

**SOCIOLOGY, WORK
AND INDUSTRY**
FIFTH EDITION
TONY J. WATSON

Sociology, Work and Industry

This popular text explains and justifies the use of sociological imagination to understand the nature of institutions of work, occupations, organisations, management and employment and how they are changing in the twenty-first century.

With outstanding breadth of coverage it provides an authoritative overview of both traditional and emergent themes in the sociological study of work; explains the basic logic of sociological analysis of work and work-related institutions; and provides an appreciation of different theoretical traditions. It fully considers:

- the direction and implications of trends in technological change, globalisation, labour markets, work organisation, managerial practices and employment relations;
- the extent to which these trends are intimately related to changing patterns of inequality in modern societies and to the changing experiences of individuals and families;
- the ways in which workers challenge, resist and make their own contributions to the patterning of work and shaping of work institutions.

New features include an easy-to-read, fully signposted layout, key issue questions, snapshot case studies, chapter summaries and a companion website which contains useful resources (for students and teachers). All of these elements – and much more – provide you with a text unrivalled in the field.

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Sociology, Work and Industry

Fifth edition

Tony J. Watson

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Introduction

It might appear to be a truism to use the term ‘continuity and change’ when writing about work in contemporary societies and in peoples’ lives. But, as other authors concerned with these issues recognise (Edgell 2006; Williams 2007, to take just two examples) the expression is more than a cliché. There are significant changes occurring across work organisations, occupations and the global division of labour which affect the lives of practically every living person, whether their main involvement with work occurs in the office, the factory, the shop, the school, the home or wherever. Yet many of the key features of contemporary work structures and processes are those which took their distinctive shape within the industrialising and modernising processes of past centuries. Sociology emerged as an intellectual way of coming to terms with those changes and *Sociology, Work and Industry* is based on the premise that the sociological discipline continues to be a vital resource for anyone wishing to appreciate what is happening to work, industrialised societies and people’s experience of work (or, indeed, the lack of it).

Two further premises follow from this initial one. First, it is assumed that we can appreciate neither the continuities nor the changes in work unless we set in their historical context both the work-related social institutions themselves and the sociological concepts, theories and research which have been used to understand them. This means that an effective text must present and explain what we might call the ‘classical’ ideas and research studies of the sociology of work which emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as being fully ‘up to date’ with insightful and productive new ways of thinking. Second, it is believed that for sociology to fulfil its potential for informing our relationship to work it must avoid going too far with its own division of labour and leaving us with separate ‘subjects’ like organisation theory, sociologies of occupations, professions and work-experience, employment relations and so on. In such a deep and broad endeavour as that of studying ‘work’, these tendencies are inevitable

and they are often fruitful. But it is vital that we have at least one text which crosses and integrates themes which run through these subjects. This is where *Sociology, Work and Industry* fits into the division of labour.

The fact that the text is now appearing in a new edition, after four earlier and successful versions, suggests that it is meeting a significant need. And the fifth edition does more than simply update the research and thinking that appeared in earlier versions of the book. It has been developed to strengthen both its integrative purpose and its concern to relate sociological thinking to the lives of its readers. Hence two of the new 'devices' of the fifth edition. The 'snapshot' illustrative cases are designed to bring alive the more abstract academic reflections of the main text (drawing on a variety of sources, varying from the author's own research work and personal experiences to published studies of other researchers). The signpost or 'linking' system might, at first sight, look like little more than a fancy form of cross-referencing. But it is much more than this. It allows us to come to terms with the fact that many themes run across and through the various chapters. And it also makes it possible for the reader or student to enter the text at whichever point best suits them or their tutor. If the focus of a module is, say, on work organisations or the management of organisations, one could start with Chapter 4 or 5, allowing the signposts to refer the reader back to relevant material from earlier chapters (on 'rationalisation' say) or forward to subsequent chapters (on worker orientations, say).

A lot of work has gone into writing this book about work! But much of that work has been a pleasure to undertake, as has the teaching and the original research work which has been done alongside the preparation of this edition. Reading, writing and doing sociology is an exciting and rewarding activity. It is hoped that every reader of *Sociology, Work and Industry* will, in their own way, find it rewarding to engage with. And it is hoped that part of that reward will be an enhanced ability to come to terms with, and to contribute to, the shaping of their work activities either in the present or in the future.

I Studying work and society

Key issues

- How can we most usefully differentiate ‘work’ from other human activities and endeavours?
- What are the essential characteristics of a sociological way of thinking?
- How can we most helpfully think about ‘society’ and ‘societies’?
- What role has sociology played historically in understanding a changing world and what role might it play in understanding both contemporary issues and questions about the future of work?
- In what ways can sociology be understood to be a science?
- In what ways do sociologists use theories, adopt various research methods and work with differing philosophical (or ‘methodological’) assumptions?
- How can we cope with the variety of ways in which sociologists orient themselves in their studies of work and work organisations?

People, work and society

Work is something in which everyone is involved in one way or another. This applies to people across the whole world. And it has applied to the human species across its whole history. People may work in their own small field, growing food to keep themselves alive. They may work in an office or a factory and, after a day working in an employer’s premises for a wage or a salary, they may return to do their housework or to work in their garden. Even those who do not themselves perform any of these labours are nevertheless involved with work; as owners of land on which other people work, as investors in industrial enterprises or as employers of servants. To understand the way of life of people living in any kind of society we therefore have to pay close attention to work activities and to the institutions associated with those activities.

If we intend to study work activities and the institutions associated with them systematically, we need to decide first just what we mean by ‘work’. This is not a matter of producing a final and absolute definition of work. Sociology, like all scientific and other forms of systematic study, proceeds by deciding what is likely to be the most useful way of characterising the topics being studied. Certain types of economic inquiry in a modern industrialised society might best be conducted by defining work in terms of task-based activities for which people are paid by an employer, client or customer. However, this would exclude all those tasks that we refer to as ‘housework’ for example. This would be a serious omission given that, in Brown’s (1997) words, ‘without the enormous volume and unremitting cycle of domestic labour the formal economy of jobs and pay packets would cease to function’.

It is argued by Pettinger *et al.* (2006) that feminists in the 1970s crucially challenged traditional conceptual boundaries when they ‘questioned the taken-for-granted assumption that work undertaken in the private sphere of the home was not “work”’. And Pettinger *et al.* (2006) build on this new tradition to propose what they suggest might be a ‘new sociology of work’. At the heart of this is Glucksmann’s notion of the ‘total social organisation of labour’ (Glucksmann 1995, 2000). This involves emphasising what Pettinger *et al.* (2006) call the ‘blurry line between work and not-work’ and Glucksmann (2006) herself illustrates how far this approach might be taken by proposing a ‘new’ area of study, that of ‘consumption work’. Sociologists traditionally put a boundary between work and consumption but Glucksmann (2006) observes that engaging in consumption practices ‘often relies on the “work” of knowledge acquisition and learning specific practical skills, so raising the question of whether, or in what sense, the acquisition of skills necessary to undertake consumption constitutes work’. Although one can see the value of suggestions such as Glucksmann’s one that ‘cooking and preparing meals could be a fruitful example to investigate for a complex fusion of work, non-work and skill acquisition’, we need to be careful. If we include in the scope of the sociology of work all task-oriented activity in which effort is expended, then we risk extending our study to such activities as walking across a room to switch on a television set or packing a bag to take for a day on the beach. We need a compromise that gives sufficient focus to our studies without limiting them to activities with a formal economic outcome.

There are two main aspects of work that a sociological concept of work needs to recognise. The first is the task-related aspect of work and the second is the part played by work in the way people ‘make a living’.



Looking forward

Work which is done outside the traditional ‘workplace’ is looked at in Chapter 6 in connection, for example, with domestic work (p. 197) and work in the informal economy (p. 196).

