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Alienation from work in
the factory.

By

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ALIENATION FROM WORK IN THE FACTORY

BY

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Abstract

This thesis addresses itself to the problem of "alienation from work" among blue and white collar workers in Motor Coach Industries Limited - a manufacturing company in the city of Winnipeg.

The dependent variable, "alienation from work" included four dimensions of analysis :Powerlessness, meaninglessness, self-estrangement and job dissatisfaction. The independent variable, "occupation" incorporated two dimensions :Blue and white collar occupations.

Four hypotheses were formulated as follows :

- (1) Blue collar workers have a tendency to experience powerlessness more so than do the white collar workers on the job in the same company.
- (2) Blue collar workers have a tendency to experience meaninglessness more so than do the white collar workers on the job in the same company.
- (3) Blue collar workers have a tendency to experience self-estrangement more so than do the white collar workers on the job in the same company.
- (4) Blue collar workers have a tendency to experience job dissatisfaction more so than do the white collar workers on the job in the same company.

Survey questionnaires were administered to one hundred MCI employees on the basis of a systematic random sampling procedure. Eighty-four of them(ie,forty-two blue collar and forty-two white collar)responded. This permitted

to adequately test the formulated hypotheses via the following statistical procedures :Frequency distributions, average mean alienation scores, Eta measures of association and regression analysis.

The summarized data results provided empirical support to the foregoing hypotheses of the study. Even after controlling for "Age, sex, marital status, income, education, length of time on job, union attendance and union participation" the direction and the strength of the relationships between "alienation from work" and "occupation" remained basically unaltered.

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Quite aside from the academic environmental stimulation, emotional influences in this modest intellectual inquiry cannot be discounted. Rightly so, I would like to dedicate this piece of work, regardless of its merits and demerits, to my dear Mam and Dad - Mr and Mrs Harry parsad Mohit - for their steady moral support all throughout my study years. In addition to personal gratitude to Mr and Mrs L.Zielinski, I would also like to express my profoundest concern to my wife - Anna - for her patience and devotion during this endeavour, for which no words can translate.

Introduction to the research

Frequent interaction with blue and white collar workers in different work settings has led me to believe that the majority of them, if not all, are faced with social and psychological problems in the work place. Whether real or imagined, these problems are linked particularly to the idea of alienation - a phenomenon that is well reckoned for its theoretical usage and empirical versatility in social science.

Here it is not so much that the problematics of alienation figure prominently in the worker's universe of discourse. It is rather that certain aspects of the alienation syndrome are implicitly disclosed in our informal talks about work. To illustrate this point, while the utility labourer insinuates a "lack of meaning" on the job in a cloistered work environment, the office clerk posits a certain "lack of control" in the routinized work process.

This state of things, the argument goes, is for the most part a by-product of management officials in terms of impersonal attitudes, rigidity of authority towards the subordinates in the industrial organizational system. There are other instances of malaise and disaffection which are expressed in the work milieu. Absenteeism, strikes and high turnover rates are, for instance, frequent indicators of

unrest in modern employment settings.

Sociologists (R. Blauner :1964, J. Shepard :1970, G. Susman :1972, B. Widick :1976) have particularly addressed the foregoing issues within the spectrum of alienation from work. For instance, some empirical studies (R. Blauner :1964, M. Seeman :1967, Kirsch et al :1971) have explored the causality of alienation from work in different blue and white collar settings from the standpoint of technology in various industries.

Emerging from these studies is one striking point of interest. It is the support and enduring vitality that is given to the conceptualization of alienation in general. This is reflected in the continuing flow of empirical and theoretical work in the area of alienation. Despite this activity, virtually no efforts have been made by sociologists towards a comprehensive analysis of alienation from work among different types of workers in a specific work setting, i.e between blue and white collar employees in the same company environment.

In view of this paucity of research, the general purpose of this thesis is to test several dimensions of alienation from work among blue and white collar workers in the same company employment. More specifically, the researcher's objective is to find out to what extent the

blue collar worker differs in alienation from work from that of his white collar counterpart. In this regard, the multi-dimensionality of alienation, as is conceptualized by several analysts (R. Blauner :1964, M. Seeman :1967, Kirsch et al :1971, J. Shepard :1972) is theoretically considered.

In more precise terms, the proposed sociological dimensions of alienation from work used in this thesis included those of :Powerlessness, meaninglessness, self-estrangement and job dissatisfaction.

A discussion of the above-mentioned components is presented in chapter 2.

Organization of the thesis

Chapter 2 of this thesis provides the springboard for a discussion of the theoretical perspective. It first involves the review of the classical context of alienation in the Marxian tradition. It consequently attempts to trace the Marxian underpinnings of modern empiricized versions of alienation, as advocated by various sociologists like Blauner, Seeman and Shepard. It further provides for an analysis of blue and white collar occupations in terms of their skills and distinctions. Finally, hypotheses concerning alienation from work among blue and white collar workers are formulated.

Chapter 3

This chapter delineates the methodology of the thesis. This includes the description of the research design and instruments to measure the dependent and independent variables. The sampling procedures and statistical techniques of data analysis for hypotheses testing are also discussed.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 provides a thorough discussion of the summarized data results. That is, it spells out the relationships between "alienation from work" and "occupation" via the statistical techniques of analysis used in this

study.

Chapter 5

In this chapter, the summary of the findings is presented. The conclusion, limitations, contributions and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework of alienationMarx and Alienation from work

Any discussion of the phenomenon of alienation must refer in one way or another to the thoughts of Karl Marx. The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 provides an excellent reference point to understand the dynamics of alienated labour, as Marx himself saw it evolve in industrial society.

A cursory review of the Manuscripts presents us with one basic idea :The relationship of the worker to production. Marx expounded a three-fold theme to support his argument. According to him, the first aspect of alienation stems from the externality of work. A citation from the Philosophical Manuscripts is perhaps illustrative in this context here.

"What then, constitutes the alienation of labour? First the fact that labour is external to the worker, ie it does not belong to his essential being, that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his mental and physical energy, but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labour is not therefore not voluntary, but coerced, it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need, it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. The external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but for someone else, that it does not belong to himself, but to another."

To the extent that work is externally controlled, it can