

ORIENTATIONS AND DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYEE IN TODAY'S LABOUR MARKET

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to attempt to analyze the changes in the workplace and the resulting consequences for the contemporary worker. These changes, which are the result of automation and robotics, the dynamic development of the technology in all aspects of human life, or the globalization process in general, are important elements that affect changes in the workplace and employment. The work and related numerous socio-economic processes are the source of both the great development and disorganization of the private and professional life of contemporary workers.

Keywords: contemporary labour market, theories and concepts of the labour market, economy based on knowledge, flexibility.

Economic development which has been progressing for the last few decades has caused changes in all spheres of social life, in particular in the area of employment and labour relations. Of particular interest are the changes that result in the abandonment of the traditionally conceived employment relationship (as a full-time employment contract for indefinite duration) in favour of solutions far different from that traditional pattern. The first formal and legal analysis of the phenomenon of work began to appear with the spring of capitalism, economic liberalism and the formation of the working class. It forced the emergence of regulations forming the background for the definition of the relationship between employees and employers (Kucharski, 2012, p. 12). The development of the market economy forced subsequent changes in the terms of employment and the behaviour of individuals in the labour market. The labour market became in fact a system of regulations, part of which were the basic mechanisms of supply and demand for labour. Over time, new trends began to appear for a transition from universal permanence of labour relationships towards a flexible organization of work.

Work is a phenomenon that has played an inherent part in the history of human development, although awareness of the importance of work as a driving force of development emerged relatively late.

Pre-existing civilizations and cultures grew and developed as long as the alignment of awareness and the conditions of work as the most important element of survival predominated. A lack of adaptive forces in the realm of awareness, a change in conditions, a destructive competition of another more efficient civilization or other causes (natural disasters, wars) rendered the previous models of life

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impossible to maintain. That, in turn, led either to a fall, or an evolutionary transformation of labour relations...The work of man gradually became not only an element of identification, but also differentiation of people. Its quality became a measure of value of people, a determinant of the meaning of life. The importance of people started to be measured, among other things, by the contribution their work had to the opportunities of other people to act and develop. (Working out Employment 2004, Human Development Report Poland 2004, United Nations Development Programme, Warsaw 2004, pp. 11-30)

Since the importance of work in socio-economic development was defined, there have appeared a number of different concepts attempting to explain the phenomena and processes of the evolving labour market. Unfortunately, in the case of theoretical studies, both those produced in the late nineteenth century and today, there is a clearly noticeable gap between theory and practice in everyday life, mainly due to its lagging behind rapid changes in the society. Classic theories of the labour market and unemployment based on the free market principles, unlimited by laws and regulations, point to the balancing, or the equilibrium characterized by full employment. However, the formulated concept of a perfect competition proved to be insufficient if only because of the complexity and multiplicity of actors and processes affecting the situation of an individual in the labour market. The second half of the twentieth century was the period when economic and socio-economic theories appeared, which were based on entirely different assumptions than the classic concepts.

The first of them exposed the structural and institutional factors as responsible for the emergence of imbalances in the labour market. Another group of theories concluded that the imbalance can be caused by the long-term character of the adaptation processes in the labour market (search for a job, retraining process). Further, the third group of theories assumed that the imbalance in the labour market may be caused by rigidity of wages. (Kucharski, 2012, p. 16)

On the other hand,

The theories of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries stand out by their increasing the freedom of economic operators and reducing the state intervention in the field of collective labour relations. Contemporary labour market deregulation takes into account not only economic, but also social aspects... (Kucharski, 2012, p. 17)

These theories and concepts of the labour market describe different approach to what the phenomenon of unemployment is and what the role of the state in the market is, but above all they indicate certain attitudes of individuals towards the circumstances and processes taking place in the labour market. Among the most frequently cited theoretical concepts in the literature one should mention the theory of employment by J.K. Keynes, the theory of curve by A.W. Phillips, the theory of the natural rate of unemployment by M. Friedman and E.P. Phelps, the NAIRU theory by R. Layard, S. Nickell and R. Jackman, the theory of job search by G. Stigler, E. Phelps, D. Mortensen, C. Holt and A. Alchian, the theories of dual labour market by M. J. Piore, the theory of human capital by T. W Schultz and G. Becker, the theories of implicit contracts by C. Azariadis, N.B. Baily and D. F. Gordon, or the theory of agency by K. Arrow.