Glucksmann’s notion of the Total Social Organization of Labour is returned to in Chapter 6 (p. 207).

Work

The carrying out of tasks which enable people to make a living within the social and economic context in which they are located.

This way of thinking about work associates it with the expenditure of effort to carry out tasks but it limits it to something that has an economic element – in the very broad sense of dealing with problems of survival in a world of scarce resources. But the notion of ‘making a living’ implies much more than just producing enough material goods to ensure physical survival. People do not simply extract a living from the environment. Work effectively transforms environments in many ways, and, in the process, creates for many people a level of living far in excess of basic subsistence. But it does more than this. It also relates intimately to how people shape their very lives and identities. And people’s lives are significantly shaped by the circumstances in which they have to work. The work people do becomes closely bound up with their conception of self. In looking at how people ‘make a living’ we are looking at how they deal with both the economic and the social or cultural aspects of their lives.

Work is a social, economic and social phenomenon. It is not simply a matter of behaviour. Work occurs in societies and, as with work, we have to conceptualise society before we can examine systematically the role of work in human societies.

Each society has its own set of economic and legal arrangements and dominant values, and its members are often pressed to share a degree of communality of identity. Each society also has its own pattern of power and inequality. Precisely where each individual and family fits into that pattern will be fundamental to how they experience work and how well they share in whatever human benefits derive from the work carried out in that society. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that we typically identify societies with nation states, it is vital to note that it is sometimes more realistic to talk of, say, a ‘society’ of small farmers to be found in a remote part of a large nation state such as India, and sometimes it is more helpful to think about, say, managerial workers in ‘modern industrial capitalist society’ as opposed to looking separately at the lives of British, Swedish or American managers. There are significant patterns to be observed within and across nation states. Thus, when we think about ‘society’ as the subject matter of the discipline of sociology, it is wise to think of it broadly in terms of ‘the social’ in people’s lives – ‘social’, that is, at the level of the larger patterns of culture, community and political economy within which the smaller scale social interactions and, indeed, individual efforts to ‘make a life’ and ‘make a living’ occur. Sociological study looks at all these levels of human existence but, as we shall now see, its characteristic feature is its relating of the small scale, the local, the intimate in people’s lives to the bigger social scheme of things – both within and across particular societies.

Society

The broad pattern of social, economic, cultural and political relationships within which people lead their lives, typically but not exclusively, in the modern world as members of the same nation state.



Looking forward

The question of how we deal with the notion of ‘society’ in the context of an allegedly ‘globalising’ world is considered in Chapter 3.

Sociology

The study of the relationships which develop between human beings as they organise themselves and are organised by others in societies and how these patterns influence and are influenced by the actions and interactions of people and how they make sense of their lives and identities.

Thinking about work sociologically

Sociology provides us with a range of insights, concepts, theories and research findings which help us understand the wide range of work and work-related activities that occur in the context of the broader social and cultural arrangements.

The defining characteristic of the sociological perspective is that it *ultimately relates whatever it studies back to the way society as a whole is organised*. The essential insight which sociology provides is that no social action, at however mundane a level, takes place in a social vacuum. It is always linked back to the wider culture, social structure and processes of the society in which it takes place. These structures, processes, norms and values, with all their related inequalities, ideologies and power distributions, are the source of both constraints and opportunities which people meet in conducting their lives. The better and more widely these cultures, structures and processes are understood and the better the connections between specific actions or arrangements and these basic patterns are appreciated, then the greater is the opportunity for the human control over work, industry and every other kind of social institution.

Let us envisage trying to make sense, sociologically, of a simple piece of ‘everyday’ work-related human behaviour (Snapshot 1.1).

In analysing this simple piece of mundane activity in this way, we are thinking sociologically. In asking these questions, we are asking sociological questions. And, in doing so, we would be engaging with issues of power and life-chances in a way that would not just enhance our ‘academic’ understanding of relationships at work but would, potentially, offer understandings of possibilities and practices that could inform human choices that might further – or, for that matter, resist – social change.

Choices, constraints and opportunities in work and society

Sociology’s potential as a resource for informing human choice is something to which we will return shortly. First, however, we need to reinforce the point about working arrangements and social patterns being both the outcomes of human actions and factors helping shape those actions. Sociology has been defined here as something that looks at how human beings organise both themselves and each other. In looking at how people think and behave, it looks for cultural patterns and ‘structures’ in social life. These patterns are seen as both the outcome of the activities of individuals and as things which, in turn, influence, encourage and constrain the individual. If, for example, it was the man in Snapshot 1.1 who was the more senior of our two social actors, he might tell us in an interview that



SNAPSHOT I.1 Two people arriving at work: a simple case of thinking sociologically

A man and a woman get out of a car and walk into an office block. One of them goes into a large private office and closes the door. The other sits at a desk outside that office alongside several other people. The person in the private space telephones the one in the outer office and a few minutes later the latter individual takes a cup of coffee and a biscuit into the person in the inner office.

If we were viewing this scene as strangers to the work organisation, whether or not we were formally trained as sociologists, we would be thinking about both the personal and the work relationship between these people: were they a married couple, lovers or simply people sharing a lift to work? We would wonder how this aspect of their relationship related to the authority relationship between them: presumably one of them was 'the boss', was the more highly paid, the more highly trained, and had the right to give instructions to the other. We would here be drawing on our knowledge of 'sociological' matters such as social class, educational and career opportunity structures, bureaucratic authority structures, culturally normal patterns of workplace layout and the patterns of behaviour, rules, assumptions and expectations associated with work activities in this particular society and culture at this particular time in history.

If it were the man that entered the private office we might note that standard 'norms' were being followed with regard to gender relationships. But if it were the woman who 'played the role' of the senior person – the presumably higher paid, more qualified individual with greater authority – we might begin to reflect on how this individual has come to challenge established patterns. How had she come to break established norms? What opportunity structures had she used, what barriers had she overcome? To what extent were her actions and her relatively unusual position in the workplace part of a broader pattern of social change?

his current role as the organisation's head of information technology was the outcome of a series of *choices* that he personally made in his life. The woman, to whom he gives a daily lift in his company car, might talk to us about how she chose to train and work as an office secretary.

As sociological observers we would not want to discount these claims to choice or 'agency' in these individuals' career patterns. Nor would we say that there were no individual choices behind the pattern whereby the great majority of the important 'decision-makers' in this organisation are currently men and most of the secretarial and 'personal assistant' workers are women. Choices have clearly been made. Nobody forced these people into these jobs. Each human individual is an agent, with wants, aspirations and a sense of identity which they bring to any decision to speak or act. But, at the same time, we are likely to be aware that the pattern we have observed is, in some sense, an outcome of the way the 'society' in which these people grew up channelled male and female children into different spheres of activity. There were clearly pressures on each child from the world around

them: from role examples observed as they grew up to the opportunities made available to boys and girls in both education and initial employment. It is easily possible to see two mutually exclusive alternative types of explanation emerging here: agency and choice on the one hand and structural ‘channelling’ on the other. Sometimes sociologists talk of making a choice between *voluntarist* and *structural* frames of reference and modern sociological thought is characterised, says Swingewood (2000), ‘by a continual tension between . . . a voluntarist model which emphasises the creative and active role of agents, and a structural model which focuses on institutions and processes which constrain and determine the course of action’.

To use terms which have been around as long as there has been social thought, we can speak of explanations which emphasise free will and explanations which stress determinism. This is something that sociologists try to go beyond. To develop an explanation of the patterns observed we need an analysis which considers the way these individuals came to shape their career interests and ‘choose’ their aspirations in the light of their previous experiences in life and what they have learned from the cultural and parental influences upon them to be the appropriate and possible types of work for them to enter. There is an interweaving of individual and social factors, of free choice and of constraint. We might simplify this, as Figure 1.1 does, by saying that individuals make society and society makes individuals.

