

Work as Key to the Social Question

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



The Double Dimension of Human Work and its Incorporation to the Productive System

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Abstract

This paper is intended as a technical note to supplement and provide the foundations to develop the issues concerning human work [1] in the courses delivered by the “Business, Society and Economy” Academic Area for all IAE Programs [2]. Its purpose is to communicate the contents of the Church’s social teachings on work, in a language rendering them attainable and operational for businessmen. Thus, the paper starts by locating the topic within a model of aims devised for the productive system, which hinges on the generation of productive work positions providing those who fill them with opportunities for human development. After reviewing the inheritance received, which shows several reasons for change, the paper develops the double dimension –transient and immanent- of human work and proposes several streamlines to achieve the blending of both dimensions in its incorporation to the productive system. Then, it shows the anthropological wealth of human work, and it explains the contribution of the social teachings of the Church on these issues.

Personal experience

For almost two decades, my professional work has been devoted to developing capacities, skills, and, above all, attitudes in people who belong to the business world. It is a complex and exciting world, and its functioning is paramount –as we will see later- to human and social development. In this dialog and communication process inherent to education, there is a key and transcendent moment for those who seek enlightenment. It is precisely when they become really and deeply aware of the fact that, as business managers,

they are responsible for other people.

Perhaps, this may seem obvious –indeed, it is-; however, most people running companies ponder little on the impact their decisions at work have not only for themselves, but for others.

The productive system is a part of the social system

The productive system is a part of the global social system, where it interacts with the other partial systems: political, cultural –socially valid values, educational, intermediate institutions, etc..

The history of the economic life of nations [3] also proves the results come from the interaction between the economic and productive systems with the other social systems, and that the economic and productive model is always integrated to a broader social, political and cultural model [4]. The economic and productive model is never isolated. It is essential to know the peculiarities of the social, political and ideological system of nations in order to complete pure economic analysis and explain results.

The system of socially valid values –the cultural system- is particularly important since it constitutes the root, later to be projected throughout a historical process to determine the profile of the other social systems and their institutions, their roles and their co-ordination. These values also permeate dispositions, attitudes and decisions inspiring projects and actions in the historical protagonists in the history of each society, for better or worse. The socio-economic problems nations faced throughout their history and the outstanding issues still awaiting solutions are explained through and rooted in ideologies engulfing a mistaken, partial or impaired anthropological vision. It is also interesting to note how, in certain instances, for this reason, effective economic tools, which in other contexts rendered socially desirable results, have served true social tragedies [5].

In this context, what should be the contribution of the productive system?

In this context, and in co-ordination with the other social systems and agents, what should be the specific contribution to social welfare pertaining to the productive system? This contribution is increasingly significant these days, especially in those countries where a productive transformation is necessary to access a globalising world [6]. In the current scenario of the new social organisation, where the State withdraws from the production sphere, increasing aspects of social welfare –and more important aspects- depend on the results of the productive system workings. Businessmen and managers become –whether they want to or realise or not- key agents in the global result of social life [7].

To design the content of this contribution of the productive system to social welfare,

it is necessary to take into account the legitimate rights derived from the dignity of all the people involved in its development: those who participate in its workings as well as those in society at large. Also, it is necessary to consider all the dimensions of people, not only those related to productive efficiency results –viewing them as employees, customers or suppliers-, but those inherent to them as individuals who must carry out a personal project –in its complete scope- as well as a family project, based on the resources obtained by means of their involvement through their work.

The anthropological vision impairment lies at the basis of the reductive formulations of these objectives [8]. Maybe one of the most famous simplifications is that of the well-known opinion voiced by Milton Friedman, for whom businessmen's sole responsibility consists of the generation of benefits, within the legal framework [9]. This notion has been largely widespread, more than theoretically, as a criterion to manage in daily practice.

Nothing could be argued against this statement if it were an attempt to point out that the economy has its laws, which cannot be overlooked in productive life, or if it were to support the unavoidable need for companies to generate benefits, even, as a condition for their own survival. However, is that the only purpose to be pursued? Aren't there other human dimensions, beside the economic ones, at play in business management? Within the economic realm, does mere benefit generation solve, just like that, all the issues concerning justice and solidarity which arise in business life and in its relationship with society?

It is true Friedman adds that this benefit generation should be produced within the legal framework, and it could be assumed that the legal framework should provide the answer to these issues. However, what legal framework is he referring to? Does this legal framework have any necessary content? The Argentine experience –and that of many other countries- shows the legal framework has often changed, affecting the ways in which companies create benefits, and not only accidentally, but also changing the impact the various ways in which this objective was attained has had on people. Were all these legal frameworks the most convenient ones? For whom? For company owners, for employees, for society? Or what would actually be more convenient: for all of them at once? As can be seen, an increasing number of questions arise.

Also, the socio-economic and productive history of nations is rich in events, and the criteria on which value judgements were and are based are very diverse, even antagonistic [10].