Work becomes the primary area of activity during the rapid development of capitalism after World War II. During that period, the activity of individuals had three characteristic features. Work, (1) first, marked the circle of social identifications of an individual, which meant that type of profession defined the place of the individual in society; (2) second, it determined the basic framework of individual biographies; from the end of World War II, the sequence of preparation

for work, a period of employment, retirement, clearly delimited the stages of life, making a linear narrative... It gave an individual biography not only the value of predictability, but also of progress, of elevation to ever higher levels in the social hierarchy. That predictability also had importance in the system of professional advancement and career building, where the seniority element played a fairly significant role. Finally, (3) thirdly, there was a very clear separation between working time and private life time. That separation was strongly linked with the division into the private sphere and the public sphere. It was based on the division into eight-hour workday and leisure time (Marody, 2015, pp. 133-134).

Literature on the transformation in the sphere of work, labour market and employment written in the last two decades mainly points to the changes in the very nature of work, its essence. One of those is the “dematerialization” of work, which means less and less focus around objects, tangible artefacts of work, and more and more focus on the handling of abstracts and ideas. It is mainly related to the transition to a knowledge-based economy. In an attempt at a most general reflection on the changes, one can describe those as a diversion from Fordism towards Post-Fordism.

Problems which all the players in the contemporary labour market have to face have not been readily answered in the socio-economic analyses formulated to-date. The traditional concepts that explain the principles of operation of the labour market and its selected players do not fully take into account the dynamics of changes, their sources and the variety of their consequences. Unemployment, variable streams of supply and demand, the dissonances between education and labour market needs are examples of the problems that have been raised before, but today they operate in a completely different socio-economic environment, which is more dynamic, complex and full of intricate networks of interdependencies. All this is further contextualized by assertions about the “twilight of work,” “end of history,” “risk society,” “collapse of the world of work,” etc. Such an approach leads to focusing on pessimistic concepts which envisage machines eliminating workers, far-reaching changes in the nature of work, the emergence of new, alternative forms of employment that are the opposite of Ford’s system of work and employment. However, one must note that a significant reduction of jobs through new technologies is nothing new; it is a process which developing societies first faced as early as the nineteenth century. The turning point was the use of the production line by H. Ford. Workers with specific skills were eliminated, in favour of other qualifications which were necessary for people to find new opportunities in the new “world of technology of the industrial age”. The contemporary world is a kind of repetition of what has already happened, the point is only that the changes are of a different nature. In the sphere of work, one can speak of two great revolutions that have caused significant and irreversible changes, mangling mark on social development, and influenced the behaviour of individuals in the labour market.

The first one took place along with the progress of the nineteenth century industrial revolution, with an increase in demand for labour and the emergence of employees. Another breakthrough came in the late twentieth century. The information revolution, the progressive computerization and professionalization of society have led to the demand for a completely different type of employees. These were employees, for whom the capital ceased to be physical strength and became knowledge, qualifications and skills. “These new conditions of civilization meant that labour and capital, i.e. the central determinants of development in the industrial society, have been replaced by information and knowledge. The theory of value of human labour has been replaced by the theory of value of knowledge” (Wilsz, 2009, p. 34).