The analytical distinction between individual actions, on the one hand, and ‘the social’ on the other does not fully parallel the free will and determinism distinction, however, because it is possible to talk of an individual’s actions being severely constrained, if not determined, by factors such as their individual genetic make-up. Equally, it is possible to see social structures as providing opportunities for individuals to realise their individual interests (‘climbing the ladder’ of the class structure, say) as well as seeing people constrained by such structures (being excluded from an activity because of one’s gender or race, for example). Human beings are makers of social patterns and are also made by them. These patterns both constrain us and enable us to achieve our purposes. But these patterns or



Looking forward

Work organisations are part of this ‘structural’ world and precisely to what extent organisations ‘exist’, apart from the actions of people involved in them, is an important matter which we look at in Chapter 4 (pp. 109–12).

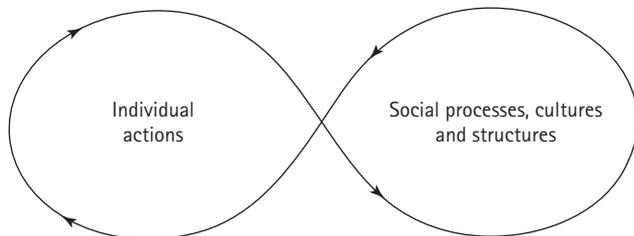


Figure 1.1 Individuals make society and society makes individuals

'structures' are not objectively existing entities outside of human patterns of interaction, even though it may at times feel as if they have this kind of forceful presence.

Sociology is not simply the study of 'the social', of societies, of social structures. Neither, of course, is it a study of individuals' activities, aggregated in some way to give us a view of societies as little more than the sum of their parts. It is, rather, a study of the interrelationships between the individual and the social whose greatest potential lies in examining the processes whereby human initiatives and choices shape and are shaped by patterns of human interaction and power.

Work and the sociological imagination

In one of the most influential considerations of what sociology can contribute to human life, Mills (1970) identified the *sociological imagination* as a way of switching 'upwards' from an initial focus on the private problems of individuals. Such problems arise in the case of Mathieu and Valerie, who face losing their jobs (Snapshot 1.2).

Although, as human beings, we are likely to be very concerned for Valerie, Mathieu and for all the other families affected by this big business decision, our distinctively sociological interests move us to a further level of concern. The sociological perspective places human predicaments such as these in their broader context. Mills (1970) characterised this broader context as raising 'public issues' and this language immediately suggests to us a range of matters such as the levels of employment and unemployment in the city, the quality of educational provision for young children in this society and the nature of housing markets. These issues would require us to draw on other social sciences in addition to sociology – economics in particular. We would look at issues ranging from the state of the international market for manufactured goods and managerial, governmental and trade union policies, to patterns of technological change and patterns of business ownership. And within the analysis which we would undertake, there is considerable potential for distinctly sociological matters such as patterns of urban change, gender differences in careers and child-rearing, class and power in business decision-making, the relationship between work and personal identities, the impact of globalising trends on different nation states and so on and so on.

Sociology, then, shifts the level of focus from that of the close-up on the individual and their working life to that of the 'big picture' of the society in which they live but sociology is not simply to do with 'painting a picture', however broad that might be. It goes beyond this to look for regularities, patterns, structures and processes. The events in Valerie and



Looking forward

A valuable context in which to look at the interplay to be seen in social life between 'choice' factors and structural opportunity/constraint factors is that of people's entry into particular types of work or occupation. This is covered in the 'Entering work' section of Chapter 7 (pp. 230–3).



SNAPSHOT 1.2 The personal troubles of Mathieu and Valerie

Mathieu and Valerie are a couple in their thirties who have three young children, two at primary school and one at nursery school. For the past dozen or so years, they have both done assembly work at a car factory which, under a variety of owners, has been part of the industrial city in which they live for many years. The current owners have decided to move all the work to a newly built factory in eastern Europe – arguing that that the ‘cost patterns’ and the ‘potential for innovation’ in that setting make it imperative for them to cease operating the city in which Valerie was born and into which Mathieu moved when he and Valerie first set up home together. The first ‘personal trouble’ which confronts the couple is that of the large drop which is likely to happen in their family income. Neither of them knows of alternative jobs in the city, which they might investigate. They are distressed at the prospect of losing their heavily mortgaged home and they worry that, even if they choose to sell the house, they will have serious difficulties because many other redundant workers are likely to be putting their properties on the market at the same time. Also, if they are able to move, whether within the city or beyond it, they are very worried about the children’s education. They struggled to get the children into the schools in which they are currently very happy. They would hate to take their children away from these schools and from the various friends and relatives that are such an important part of the lives of the whole family. Valerie’s mother is seriously ill and . . .

Mathieu’s city will be set in their historical context and the overall structure of the several societies involved – the industrial bases, the political-economic systems of both eastern and western Europe and the ways in which these fit into patterns of global change. In analysing these structures and processes the sociologist would try to show how they potentially both constrain people as well as enable people to further their personal wishes, whether these people be corporate managers, politicians and trade union officers or ‘ordinary’ employees like Mathieu and Valerie.

This distinctly sociological way of thinking means stepping outside our normal ‘everyday’ commonsense way of thinking about our working lives and adopting what is perhaps the most basic sociological insight of all; that there is more than one way and one way only for men and women to organise their lives. In other words, the way society is is not necessarily the way society *has to be*. In the realm of work this means that the way we currently organise production and distribution does not possess some immutable inevitability. It is only one of a range of possibilities. Baumann and May (2001) refer to sociology’s ability to help us appreciate its ‘anti-fixating’ power. We are reminded, they say, that what we might think of as the ‘natural, inevitable, eternal aspects of our lives’ have come into being as a result of the exercise of ‘human power and human resources’. This, in turn, suggests that social patterns are not ‘immune and impenetrable to human action – our own action included’. A world that might have seemed

'oppressive in its apparent fixity' is shown to be a world that could be 'different from what it is now'. We are thus encouraged not to surrender to what might, at first, seem to be irresistible pressures and circumstances.

The original sociologists were thinkers striving to make sense of the dislocations of their age, as we shall shortly observe. The attempts by the classical sociological thinkers to make sense of their time are invaluable to us because, in an historical location more marginal than our own, they were better able to look at the industrial capitalist world in the light of conceptions of alternatives. This is the humanistic significance and the continuing relevance to us today of people like Marx, Weber and Durkheim. They were perhaps more aware of alternatives on a societal level than we are because they were better placed historically to contrast the modern and the industrial with the traditional, the urban with the rural, and so on.

Sociology, critique and democratic debate about work

The sociological imagination requires us to suspend our everyday common-sense assumptions about the world and, indeed, about the future of the world. But it also means being wary of styles of intellectual analysis that are more concerned with solving the problems of particular sections of society than with developing an analysis that would be relevant to members of society more generally. Jacques (1996) points out, for example, that many of the attempts currently being made to theorise work relations are producing their own kind of 'commonsense'. At the heart of this is a standard body of relatively unchanging US-created 'management knowledge' that takes for granted that the key 'work' issue is one of finding better ways to manage employees to enable organisations to achieve high productivity, international competitiveness and 'world class efficiency'. Questions are not asked about the nature and legitimacy of work organisations or, for example, the role of non-managers in 'managing' work, in shaping 'motivations' or acting as social citizens within work arrangements in which relationships are built and balanced. To ask these questions, we might add, does not preclude an interesting issue of efficiency and productivity but it does mean asking 'efficiency and productivity in whose interests?'

