

California University Institute of Industrial Relations (Berkeley)

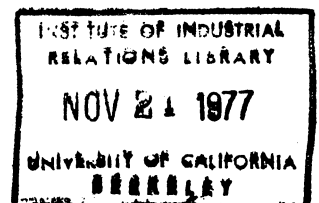
FINAL REPORT

WESTERN ASSEMBLY ON THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

At the close of their discussions the participants in the Western Assembly on The Changing World of Work at the Highlands Inn, Carmel, California, May 30 - June 2, 1974, reviewed as a group the following statement. The statement represents general agreement; however, no one was asked to sign it. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to every recommendation.

The world of work is changing. The problems of work dissatisfaction are manifested among a variety of groups in a variety of ways but nowhere have they reached crisis proportions. In particular, there appears to be an emerging set of new values and expectations on the part of younger workers, women, members of minority groups, and among those contemplating retirement. The claims of these groups demand immediate attention and action. They constitute a major problem for management, unions, and society. The fact that the work situation in America has not yet reached the crisis stage is all the more reason why we should seek appropriate improvements now, while an atmosphere of calm and cooperation prevails, rather than under conditions of emergency and confrontation that could emerge in the future.

Worker dissatisfaction also mirrors the problems of the broader society as it struggles to perfect democracy and to resolve the contradictions of the post-industrial age. There is a general questioning of the major institutions of society -- family, community, church, and government -- which spills over into the workplace. Discontent and dissatisfaction are a reflection of



increasing education and rising aspirations. The individual worker and the society are changing much faster than the institutions and the quality of the jobs they provide.

At least five sorts of problems, not necessarily new but no longer acceptable in the present environment, are involved:

First and foremost is the need for a national commitment to provide all Americans with the opportunity for a secure job at decent wages -- and especially the need to make this opportunity available to women and members of minority groups. Too many Americans still live in poverty; fears of unemployment and economic disaster still haunt the lives of millions in our work force. Women and minority groups are still largely excluded from the mainstream of American economic life.

Second, there is a demand for a greater humanization of the workplace. Work conditions which were tolerated in the past are increasingly questioned today. Workers are asking for the elimination of the unhealthy and unsafe conditions that still plague many industries and for the replacement of autocratic managerial practices with those that treat individual workers with dignity.

Third, there is a growing restlessness with those forms of work which involve little meaning or challenge. Younger workers are in the forefront of those who insist that jobs be meaningful and provide opportunity for the expression of human creativity. Accompanying this widening of demands for participation has been an equally widespread change in values about personal and public morality, the social responsibility of business, and concern for the environment.

Fourth, there is a problem of freedom of choice and independence from

the narrow constraints of circumstances. Mobility is still made difficult by the nontransferability of pension and other benefits, the lack of training, and the lack of community help.

Finally, new, meaningful jobs should be created which would fulfill unmet social needs -- housing, health care, care for the aged. Moreover, these new public goods and services would contribute to the quality of life rather than just to the Gross National Product.

YOUTH, MINORITIES, WOMEN, AND OLDER WORKERS

There are important changes in the age, race, and sex make-up of the work force. Youth, minorities, women, and older workers each demand their rightful place in the labor force. Yet for this to occur, positive programs are required to meet the changing needs and expectations of these various occupational groups.

Youth. The problems of various segments of youth are considerably different, yet many of these individuals are questioning the values of traditional, mainstream society.

Due to sometimes unnecessary credential requirements, many noncollege youth are restricted in their job opportunities. A related problem is the decreasing opportunity for job entry through part-time or temporary work.

The values of youth generally are changing. Middle-class youth, in particular, place less value on material things. They have gotten away from the notion that the good life can be bought. They seem less willing to conform to the "system." Compared to their elders, they show less tolerance for workplace authoritarianism and a greater willingness to express discontent.

A few have dropped out from the "rat race" altogether, and the majority desire work that is challenging and socially meaningful. The nature of their tasks and the nature of the products they produce are both important. They wish to participate meaningfully in decisions which affect them and yet feel that management is not sufficiently responsive to their needs.