Already now and even more so in the future, work will not mean the same as it means today. Increasing competition on a global scale forces organizations not only to pay closer attention to cost and performance, but also to monitor and continuously adapt to the changing surrounding conditions. Employers see solutions to the problems that they face mainly in the reorganization of work, decentralization of management, diversification of jobs, greater individualization of tasks and hiring employees depending on production needs. In order for society and individuals to be able to adapt to the new conditions, existing solutions are not enough (e.g. emphasis on education) and it is necessary to understand the cause and effect relationships between how the modern world is changing, how it affects the labour market and, consequently, the individual employee. An individual ceases to be tied to one company, but is someone who has specific knowledge and experience acquired during their studies and work, and the range of skills learned predetermines them to perform various types of tasks. Increasing competition on a global scale forces companies to pay close attention to cost and performance. Employers therefore see the solution in the reorganization of work, decentralization of management, diversification of jobs, greater individualization of tasks, assigning different jobs depending on demand. This is what causes the growth of new forms of employment, such as part-time, limited duration, specific task jobs, or subcontracting. The range of knowledge allows employees to be more mobile and thus to perform various types of work. The effect of individualization and diversification of work is the separation of the increasing number of employees from one “permanent,” full-time job in a stable company.

The ever growing interest in labour problems seems to stem from many phenomena and processes, among which one can find the dynamic and unprecedented economic development, the changing global economic conditions, international competition, the advancing process of globalization, the spread of information technology and electronic media. The turning point in contemporary analyses of work as a socio-economic phenomenon was the announcement of the “end of work” by J. Riffkin. Besides, it was not only J. Riffkin who wrote about it, but also R. J. Barnett (1993), who argued that new technology will allow production of a whole host of new products and services but at the same time jobs will be fewer because it will take fewer people to produce additional quantities of goods. From that moment, as M. Carnoy writes, began a ruthless struggle for a piece of “the global job pie” (Carnoy, 2002, p. 31). Next to J. Riffkin, at this point one should mention F. Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 2000, p. 59) who with reference to the nature of civilizational transformations determining the nature of the labour market points to the need to define new ways of responding to changes the world is witnessing. It is mainly about reducing the amount of professional work and tasks of a stereotypical character, ones that require low skills, in favour of professional work and tasks which need a higher level of qualifications, including the competence necessary to build the right relationships, teamwork skills, manners, responsibility for oneself and others, independence, ability to cope with new situations. Therefore, the key will remain the work associated with such types of tasks as creative activities, especially research, tasks related to science and applied arts; the area of activities relating to the functioning of social institutions providing services to the public; activities related to the service and assistance to the elderly and disabled as well as creating all kinds of specialized consulting for planning your own future, selection of studies, etc.; activities relating to the preparation of highly qualified professionals to organize production, services and automated system control; activities to gain competence associated with the life and use of leisure time (Friedrichs, Schaff, 1987).

According to neoclassical economic theorists, behaviours in the labour market have their subjective beginning in the decisions of future employees to satisfy their needs as motivation. Thus, the question arises how to break the work-needs-motivation circle. Besides motivation there also appears the concept of work as a value. Although this is defined in equal ways, praxeologically, sociologically, legally, economically, it remains a value in response to the existential human needs. It is an act on the road to utility, but it is also an action which defines social positions within the structure of income, power and consumption. Work has always had a definite place in the social system of values, regardless of how it was understood, whether in abstract terms, that is work as a socio-economic phenomenon, or in utilitarian terms, as a specific type of activity performed. Of course, the rating of jobs in the axionormative system of an individual, a group or a society, depends on multiple factors. Today's work ethos is made up of norms, values and behaviours, whose source lies in the economic capitalism, which is dominated by business ethos, collection, enrichment and consumption.

