

An Analysis of the Labor Process Theory: from Marx to Post Braverman Debate

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Abstract

The roots of labor process begins with Marx analyses of how the labor process shifted from simple cooperation to manufacture and modern industrial stage, which resulted in the elimination of the skilled craft workers ability to exercise his judgment and authority over their labor power. Braverman take a new look at the skill, technology and work organization. He argued there is a greater possibility for managerial control which resulted in the wide-range deskilling of the workers. The Labor process debate in late 1970s attempts to include into discussion the important changes in the labor process. The debate over the development of the labor process led to a developing body of theoretical and empirical literature in the sociology of work. The present paper reviews the theoretical contribution of various thinkers to the labor process and to analyze the roots of deskilling or Upskilling of the workers in the labor process.

Keywords: Labor process • Deskilling • Division of labor • Upskilling

Introduction

The labor process refers to the connection between labor and their work. The study of the labor process offers a singular and influential version of how work is organized in capitalist societies. Work in a society is not only to meet the needs of society, or carried by people to survive, but it is the basis through which owners of the capital make sure the appropriation of the surplus [1]. The primary thought of the labor process theory is the degradation of work in modern capitalistic societies. For Marx, labor in its first place, is a human-nature interaction, the man is a conscious being. As a result of his/her consciousness, the information of the creation procedure exists in his/her imagination at the beginning of the work. Marx states that towards the end of each work process, we get an outcome that already existed in the creative ability of the labor at its initiation. Marx analyzed how organization of labor shifted from simple cooperation to manufacture and modern Industrial phase (discussed in details below), which resulted in the elimination of the skilled craft workers ability to exercise his judgment and authority over their labor power.

Braverman made a successful effort to renew Marx's theory of the labor process and taking a new look at the skill, technology and work organization. He argued that with the introduction of new forms of technology and science in the service capital, there is a greater possibility for managerial control (Taylorism) which resulted in the wide-range deskilling of the workers. The Labor process debate (Post Braverman approach) attempts to include into discussion the

important changes in the labor process during the late 1970s. The debate over the development of the labor process led to a developing body of theoretical and empirical literature in the sociology of work. Braverman is criticized on the basis of his particular assumption that capitalism developed in a particular fashion, i.e. deskilling and degradation of craft work excluding the reskilling of workers with the introduction of new technology, workers' resistance, management control as the exclusive form of control.

Conceptualizing Deskilling

With the introduction of new technology and new methods of production have been introduced, many thinkers have thought that the new technologies would deskill the workers or rob him of his traditional skills and crafts rather than liberate the modern workers from the manual labour or upskill them. The term 'deskilling' first used by Harry Braverman in his book "Labour and Monopoly Capital". For him deskilling refers to a process of reducing the skill level of jobs through a detailed division of labour and the application of new technology in order to enhance managerial control over the work process. The breakdown of skills of craftsmen and the reconstruction of production process destroyed the traditional concept of skill [2]. Deskilling aims at degrading the position of workers and this happens through incorporation of three elements: firstly reducing the need for skilled worker by simplifying individual tasks to make the workers exchangeable with other workers or skilled workers replaced by machines, secondly making their work easier through division and

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sub-division of jobs and lastly downgrading a job or occupation from a skilled to a semi-skilled or unskilled position in order to decrease the total wage cost associated with the employment of skilled labour. Littler argued that deskilling mainly includes four processes; workers lose the right to design and plan work i.e. a Separation between planning and execution, redistribution of jobs among unskilled and semi-skilled workers, shift of work organization from craft system to modern and Taylorized forms of control [3]. Palloix opined that deskilling of the workers developed by: reducing the field in which the worker's skills can be used and developed; suppressing that part of the worker's activity which consists of preparing and organizing the work on his own way; eliminating his understanding of the whole of the labour process, as a result, eliminating his concrete control of the labour process [4].

Historical Background of Labor Process Theory (First Wave)

In Capital, volume I, Marx provides the framework of nature of work relationship in the capitalistic mode of production. He was perhaps the first to show that there is a long-run trend for workers to become deskilled in the process of production in a capitalist economic system. Marx held that the design of work under capitalism suppresses creativity of workers and prevents them from enjoying the fruits of their labor, so distorting human nature [5]. Marx studied the labor process under transition from pre-capitalism to capitalism. Marx analyzed how organization of labor shifted from simple cooperation to manufacture and modern Industrial phase, which resulted in the elimination of the skilled craft workers ability to exercise his judgment and authority over their labor power. For understanding the roots of deskilling of workers we need to analyze the organization of the labor process under capitalism

