neoinstitutionalism Theory*, developed by Meyer and Rowan (1977), Zucker (1977), DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Powell and DiMaggio (1991) and Scott (1992). They share a common theoretical foundation in social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann 1967) and the theory by Giddens (1979) on social structure. In essence these authors understand that society is a social construct, being created by social interaction and an institutionalization process takes place by homogenizing practices. They take for granted people's beliefs and promulgated rules that serve as templates for organizing. In this context particular emphasis is placed on social, political and legal aspects of the environment, and on "social legitimacy". According to Zucker (1977) organizations need social legitimacy to survive within a certain environment.

Strategy can be understood as the source for an adaptive process, and therefore as the key for organizing. The main exponents of this approach are Raymond E. Miles and Charles C. Snow (1978, 1984, 1994), J. B. Quinn (1978, 1980) and Henry Mintzberg and J. A. Waters (1985).

Among the scholars who focus on the *impact of technology* on the social structure of the organization we can mention J. Woodward (1958, 1965), who studied the relationship between performance and the degree of technical complexity and found that technology is a mediating factor in the structure-performance relationship. She concluded that organizations with continuous process performance are better when they are *organic* while mass production technologies perform better when they are embedded in *mechanic* organizations (smaller span of control, high formalization and centralization, low communications, etc.).

James D. Thompson (1967), following the ideas of Parsons (1960), portrays complex organizations as open systems, hence indeterminate and faced with uncertainty. At the same time they are subject to criteria of rationality and therefore needing determination and certainty. In Thompson's view the aim of management and administration when designing organizations and making decisions must be the effective alignment of organization structure, technology and environment.

Other developments in this field were made by C. Perrow (1967, 1984, 1986) and J. Galbraith (1973). The latter faces the problem of how information and knowledge technology mediate the impact of technology on social structure. Recently authors like Barley (1986) and Weick (2001) have studied how new technologies influence organizations. Their conclusion is that technology is not a determinant of the structure, but an occasion to restructure the technical system.

As everybody can imagine, in all of these theories work is a function of external variables and the subjective dimension of work hardly appears. In addition, some of these theories show a deterministic approach.

People satisfaction

A quite different approaches to work organization are those which focus to people satisfaction in working.

Elton Mayo, who is considered the founder of the Human Relations Movement and industrial sociology, introduced an approach based on satisfaction for social conditions of work. From the famous experiments of Hawthorne (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939) of the Western Electric Company in Chicago, Mayo (1933, 1945) he realized that informal organization exists in all organizations and the informal group is an outlet for the aspirations of workers. His findings showed work satisfaction depends to a large extent on the informal pattern of the work group, and satisfaction is related to productivity. So, management ought to provide the bases for group affiliation and to foster spontaneous cooperation. For this purpose an suitable communications system is important, particularly upwards from workers to management.

An informal group is a source of motivation but there are others as well. Abraham Maslow (1943, 1954) from clinical psychological observation stated that humans are motivated by multiple needs and those needs are hierarchied. Maslow identified five general levels of motivating needs. The most basic level is *physiological needs*. They are reflected in work organization in the need for adequate work conditions (heating, air, etc.) and a base salary to ensure survival. Next is the level of *safety needs*, which includes safe jobs, fringe benefits and job security. The third level is *the need to belong*, that is to say, to be accepted, be part of a group, and be loved. In the organizational setting these needs are expressed through desires of a good relationship with peers, clients, supervisors, participation in a work team and other forms of positive relationships at work. The next level is *the need for esteem*, which is related to recognition and appreciation from others. As a consequence, a positive self-image, high status, increased responsibilities and credit for contributions are also sought. At the highest level of human needs, Maslow situates *self-actualization needs* or needs for self-fulfillment. They include developing one's full potential, increasing one's competence and becoming a better person. These needs are satisfied within an organization when the worker has opportunities to grow as a professional and as a human being.