The result of the formation of a new type of economy, an economy based on knowledge, is the focus on knowledge, formal skills, and efficiency in adapting to change. A change which rather than making jobs "disappear," mostly causes them to transform profoundly. Today's employee should be able to make a smooth transition from the system of permanent employment to flexible working hours, display mobility in performing the tasks, and be aware of the fact that modern employment is a task-based employment. The new economy is forcing people to work hard, but is also capable of rewarding them generously. The basic condition for success is understanding the necessity of change, its source and direction. Modern economy is not just about the Internet, new technologies, dynamics and mobility, but also it is work in the form of networking, which has a significant impact on the style of work and life, whose main values are flexibility, innovation and risk. It is also clear that over recent years work has shifted from the production of agricultural and industrial goods towards services, including in particular highly specialized services. The main component of the new services is knowledge which increases productivity, ensures precise adaptation to specific customer needs and creates opportunities for the creation of new ones. For individuals to be able to adapt to the current conditions, the existing solutions, such as increasing the number of jobs, the emphasis on education, and retraining of workers, are not enough. It is because they do not encompass interactions caused by the processes of change, the source of which is globalization and the new organization of work (Michałków, 2003, pp. 43-44).

The new logic of work and organization brings two main consequences: firstly, individuals or businesses that are not ready to act in line with the requirements of flexibility are and will continue to be gradually pushed out and marginalized by competition; secondly, job flexibility causes the individualization of work tasks and the growing diversification of employees. To meet the challenges, one must constantly explore the opportunities offered by the education and continuous learning process. It is a major determinant of readiness to change. In today's market there is a struggle for talent and a search for the best specialists. Both employers and employees themselves invest in continuous improvement of qualifications. However, experience shows that merely having education and knowledge does not guarantee success and advancement. In the era of globalization, theoretical knowledge is one thing and having practical skills is another important element of the curriculum vitae of the employee. Besides the basic, as it would seem, skills as knowledge of foreign languages or the efficient use of the IT programs, techniques and tools, increasingly important become the skills related to innovative thinking, or those that help in analytical and creative thinking and are focused on finding effective solutions (Michałków, 2003, pp. 43-44). Professional success is also about personality traits and emotional intelligence.

When analyzing changes in the nature of work itself it is impossible not to refer to the consequences that they entail in the area of human activity. These changes are an important point of reference in the analysis of the contemporary labour market. To understand why this is so, one should start from understanding how important work is in human life, what place it has in the structure of values, and what its importance is to broadly conceived development. As M. Marody writes

...the importance of paid work in determining the order of modern society was associated with the fact that for most individuals it represented a fundamental factor that defined their place in society. Provision or non-provision of work, its nature and pragmatics, not only determined access to the resources needed to sustain biological existence but also marked the network of contacts and the resulting social capital, identity and self-esteem, life chances and opportunities for action in other areas of activity. Therefore, as U. Beck succinctly recognized, “paid work and occupation in the industrial society became the axis of life. (Marody, 2005, p. 131)

That did not occur right away, it was not born with humanity. It occurred with the advent of organized capitalism.

It is together with the settling of capitalism and the ensuing rise of a new middle class that “sales of work” becomes a primary source of livelihood for the overwhelming proportion of the population, social divisions begin to refer to the meritocratic criteria, and the social place and chances of an individual begin to be determined not so much by the fact of having or not having property as by the type of work performed. (Marody, 2015, p. 133)

Society is a system of rules and principles operating on individuals whose actions run in the local “here and now” of social reality. Social life as a continuous process of socialization of human action not only breaks down its previously existing forms but also constantly produces new ones, which become applicable standards for individual actions. Then, even if from the point of view of researchers dealing with issues of social development these forms are characterized by the lack of “closure,” transience and liquidity, precisely, from the perspective of individual life they are fairly stable signs which direct human action (Bauman, 2006; Marody, 2015, p. 120). If the stable, Fordism-based work determined the meaning of life, what will happen, what will be the source of identification of contemporary man when he is deprived one of the main pillars of this stability? How to escape the scheme, which expired? How to get rid of patterns of activity shaped by a system which falls short of merit in the modern world?