Marxian perspective

Before the development of capitalism in Western Europe, Marx argued labor process was organized in the domestic sphere of the craftsmen or producers, either independently or through guild or putting-out system. In handicraft and domestic production, worker or craftsmen were usually involved in independent production. They make products by hand with their creative thinking and hard work. The independent producers or craftsperson directly controls the labor process as they were the owners of the means of production, i.e. raw-material and tools. Some jobs or crafts were organized under the putting-out system or guild system, in which the merchants or masters only supply the raw-material and wage funds to the workers. The worker owned the tools or instruments of production, which directly interacts with the raw material to change its shape. The craftsmen had a full knowledge of work and skill; therefore, there was no separation between the conception and execution in the labor process. The craftsmen had full control, quality, concentration, judgment and knowledge, over the decisions, regarding their work, e.g., when to work, how to work, and how much to work.

Marx has identified the three stages of development in the capitalist labor process, i.e. the simple co-operation, the manufacturing and the modern industry or machinery. For Marx, the process of deskilling i.e. separation between the conception and execution of the craftsmen started in simple co-operation where capitalist control the labor process, developed in manufacturing

through division of labor and completed in large-scale industry, which separated the labor from production and concentrated it into service capital [5].

The Simple Co-operation Stage: For Marx, in simple co-operation the capitalist; bring together the number of craftsmen for the purpose of production who all perform the same work. Each craftsman makes the whole commodity from starting to finish and does the series of tasks essential to produce the whole product example, textile making, paper making, shoe making, etc. The total work and with it the full conception of work is in the hands of workers. Labor process is carried on a large scale and production is carried on large quantities and the means of production were concentrated in the hands of single capitalist. The plan of the production and guiding authority becomes a task of capitalist. The actual producer exercises less and less control over their own activities. Eventually, the craftsmen lose their control and authority over the production process. Therefore, the roots of deskilling can be traced in this stage. Here the division of labour and machinery does not play a significant role in the production process [5].

The Manufacturing Stage: Manufacturing is the subsequent stage of the organization in the labor process developed in the middle of the 16th century to the last half of the 18th century [5]. The main feature of the manufacture is the division of labor which increases the rate of surplus value and capitalist control of the labor process [3]. Under this system, the capitalists have a forcible authority over the workers by imposing the general terms of work, time and space including the division of labor. The division of labor rests on the fragmentation of handicraft skill and the breakdown of handicraft into different and partial operations. Labor as such becomes the life-long partial function [5]. The work is subdivided between the workers and they became detail-workers. The skills which formerly belong to workers under simple cooperation became the property of the shared division of labor and deprived the craftsmen from their skill. The manufacturing stage was still based on craft technology. The craftsmen still have some level of control over the content, intensity, speed, etc. and so forth of the work. The division of labor is the starting point of the separation between conception and execution which resulted in the deskilling of the workers. However, the deskilling had just a beginning at that time because at this stage, it may be noted that each operation had to be done by hand.

Adam Smith looks at the division of labor from 'reskilling' point of view by increasing the dexterity of workers, but we can trace the roots of deskilling from his example of pin making. He formulated the three principles of division of labour results in the increase in productivity: by increasing the dexterity of the workers by performing the single task repeatedly, by saving of time which is generally lost in passing from one type of work to another and the invention of specialized machines [6]. The division of labour under a manufacturing system results in the development of workers detail dexterity at the cost of his general craft skills. Gorz argued that the division of labor in modern capitalist society 'transforms the worker into a crippled monstrosity by transforming his productive skills into detail dexterity. The judgment and the will, the knowledge practiced by craftsmen are swept from them and concentrate into capital through machines, organization of labor and technology. He concluded that 'to subdivide a man is ... to assassinate him...The subdivision of labor is the assassination of the people' [7].

The power theorists [8]. Stated that the division of labor in British Textile Industry did not necessarily increase the productivity rather it provides opportunities to the capitalists to play their role in organizing production and enable them to take a greater share of profit. 'The social function of the hierarchical work organization is not technical efficiency, but accumulation'. Stones (1973) in his study show that how the division of labor was developed in the steel industry to control the workers rather than for any economic benefits. In the 19th century, the skilled workers control the labor process, but this system came into conflict with capitalists need to increase their capital accumulation without giving any share to the workers. With the technological advancement, capitalists are able to break the power of the workers over the production and then to create an unnecessary division of labor, which was developed to maintain the power of capitalists over the workers.