Instead of seeing the dissent and dissatisfaction of young people as a threat to society, it should be regarded as a positive factor. In a dynamic society, each new generation challenges its elders. The dissatisfaction of youth, then, should be regarded as a spur to re-examining the current assumptions about work organization.

Minorities. Minorities face all the problems of their majority counterparts -- and then some. Black unemployment is at least twice that of whites and in some cases higher. A five per cent figure for whites translates to a totally unacceptable ten per cent figure for blacks and a tragic 25 per cent for youths imprisoned in ghettos, barrios, and reservations. Thus, the first objective of many minorities is not job enrichment, but getting and keeping a job.

Minorities are still concentrated in deadend jobs and in the lowest paid industries. They are subject to the greatest amounts of employer autocracy and have the fewest opportunities for creative self-respect on the job. In addition to continuing discrimination, they are handicapped by lack of training and lack of opportunities to obtain training. Education and experience requirements often inhibit their employment. Being the last to be hired, they are frequently the first to be fired. Seniority rules sometimes restrict them to low paid departments where promotional opportunities are limited.

Nevertheless, some progress has been made in reducing discrimination in job opportunities. Increasing numbers of minorities are now employed in occupations which previously were largely white. But statistics about employment changes may exaggerate the actual progress being made. Even when minorities obtain employment, they are not always effectively integrated on the job. Minorities look upon much of what has occurred as involving tokenism. Symbolic breakthroughs have occurred, but many minority workers still feel that they are treated as second class citizens, patronized and tolerated, but not accepted as persons, or as co-workers. In affirmative action settings minorities are put on the spot to prove themselves; too often whites see them as getting these jobs not through merit but because of quota requirements. Minorities frequently feel that higher standards of performance are required of them. They feel that mistakes which are tolerated, when committed by whites, are held against them. This adds a greater source of dissatisfaction by the implication that they cannot live up to white standards. For example, when appointed to jobs with seemingly impressive titles, they feel that little authority is entrusted to them. Employers frequently deny that this is occurring, but we feel that more must be done to insure that this is not happening and to improve understanding in this area.

Women. Women now demand equal access to, and equality in, the workplace. The percentage of women who are participating in the work force and who no longer accept being relegated to traditional female jobs is steadily increasing. Sex stereotyping of jobs should be eliminated. Women should obtain equal pay for equal work. There are still many areas where women receive considerably less pay than that of men for equivalent work. The EEOC is forcing dramatic changes regarding practices dealing with female employment and upgrading.

Employers should create meaningful part-time jobs at adequate levels of pay. Where feasible, job sharing by couples or even groups should be permitted. Such practices have already been established in some areas of public employment. A substantial expansion in educational day care centers, with fee schedules geared to family income, will further improve women's opportunities for meaningful working careers.

Older workers. In addition, a larger share of the nation's resources should be directed towards meeting the special needs of the retired worker. Mandatory retirement policies, changes in some of our basic social institutions, especially the family, and inadequate provision for financial security place many older workers in an untenable position. Many are forced to retire whether they wish to or not; they frequently live lonely, meaningless lives; their needs are among the last to receive attention in the distribution of social and economic resources.

The older worker should be given a wider range of options as he nears the end of his career. Retirement would be acceptable if there is provision for adequate financial security and imaginative programs for preparing for retirement -- e.g., education and opportunities for continued part-time work if desired.

Finally, we note that progress with regard to eliminating discrimination against women and minorities has rarely occurred voluntarily. Instead, governmental and social pressures have been and will continue to be required.

THE RESTRUCTURING OF WORK

The workplace has not been immune to the recent turbulent and rapid changes in society, and employers have begun to respond to pressures for change.

There have been a number of notable successes but many of the measures applied have been insufficient, misdirected, or ill-motivated. It has been charged that these techniques have been used to drive wedges between workers and unions. Other failures have been due to the futile search for a universal formula that will simultaneously maximize high job satisfaction and high worker performance. We believe no such panacea exists. Flexibility, not rigidity, is called for.

Given these concerns, we recommend that the following changes be given strong consideration by all organizations, both public and private, in view of the promising results they have shown in improving worker satisfaction and increasing productivity.

