

S: SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

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The issue of well-being at work has undergone considerable change in recent years, gaining prominence most notably in the political arena. This is because well-being at work plays an important role in defining working conditions. Measuring well-being, on the other hand, is not easy. Most European and national (in this case, French) studies do not approach the topic of well-being at work head on. For the most part, studies on working conditions try to define 'risks' that might damage the health of employees in the workplace. Few studies show an interest in the question of well-being (happiness), with the exception in France of the work *Travailler pour être heureux. Le bonheur et le travail en France* (Baudelot et Gollac, 2003). Early approaches in sociology seek to identify those elements that can easily be objectified in order to measure well-being, which is to say, the social and economic conditions required to achieve this sense of well-being.

Another series of works place the emphasis on quite how relative well-being is and, using a constructivist approach, locate it in a precise social context. This essay will show that one way of analysing health at work is to take as a gauge employee participation. This question leads us back directly to the issue of organizational structures at work and to the level of control that employees may hold both over how a business is managed and over its strategic orientation. Firstly, we will see how sociologists of work view the question of participation in a classic business setting, before introducing the question of how much organizational structures vary and how in some organisations participation has a more political character and consequently has positive effects on health. This is not to say, though, that such participation doesn't raise certain questions and paradoxes when it comes to investment and social recognition.

Participation: an unrealistic question in organisations?

For some sociologists of work the issue of the participation of employees is a distorted question that is out of place (Burawoy, 1979; Borzeix et Linhart, 1988). It's true that sociological analyses of work during the 1940s repeatedly showed that for work to be effective employees need to have a level of engagement that goes beyond that required by the job



contract. In other words, there is a discrepancy between work as formally defined and the work actually effected by employees in the course of their daily activities. Employees build their knowledge bases and the different ways in which they respond to the vagaries of work activities through 'the appropriation of work' (Bernoux, 1979). This appropriation puts the realisation of work first while allowing the organization to exist. It contributes to the construction of professional identities at work and to the engagement of individuals. This participation is, though, for the most part little recognized; it is, rather, 'informal'. And yet, businesses in the 1980s and 1990s, in France in particular, tried to recognize this participation by means of a number of policies: for example, quality circles, semi-autonomous groups, management through objectives. Paradoxically, in taking these steps, instead of recognising this knowledge, these professional practices, the policies have produced the opposite effect, which is to say the destruction or the control of these practices, due to the fact that they were founded on fictitious work groups. In reality, according to Borzeix and Linhart what is at stake is the actual control of the organization of work. Furthermore, the capitalist organization of work has a force written into its technical structure that leads to competition between employees and thus encourages 'productive consent' (Burawoy, 1979).

However, if such an analysis draws attention to the limits of management that shows little sensitivity to the real dimensions of work, it leaves aside the different forms of organization of work while privileging the Taylorian archetype.

Forms of organization of work as a factor in well-being

Recent work on a European level by Lorenz and Valeyre (2005 and 2009) leads us to think that the impact varies according to the type of organisation. This idea had already been explored by Tom Dwyer who looked at the production of accidents at work and showed the important impact of forms of power or else of reward systems in the regulation of social relations (Dwyer, 1991). By making use of European enquiries into working conditions, Lorenz and Valeyre show not only the diversity of forms of organization of work in Europe (simple, Taylorian, slimmed-down – lean production and *apprenant*) but also the effects on employee health. For the authors, it is clear that the '*apprenant*' organization is best equipped to emphasize human capital, autonomy, co-operation, and collective decision-making. To be able to work in these circumstances allows



the authors to state the most favourable working conditions according to the model found in Karsek and Theorell (1990).