A simple systematisation

A simple and practical systematisation to realise the contribution to general welfare expected from the productive system in co-ordination with all other social systems and agents could be the one outlined in the following chart [11]:

- To provide, as effectively as possible, the goods and services citizens need to satisfy their needs. To make them available, in terms of price, and satisfactory, in terms of quality.
- To generate wealth = per capita GNP growth = Economic growth
- To distribute wealth fairly among participating factors: labour, funding, state and society = Social development.
- To ensure the existence of labour sources with real value contribution to the productive process.
- To warrant all jobs provide those performing them with development opportunities in their personal, family and social dimensions.
- To become a culture school, improving society by means of values allowing for co-ordination with other social agents, so that it can achieve all previous objectives.

This is not a “good-will” model. These objectives should be achieved all at once, since overlooking one of them would entail neglecting the legitimate rights of the people protected by that objective. Also, historic experience proves that, when one of them is not achieved, social life becomes unstable. Thus, it is necessary to avoid a dialectic approach to these aims: a complex and comprehensive vision is particularly important. And this is the challenge businessmen and managers are called upon to meet.

The fact that, through sufficient value addition, the productive system must create wealth is an objective beyond argument, at least theoretically. The relationship between global economic growth –per capita GNP growth- and social development [12] is, instead, one of the most discussed topics [13], although many conditions to ensure economic development –not only appropriate economic policies but also socially valid values- are also –especially the latter- are the same as the ones needed to reach social development.

Hence, the model hinges on the existence of truly productive work sources, providing human development opportunities for those who perform those tasks. This is not only the most relevant objective because of its anthropological content, but also because, as it is attained, all other objectives may follow suit [14]: wealth creation, equitable distribution, and efficient production of the goods and services required by citizens. If people who are capable of adding value through their work are the ones to create wealth, for that same reason, they acquire a right to participate in its distribution. Thus, wealth creation, per capita GNP growth, is not an objective opposed to that of fair distribution, social development.

Instead, this does not happen when the capital is taken as the primary protagonist in the system, and, per capita GNP growth, at the macro level, and investment return rate, at the micro level, become the priority, as we have seen in previous paragraphs, without taking into account the consequences. Thus, all other factors are subordinated to these objective. In this perspective, all other productive factors become costs and/or resources. Human work is viewed as a “human resource”, a sadly popular expression entailing, even, a

great inner contradiction, since people are never a resource but an end in themselves [15].

The inheritance received. Reasons for change

Certainly, finding streamlines for the productive system to achieve all these aims, while respecting the criteria outlined in previous paragraphs, is a hard task. To find practical responses, it may be important to bear in mind how we have reached our current situation: “In human political, social, economic and business matters, it is senseless to try to foretell the future, even more to attempt to foresee what will happen in 75 years’ time. However, it is possible –and useful- to identify the most important event which have irrevocably happened in the past and, therefore, will have predictable effects in the following decade or two. In other words, it is possible to identify them and prepare for the future” [16]. This statement by Drucker is interesting because, indeed, it will be necessary to anticipate events in order to avoid regretting the negative consequences of the predictable effects of past history on people, especially now when globalisation brings about a productive revolution of such deep outcomes as those of the various stages of the industrial revolution, in which undesired costs were not timely heeded. It is a commitment for all those who have responsibilities related to the productive system: businessmen, political system leaders, agents in the other social systems and, of course, Business Schools faculty members.

A brief review of business history [17] leads us to conclude that, at the end of the last two and a half centuries, work and capital have drifted apart. Before the industrial revolution, craftsmen, who owned their tools, embodied people’s skills and capacities to produce something adding value, which, in turn, became their identification and distinctive character even in front of society. The relationship between work and capital revolved around a single person or, at most, unions. The advent of machinery brought on a new figure who radically changed the productive scene: the technology capitalist. With his resources, knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit, this figure concentrated the capacity for scale production, effectively lowering manufacturing costs. This benefit, however, was associated to a different reality: the separation between work and capital holders, along with the undesired consequences of the industrial revolution [18]. Hence, the skill demand featured in craftsmen’s times gave way to the demand for man hours as raw materials for production.

Fast growth in production scales called for new ideas and methods to organise factory performance, yielding what is known as scientific management [19]. For all its real and specific advantages, scientific management produced a new separation in the world of work: people who think, decide and are responsible for running business, and those who simply toil, without thinking, deciding or having any responsibility other than doing what others have determined. Surely unintentionally, though clearly disregarding the consequences underlying this way of working, it is the breeding of a productive system seeking efficiency at the expense of depriving a large group of workers of the possibility to better themselves through the exercise of their task, since they are only expected to do as much as possible without thinking.

Finally, the last years of the 20th Century show that, although new ideas are born to mend this situation, other facts further complicate the scenario: there is the separation between financial and productive capital [20]; the gap between those who think and those do not in the productive process has not yet been solved, and there is a new and increasingly present element: those excluded from the system [21], not only in each society, but also among nations, because they lack the skills to access the new value adding modes.

In short, history seems to prove the impact borne –up to now and most probably in the future as well- by values and anthropological paradigms at play in business life, not only on economic grounds, but also on the lives of people, both individually and socially considered, and on the world of ideas and socially valid values. “Not often in history has an institution risen so fast as management, nor has any other had such a fast and immediate impact. In less than 150 years, management has transformed the social and economic structure of the nations in the industrialised world. It has created a global economy and set new rules for the nations wanting to participate in that economy as equals. And it has transformed itself.” [22].