Tendencies in the sociology of work to play down the plurality of interests at work have been powerfully criticised by Castillo (1999a). He points to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a key purveyor ('MIT Productions Inc.') of analyses which, in effect, betray the critical legacy of sociology. He sees too many sociologists of work 'penning pastoral odes to just-in-time production, to composing night serenades to work



Looking forward

The elements of the contemporary sociology of work which have their roots in the thinking of Marx, Weber and Durkheim are examined in Chapter 2.

commitment, almost Wagnerian symphonies to flexibility, or Mozartian *divertimenti* to lean production and “high technology work districts”. There may be a degree of exaggeration in this attack. There is also perhaps a degree of over-excitement in the polemic (leading to the mistaken idea that Wagner composed symphonies) but, in Mills’ (1970) terms, the charge here is that the ‘private’ problems of members of society generally are not being related to broader ‘public issues’ in much of the contemporary social scientific study of work institutions and practices. In effect, the issues are less ‘public’ or democratic ones than issues for corporate, and especially American, capitalist interests (cf. Hutton 2002).

In an address to the American Sociological Association, Burawoy (2004), a distinguished sociologist of work, argued for a greater engagement of sociology in public debates. This would entail harnessing sociology’s ‘longstanding critical imagination, reminding us that the world could be different’. Burawoy (2004) draws here on Mills’ (1970) notion of the sociological imagination, proposing that ‘as they turn private troubles into public issues, public sociologies should challenge the world as we know it exposing the gap between what is and what could be’. In the specific context of the sociology of work and employment, Stewart (2004) connects the notion of a public sociology to a recognition that there is ‘an ethical dimension underlying our work’. This might, in turn, be connected, in debates, to the ‘question[ing] of *the hegemony of neo-liberalism and the need to challenge it in our work* whenever relevant’. Stewart (2004), in addition to suggesting a critique of neo-liberal market-based political-economic philosophies is particularly concerned, alongside Fevre (2003), to counter the influence of what he refers to as ‘a range of actors obsessed with paying court to management as consultants peddling the verities of, for example . . . lean production and High Performance Work Systems’.



Looking forward

High performance work systems and lean production are some of the changing aspects of work design and control that will be examined in Chapter 5.

Sociology and the emergence of industrial societies

The sociological imagination requires a strong historical awareness. The sociologist of contemporary work studying, for example, lean production methods of high performance work systems is likely to consider these practices in the context of the continuing history of industrialisation. Sociology is itself a creature of the modern industrialised societies within which it developed as a form of critical reflection on the considerable social changes associated with industrialisation and the growth of capitalism. Sociology emerged in the nineteenth century as both a reaction to and a reflection of certain major social and cultural shifts which had been occurring for some hundreds of years in Europe. For some centuries prior to the emergence of sociology, the glue which held together the fabric of

European society, giving it stability and a widespread taken-for-grantedness, had been weakening:

- The Reformation in the sixteenth century saw a questioning of the authority of a centralised Catholic Church and, with the emergence of Protestantism and dissent, came a growing stress on the individual rather than the corporate and the rational rather than the traditional.
- The Enlightenment in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought under rational and critical scrutiny institutions of religion, inequality, kinship, property and monarchy.
- The Industrial and French Revolutions in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ensured that all of these institutions were further shaken and indeed often overturned.

A bourgeois revolution occurred in England in 1688 limiting the power of the monarchy and, in France, the monarchy was toppled. Notions of democracy were becoming increasingly popular in the early decades of the nineteenth century but the problem of finding appropriate institutions for democratic politics was increased by the complications introduced by the Industrial Revolution. Capitalism had been growing in strength for centuries but by the early nineteenth century it had become combined with an industrial spirit and associated techniques which carried revolutionary structural implications. Arising partly within and partly from outside the established bourgeois class was the new industrial middle class and, even more threatening to stability, was the appearance of a new social phenomenon – an industrial working class.

Some sense had to be made of these massive processes of change. How could people come to terms with processes of urbanisation, industrialisation, a growing division of labour, secularisation, bureaucratisation, democratisation, national state centralisation and the rest? Sociology can be seen as an intellectual coming to terms with these processes and as an attempt to understand their impact.

The potential for a sociological way of coming to terms with these changes had developed during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment period, prior to the full emergence of sociology in the nineteenth century. The scientific aspects of such a venture were implicit in the Enlightenment and its characteristic belief that 'people could comprehend and control the universe by means of reason and empirical research' (Ritzer 2000). But also emerging in this period was the idea that human beings can be understood only in the context of the whole society in which they live. This was an insight that later sociologists were to take up from the eighteenth-century writing of Giambattista Vico. It was also a key idea of the Scottish Enlightenment, and two key figures in this – John Millar and Adam Ferguson – examined changing patterns of work specialisation and division

of labour sociologically, stressing the social as well as the economic aspects of these changes and identifying their implications, both positive and negative, for human welfare and work experience (Swingewood 2000; Herman 2001).

A near total breakdown in old assumptions about authority and social order followed the Enlightenment and the Industrial and French Revolutions, a breakdown which called for a reconstruction of the social order. Piecemeal reconstruction was seen as inappropriate, according to Fletcher (1971), when the 'entire fabric of institutions was falling apart' and a need for a 'body of knowledge about society as a totality of institutions' became apparent. It was this need that the founders of sociology were to try to meet. The key concepts or 'unit ideas' of sociology, Nisbet (1970) argues, were all developed as part of an attempt to achieve a 'theoretical reconsolidation' of the various elements on which social order had once rested – kinship, land, social class, religion, local community and monarchy – but which had now been 'dislocated by revolution' and 'scrambled by industrialisation and the forces of democracy'.

Sociologists, in this view, developed concepts like society and community to provide a consolidating or overarching perspective which would counter the divisive, contradictory and individualistic tendencies of life in this period of emerging modernism. The founders of sociology were preoccupied with the analysis of industrialism and were engaged in creating a 'powerful vision or "image" of a society in the making' (Kumar 1978) and, says Giddens (1971), the overwhelming interest of Marx, Durkheim and Weber was in the 'delineation of the characteristic structure of modern capitalism as contrasted with prior forms of society'. Contemporary sociology has inherited this role and has 'as its main focus the institutions of "advanced" or "industrialised" societies, and of the conditions of transformation of those institutions' (Giddens 1982).



Looking forward

Chapter 3 focuses on this question of how we can best characterise the types of society in which we currently live and understand the changes which are occurring in those societies.

The continuing challenge

It could be argued that the twenty-first century presents us with challenges of coming to terms with social and economic changes that are no less significant than those faced by the creators of sociology almost two centuries ago. Industrialisation continues apace, if unevenly, across the globe and links between different areas and cultures are becoming closer and more immediate with fast-developing information and communication technologies. It sometimes seems that there are few choices left to us about how we live, at the level of the nation state let alone at the level of the local community or family. Technology, international corporations and pressures for capital accumulation sometimes seem to be pushing everyone towards

a globalised future within which some will be allocated rich, secure and fulfilling lives at the expense of a mass of materially and experientially impoverished insecure workers and an even more impoverished stratum of economically inactive groups. At other times, we are encouraged to believe that the best of all possible worlds is available to us all, if we take advantage of the great opportunities both for challenging work and exciting recreation made possible by the same technological, commercial and globalising forces. Sociology has to bring us down to earth with regard to all of this. It needs to analyse what is going on and help us make a balanced appraisal of trends. Such analysis and insight can be a valuable resource, informing us and encouraging us to think imaginatively about the alternatives and choices facing us in all aspects of our lives, in our families, our communities and the wider societies of which we are members. How we think about the part that work is to play in our lives is necessarily central to this.

Sociology and the informing of democratic choices about work

What role, then, is suggested for the sociology of work and industry by the above analysis? First, we must recognise that it implies a rejection of a role like that criticised earlier by Stewart (2004) and Fevre (2003) (see p. 10) where industrial sociologists function more or less as management consultants. This relates to what has been called a 'servant of power' role. Here, those trained as industrial sociologists would primarily be employed as specialist human manipulators by large organisations in the way Baritz (1960) saw beginning to happen in pre-war America where such people were 'doing what they were told to do and doing it well – and therefore endangering those other personal, group, class and institutional interests which were opposed to the further domination by the modern corporation of the mood and direction of American life'. Sociological knowledge and insights inevitably have a relevance to practical problem-solving in large organisations and can be shown to help solve problems in certain relatively bounded situations (Klein and Eason 1991; Klein 2005). One would be naive and wrong to deny the right of any group to make use of knowledge in this way. What can be objected to, however, is the exclusive development of industrial sociology as a manipulative instrument for the pursuit of sectional interests.