The Modern Industry Stage: The modern industry started in the last half of the 18th century with the progressive introduction of machinery into the production process. Under the machinery, the change in the labor process begins with the instruments of labor for example, in the spinning mill the shuttle bobbin is replaced by the power loom. As Marx wrote, in the manufacture, the transformation of the mode of production takes labour power as a starting point. While in the modern industry, the instruments of labour are the starting point [5]. The machinery used by the capitalist for production and labor control. The workers increasingly became a mere "living appendage" to the machine [5]. As tools become a machine, the worker is alienated from the intellectual potentialities and aspects of work and the task of the worker is routinized in the name of increasing and cheapening each element of production. Under manufacture, the workers or craftsmen in workshop require a traditional skill in a single trade. The shift from manufacturing to machinery lessens the skill level required in productive activity. This enables the capitalists to replace the skilled worker and engage women and children in the labor process. The displacement of the workers what Marx called 'reserve army of labor' important feature of capitalist society [9]. Therefore, the use of machinery essentially creates nothing for the workers except creating more misery and poverty for them. This process occurs in following ways: machinery are used to replace the workers; the displaced workers create growing reserve army of labor, demand for labor decreased and labor supply increased which results in decline in real wages; it allows the more use of women and child labor and increasing use of machinery results in deskilling of workers, the workers no longer needs the specialized manual dexterity that characterized the manufacturing stage [10].

Bravermanian perspective on Labour Process

In "Labor and Monopoly Capital" (1974) Braverman renew Marx's theory of the labor process and taking a new look at the skill, technology and work organization. He argued that with the introduction of new forms of technology and science in the service capital, there is a greater possibility for managerial control (Taylorism). which resulted in the wide-ranging deskilling of the workers [1]. Braverman tries to reveal how craft work has been eroded and destroyed in America during the 20th century. Braverman attempts to disclose that craft workers are takeoff from their skill by the detailed division of labor, introduction of managerial control and routinization of their traditional work within capitalist societies. For Marx, the real subordination of labor occurred when capitalists

changed the organizational and technological basis of production due to the industrial revolution. Braverman in his thesis showed that the industrial revolution left significant areas of production in which skilled workers still maintained their control over the labour process [11]. Capitalists, in order to gain larger control over the labor process, introduced the concept of 'scientific management' that completed the transition to real subordination. This results in the deskilling, job fragmentation and degradation of work in the 20th century. Braverman argues that throughout capitalism a degradation of craft work is produced where the worker not only loses his craft skills, but also the control of the labor process that was associated with them. He argues that capital, in destroying the craft as a process under the control of the worker, reconstitutes it as a process under his own control. These developments are most significant since the introduction of scientific management at the end of the nineteenth century [12]. For Braverman, the main focus of the 'scientific management' is to ensure the management control of the labor process. Palmer argued that through scientific management practices capitalist undermined the populist view resulted in the dilution of a craftsman's skill became a passive factor of production and capitalist or managers attain more extensive control over the work process [13]. Braverman précised the 'Taylorism' in the form of three different principles: first principle involves the 'dissociation of the labor process from the skills of the workers, The second principle involves the 'separation of conception from execution, of mental from manual work and The third principle is the 'concentration of knowledge in the hands of management to control each step of the labor process and its mode of execution' [2].

Rubery stand with Braverman argued that Craft workers control the work process before the development of mechanization and scientific management because the knowledge of the craft was stored in the craftsman themselves [1]. During the 20th century, the craft workers lose their skills as a result of mechanization. The jobs of workers were simplified and divided into segments. The craftsman, who had used their own specialist skill and knowledge in production, was replaced by the workers who only perform one special operation and also required little training to do the job. Reckman observed that the carpentry craft have suffered from the deskilling since the past century due to technological innovation. Carpenters' craft position faces a strong challenge from a machine woodworking technology in the late 19th century. The factory production of house parts such as doors and windows, etc. has been the main source of challenge, rather than new tools and machinery used by carpenters themselves [14].

Labor Process Debate: Post Bravermanian approach (Second Wave)

Labor process debate attempts to include into discussion the important changes in the labor process during the late 1970s. Braverman's book plays a 'pivotal role in later debates because he combined a renewal of Marx's categories with an explanation of the dominant trends in the world of work' [1]. The labor process debate counters with the usual conceptions of his book "Labor and Monopoly capital" and responded to it representing a fresh departure in this field. The first problem lies in Braverman's farsightedness about scientific management. He argued that Taylorism had been accepted by capitalists on the both the sides of the Atlantic. But the fact is that European and American industrialists hastened in

introducing the work reorganization advocated by scientific management. Many thinkers have argued that, on the contrary, Taylorism existed more in theory than practice, and was only successfully introduced in a handful of firms. Management acted as resistance to the scientific management for their entry into the firms. Robert Hoxie's in his report 'U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations' 1914 concluded that 'no single shop was founded which could be said to represent fully and faithfully the Taylor system as presented in the treatise on shop management' [11].