A businessman, who is also an engineer and a philosopher, appraises the magnitude of the impact of management and business activity in society, with an optimism that should, perhaps, be somewhat checked: “In this sense, management turns out to be the first science affecting ideologies, though flying over them. Management’s social revolution is inevitable and universal. Its theoreticians could have never fathomed their work could influence the world’s social balances, and they will continue to do so for the good of humanity” [23]. Obviously, it could be added that, if no benefit is achieved for humanity, what will surely follow is, unfortunately, a damage.

The “efficiency-driven” vision of business management makes us forget that, above all production systems and quantitative results, there should be the development of people as such. The misinterpretation of a technical notion applied to management, as well as its inadequate presentation, has created a culture in which everything tends to be measured by its results. One of the relatively recent examples is that of the corporate reengineering frenzy, so humanly costly when it focuses on a purely economic objective, often so short-term-oriented that it did not even turn out to be effective in the medium or long run.

Another image of this efficiency-driven pressure comes from the array of factors involved and from the permanent demand they entail. A successful businessman [24] said the “pressure machine” never stops, and its energy is drawn from demanding and threatening stockholders, sceptical customers, uncommitted employees and savage “hyper-competition”.

Charles Handy broaches this same issue with a certain pessimism: “Efficiency, we may conclude, may be essential to the continuous existence of society -lately, it is- and of the economic model to which it belongs. However, it cannot face the answer to hunger in humanity or to the reason for living. Perhaps, we will need to create more activity outside the purely economic realm, where motivations will be disconnected from efficiency and will be more closely related to inner satisfaction and values. In this situation, the currency and

the market will be irrelevant in the scheme of things we will each have” [25]. Handy’s position, clearly diagnosing the problem, is, nevertheless, not enough because it would seem the battle to make efficiency itself more humane is lost already, and, thus, it looks for human spaces outside efficiency, when, actually, the key to the challenge lies right there.

Also the elaboration of the economic science, even more radically than that of management, is often developed from an impaired anthropological notion. “The usual criticism to the epistemological position of the main economic science stream is that it consists of a scheme borrowed from natural sciences, inadequate for human action. Men are free and social beings. Therefore, it is inappropriate to discuss one of human life aspects, the economic one, from a framework belonging to a reality which is neither free nor social. (...) The notion of economics as a technique responds to –and implies- a mechanistic vision of man. A tainted methodological individualism also arises from –and shapes- the concept of isolated men” [26].

Also, Herbert Simon clearly poses a decisive aspect economic science fails to broach when he says: “Economies in industrialised modern societies may be more accurately defined as organisational economies rather than market economies. Therefore, even capitalist market-driven economies need a theory of organisations as well as a market theory. The attempts of the new institutional economy to explain organisational behaviour only in terms of agency, asymmetric information, transaction costs, timing and other concepts derived from neoclassical economics ignore key organisational mechanisms such as authority, identification and co-ordination. Hence, these are incomplete” [27]. Simon, however, does not reach the heart of the matter -although it is hinted at through deepening the diagnosis-, which is none other than the nature of human work.

The double dimension of human work

Among the aims mentioned before for the productive system, there was the statement that jobs should provide those performing them with human development opportunities in all dimensions: personal, family and social. The way in which work is incorporated to the productive system is not only an ethical issue of utmost relevance in business activities, but also an aspect immediately affecting businessmen and executives personally.

The other aims of business, although also entailing an unquestionable personal ethical commitment, may be highly conditioned by the macroeconomic framework in which companies carry out their business. Problems referring to the workings of this framework involve companies and their managers inasmuch as they are a part of, along with the other social agents, the social fabric. Instead, managing people in the internal life of companies constitutes an issue in which businessmen and executives are more directly involved. Besides, the other aims of companies are more immediately related to things –goods, services, wealth-, that, though important as means for people to live according to their human condition and, hence, showing relevant ethical dimension, are not as important as

men themselves, their personal activity. Thus, the topics arising are essential and immediately ethical in nature [28].

The transient effect of work

As a consequence of the application of human work to the productive system, a first result is achieved, namely the product. In the subtitle, it has been referred to as a transient effect because it is achieved outside the person of the worker. In this perspective, work allows for –or, rather, demands- an economic consideration. For example, and to simplify the notion: if the productive result of a worker’s workday is quoted at US\$ X, and another worker’s workday is quoted at US\$ 2X, it is clear that the proportional impact on the production cost of work for a good or service is half in the case of the second worker.

Also, since the task carried out to achieve the productive result within an organisation corresponds to the fulfilment of a function, work, as seen from the perspective of its transient effect, allows for a functional consideration as well: the worker becomes a manager, a collector, a receptionist, a clerk, etc..

Indeed, the analysis of work in the productive system, from the perspective of its result, does not lead us to the personal reality of the individual performing it. Rather, it is someone who performs a function bearing an economic result. That’s it. This is so to the extent that a worker may be replaced, easily, by any other person as long as this individual performs the same function with the same economic result.