In other words, greater participation, recognition, and autonomy in these organisations not only sets up positive conditions for greater well-being at work but also better physical conditions, all other things being equal. More recently, Francis Green and Tarek Mostafa (2012) came to the same conclusions on quality of life at work, namely that this is more apparent in Nordic countries, where organisations of the ‘*apprenant* type’ are more common. This example is helpful in understanding the importance of well-being at work on a number of fronts. Firstly, businesses cannot be analysed outside their socio-economic setting. Nordic countries have their own histories, social inequalities are present but to a lesser extent than in other European countries, and the importance of social dialogue is also written in to social relations. Secondly, the participation of employees is seen as more important, particularly in the strategic planning and internal politics of businesses. This isn’t a case of formal and consultative participation. On the contrary, participation observed in these contexts is conceived in distinction from production. In this respect, the example of co-operatives provides an interesting test case for this series of works on well-being.

Participation as an element of political control?

If participation in the capitalist and state model seems hard to conceive, there are variants, such as the forms of organization observed in Nordic countries. This encourages us to turn our attention to certain older forms of organization that align themselves with models other than the state or capitalist one (Laville, 2005). Forms of co-operative, mutualist, or associative organization openly and historically defend another form of relationship with work. Among the criteria (or values) defended is the ‘democratic’ participation of members. In this perspective, what effects can these forms have on well-being at work?

Research shows that the greater the political participation of members in an organisation, the greater the well-being. However, this raises a certain number of questions and paradoxes. It’s true that co-operative organisations report a lower and less regular number of accidents at work than classic organisations (Guiol and Munoz, 2007). Co-operative organisations appear to protect workers’ health better to the extent that the members have greater ‘control’ over the work processes. That translates,



moreover, into a more positive social recognition than in other organisations. Working conditions also seem to be more protective in mutualist and co-operative organisations, according to the French national research institute on social economy (2014).

Globally, the members of the ESS (*economie sociale et solidaire*) structures are more satisfied with their conditions of quality of life at work despite earnings on average lower than the classic sector (Insee and Anact). However, this satisfaction varies according to whether workers are in a mutual, co-operative, or association. Thus according to the 2014 Atlas of the ESS, members of mutuals are the least satisfied at work, while co-operatives appear to have the most content workers. The size and the sector also play a role here. Structures with fewer than twenty members have the most satisfied employees, underlining the importance of workers knowing one another, but also possible effects of the life cycle of co-operatives (Meister, 1972) and the risk of organizational isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Finally, in the case of France, if the ESS imposes a new framework, which has effects on well-being at work, its associative character means it must confront a twofold challenge. Associative structures make up 78% of the jobs of the ESS. But the large majority of these jobs are of fixed-term contract and tend to be roles that require few qualifications and which involve a female workforce. This consequently exacerbates problems of job security and working conditions (Dussuet, 2010; Hély, 2009; Inrs, 2014).

Although these structures seem comparatively beneficial for salaried members, they have paradoxical and particular effects. For work requires an engagement that goes beyond simple legal status. Research by sociologists of work over the past 70 years have shown this. The structures of the ESS do not represent an exception to this rule but they add an openly 'political' dimension to the extent that members of an organization have signed up 'freely' to the project. But such membership expects from members not the engagement of an employee but that of a 'co-operator'. As such, members of these structures frequently complain of not having enough time to carry out their work (Guiol and Munoz, 2009). Moreover, the greater social recognition can translate into a 'minimisation of risk'. Finally, the temporal dimension becomes central in an organization where the relationship with work isn't limited to a pre-established duration. Members must not only take care of productivity but also management, strategic choices, investments, and so on. In sum, all of the elements that make up the reality of work.



Conclusion

From this rapid glance at the notion of well-being at work, we might characterize it using a certain number of criteria. The shape of the organization seems to play an important role, above all when it comes to the position of its members. If there can be objective constraints (timetables, work rates, job status), modes of participation will have a strong effect on deleterious outcomes. Forms of participation in the structures of the ESS, however, tell us that the effects are far from homogenous and depend on size, type of job or else categories (workers, employees, or managers). Thus it appears that the major risk for well-being within the structures of the ESS is to enter into a process of limiting isomorphism, which would lead to the total negation of the positive effects of this mode of governance. In this way, well-being at work cannot be limited to an objective measure but must equally take account of subjective elements such as the political and institutional character of a given situation.

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