Although Maslow understood 'self-actualization' as the realization of one's distinctive psychological potential, undoubtedly it includes developing moral virtues. Rensis Likert (1961, 1967) found that supervisors, who were strict followers of Taylor's prescriptions, achieved lower efficiency than others who focused their attention on the human aspects of their subordinates' problems and on building effective work groups. Likert distinguishes four systems of management. The best is characterized by economic rewards, full use of group participation, and involvement in setting high performance goals, and improving work methods, accurate communication which flows downwards, upwards and with peers; decision-making is widely done throughout the organization through group processes and subordinates and superiors are very close psychologically. That produces high productivity, greater involvement of persons and better labor-management relations.

According to Likert a leader must always adapt his/her behavior to take persons into account, to lead them with their expectations, values and skills. So, Likert didn't consider how to develop the humanity of his collaborators, but he advanced a new step in taking into account people's expectations, values and skills and involving people in organization in an active way.

Douglas McGregor (1960, 1966) gave another interesting contribution to work organization. He stated that at present the potentialities of the average person are not being fully used and external control is not the only means for obtaining effort. People will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of the objectives to which they are committed. McGregor proposed his 'Theory Y' in which he considered that the satisfaction of the individual's 'self-actualizing needs' is the best way to obtain commitment. He pointed out that the average human being learns, under proper conditions, not only to accept but also to seek responsibility, and many more people are able to contribute creatively to the solution

of organizational problems than do so.

Argyris (1957) focused on the development of the individuals as well. He studied how the kind of situation in which one is working affects the worker's potential. Argyris verified that the typical approach of management of organizations and their lack of interpersonal competence in the 50's prevented people from becoming mature in outlook. That led to passive and dependent positions by employees, who were shortsighted in their actions on the job, without any initiative. Argyris champions the decreasing use of management controls, because they deprive employees of any opportunity of participating in the important decisions that affect their working lives, leading to feelings of psychological failure. He is against managers who develop "defensive routines" which protect their current ways of working and inhibit them from considering any changes. Those who looked forward to making the assigned tasks were unable to foresee the success or failure of the company over a period of years. Managers must have an attitude of continuo improvement and look for contributions from others who are competent.

Herzberg (1968) researched on motivation to work and again he took into consideration personal growth. From a large empirical study he established two groups of factors for motivation. The hygiene factor related to work dissatisfaction and motivator factors, which influence the level of satisfaction. Hygiene factors include working conditions, pay and security, company polices, supervisor and interpersonal relationships. Motivator factors involve challenge, achievement, recognition, responsibility, work itself and personal growth. Hygiene factors remove dissatisfaction, but they are not enough to cause people to become highly motivated in their work. On the contrary, motivator factors lead employees to be greatly motivated to excel at their work.

Edgar H. Shein (1980) held a complex model in which human needs are considered, but in a different way to that of the previous authors. He maintains that earlier theories are too simplified and generalized. Human needs are a complex matter. In fact, human needs fall into many categories and vary according to the person's stage of personal development and living situation. So, motives may be different from one person to another and even in the same person from one time to another and from a current situation to a new one. On the other hand, employees are also capable of learning new motives through organizational experiences. In addition, motivating incentives can have an impact on different needs. For example, money could be an incentive to motivate greed or to keep the family going.

According to Shein, getting workers to work with commitment and enthusiasm is the result of a match between the expectations of employees and the organization. A crucial element in this match is the sort of "career anchor" that each individual holds. This is the self-perceived set of talents, motives and attitudes based on the actual experience each individual develops.

Coming back to the subjective aspect of work, it can be said that all these authors, Likert, McGregor, Argyris, Herzberg and Shein consider it to some extent, although solely

from a psychological perspective. Consequently they don't defend any ethical prescription, although they propose a model or give recommendations for the sake of efficiency. What is remarkable, apart from taking worker satisfaction into account, is the relation they find between, the subjective and objective aspects of work. The former is mainly related to the motivations of the worker, and the latter to work organization, managerial style and outputs.

Within this group some other influential authors have to be mentioned, even though their writings respond to a quite different approaches. One is Peter Drucker (1946, 1954 and others) who stressed good managers realize their main mission is serving customers and the best way to achieve that is to deal with workers as resources capable of providing a regular and valuable contribution.