A question could be asked: is it incorrect to consider work in this perspective? Clearly, the answer is no. Not only it is not incorrect to do so because this dimension of work is absolutely real and objective, but also because companies, which aim at creating wealth, can but take it into account. Instead, it would be inappropriate to consider work solely from this perspective, which is what an “economicist” vision of work does, failing to acknowledge human work can –and should- achieve another effect, besides its transient result, because its subject, he who performs it, is a person.

The immanent effect of work

When workers devote themselves to work, with the necessary personal disposition, and working conditions allow for it, people may perfect themselves while at work. The human perfection workers achieve through their task has been dubbed immanent in this section because it is a result of work which remains in its subject.

Thus, the statement that capital is “saved work” may seem ambiguous. Actually, capital, put in a more rigorously conceptual way, is indeed a saving of the transient fruit of work. Work should be “capitalised” in something far more relevant yet: workers’ own

human perfection. Their deepest alignment does not derive, as Marx [29] assumed, from the workers' projection through their labour result, turning them into a merchandise, to be deprived of as much of that result as possible by the private property production system. Workers' alignment -more radical indeed- takes place when work is divested of this second dimension, its immanent effect, because, thus, workers are deprived of the most valuable fruit of their work: human perfection for those who perform it [30].

Men are intelligent and free beings. These two faculties, intelligence and will, constitute the specifics of their condition, not only distinguishing them from animals and even more so from machines, but also raising them above all other creatures. Hence, men are also beings "in themselves" and "for themselves", meaning that, in their constitution, because men are the subjects of these faculties, they own their life project. This is what we imply when we state that men are persons [31]. When a person acts according to his nature, he is moved by decisions rooted in himself; in other words, he commits his freedom enlightened by some good shown by his own intelligence.

Also, when a person does something driven by his own roots and not by an outside coercion -which needn't be violent; it may be institutional-, only then does he display all the richness of his human condition, for, in exercising his intelligence and freedom, he exhibits the creativity, initiative and responsibility skills [32].

These skills, committed to pursuing a good aim -company objectives should fulfil this condition-, constitute the capacity to do good. Doing good, men develop their perfectibility -their capacity for perfection-, which determines them as endowed with the intelligence and freedom faculties, and their subsequent skills for creativity, initiative and responsibility [33]. Although it may seem too obvious when this vision of human nature is shared, it should be noted that men do not improve, do not perfect themselves or mature when they act like trained animals or machines, but when they exercise what is specific to their condition: intelligence and freedom; in other words, when they work in an intelligent, free and responsible manner.

The fact that people are the subject of work constitutes the foundations for all the ethical considerations regarding the incorporation of work to the productive system. The objective aspects of work, related to its transient effect, i.e., technique, productive system organisation and economic laws, should agree with the dominion of man over things. This does not mean that the personal, subjective dimension should overrun the objective aspects of the economic and functional dimension. The objective aspect of work may and should not be avoided, as previously stated, because this would also entail a denial of the reality of things, which also includes the unavoidable criteria of productivity and professionalism of this realm. The human aspect is also technical and objective, but the technical aspect may never justify an inhuman action.

The two dimensions of work are inseparable in that their separation would counterfeit reality. Separating the transient from the immanent dimension for ideological reasons of any denomination would stand for introducing a rupture between the world and

people [34].

Then, how is it possible to get a person to mature, improve or perfect himself when he does something? Specifically, in our case, when he carries out the task assigned to him in the productive process, yielding an economic result and performing a function within the organisation. This is only achieved when workers, involved in companies' productive tasks, are able and have to commit the specific conditions of their humanity: intelligence and freedom, and the subsequent skills related to these faculties. It would be extremely frivolous to state that it is better to have people participate in productive tasks without committing their faculties in order to avoid the problems people may create in company life or in achieving its objectives if they think and exercise their freedom.

Organisational tasks and operative work

What we have said so far means that, in the task assigned to a person in the productive process, the larger the content of knowledge and responsibility, the more work is divested of its materialistic, mechanical and even brute force character –which renders those who perform it more similar to a machine or a trained animal- and the more it becomes enriched so that it may constitute the raw material for perfecting the one who carries it out.

Therefore, it is necessary to question [35] the old distinction in company structure between organisation and work, staff and line, leading to the division not only of the concepts inherent to organisational tasks and operative work, but also of the people who perform those tasks. In this context, some people are the ones who think, organise and are responsible for objectives, whereas others only do what the former ones have decided, ruled and organised.

Clearly, organisational tasks –those defining operative work contents and setting the rules for it to achieve the company's productive objectives- constitute a work calling for the commitment of responsibility and the capacities of creativity and initiative of those who carry it out.