An alternative role for the sociology of work and industry would be as a resource which helps those living in the industrial capitalist type of society to understand better the possibilities and choices which exist with regard to how work is organised and experienced in those societies. Its role is thus to inform choice. Here, the subject is not the sole preserve of the expert – be they 'servants of power' or marginalised academic teachers too hung up

on their naive political utopianism or too caught up in dense conceptual mystification to be seen as worthy of attention by other than their own acolytes. Instead, it is something to be disseminated through both formal and informal educational institutions and communication media. It becomes something in whose development the individual is first involved as a student, and something which is subsequently drawn upon and further engaged with in their later life and career as employees, managers, voting citizens, trade unionists, self-employers or consumers. It is a resource vital to a democratic society. Burns (1962) in discussing industrial sociology at a time when it scarcely had a foothold in Britain argued that it is the sociologist's business 'to conduct a critical debate . . . with the public about its equipment of social institutions'. As Eldridge *et al.* (1991) said about the role that industrial sociology might play in coming to terms with economic and social issues emerging later in the twentieth century, 'To show what possibilities may exist for political choices in an active democracy is to exercise the sociological imagination'. Such an imagination is as relevant as ever in the twenty-first century.

In the past, social thinkers were a tiny minority addressing a slightly larger minority of the population. The modern age is one of vastly increased literacy and access to schooling and communication media. This means that critical reflection on the values and institutions of society need no longer be the preserve of the privileged social philosopher or the dilettante intellectual of a leisured class. An ability to be analytical about social, economic and political issues can be developed in every citizen – this furthering the ideal of democratic control of society and its institutions. Institutions of work and industrial organisation are central to the very nature of society and they nowadays require perhaps closer and more rational scrutiny and rethinking than ever before. Sociology, as a science that looks critically, rationally and systematically at aspects of our social lives, has a great deal to offer.

Sociology and the future of work

Work institutions, organisations and processes are created by human beings and are not the outcomes of immutable historical forces. Recognition of this should make us cautious about associating the sociology of work with the popular activity of making *predictions* about the 'future of work'. Prediction is often seen as a key aim of scientific research and theorising. But, until recently, many of the predictions about the future of work have been speculative, sometimes highly pessimistic and sometimes highly optimistic. Handy (1994), beginning with his influential *The Future of Work* (Handy 1984), put forward the notion of a revolutionary level of change in

the so-called emerging 'knowledge economy'. This envisaged bureaucratically hierarchical work organisations being replaced by networks and partnerships in which people would undertake a variety or 'portfolio' of jobs instead of having a traditional career at a single employing organisation.

This flavour runs through a great deal of the writing on work's future. In optimistic versions of this kind of futurology we see visions like that of Leadbeater (2000) in which we move into a world of rewardingly cooperative, creative and socially useful work. On the pessimistic front, Beck (2000), on the European side of the Atlantic, sees a world of growing insecurity and risk, this being matched by the pessimism, on the American side of the ocean, of Bridges (1995) and Rifkin (1995) who titled his book *The End of Work*. However, all of these 'grand narratives', as Nolan and Wood (2003) call them, are produced with an 'almost complete absence of any grounded theory or systematic data'. This comment is made in the course of explaining the importance of the major set of research projects funded in the UK by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under the 'Future of Work' banner. Rigorous examination of trends that were actually emerging has been undertaken to provide a 'check on the more extravagant claims about the likely pattern of work in the twenty-first century' (Nolan and Wood 2003). As White *et al.* (2004) put it, this research asks the same questions as the 'gurus and futurologists' and in their own contribution to the broader project they follow the careful logic of closely examining the detailed managerial 'decisions being taken and plans being laid in a million workplaces large and small . . . decisions and plans [which] will affect every working person, and the families, over the next 5–10 years'. This is sociological work which makes possible commentaries on the future of work which are 'firmly rooted in the evidence base' rather than relying on 'anecdotes and speculation' (Moynagh and Worsley 2005).

Following a similarly cautious and critical overview of the range of diverse writings on the future of work, Williams (2007) concludes that a similar 'storyline' runs through them. Writers tend, first, to push economic activities onto one side or the other of a dichotomy such as Fordist/Post-Fordist, bureaucratic/post-bureaucratic, informal work/formal work. Second, they identify a 'one-dimensional linear trajectory' towards an '-ation' like 'globalisation', or an '-ism' or a 'post-something-or-other' like post-capitalism or post-bureaucracy. (Littlewood *et al.* (2004), in reviewing the future of work in Europe, complain about all the 'post-this-and-thats' which 'clutter the literature on change'.) Williams' (2007) examination of the areas of activity covered by these analyses shows that this storyline 'fails to do justice to lived practice by obfuscating the multiple and divergent trajectories, ignoring many other dimensions along which transitions are taking place'. There is a great deal of continuity in the way work is



Looking forward

The alleged 'end of bureaucracy' is critically examined in Chapter 4 (pp. 128–30) and the idea of portfolio jobs is discussed in Chapter 7.



Looking forward

Use will be made of this rich collection of research studies in various chapters, especially Chapter 5, which looks at the changing patterns of control in the organisation and management of work, and Chapter 7, which focuses on people's experiences of work and careers and how it relates to their identities.



Looking forward

This mixture of continuity and change will be apparent in later chapters of this book in discussions of such matters as industrialism, capitalism, globalisation, postmodernity and McDonaldisation in Chapter 3; the 'fantasy of the post-bureaucratic organisation' in Chapter 4; standard and non-standard employment and patterns of gender relations in Chapter 6, and portfolio and 'boundaryless' careers in Chapter 7.

organised and experienced. On the evidence of a detailed ethnographic study of an organisation which is engaged in a whole series of 'new' managerial practices and 'change programmes', McCabe (2007), for example, argues that they 'reproduce much of our industrial past'. Yet Williams (2007) demonstrates that significant changes are occurring, alongside the continuities, with different patterns being apparent in different circumstances and in different parts of the world.

In any attempt to use sociology to reflect on the future of work it is important to remember that we can only ever research what 'is', as opposed to what 'might or will be'. Inferences about the future from whatever 'evidence' we gather about the present must be made with great care. While it is necessary, however, to avoid the exaggerations of much of the futurology and guru writing, this should not rule out the application of a degree of imagination in our writing on the sociology of work and industry. Castillo (1999b), for example, calls for sociologists of work to *explore* 'work of the future' instead of trying to predict the 'future of work'. Perhaps the greatest promise of sociology is in making imaginative contributions to exploration and debate rather than producing predictions. This does not mean abandoning attempts to theorise in a scientific manner but perhaps, as Miles (2001) argues, we should evaluate a theory not according to the accuracy of its predictions about change but rather 'according to how far it stimulates debate about that change'. 'Good theories', he suggests, are those that 'bring the sociological imagination to life'. And Williams (2007) points out that recognising that the future is not 'cast in stone' frees us to 'imagine all manner of alternative futures of work' and that this, in turn, can help to stimulate 'greater discussion of how to open up the future more for those who currently have little choice'. Sociology and theorising is not just a project of the imagination, however. Recognition that sociology is a scientific and research-based endeavour has been implicit in everything said so far. We must now look more explicitly at what this means and consider how it relates to the notion of theory.