People's satisfaction, including customers and workers (internal customers), is also the key in total quality management, as has been explained by W. Edwards Deming (1982, 1986), Josep M. Juran (1980, 1982) and others. Describing that approach in a very synthetic way, it can be said that quality is measured by customer satisfaction and to achieve it worker satisfaction is also required.

Summarizing the vision of all these contributions it can be stated that satisfaction is related to the subjective meaning of work, but work satisfaction is not always human fulfillment. Satisfaction could be a requirement for efficiency and could even be related to ethics but satisfaction it is not itself the foundation for the primacy of the subjective meaning of work over the objective one.

Organizational culture

Work performance is also related to organizational culture and values, the implementation of which can notably affect the subjective dimension of work. Some theories take these aspects into account.

In quite an innovative way, Philip Selznick (1949, 1957) assumes that organizations have distinctive values. Organizations are infused with values through a process defined as institutionalization by Selznick. Within this process leaders play a key role. They choose and protect the organization's distinctive values and create the social structure that embodies them.

During the 80's several scholars were interested in understanding what kind of corporate culture enhances long-term economic performance. Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman (1982), T. E. Deal and A. A. Kennedy (1982) and D. R. Denison (1990) wrote books, which were widely diffused especially the first one. Schein (1985) presented a model sustaining that culture exists at three levels. At the very bottom there are core beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions. Above it there are specific values and behavioral norms of

the organization influenced by the previous level. Finally, on the surface, artifacts as practices, or rites exist as the tangible manifestation of beliefs, values and norms, and as the external manifestation of a specific culture. According to Schein, leadership has a lot to do with organizational culture. In a similar way, Kotter and Heskett (1992) consider culture to have two basic levels: shared values and group behavior or norms. On the other hand culture is highly dependent on management. It emerges from vision, strategy and experiences of people implementing them.

Charles Handy (1978) relates four kinds of cultures in organizations: 1) club culture, which epitomizes a strong leader who has power and uses it and people advance in this organization by learning and acting as the boss would have done in your situation; 2) role culture, based on well defined roles and a number of rules and procedures to be fulfilled; 3) task culture, regarded as a series of problems to be solved with flexibility; 4) existential culture, in which the organization exists to help in the achievements of the individual's aims. Obviously these cultures condition the form of working but this also contributes to creating culture.

All these approaches are based on sociology. They only seek a description of the relationship between corporate culture and performance, although implicitly they prescribe that if you want to improve outputs try to develop that kind of culture. The values considered are social values and not necessarily ethical values. However, pointing out the influence of culture and shared values on performance is again a demonstration that the subjective meaning of work, on which culture should have an influence, is related to the objective meaning.

Toward a proper work organization

The overview of most influential theories on work organization we have just presented points out that each of them is focused on partial aspects of work, like external control or constraints, motivation to work or organizational culture. They use approaches taken from social science. That means a valuable contribution but it is not enough. Science tries to explain the reality using models and paradigms, which are quite limited, since the reality is complex and it is not possible to study all the aspects together.

In addition, the findings on which the theory is developed are taken from some specific cases or facts, but not from all possible cases. So, the theories are not universal and the predictions you can make from theories are quite questionable.

Another problem is using theories in a prescriptive way. Although theories are descriptive and to a certain extent predictive, however, in practice they are frequently considered prescriptive, or at least some kind of prescription is suggested. In fact, some authors present clear recommendations for organizing work and structures around work.

Others do not do so, but their implicit message is quite prescriptive: “You know our findings and what businesses were able to survive”, “Companies which did that became successful (what about you?)”. “There is a high correlation between such a variable and a good performance (so you will see what to do).”

Let us take for instance of Taylor’s theory on work organization. He presented a model of man, which clearly was a reductionism, but his theory was extensively adopted. His theory was descriptive and predictive but at the same time was prescriptive (if you want to be efficient you must be so).