Instead, when a person does not work according to rules set by himself or, at least, assumed as his own; i.e., when he performs the role of a mere operator, he cannot perfect himself through his work. In the production chain organised according to the scientific management approach, in which each person does what he is assigned to do at a certain time, usually ignorant of the insertion of his task in the logic of production and business processes since the tasks are partial and automatic, there is very little humanity left in operative work [36]. Let us remember Charles Chaplin's genial satire in "Modern Times", however cartoon-like and far-fetched as it may be. The evidence lies in the fact that men may be replaced by machines or robots, which confirms the smart remark by Aristotle, highly related to the labour organisation in his times: "If looms were to run by themselves, there would be no need for slaves" [37].

Some practical consequences

How could we define, then, the content of the task businessmen should devote themselves to regarding these issues?

Since in the order of action, the first thing is the aim [38], it will be necessary for those who incorporate their work to the productive effort to understand and freely adopt the company's objectives. Only those who are personally committed to an objective are capable of contributing towards its achievement through their best qualities: the skills for creativity, initiative and responsibility we have already mentioned. Until workers share the company's aims, the real aims of the specific company they work for, they will not reach the commitment necessary for them to seek perfection. Moreover, it will never be possible. There is an old and well-known anecdote which illustrates this notion. There were two workers grinding stones and they were both asked the same question: "what are you doing?". One of them answered: "I'm grinding stones", while the other one replied: "I'm building a cathedral".

For the first step, two elements are important: the content of the company's objectives and the expectations of those incorporating their work to it. This means, actually, they are going to share the same values. The more company objectives resemble the aims set for the productive system and the more workers intend to mature as persons through their work, the more consistent this step will be [39].

The next step relies on workers' understanding, to the extent of their possibilities, company management processes and, hence, the contribution entailed by their specific tasks to those processes in order to reach the objectives they had adhered to in the previous step. This is, simply, to understand the rationale of the means as related to an end, which is crucial for actions to be rendered human [40], i.e., as an exercise of intelligence and freedom.

Also, in order to encourage responsibility in the use of freedom, companies should incorporate, in an operative fashion, the chance for workers, at all levels, to enrich management processes through the contributions of their creativity and initiative skills to help companies reach their objectives more efficiently. As, thus, workers contribute to a greater company performance, they will have further professional and economic development possibilities since they also acquire the right to participate in the growth of results. In other words, there should be room for the consequences of the wise social life organisation principle –companies constitute a community-, the subsidiarity principle [41].

Managing and operating, each one at his/her own level

This last topic should be taken into account at all organisation levels, but especially

at those the production technique logic demands –and, sometimes, it will be unavoidable– for workers’ tasks to be almost exclusively operative. In this circumstances, it becomes an ethical duty for executives to seek, creatively, ways to find a solution for what could turn into a real human problem.

How should it be attempted? First, managers should try to encourage a spontaneous trend, contrary to the division between management and operative work, which is beginning to show in the practical experience of companies, though timidly still. It seeks to take advantage of the spots where it is possible to add a share of management to the mere operative tasks. The fact is that, in spite of the many rules operative work should follow – which is good because that is precisely the law of operation–, in spite of the many norms it should be subject to, there is always a margin for personal management at work. The proof is that, although controls may be implemented to ensure the enforcement of norms and regulations, workers always leave their own personal touch in what they do, even in tasks that are apparently operative. If the touch is positive, there is an actual possibility, which could be acknowledged by right, to incorporate a share of management in operative work.

Also, the application of the subsidiarity principle, already mentioned, valid in all social orders, determines that what may be thought, decided or carried out by those who are below in the hierarchy ladder should not be thought, decided or carried out by those on top. In workers’ capacities, there could be chances to question regulations and norms for operative work and to test their validity with the intention of enriching them. These may be found more often than could be thought, which also allows for the incorporation of management to operative tasks [42].

Through these streamlines, it is possible to approach the ideal in which everyone working in a company is able to manage and operate according to his/her level, so that, in exercising both functions, he/she may participate in company activities in a more human way, not only as a piece of the organisation. At the higher capacity levels, management will prevail over operative work; at the lower capacity levels, surely operative work will outdo managerial tasks, but, even then, some room for human development may be ensured in operations.

Besides seizing possible room to encourage self-management at work, there is another path to introduce management in operative work, also in cases in which it may be unavoidable to stick to a necessary distinction between the people who perform managerial tasks and those who carry out operative work. The managerial dimension of work need not be specific. Its importance does not dwell in the fact that the norms to which a person working as operator must abide to should have been thought by that person alone, or discussing them with others or by others. The key lies in the fact that the person understands and freely adheres to the norm to be followed. The notion that the adhesion to an operative criterion necessarily depends on having thought of it by oneself is a prejudice introduced in many environments as a consequence of modern immanentism, but it is not a demand based on human nature [43].

So, what does acceptance of a norm depend on when it is not the product of one’s

own thought? Basically, it depends on two factors. The first is the technical quality of regulation: that the action norm turns out to be effective to reach, through work, objective pursued in the best possible way. No one can be asked to freely accept what bears no reasonable foundation. However, this alone is not enough. It is also necessary for the norm to be attainable by the person who should follow it at work. This means the norm should be designed according to the worker's capacity, or, better yet, the worker should be taken to the level of intelligence and personal quality necessary to adhere to the content of the norm.