Braverman is criticized on the basis of his particular assumption that capitalism developed in a particular fashion, i.e. deskilling and degradation of craft work excluding workers enskilling, workers resistance and management control as the exclusive form of control. The criticisms can be arranged under three headings; one group relates to the conception of class struggle or worker's resistance; the other group is related with the conceptualization of control and the third group of critics dealing with the concept of skill.

Criticism on the basis of class: Braverman's conception of class arises from his own methodological assertion that his work will deal with the working class 'as a class in itself, not as a class for itself' and that consequently there will be no discussion of it on "the level of its consciousness, organisation or activities" [2]. He explained the objective conditions of the working class in the US, with one central theme ignoring the subjective dimension of work for most occupations. Elger viewed this theoretical approach is not a legitimate one, as objective and subjective dimensions of class are logically and historically interpenetrated. He fails to recognize the class struggle is integral to the course of development of the capitalist labor process. Braverman fails to identify the 'working class as an active and a problematic presence within the mechanism of accumulation' [12]. He ignored or minimized the role of class struggle in shaping the labor process and portrayed capitalist's 'as having uncontested, unilateral control over the labour process' [15]. Littler argued that there are varied forms of workers' resistance; 'some groups resist more than the others, some changes are resisted more than others, some groups achieve a negotiated order, while some groups become a privileged elite' [16]. The skilled workers, those with trade or craft training in the US at the end of the 19th century engaged in a political struggle which was widespread enough to form an obstacle to the valorization and accumulation of capital [4]. In the beginning of 1967, Gorz argued that throughout the world the capitalist division of labor found itself at the centre of class struggle. A new generation of workers in France and Italy in the assembly line rebelled against the fragmentation of work, work speed, the hierarchy, the supervision etc. In the US the non-attendance, rebellion against work speed and inside and outside damage of the product were cutting into foreseen profit margins. The Vietnam war and Chinese cultural Revolution on the other hand was against the use western technology [7].

Criticism on the basis of control: Braverman's 'Labour and Monopoly Capital' presented a one dimensional view of the development of management strategies i.e. Taylorism and ignores the existence of many other forms of control strategy, what Littler calls the 'panacea fallacy' [16]. i.e. viewing any single strategy as a remedy for labor control problems. Littler is surely correct in seeing the contribution of Taylor himself, as only one version of many forms of work reorganization involving the fragmentation of tasks and

concentration of technical knowledge in the hands of management. For Littler there are other three forms of work organization; level of the division of labor and technology, formal authority structure of the factory and the capital/labor relationship [3]. These three forms of work organization are often mixed, composite and even contradictory. There are number of studies investigating the role of other forms of management control strategy [9,17,18].

Friedman argued that the resistance of the workers compels the management to adopt the new forms of control on the labor process what Friedman calls the "Responsible autonomy". The Responsible autonomy is a strategy which provide freedom to workers and assuring them to adjust "changing situations in a manner beneficial to the firm" [9,17]. Viewed that the capitalists do not depend on a single strategy of control. Despite Braverman, he claimed that the worker's struggle was the major cause for changes in the means of control. There are three forms of control: simple, technical and bureaucratic adopted during historically distinct periods of the labor process and with a tendency to favor the latter. Simple control is exercised during the competitive capitalism prevailing in the late 19th and early 20th century in America. When the owners directly supervise work and decide each situation of the labor process. Technical control was the first structural control exercised through machines as Marx described developed during the factory system or large-scale industry. In 'technical control' the speed and content of work were controlled through production technology. Workers' resistance to this form of control gave way to the second structural form of control, i.e., Bureaucratic control developed under monopoly capitalism. Bureaucratic strategy is based on 'the social and organisational structures of the firm and built into job categories, work rules, promotion procedures, discipline, wage scale, the definition of responsibilities, and the like'.