Job enrichment. Jobs can be made more satisfying through providing greater variety, challenge, and scope. Such changes may reduce turnover and absenteeism, and may improve self-development, but they require considerable planning and patience. There are many different needs among the various groups of employees in industry and not all workers want to share responsibilities.

Participation. There is a desire on the part of most people, at all levels of organization, to participate more fully in the planning and management of their work. This desire is for greater control and influence over their own jobs and activities, and not necessarily for a voice in top management decision-making. Several organizations have found great success with programs designed to build more effective teams or systems, by periodic meetings designed to improve the clarity of goal setting or planning, to solve immediate problems, to improve interpersonal relationships, and to set up action plans for the future. This is one of several organization development techniques to improve the quality of the total organization by improving the way groups function.

Improved physical working conditions. High priority should be given to occupational safety and health. We endorse the concept of OSHA, but believe in the elimination of other duplicative agencies performing the same services. We further recommend that organizations should explore various ways in which the physical design of the workplace can help improve the overall quality of working life. Much research remains to be done in this area, but there are strong indications that changes in the environment can support and enhance positive shifts in social attitudes.

Supervision. To the worker, supervisors and supervisory practices represent the company and its policies. There is an increasing need to improve the quality of supervision at all levels and to a large extent determine the degree of worker dissatisfaction through better training. Supervisors today need special skills in order to relate to the changing mix of the labor force.

Flexible time structures. Europe has exported to the United States some new concepts of flexible working hours which allow workers to have a voice in deciding when they start and leave work. To this concept can be added the greater utilization of part-time jobs, the sharing of jobs, and new work shift patterns. These variations show promise in allowing the working mother, the student, the older worker, and others greater access to meaningful jobs.

By itself, job restructuring represents an insufficient response to quality of work problems. It must be accompanied by efforts to provide mobility, security, fair wages and safe and healthy environments for workers. But, in tandem with these traditional responses, job restructuring offers perhaps one of the best available responses to the quality of work life problems.

Employers should experiment and innovate in the workplace, unions should represent workers' interests in these new issues, and researchers should measure and evaluate the experiments. It is in the long-run interest of all citizens to find ways to simultaneously increase satisfaction and productivity.

There is no easy way to achieve this goal, but some guidelines and caveats can be offered. First, experience shows that the more carefully planned and the more thoroughgoing the restructuring, the more likely it is to succeed. Success seems to hinge on the complete and early training and participation of all parties to the change -- workers, supervisors, managers, and unions. In short, job restructuring is neither easy nor inevitably successful. But it may, in the long run, make an important contribution to the quality of working life as well as to the economy as a whole.

LABOR UNIONS

Labor unions have long been concerned with improving on-the-job conditions. Good wages, decent working conditions, comprehensive fringe benefits, job reclassification, job security, and individual job protection are highest on their list of priorities. Indeed, labor's constant thrust has been to expand the scope of contractual terms and conditions -- some of which have encroached on "traditional management rights." Their contribution towards "humanizing" the workplace has been substantial.

Union leaders are now told that job enrichment is necessary to improve the quality of working life. Some are highly suspicious of this technical jargon and of the recent concern by social scientists with the contentment and wellbeing of workers. Based on their past experience with mechanization and automation, they tend to look upon these new programs, too, as devices to cut

the work force and "speed-up" operations.

On the basis of their negotiating and strike experiences, labor leaders believe that economic advancement is still the primary concern of the majority of workers. Moreover, during this era of inflation and rising economic expectations, they are fully preoccupied with wage and related matters. In addition, the correction of inequalities (relative wage and fringe benefits) continues to be a major objective of labor unions.

Yet, labor unions must expand their efforts to improve the quality of working life. Along with management, they have the responsibility to consider all possibilities for genuine improvement in jobs. Labor unions have demonstrated that they are capable of bargaining constructively, and simultaneously protecting the interests of their members. They should apply the same ingenuity to job enrichment and other quality of working life matters.