It is, therefore, very important to pay attention to the design of the operative system, personnel training and proper allocation of tasks, which calls for a deep knowledge of people –always difficult to have-, entailing a significant ethical responsibility for businessmen. Also, this notion demands a co-ordination and co-operation culture based on the practical exercise of values and virtues, such as loyalty and trust, among many others.

An additional cost

Managing to incorporate a properly human dimension to productive work implies, of course, a considerable effort, but in no way should it be deemed, pejoratively, as a “cost”. On the contrary, attempting to spare this cost embodies a sad short-sightedness, at least for two reasons. First, when human work is incorporated to the productive process as a machine or a trained animal would be, there is a complete waste of its most valuable dimension: workers' responsibility and their creativity and initiative skills, which, obviously, may not be contributed by trained animals and, least of all, machines. Then, also, when instruments are used rejecting their nature –men are not instruments, although they perform a function in the productive system-, the inconveniences of such misuse always end up showing. If this happens with a pair of pliers, designed to pull out nails, which break when used to hammer nails, the consequences are much more severe when it applies to a human person.

Indeed, inconveniences are many and they show up soon enough: undermined trust in system operators, lack of expertise in task performance, less personal involvement in processes and in their consequences, producing responsibility failures, and, more serious yet, the occurrence of disjunctive situations, where one wins while the others lose, causing antagonism between workers and managers, etc..

All this entails an additional, truly relevant, cost for the productive process. Between the management task, which sets the rules for operative work, and the operative work, which must follow these rules, there is the control task, which, in itself, is not productive at all. There is, also, the paradox that lies in the fact that the more valuable –more human- a worker is and, therefore, more capable of questioning the rules governing his work, the more intense the control should become in order to make him follow those rules. Thus, the dilemma mentioned before tends to become even more dramatic. In this way, a method supposedly based on effectiveness ends up complicating, disturbing and antagonising the system it attempts to organise.

Increasingly more often [44] modern management techniques refer to the participatory incorporation of work to the productive system –empowerment- for the sake of technical efficiency. It has been noted that men are more capable of adding value to that process when they act as such: the more they identify with their work, the more they commit their creativity, initiative and responsibility skills, yielding the corresponding productive result. It has even been argued that current competitive differences between companies are produced by the participatory incorporation of work to their management. However, in spite of the considerable thrust this topic has been endowed with in the past few years, we are still facing open issues. The ultimate motivation of many of these management techniques has not yet overcome the ethical level of productive efficiency while the very roots of the nature of work should be reviewed. However, these techniques do show, contrary to an opinion widely upheld until recently, there is no technical opposition between the transient and immanent effects of work. Instead, these two constitute a structure.

As Mulligan points out, in order to reach deeper, we should reflect upon human nature and organisations more in depth: “An important mission for Business School faculty members should be to provide a humanistic counterbalance to the scientific teaching offered nowadays. Ethics professors should familiarise their students with human alternatives to the scientific vision of knowledge, human nature and organisations. They should make their students more sensitive to the key issues separating both cultures and to the contribution humanities may provide for the human issues in business. Even if the final solution may not be reached, students will have the opportunity to enlighten themselves in the vision of both cultures, the scientific and the humanistic” [45]. Indeed, work is not merely an activity of hands and intelligence, nor is its meaning restricted to its capacity to transform nature. It is a reality full of anthropological and social dimensions, which, as stable occupation, qualifies its performer, while inserting him in the building of society [46].

Work requires knowledge and skills, develops attitudes and ways of thinking; it brings about human relations, and grants opportunities for personal and family keeping; it provides resources to the society in which it performs; it relates to the ideas, aspirations, needs and problems shaking society and explaining its history. In other words, work –and, more specifically, its real and effective exercise- not only takes up a considerable portion of human life, usually larger than that of many other activities, but also, because of its very nature, implies and sets in motion a dynamics relating to some of the deepest dimensions of men [47]. Work connotes, in a way, life as whole, seen from one of the factors or elements contributing more to its structure and consistence.

Contributions by the social teaching of the Church

The fundamental contribution of the social teaching of the Church to broaching the topics we have been dealing with is stated by John Paul II in his *Centesimus Annus* Encyclical [48], quoting the Second Vatican Council document, *Gaudium et spes*: “... the main thread and, in a certain sense, the guiding principle of all the Church’s social doctrine, is a correct view of the human person and of his unique value, inasmuch as “man... is the

only creature on earth which God willed for itself” [49]. This is, essentially, the realisation, at the level of social teaching, of the central idea of his Pontificate, announced and clearly expressed from his very first document, the Redemptor Hominis Encyclical: “man is the first and fundamental path for the Church” [50].