Social researches take for granted that efficiency is the common goal of work organization, but few of them pay attention to the subjective meaning of work and above all to its ethical dimension. Psychology and sociology widely used in work organization are positive sciences and consequently they only consider facts. That is why some people say these sciences are free values. Is that right? I don’t think so.

Psychology and sociology use an epistemological approach and the correlation between variables studied implies an end, which is non another than efficiency. Furthermore, a philosophical concept of man and society underlines each theory. As we have seen, some authors have a rationalistic approach to reality while others use the symbolic-interpretative approach and try to construct reality. Some consider man as a being of needs—frequently identified needs with desires—and without any objective end in life. Others consider responsibility but there is no agreement about what this responsibility is about.

Ethical values are generally not mentioned and when they are they hardly talk about human values; instead they consider only subjective values or social values. Probably positivism and scientism prejudice—ethics and values are subjective matters— is still going on. At other times it is pragmatism, which focuses exclusively on the results and ethics falls into oblivion.

However ethics is in fashion nowadays. The challenge is integrating ethics in work organization in a proper way. That is not an easy task since all the relevant theories on work organization are centered on the results, as we have tried to show in our previous exposition. So, it is understandable that a first attempt is introduce ethics as a set of limiting rules or prohibitions, like fair contracts, safe conditions at the workplace, rules for quality of life at work, and so on. The primacy of the subjective meaning of work and the vocational sense of work, which require persons to achieve human fulfillment through work, call for a new approach to work organization.

Modern thought is result-oriented, while Greek and Medieval thinkers were being-oriented. Christian thought, as is presented in Catholic Social Teaching, is person-oriented. The latter included being and results, but giving priority to human development. As the Spanish philosopher Leonardo Polo states “What is radical for Christians is person. From this perspective, one take living as a destination towards a radical core: the person. Each

person, who is created as a novelty, transcends himself. Life has roots and doesn't occur merely in gerund. The classic radical (*being-oriented*) is not abolished but deepened and transcended. Since what is radical in a man is being transcend towards a destination, outputs are included." (1990, p. 84).

When only the results are taken into account then self-realization is merely for output achieved. That is the position of some modern philosophers, including Nietzsche, Marx and Sartre. In fact, that is also the practical reference of some people when they talk about self-realization. But that is a misconception since it is contrary to the reality of being a human individual. Of course, work outputs are important. They point out creativity and capacities of the subject of work, but being a person is previous to outputs. That is ontologically superior to the outputs of work.

As far as I understand that is the key message of *Laborem exercens* for work organization is the primacy of the person and his or her development. So, that must be taken as the starting point both in theories on work organization and in business practices. This approach respects the autonomy of the social sciences but introduces a subordination criterion of social science toward ethics (intrinsic value and dignity of every human being) and ultimately theology. As is stated by Gaudium et spes, (n. 36),

“If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. (...) But if the expression, the independence of temporal affairs, is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator, anyone who acknowledges God will see how false such a meaning is. For without the Creator the creature would disappear. For their part, however, all believers of whatever religion always hear His revealing voice in the discourse of creatures. When God is forgotten, however, the creature itself grows unintelligible.”

Summarizing, the challenge is rethinking current theories and practical approaches with a proper epistemology, considering persons in a whole sense and not only as producers and giving priority to human development over economics results. That doesn't mean that economic results will be worse, as human development has a lot to do with results, but this is another theme.

Notes

[1] That is summarized, among other places of the Magisterium, in the Catechism of Catholic Church (CCC), 357. For a philosophical development, see Wojtyła (1979). See also

Schmitz (1993) and Buttiglione (1997).

[2] Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 24,3.

[3] CCC, 1755. See also the Chapter II of the Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*.

[4] LE alludes to this requirement talking about primitive capitalism: "... in the light of the analysis of the fundamental reality of the whole economic process—first and foremost of the production structure that work is—it should be recognized that the error of early capitalism can be repeated wherever man is in a way treated on the same level as the whole complex of the material means of production, as an instrument and not in accordance with the true dignity of his work—that is to say, where he is not treated as subject and maker, and for this very reason as the true purpose of the whole process of production." (LE 7, 3)

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