POLICY IMPERATIVES

A high quality of working life will be achieved only when there is a national commitment to five goals: affirmative action to eliminate discrimination, job security, a system of social accounting, a shift in national priorities to satisfy unmet social needs, and, most importantly, an effective and implemented policy of full employment. Affirmative action is necessary to provide a climate of equity and trust in the workplace. Security is necessary to assure workers that they will not work themselves out of their jobs through greater productive effort. A system of social accounting will provide a needed balance to the current system of economic accounting. It will also call attention to the benefits of shifting our social priorities to meet such public needs as health care, housing, and transportation. And meeting these needs can provide

the jobs to make a policy of full employment meaningful in a world of shrinking resources, over-population, and over-production of nonessential material goods.

Within this broad framework of positive public policy, the following steps should be taken by government, labor, management, and educational institutions, sometimes acting alone and sometimes acting together, in close cooperation with each other:

1. Establishment of incentives which will provide motivation for training and upgrading of the work force.

2. Encouragement of an active policy of experimentation with job reorganization. This should include a national commission -- to include labor, management, government, educational institutions, and private foundations -- to focus attention on and encourage innovative experiments, an underwriting of such experiments, the careful collection of data on these experiments, and the establishment of clearing houses to disseminate the results.

3. Re-examination of the role of the public and private employment services and institution of a policy of actively integrating the job placement and prehire training functions. This should include a more positive "outreach" policy on the part of job placement agencies.

4. Measures to improve labor mobility which will provide workers with greater security and more options in the job market, such as portable pensions.

5. Encouragement of the federal government to develop a concept of measuring "Gross National Welfare" in addition to, or in place of, measuring national progress just by the traditional "Gross National Product" and encouragement of public and private employers to develop related accounting systems which measure human contributions to the enterprise and to give these attention at least equal to that given to capital and material resources.

6. Measures to focus attention on restrictions to job entry, promotional mobility, and effective affirmative action, such as credentialism, nonrelevant entrance requirements or selection techniques, and outmoded and inconsistent practices. This might be done through comprehensive research programs, funded jointly by government, unions, employers, and foundations, which evaluate the continuing relevance of these practices and their job-related validity.

7. Granting of accreditation for the education, training, and job experience gained by workers while in the armed forces, so as to more efficiently reabsorb them into society.

8. Closer cooperation among schools, employers, unions, and the military to introduce youth to the world of work. This could include programs for phasing youth into full-time work via work/study programs and meaningful, well-paying part-time employment.

9. Recognition that education and learning is a lifelong endeavor and should be available to the population, regardless of age.

10. Acceptance of the principle that older workers should not be forced to retire merely because of their age and should be given a wider range of choices at the end of their full-time, working lives. This principle might be implemented through programs of pre-retirement training for both leisure activities and new employment interests as well as the creation of meaningful, well-paid, part-time jobs. Those wishing to retire should be provided adequate security, including medical care, to enable them to meet their needs.

CONCLUSION

Something, clearly, is stirring. In part, we are witnessing a revolution in personal values that is seen and felt not only in the United States but around the world. In part, we are experiencing merely the latest chapter in the continuing story of the quest for fulfilling American goals and aspirations: A fair and equitable society; an opportunity for each citizen to participate in the forces that affect his life; a confirmation that the democratic process does, indeed, work for all. Now that challenge is emerging at the most basic level of work itself. The questions have come down to society's responsibility to provide a more "humanizing" work environment, enhanced job satisfaction, and increasing opportunities for those millions on the fringe who for so long have endured the reality of a life in which all our fine talk about job enrichment and job humanization is meaningless. We believe that the changes we advocate can help us work toward a more democratic and more productive society. They will not solve all the problems; they are a beginning.

No single change -- job restructuring, new training programs, worker participation, salary improvements, or portable pensions -- will, by itself, significantly improve the quality of work. The quality of work, the opportunity to have a meaningful life, is affected by the interaction of numerous organizational, economic, technological, psychological, and sociological factors.

We feel no sense of urgent crisis, but we believe a crisis could confront us if business, labor, universities, and government fail to respond. If we are lulled by our successes of the past, if we presume they inevitably will carry over into our future, we are mistaken. They will not. While we differ on specific points and proposals, we are united in one belief -- these questions are vital. The time has now come to put our words and proposals into action.