It is in the *Laborem Exercens* Encyclical that the Pope deals with the issue of human work in a direct fashion. It is not the first time that the Church teachings broach this topic, but, from the beginning, it is made clear that this time “... is not merely in order to gather together and repeat what is already contained in the Church’s teaching. It is rather in order to highlight –perhaps more than has been done before- the fact that human work is *a key*, probably *the essential key*, to the whole social question, if we try to see that question really from the point of view of man’s good” [51]. If the Pope does not wish to repeat what is already contained in the teachings and the intention is to view things from the new perspective of man’s good, the speech will have to focus in the meaning of work for man himself, and in the way to achieve a “more human” life for men in the exercise of their work. For this purpose, it will be necessary to provide more depth for the anthropological arguments seeking to answer the questions of why and how work is “a good thing for man” [52]. It is not enough to state that “the Church is convinced that work is a fundamental dimension of man’s existence on earth” [53] in order to respond to the questions of contemporary men or to justify that work does constitute a good thing for them.

The Encyclical provides an answer to these questions in its anthropological proposal for the specific problem it deals with. Clearly, “anthropology constitutes the true heart of *Laborem Exercens*” [54]. Actually, this perspective taken by John Paul II entails a turn for the whole argument of social doctrine, since, as Illanes upholds, it shows that “he who expects to analyse what has been known as the social issue in depth should not be restricted to considering the situations and structures prevailing at a certain time; rather, he should try to focus his attention towards the constitutive force in economy and history, which is work, and, more radically yet, towards man himself, from whom work comes. This position has significant consequences in terms of the social doctrine approach, which is tackled not only in terms of ethical problems and imperatives, but, more radically, in terms of anthropological dimensions” [55]. Thus, the most attractive aspect of the Encyclical consists of its effort to ponder the man who works, in the light of faith and reason [56], aiming to promote the awareness that work is a constitutional dimension of human existence, an essential factor for building its personality. Therefore, its subject is prior and more important than everything else at stake in productive activities.

However, since the beginning, quoting the book of Genesis, the Encyclical states that “when man, who had been created ‘in the image of God... male and female’ (Gen. I, 27), hears the words: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it’ (Gen. I, 28), even though these words do not refer directly and explicitly to work, beyond any doubt they indirectly indicate it as an activity for man to carry out in the world. Indeed, they show its very deepest essence. Man is the image of God partly through the mandate received from his Creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth. In carrying out this mandate, man, every human being, reflects the very action of the Creator of the universe” [57].

Immediately, the document adds that “work understood as a ‘transitive’ activity, that is to say an activity beginning in the human subject and directed towards an external object, presupposes a specific dominion by man over ‘the earth’, and in its turn confirms and develops this dominion” (...) “Man ‘subdues’ and ‘dominates’ the earth specifically through his work, and thus ‘increasingly becomes its owner’” [58]. This process of technical dominion over the world is what John Paul II calls work in an objective sense, which was previously considered in this paper as the transient fruit of work.

Beyond what is said about its objective sense, the Encyclical intends to refer to work in the subjective sense, which this paper referred to as the immanent fruit. The subjective dimension of work is also discovered in the document through the same passage of the Book of Genesis I, 27-28: “If the words of the Book of Genesis to which we refer in this analysis of ours speak of work in the objective sense in an indirect way, they also speak only indirectly of the subject of work; but what they say is very eloquent and is full of great significance. Man has to subdue the earth and dominate it, because as the ‘image of God’ he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realisation. *As a person, man is therefore the subject of work*” [59]. Then, it concludes in a statement full of content and practical consequences: “As a person he works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realise his humanity, to fulfil the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity” [60].

In the following paragraph, the document insists on the reading of the same passage from the Book of Genesis, since it shows the unity of both dimensions of work: “And so this ‘dominion’ spoken of in the biblical text being meditated upon here refers not only to the objective dimension of work but at the same time introduces us to an understanding of its subjective dimension. Understood as a process whereby man and the human race subdue the earth, work corresponds to this basic biblical concept only when throughout the process man manifests himself and confirms himself *as the one who ‘dominates’*. This dominion, in a certain sense, refers to the subjective dimension even more than to the objective one: this dimension conditions *the very ethical nature* of work” [61].

It is not possible to separate the objective and subjective dimensions of work, since both are present at the same time in any activity which may be considered as truly human. Thus, work is truly human only when men, while subduing and dominating the earth objectively, act as true subjects of those actions. “In fact there is no doubt that human work has an ethical value of its own, which clearly and directly remain 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” [62]. The dignity of work derives from its subject and precedes all other elements in its organisation. This truth constitutes one of the focal points of the Christian doctrine on work, although it had not been clearly expressed by the teachings until the *Laborem Exercens* Encyclical [63]. The renewed reading of the Book of Genesis, in which we receive the original message of God for men, and the philosophical reflection on the subjective dimension of human action, enable us to access a much broader

anthropological understanding of work than ever before [64].

Then, it is unacceptable to invert the order in such a way as to consider man a simple instrument of production, a “human resource”, which, as already stated, constitutes a contradiction now to be more clearly understood, since man may never be only a means subordinated to an objective other than his own perfection. Man is an end in himself. Neither is it acceptable to treat man as part of the set of material means of production because man is subject and author; therefore, he is the true aim of the productive system. Illanes says: “The dominion over nature man exercises at work may not, then, be restricted to or end in mere material dominion. It should yield a good for the person, who is defined and characterised by his immanent realisation” [65].