Researching and theorising work patterns and experiences

Sociology as science

Sociology's history unfolded alongside the rise of democratic institutions in western societies. It is also a result of the rise of scientific ways of looking at the world. Sociology is a science. But what makes it a science is not a sterile value-neutrality or a concern with amassing facts uncontaminated by subjectivity. Neither is it a pursuit of final laws. Sociology uses insight,

imagination and even inspiration; it is motivated by moral concern and even by political commitment, and it is characterised by internal debate and rivalries of both method and interpretation, but, in the end, it falls into the category of the sciences rather than the arts.

Sociology is a scientific pursuit because it goes about detecting regularities and because it makes its generalisations on as systematic a basis as possible given its subject matter. This involves the ‘testing’ of propositions and the basing of statements on evidence – this being collected, explained and interpreted in such a way that others can scrutinise that evidence and make their own judgements on the generalisations which are offered.

Sociology as a science is not essentially different from shrewd practical reasoning about our social lives. It is not radically distinguishable from informed journalistic critiques of social institutions and trends in social change. It is different from these other endeavours in degree rather than in essence, in three ways. It is

- more formal, systematic and precise in its observing, classifying, conceptualising and interpreting;
- more rigorous in the extent to which it submits its procedures to critical examination (seeking to falsify rather than prove its tentative explanations for example);
- more committed to building up a body of knowledge and a series of generalisations which go beyond immediate and practical needs. This body of knowledge is, therefore, available to be drawn upon when there is a practical issue to which it may be relevant.

Theory, work and society

Science is concerned to make informed generalisations about the world. These are scientific *theories*. In part these are informed by rational and critical reflection about the world but, most characteristically, they are informed by careful and considered attention to systematically gathered evidence.

It is unfortunate that many people use the term ‘theory’ in a derogatory manner to refer to ideas that do not effectively connect with human practices in the world. Facts about work, some people say, are interesting and useful but once we start to ‘get theoretical’ we start to become self-indulgent and irrelevant. However, once we recognise that sociological theories are essentially attempts to make sense of how society ‘works’, the nonsense of this becomes apparent. Indeed, ‘facts’ about society and work activities cannot really exist separately from the theoretical frames of reference within which they are expressed. How could we in subsequent chapters, for example, talk about the ‘facts’ of work security and insecurity

Science and sociology

Science is a formal, systematic and precise approach to building up a body of knowledge and theory which is rigorous in examining propositions about the social world in the light of available evidence. Sociology is a science because it makes generalisations as systematically as possible in the light of available evidence.

Sociological theories

Systematic generalisations about how the social world ‘works’.



Looking forward

In Chapter 2, where the various analytical strands that make up the sociology of work and industry are examined, we will come across theories that have largely been developed at the desks of their creators – albeit, we would hope, within a well-informed general awareness of events going on in the social world outside of their libraries. These theoretical ‘strands’ are, in effect, broad conceptual schemes that we can take out into particular work contexts to make sense of what is going on there.

In Chapter 3 we will come across large-scale generalisations about modern societies that are typically derived from critical reflection on broad trends in work aspects of the social world, often using evidence not especially gathered within specifically designed ‘research projects’.

In Chapters 4 to 8 we will see, in addition to this kind of material, generalisations emerging from specifically designed research projects or ‘empirical’ investigations.

without a theory of what constitutes ‘security’ and ‘insecurity’ in this context? How can we consider the extent to which the world is in fact ‘globalising’ without some reference to theories of globalisation? How can we even talk about ‘work’ and ‘society’ in a theory-free way? The way we conceptualised work and society earlier in this chapter was the start of the broader process of theorising the role of work activities and experiences in modern societies (and, yes, we will have to theorise ‘modern’ at the appropriate stage). The point of all of this is to deepen our understanding of *what is going on* in the world of work. Surely such an appreciation is valuable to all of us in shaping our social practices.

A range of research methods

Sociologists of work and industry use a variety of techniques of investigation when they undertake empirical research (‘empirical’ meaning dependent on observation and experience of phenomena rather than reflection on them ‘at a distance’ so to speak). At one end of a continuum are studies involving the manipulation of existing bodies of statistical information and research projects involving the analysis of quantitative information gathered through questionnaire-based surveys specially designed by the investigators. At the other end of the continuum are studies in which a large amount of time is spent interviewing in depth a small selection of people or projects in which the researchers immerse themselves in the lives of the people they are studying by becoming ethnographers and/or participant observers (Watson 2008d). In between these contrasting styles of investigation are studies in which relatively large numbers of people are interviewed by research teams to gather both quantitative information and more qualitative material, ‘qualitative’ information typically taking the form of statements made by the people interviewed or observations made by the researchers themselves during the process of investigation.

Sometimes the research goes for *breadth* of coverage by looking at large numbers of instances of whatever is being studied or by checking samples large enough to be statistically representative of larger patterns. At other times the concern is to achieve *depth* of understanding by giving attention to close details of particular *cases*. Case studies might examine particular work organisations, particular events or even particular individuals. The logic of such work is to get a detailed understanding of the processes that occur when, say, two work organisations merge, a new occupation establishes itself or an individual rises from being an ordinary worker to taking over the leadership of a large trade union.

We will come across studies in subsequent chapters which use some of these different approaches to develop our understanding of what is generally

'going on' in the work and industrial aspects of societies and the work dimension of people's lives. It is possible, however, for a variety of techniques to be used within one study, as we see in the imagined research study in Snapshot 1.3.

This design of this multi-technique research project is influenced by current theories of, for example, work design, organisational change and job 'choice'. The information it produces will be analysed to develop further the theoretical understanding of these matters as well as, of course, present to the public and to policy-makers broad insights about what is occurring in an important aspect of contemporary employment. However, things are not as straightforward as our imagined case of a research project might imply. Sociologists who study work, industry, occupations, organisations and employment relations often differ from each other in quite significant ways in the assumptions which they bring to their studies.

SNAPSHOT 1.3 Designing a study of call centres: making use of a variety of techniques



A group of sociologists has decided to combine their efforts in a major piece of research to investigate in depth the large and growing phenomenon of work in telephone call centres (see pp. 170–1). After working together on reviewing the existing literature – academic and 'popular' – and agreeing on the concepts they want to use and the variables they want to examine they divide up the investigative labour.

Researcher 1 concentrates on examining employment *statistics* across a range of developed and less developed economies in which call centres are located.

Researcher 2 *interviews* workers and managers in a carefully selected sample of call centre companies of different sizes.

Researcher 3 conducts a postal *survey* of members of the public who use or are contacted by such organisations.

Researcher 4 obtains a job in a single case-study call centre to work as a *participant observer* and learn at first hand about working in such a setting.

Researcher 5 is allocated to looking in depth at two *comparative case-study* call centres. One has been selected on the grounds that it has a generally good reputation as an employer. The other has a bad reputation. The researcher will use whatever methods she finds useful, from interviews and (non-participant) observation to documentary analysis and written questionnaires. The intention is to get as full a picture as possible of each of these work organisations so that the team can compare the two. The intention of the comparative case-studies is to give a focus to the group's broad interest in the variety of work designs and work experiences which they believe are the case in this employment sector.

Methodology

A term often misused to refer to research techniques and which, more properly, refers to the philosophical issues raised by the attempt to investigate the world scientifically.

Methodological assumptions

We have just noted the range of different methods that sociologists of work use. But they also vary in the *methodological* assumptions they bring to their research and theorising.

It is unfortunate that the term ‘methodology’ is often used simply to mean ‘method’. This usage tends to divert people from some very important issues that need to be considered before a ‘method’, in the sense of an investigative technique, is chosen. Methodological assumptions are ones about the very nature of the ‘realities’ that we study, about how we can ‘know’ those realities and how we can make valid or ‘truthful’ generalisations about the social world on the basis of the very limited materials that we gather (whether these be numbers from surveys or statements and observations collected in ‘fieldwork’). There are many complexities involved here but it is vital to any student of the sociology of work to have a basic understanding of the main methodological choices that every researcher and theorist has to make.