Today, work ceases to establish the basic framework for the functioning of individuals. The standard, according to U. Beck, is employment interspersed with periods of unemployment, which individuals use to acquire additional skills (Beck, 2002, p. 133). Increasingly, the question “who are you?” which meant the occupation, is replaced by the question “what do you do?,” which is grounded in the assumption of temporariness of an activity. As a result of these changes, the labour market is filled up with people who drift from job to job, experiencing what R. Sennett and M. Castells refer to as “horizontal movement”. It just means that employees, believing that they continue to climb higher, in fact move from side to side. This situation is caused by an illegible structure of occupations and changes in the very structure of advancement (Marody, 2015, p. 137).

The increase in the liquidity of employment and the spreading outsourcing are a barrier to employees’ organizing themselves and achieving a competitive position (Castells, 2007). All this makes it difficult to identify oneself with the work provided, and even with the occupation. Even in the middle of the last century, one had their occupation for the whole life, now employees are

forced to change several times not only the workplace, but also the type of tasks they perform. As Z. Bauman writes, "...no job is forever underwritten, no position protected from the vagaries of fate, no profession resistant to the ravages of time, no skills equipped with guarantees of their market value" (Bauman, 2001, p. 47).

As a result of all these changes, "the traditional form of work, based on full-time employment, specific tasks and master career for life, undergoes a slow but inevitable erosion" (Castells, 2007, p. 267). Although work still covers a large, and in many cases even increasing proportion of an individual's life, it ceases to organize life. All this leads to a loss of sense of control over events and the inability to plan the various stages of life, with the result that individuals encounter increasing difficulty in creating a coherent narrative of life organized around their careers.

The new market has three characteristic features. Firstly, a horizontal career becomes now increasingly popular. Instead of climbing the career ladder, more and more often most of employees "jump from tree to tree in search of various fruits". Secondly, it is the fact that more and more people begin to identify with their work/tasks or profession than a company. In part, this is due to the high degree of specialization. Thirdly, more and more individuals take on more and more responsibility for every aspect of their career. They take the risk not only associated with a change of job, but also the task of taking care of their own creativity by investing in it and nurturing it (Florida, 2010, pp. 123-124).

The regime of flexibility entails the loss of importance of learned skills of the individual. What is most desirable is the ability to adapt to continuous changes and "emotional intelligence" which facilitates the functioning in teamwork.

In the description and characteristics of modern society based on the available literature, among many concepts one seems particularly often used. It is the concept of "liquidity" introduced to describe the reality of "post-modern" society by Z. Bauman. When describing the changes that occur in the area of labour and employment, referring to their essence, paying attention to their dynamics, direction, source and consequences, social scientists use many terms but it seems that the metaphor of "liquid reality" to describe the processes and phenomena occurring in the labour market is the most appropriate. This is because it refers to the ever changing shapes of the social world, and the increasingly widespread sense of disappearance of the fixed points of reference in it, which would give direction and coherence of the individual actions. "In the liquid-modern system, positions prepared to be taken are almost totally non-existent, individual identities change from "given" to "set," scarcity becomes more and more apparent of "patterns, codes and principles which could be considered as landmarks, and which can be followed in the future...Liquidity, fluidity, lack of fixed forms are the properties underlying not only the "risk society" and not just "fragmented identity" but permeating all dimensions of social life, from fashion, through science, to politics" (Bauman, 2006; Marody, 2015, pp. 119-120). This liquidity of status finds its fulfillment in the individual strategies of employees. R. Sennett points to this when he writes, "...the specificity of the new system is best reflected in the slogan 'Nothing for a long time.' Today, in the world of work, the traditional model is disappearing, of career leading step by step through the corridors of one or two institutions" (Sennett, 2006, p. 22). Z. Bauman describes the situation even more picturesquely when he writes, "The place of employment is like a camping site, which is visited only for a few nights and which you can leave at any time if the convenience offered by it is not provided or turn out to be unsuitable" (Bauman, 2001, p. 25).

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