Men are at the beginning and at the end: work in its objective sense is subordinated to work in its subjective sense, in other words, to the perfection of men, subjects of work. This orientation is not automatic, since everything in history is a product of intelligence and freedom, of how men understand themselves and how they act accordingly. Then, there may be tension or even a rupture between work in both senses, between the development of production forces and the effective perfecting of men. This, however, does not happen due to an unavoidable need, but as a consequence of man’s own thoughts and actions, of how man has understood work and, therefore, how he has performed it and the ultimate aims to which he has subordinated it.

Thus, technique and ethics become two realities –rather, two dimensions of a single reality-, different, but not opposing or heterogeneous. Rather, both are destined to an intimate binding, considered impossible by the well-known expression “business is business”. This has a well established order or hierarchy: ethics, the science of values and aims, is able to provide a reason for technique, a knowledge focusing on means. Therefore, ethics has the radical and definite saying. Social problems are always, ultimately, man’s problems, problems arising from his attitude in society and in history, and may be sorted out only in light of the truth about man. This is the deep message in *Laborem Exercens*. Moreover –and John Paul II concludes his Encyclical with this notion-, this truth is not only stated and proclaimed, but effectively realised and lived, in other words –specifically speaking-, from an authentic experience of the spiritual and transcendent condition of human beings. Only the man who enters his own inner self and captures his depth as spirit is able to adequately face historical events and to make work a real and effective part of a history enlightened by man’s truth [66].

A change in structures

Actually, the whole of the Encyclical content aims at a change in mentality, which should, in turn, produce a change in structures. So bold is its intent. This change should hinge on a principle contained in the Encyclical text and based on the supremacy of man over things: the principle of the priority of work over capital [67]. Work should be seen in that relationship –because it is indeed so- as what philosophy calls the efficient cause of

economy, while the capital is its instrument –philosophy would call it its instrumental cause. Thus, reasonably, the capital should be subordinated to the priority of work [68]. The set of material, instrumental means –i.e., the capital- have arisen from saving the transient fruit of work accumulated through history and should serve work. Capital and ownership are only justified to the extent that they serve work. So much so that the document makes the following lucid statement: “fair, that is to say, intrinsically true and, also, morally legitimate is the work system which, in its roots, overcomes the opposition of work and capital”.

We face a particularly delicate matter, since it is impossible to state –and the document does not do so in any section of its development- that the current economic organisation is the mere result of ideologies based on materialistic principles. The key to the problem is, according to the document, more of a cultural nature, not just economic. For this reason, the Pope argues that more than to a theoretical materialistic approach, the current situation seems to respond to a “practical materialism determined by a way of valuing the immediate and attractive” [69]. Then, it is said that a change in the system is needed, but avoiding the simplification of blaming all wrongs on a specific sector. Rather, the intention is to enrich socially valid values so that, then, these values are projected in the economic institutional structures [70]. So, the proposal does not involve a change in tools, but, to put it some way, in the “nurturing broth” of the values in which these tools work. The next Encyclical provides a more specific discussion, complete and seasoned with the practical projections of this principle as related to economic systems.

From the viewpoint of the contributions of *Laborem Exercens*, the “culture” of productive activity experienced in companies acquires a very significant role in enriching the socially valid values [71]. At least, in order to start this process, a mandatory requisite in all cases is “to ensure that, within the production process, provision be made for him (the worker) to *know* that in his work, even on something that is owned in common, he is working ‘*for himself*’” [72]. And this is what we have tried to deal with throughout this paper.

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[51] *Laborem Exercens*, n. 3 (italics taken from the original).

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[57] *Laborem Exercens*, n. 4.

[58] *Laborem Exercens*, n. 4.

[59] *Laborem Exercens*, n. 6.

[60] *Laborem Exercens*, n. 6.

[61] *Laborem Exercens*, n. 6 (bold type font added).

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[63] Pastor, F. A., *Homo Laborans*, at *Periodica* 72 (1983), pp. 445-446.

[64] For a better understanding of the meaning of the transitive and intransitive action of man in work, it is useful to know the philosophy implicit in John Paul II's thought. To do so, cfr. Wojtila, K., *Persona e Atto*, Ed. Vaticana, Roma 1986, *I fondamenti dell'ordine etico*, Cseo, Bologna 1980. And some excellent works, such as Buttiglione, *L'Uno e il Lavoro*, Cseo, Bologna 1982, and *Il pensiero di K. Wojtila*, Jaca Book, Milano 1982; Colom, E. – Wurmser, *El trabajo en Juan Pablo II*, Unión, Madrid 1995; Fitte, Hernán, *Lavoro umano e Redenzione*, chapter 9.

[65] Illanes, J. L., op. cit. P. 216.

[66] These are the topics covered in the last chapter of *Laborem Exercens*, devoted to explain "the elements for a spirituality of work", nn. 24-27.

[67] *Laborem Exercens*, n. 12.

[68] Laborem Exercens, nn. 11-13. The statements contained in these sections have been the subject of strong debate in the academic world, and the consequences entailed in terms of the property rights of production means have not yet been discussed.

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[72] Laborem Exercens, n. 15.