The choice is often taken to be one between ‘positivism’ and ‘interpretivism’ (sometimes the latter being labelled ‘phenomenology’, which is really only one version of interpretivist thinking). The term ‘positivism’ is often used to refer to any research which uses quantitative methods and is sometimes condemned for a naive belief in the validity of the social facts that it collects, regardless of the theoretical assumptions to which those alleged ‘facts’ relate. But this is, as Turner (2001) stresses, a ‘gross distortion’ of what was intended by Auguste Comte, the original advocate, in the 1830s, of a positivist sociology (and, indeed, the inventor of the word ‘sociology’). Comte conceived of sociology as a theory-driven activity. Data collection would be a means of formulating laws – laws that would enable positive social progress to be made and would replace superstition and guesswork as the basis for making decisions about the control of society. Positivists continue to seek ‘covering law’ types of generalisation about the social world, working on the assumption that the social world is not fundamentally different from the natural or physical world and that the social sciences can therefore adopt procedures similar to those of the natural sciences. Donaldson (2003), a leading proponent of ‘sociological positivism’ in the field of organisation studies says that the aim is to ‘reveal causal regularities that underlie surface reality’ and he follows Durkheim (1982) in arguing that the subject matter of sociology is ‘social facts’ or ‘causes that stand apart from people and constrain them, forcing them to behave in ways – even sometimes regardless of the ideas in the minds of the people involved’. And social facts ‘should only be explained by other social facts, i.e. objective conditions, rather than in the consciousness of social actors’. His example here is the explanation that Blau (1963) develops of how

organisations tend to become increasingly differentiated (broken down into more and more sub-units). The causal factor is not decisions or actions by organisational managers; it is *organisational size*. Differentiation is a social fact. And so is organisational size. Interpretivist sociologists, however, would not exclude from their accounts of such processes the meanings brought into play by organisational actors.

If positivism, as a term, has been misrepresented and misunderstood at times, interpretivism has fared little better. All too often it is thought of as research that uses ‘qualitative’ (word-based) rather than quantitative (number-based) materials, with the researcher recognising that they have actively to interpret the material they collect rather than let the ‘facts speak for themselves’. This is not necessarily incorrect but it is utterly to miss the point about interpretivist sociology. Of course the interpretivist researcher acknowledges the need to interpret their research materials. So do most non-interpretivists. But the essential difference between positivists and interpretivists is that, whereas positivists see the social world as amenable to research procedures not dissimilar to those of the natural sciences, interpretivists do not. They see the social world as different in nature from the physical world. It therefore needs to be studied in a different way. Most significantly, this is because human beings, whose actions form the subject matter of social science investigations, are thinking, sensemaking, decision-making beings who could potentially choose to defy the predictions of social scientists. Humans, unlike physical entities, make interpretations for themselves of what is happening in the world. It is the *interpretive* or meaning-making interactions of people in societies that interpretivist sociologists focus upon.

For the interpretivist, social reality (put simply, ‘what people take their social world to be like’) is something created by human beings, over history, through their interactions, interpretations and cultures. This contrasts with the positivist position that there is a social reality existing independently of the ways in which people in society interpret their social circumstances. They are thus generally said to be methodological realists. But positivism is not the only methodologically realist option. An alternative realist position that is attractive to some sociologists of work and industry is that of *critical realism*. If we take the key methodological choice to be between realism and interpretivism, as set out in Table 1.1, we can see that there are not two but three possible methodological positions for the researcher and theorist to choose from: interpretivism and two variants of methodological realism – positivism and critical realism. Positivism is interested in causes – in the covering law sense we saw Donaldson explaining earlier. But critical realists wish to go further and analyse the actual mechanisms by which any particular cause brings about any particular *effect*. They would

Table 1.1 Realist and interpretivist social science methodologies

<i>Realist methodologies</i>	<i>Interpretivist methodologies</i>
<p>Assume that social reality exists independently of how people make sense of it – or investigate it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Positivism</i> devises covering laws about social reality through testing hypotheses – propositions that can be tested against systematically gathered data which is typically analysed using quantitative methods. • <i>Critical realism</i> attempts to identify the structures, processes and <i>causal mechanisms</i> that operate beneath the surface of social reality and which are a constitutive part of that reality. 	<p>Assume that social reality is the outcome of people’s interactive and interpretive activities – how they socially and pragmatically ‘construct’ and negotiate meanings and patterns of relationship. Theoretical approaches that work within these broad assumptions include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weberian sociology (originating in Germany in the early twentieth century) • Symbolic interactionism (originating in America in the early to mid twentieth century) • Poststructuralism (originating in France in the late twentieth century).

not stop at saying that growth in organisational size, for example, causes structural differentiation in organisations. They would want to understand just how the one thing leads to the other.

In Chapter 2 we will examine six strands of thinking that contribute to the sociology of work and industry. They vary in various respects but an important differentiating factor is the basic methodological stance that their proponents have tended to adopt. The managerial-psychologicistic and the Durkheim-systems strands have more or less followed positivist assumptions while the Weber-social action, the interactionist and the discursive strands follow interpretivist principles. The critical realist approach that has emerged in recent years, very much influenced by the philosophical writings of Bhaskar (1986, 1989), incorporates some of the key ideas of Marxian thinking. One of its attractions to sociologists of work is that it stresses the reality of the underlying mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production while recognising that, at a level above this, interpretive processes and social construction processes do play a significant role in shaping social patterns and processes (Ackroyd and Fleetwood 2000). It might therefore seem, at first sight, to be a compromise between realist and interpretivist positions. It is, however, very firmly rooted in realist thinking,

granting to patterns and causal processes outside of human actions a real and solid existence.

To avoid this discussion sounding too abstract or esoteric we can outline three different ways in which researchers, adopting different methodological positions, might go about studying the relationship between people's age and their experience of work. The three approaches take the form of research proposals which might, for example, be made to a research-funding body (Snapshot 1.4).

SNAPSHOT 1.4 Three proposed studies of the relationship between people's age and experience of work



Proposal 1 (from a positivist researcher): A large survey will be designed in which a questionnaire will be posted to a sample of people, the sample being 'stratified' to ensure that there is a representative coverage of different age groups and occupations. Questions will be asked about respondents' age and about the extent of their agreement with a variety of printed statements about work satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Once collected, these responses will be treated as *data* – unproblematic 'givens' or 'findings' – which can then be statistically analysed to test the hypothesis that job satisfaction increases with age in high status occupations and decreases in age in low status occupations. If the 'data' or 'findings' supports the original contention, then the researcher will be in a position where they can say they have developed a new 'theory' about age and job satisfaction. Strictly speaking, this will be a covering law. It will take the form of a statement about the relationship between work and age which has a degree of predictive power: suggesting to each of us, in our particular occupational context, how our happiness at work is likely to change as we get older.

Proposal 2 (from a critical realist researcher): This project will be strongly influenced from the start by existing theories (in the sense of generalisations about how the social world 'works'). The study might use either, or both, quantitative and qualitative techniques to reveal how ideologies influenced by the interests of employers in capitalist societies influence younger, and hence fitter and more flexible, people to regard their work positively while older, and potentially less productive, workers are discouraged from wanting to stay at work. Drawing on both existing theoretical assumptions about the social world and on the information gathered in the research, attempts will be made to identify the causal or 'generative' mechanisms within capitalist class and employment relationships using concepts like capital accumulation, labour process and false consciousness. These mechanisms will be taken to have a 'real' existence of their own, a reality operating at a deeper level than the actions and interpretations of the employers and workers involved.