Burawoy has identified the two forms of control; Despotic and Hegemonic. The Despotic form of control was found under competitive capitalism in the 19th century. Under the despotic form of control, the capitalists control the labor process through speed up, wage cutting, the threat of dismissal, close supervision, etc. The shift from Despotic to Hegemonic control, linked with the development of monopoly capitalism. With an increase in state intervention and decline in the competitive pressure limited the application of despotic forms of control. He studied the role of the state as well as the means by which workers often consented to management's authority. The labour process under the 'hegemonic organisation of work is based on consent predominating over the coercion' [18]. The 'securing and obscuring' of the extraction of surplus value is now achieved by 'manufacturing consent' rather than coercion, notably through a decent level of wages, development of internal labour market, including, promotion structures, hierarchies, long-service rewards, etc. and 'internal state' (institutionalization of a system of collective bargaining, grievance procedures, provisions of industrial citizen rights, legislative recognition of trade unions).

Criticism on the basis of Skill: Much of the criticism of Braverman is based on the notion of skill associated with craftsmen and deskilling with the erosion of craft control. There are a number of scholars who believed that the industry needs high level of skill and a wide variety of skills. As a result, there is the continuous upgrading of skills and the continuous development of new skills. The critics of Braverman argued that the development of science and technology

has resulted in both deskilling and reskilling of the workers rather than one-way process 'deskilling' advocated by Braverman [3]. The non-Marxist arguments are regarded as 'human capital' view and the 'reskilling through automation' view. The human capital view has its theoretical roots in Durkheim's thesis. For him detailed division of labor results in increase in specialization of workers. The Specialization of the workers stimulates a diversity of skills and individuals have a wide choice of the skills instead of degradation of skills. With the beginning of process production technologies, which are automated, new skill associated with scientific and technical disciplines has become necessary for the workers. Hence there is a scope for reskilling among the workers. However, the critics may argue that this reskilling is partial because the planning of work was done by capitalist not by the worker himself. He acquires the skill with respect to a part of the work to which he is associated [19]. The technological development of the advanced industrial societies implies steadily more complex types of work task and therefore higher levels of skill. This change results in an upward shift in the overall occupational structure of the workforce and leads to skill increases within occupational categories [20].

Labour Process in Contemporary World (Third Wave)

The mid-1980s saw the rise of post-Fordism and flexible specialization theories of paradigm breakage [21]. The new forms of labor organization and labor deployment in the manufacturing sector that developed in advanced industrial countries in the 1980s arose from a number of factors other than the need to manage labor control and reduce costs, as stated by Braverman [22]. This approach, therefore, seeks to understand these new forms of work organization and their consequences for the labor process as shaped by a combination of factors such as intensified international competition, saturation of the markets for mass consumption, and the development of new scalable computer-based technologies. The definition of a 'flexible specialization thesis' could be best defined as technical framework or as an ideal model for industrial efficiency [23]. In other words, this refers to a change from a process based on mass manufacturing, specialized machinery and semi-skilled labor to produce standardized goods to a modern version of craft production based on the manufacture of a variety of products and shifting markets using flexible general-purpose machinery and multi-skilled labor. According to Piore and Sabel, this new version of craft production 'flexible specialization' involves the use of flexible computer technology, constitutes an attempt to break away from the system of mass production. It makes use of the new flexible technology so that the production of specialized products can be easily adapted to changing market demands. This process increases the skills of workers and enables them to apply their expertise in increasingly varied manufacturing processes [21]. The more flexibility the machine is, the more generally applicable the process and more it expand the workers' capacity for productive expression [24]. Labour process theorists have been at the forefront in exploring the rapid changes in technology, management strategies, and the production techniques under the term flexible specialization or Japanisation. The first and second wave of labour process came under serious criticism when flexible specialization techniques superseded scientific management. Flexible specialization is linked to flexible technology that produces standard products in mass production.

the manufacturing process with the workforces who have been trained to produce wide variety of goods. This allows the workers to increase the breadth of their skills through the practice of a range of tasks, teamwork and more conceptual tasks and responsibilities in the work process [25]. Therefore, it is claimed that flexible production reduces the detailed division of labour and removes the alienation of labour due to deskilling [26,27].

Conclusion

This paper discussed the contribution of various thinkers towards labor process theory specifically in context of deskilling of workers in the capitalist society. Each thinker has made their contribution to the study of labor process in a specific way. However, we need not only to look at the capitalist labor process in terms of capital accumulation or control, rather in terms of its effect on skilled craft workers, worker's resistance or class struggle and its impact on the general social level. The study of the capitalist labor does not finish the forms of the labor process within a capitalist social formation, but one can find many labour processes within the domain of particular social formation which does not fall under the law of accumulation or control. For example, the survival of handicraft production even in developed and developing countries. To conclude that there has been no inherent change in the tendencies of the capitalist labor process since analyzed by Marx. The change then occurred in organizational structures, material techniques, spatial location, etc., which have occurred historically.

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