Proposal 3 (from an interpretivist researcher): A series of face-to-face interviews with people of different ages and in different occupations will be conducted. Additionally, time will be spent with some of these people in the workplace, or in a leisure context, in order to note how in group interactions they talk to each other about their work and their lives. It will not be assumed that words that people speak in the research context constitute 'data' – unproblematic 'given' statements of what people actually feel or think. They

would be treated as statements made in a particular context and at a particular time. The researcher will interpret what was said to them in the light of how they believe the subject was interpreting the context in which they spoke and how they were, at the time of their speaking, choosing to present a particular image of themselves to the researcher and perhaps to other people present. In the analysis of this research material, close attention will be given to the language used by the subjects, as well as other symbols like 'body language' and the clothing worn by subjects. This will be used to construct an understanding of how the people make sense, for themselves and for others, of the relationship between age and the experience of work. The 'reality' of the relationship between one's age and one's work experience is thus treated as something that emerges from human interactions, socially negotiated understandings and available discourses. It does not exist 'out there' separately from the people who bring that reality into existence. Taking this position does not mean, however, that they will not use concepts like 'structure', 'society' or, for that matter, 'capitalist labour process'. They might be used, but, unlike the critical realist researcher, the interpretivist researcher will regard these terms as sense-making concepts for analysing the world sociologically rather than 'actually existing real things'.

Coping with the variety of orientation in the sociology of work and industry

From our examples of three possible research approaches it is apparent that there are significant variations of *methodological orientation* within the sociology of work and industry. There is also a variety of *theoretical orientations* – as we see in the six 'strands' of thought to be examined in Chapter 2. How is one to come to terms with a subject where there is such a variety of orientation? First, these tensions can be regarded as creative ones, and the multifaceted nature of sociological study seen as healthily reflecting and forcing us to confront the multifaceted nature of human society itself. Second, the notion of a sociological imagination (see p. 7) can bring a significant sense of unity to this variety. Whatever emphasis we adopt, we need to remember that sociology is essentially about relating the lives of particular individuals and the occurrence of specific and local events to wider patterns of society and the converting of 'private problems' into 'public issues'.

To undertake our own research does not necessarily mean having to join one or other of the various 'camps' that sociologists tend to set up with others of similar methodological or theoretical orientation. It has nevertheless been suggested that the various theoretical, methodological and political orientations of people studying the organisation of work are fundamentally incompatible with each other and that each researcher needs to locate themselves within one particular box or *paradigm* (a cluster of assumptions about sociological knowledge), choosing between a func-

tionalist paradigm, an interpretive paradigm, a radical humanist paradigm or a radical structuralist paradigm (Burrell and Morgan 1979; Jackson and Carter 2000; Burrell 2002; Keleman and Hassard 2003). Some researchers are happy to move back and forth between these various paradigms to find insights to apply to their area of study (Hassard 1993) while others wish to seek integration across them all to find a shared set of assumptions that provide a single frame of reference for studying work and the way it is organised (Pfeffer 1993; Donaldson 1996a).

A further approach is to reject the very notion of paradigms as irrelevant to the social sciences and to follow instead a strategy of *pragmatic pluralism* (Watson 1997). This encourages the researcher to utilise concepts and ideas from a whole range of different social science perspectives and traditions as long as, first, the chosen concepts are helpful in understanding the particular aspect of social life being studied and, second, as long as they are brought together in a clearly expressed frame of reference which has internal conceptual consistency and methodological integrity. The researcher needs to be particularly clear that they are not, for example, claiming at one point that interview materials they have collected are 'data' (i.e. unproblematic 'given' facts) and, at another, claim to be doing interpretivist analysis (which insists that such material can only be analysed with reference to the particular context in which it was uttered and in the light of the 'presentation of self' processes that were engaged in by both the interviewer and the interviewee in that context). To put it another way, one cannot try to be a methodological realist and a methodological interpretivist at the same time.

The structure of *Sociology, Work and Industry* has been devised to do justice to both unities and varieties of emphasis in the sociology of work and industry. The concern of this first chapter with achieving such a purpose is continued across the next seven chapters. Table 1.2 is intended to show how this is to be done. It recognises that, in addition to the six strands of thought that make up the sociology of work and industry, there are six areas of study to which these broad ways of thinking are applied. The six strands of thought (which form the subject matter of Chapter 2) are mapped in Table 1.2 against the six areas of study that form the subsequent six chapters which focus, each in turn, on:

- the industrial-capitalist and 'modern' nature of contemporary societies
- the organisational dimension of work structuring
- changes in the organising and managing of work
- the occupational dimension of work structuring
- the patterns of meaning, opportunity and experience of work in modern society
- the tendencies to conflict and resistance in work relations.

Table 1.2 How the six strands of thought to be considered in Chapter 2 bring different emphases to the six focal areas of the sociology of work and industry covered in Chapters 3 to 8

Focus	Work and social change (Ch. 3)	Organisations (Ch. 4)	Organisational change and managerial initiatives (Ch. 5)	Occupations (Ch. 6)	Work experience, meaning and identity (Ch. 7)	Conflict, resistance and misbehaviour (Ch. 8)
<i>Theory</i>						
<i>Managerial psychological emphasis on</i>		Increasing managerial effectiveness through satisfying the economic wants or psychological needs of workers			Causes and correlates of job satisfaction	Overcoming worker 'resistance to change'
<i>Durkheim-systems emphasis on</i>	The 'organic' division of labour in modern societies	Organisations as 'systems' of roles	Social/cultural integration of individuals into enterprises	The role of occupational groupings in maintaining social cohesion	Work meanings and experiences related to one's life in society as well as in the workplace	The management of conflict within industrial relations systems
<i>Interactionist emphasis on</i>	Division of labour as part of the moral order of society	Organisations as 'negotiated orders'		The significance of 'dirty' or deviant work	Identities and subjective careers	Defence of self and resistance to power of others

<p><i>Weber-social action</i> emphasis on</p>	<p>Rationalisation of life in modern industrial capitalist societies</p>	<p>The bureaucratic nature of organisations and the tendency towards unintended consequences of managerial initiatives</p> <p>The social construction of the 'realities' of organisational activity</p>	<p>The tendency of groups to pursue social closure to further shared interests</p>	<p>Dynamic work 'orientations' and the role of discursive resources in shaping work-related aspects of identities</p>	<p>The interplay of interests and ideas in the shaping of identities, discourses and practices</p>
<p><i>Marxian</i> emphasis on</p>	<p>The exploitative nature of capitalist societies</p>	<p>Managerial shaping of labour processes in organisations to serve interests of the property owning dominant class</p>	<p>Decline of the social division of labour</p>	<p>Work a source of human fulfilment only when a non-exploitative social order has been established</p>	
<p><i>Poststructuralist/postmodern</i> emphasis on</p>	<p>The power of 'modernist' discourses in social life</p>	<p>Organisations constituted by language – understood as 'texts' rather than structures; techniques of surveillance and attempts at identity-shaping at the heart of organisational</p>		<p>Worker subjectivities the outcomes of power/discourse</p>	<p>Human resistance to subjugation by modernist/managerial discourses</p>

To try to find some overall patterns across all of this, Table 1.2 offers a matrix identifying how the six strands of thought to be outlined in Chapter 2 each bring a distinctive emphasis to the six substantive areas studied by the sociology of work and industry (these focusing on organisations; organisational change and managerial initiatives; occupations, inequalities and varieties of work; work experiences, meanings and identities; conflict, resistance and misbehaviour respectively).

Summary

In this chapter we have established that sociology developed historically as a discipline intended to help people understand and deal with processes of modernisation and industrialisation and that it has the potential to play an important role in informing the choices that are made about work in the twenty-first century. It can also help us think imaginatively about work in the future. Sociology is a scientific discipline concerned with developing theories and insights which can inform human choices and, to this end, it uses a variety of different research methods, with different sociologists working within a number of different methodological traditions. These can be ‘mapped out’ to help anyone interested in either reading or *doing* sociology to appreciate the options open to sociological researchers.

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