
ADAPTATIVE PATHWAYS TOWARDS A DEGERDERISED LABOUR MARKET AND THE DEFINITION OF ANDROGYNOUS PERSONNEL

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Adaptive Pathways for the Undergderised Employment and the Definition of Androgynous Employees

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Introduction

The history of humanity has been written with androcentric ink since olden times. Apart from certain periods full of mythological literature or romanticist pose, the domination of men over women is a constant materialised reality that has served as a structural principle for individual gender identity. However the logic of this principle is nowadays weaken as social and economical demands of globalisation a calling for new ways of adaptation. Sex-gender system and gender roles are conditioned to new features of contemporary employment and labour market. Since the emergence of computers in working settings and domestic environments in twentieth Century we have witnessed striking changes in old industrial settings that have altered the composition of the labour force and the nature of work. These technologies have enable people to be in constant, fast communication and contribute to closer relationships of work and family domains. The new social order demands and shows work-family interchanges inside globalization economy pyosphy that have nothing to do with past times and is forcing people to negotiate new power positions and roles. Work-family dychotimies historically inhereted and reinforced during Industrial Revolution can not be assumed any more. The consolidation of capitalism model only considered “work” the economically rewarded activity being made under contractual conditions and therefore empowering those citizens that occupied job positions, normally men. This conception was even explained through naturalistic and esencialist believes by scientifics but also attacked by feminist movements that promted sex equity. One of the most important achievemnt of feminists is certainly the progressive women entry in the labour market that was partially permitted thanks to the male workforce decrease from World Wars of last Century and very low birth rates. The present article underlines this fact as a political strategy to adapt contemporary societies to globalisation economy.

New technology and globalization economy

Employers who wish to incorporate new human resources into their firms will not hire employees; those employees who are willing to work in the present century will not look for a job. The starting point of these changes must be found in capitalism post-industrial economy which is centred in new technologies. Nearly sixty years ago computers (robotics, cybernetics, PCs, telex-fax…) took us away from “pen and paper” work and presently, a second informatics’ revolution let us work and communicate through distance. The first consequence of this fact is the creation of new machinery that
operates quicker than human groups and without mistakes. For instance, motor industry has reduced the time to design a complete car model from 7 to 3 years. Informatics, ofimatics and robotic can replace human efforts with accuracy and relieve us from hard work. According to Castells (2000), the development of Internet is said to have profound implications for the organization of economy activity and for increasing productivity. Geographical distances among workers can be avoided by the use of long-distance communications and the contact with customers is diverse, closer and quicker than ever before (tele-shoppings, tele-marketing, videoconferences, telework). Certain jobs disappear and employees who survived to workforce cuts abandon the hands to use their mind in their activities. To idea, to create, to think through and to communicate seems to substitute the tasks of managing tools, taking weights, or moving the body. Therefore, new technologies have decreased the use of human power and effort and on the other side they increased mental activity among workers in a process called work mentalization. Through the mentalization process menial jobs disappear and many positions are redesigned by means of technological innovation. For example, brokers at New York and Tokyo have been extinguished from economic scenarios after 100 years of history and a complex informatic system is now being used in stead. From sanitary services to financial companies the impact of new technology is evident and progressive. Precisely, modern societies concentrate highest peak of productivity on the service sector that deals with information exchange and an intangible products across Continents.

Globalization economy that started from the development and exchange of new informational technology allows big companies to operate at a wide scope in a need to fight high competitiveness. According to Reich (1993), the exchange of products, services, money, and technology can be easily made nowadays so the value of a certain country will be placed on its citizens/workers’ ideas and creativity. Employees will have to create their own work activity or commercial image to satisfy personal or other people projects. And firms will hire ideas for very little time as they would be outdated at a blink of an eye. Employers and employees will be engaged in temporary work relationships to achieve their common interests using qualitative rather than quantitative efforts. A near future describes a market with few big companies producing and many others selling or serving the products of those. The same products will be delivered at any part of the world with no cultural feature rather than the trade of the production company. Labour interactions will not be based any more in hierarquical positions as the concepts of power and authority is weakening to a great extent in democratic societies. This fact may be due to the impossibility to put control over employees in a technological world in which be can always “be in touch” but not touch one to each other. More over, employees have less static workplaces and are involved in frequent business travels and geographical mobility. This lack of control encourages employers to delegate functions among staff and promote democratic, horizontal communications.

In summary, labour market and work activity are turning “soft” rather than “hard” as a result of the labour mentalization process that comes from globalization settings of modern capitalism. “Soft” cultures deals with mind, flexibility, adaptability, mobility, temporariness, and blends, ethereal realities. On the other hand, “hard” culture is devoted to strength, static, physical, and tangible realities. Some authors have stated that mentalization process is the reason for organizations to get rid of physical, tangible resources such as buildings, job positions, hierarchies, commercial stocks, and so on that the literature have label as temporary work, delocalization, downsizing, dehierarchization, empowerment, outsourcing, just in time, and so on in an attempt to
lower expenses. The development of informational technologies enables all these new organizational policies in fashion. The use of this new technology (internet, intranet, e-mails, Ipods, MP3, pen-drives, laptops…) is deeply changing our way of thinking (and living) primarily giving us a sense of power to construct and deconstruct in an extension of a “cut-and-paste” activity. Deconstruction of reality is a hot matter of discussion among relatively modern philosophies starting from Nietzsche and ending with Popper with important contributions from Derrida, Lakatos, and Focault. In our society all can truth or false, good or bad, legal and illegal at the same time. The debate encourages us to actively participate with great flexibility as workers and citizens in order to adapt ourselves to the on-going changes of labour markets and social environments. Our skills to deconstruct the world are the key to our success in work and life.

**Work-family interface**

Work and family are important developmental domains in everybody’s life to which we devote great amount of our time. Recent life quality surveys stated that 80% of the Spanish society assessed “family” as the most important sphere in life after health (Priot Ruiz, 1997). We traditionally define family as a primary group with emotional learnings and relationships useful to socialization processes (Quintana, 1980; Delval, 1994). On the other hand, “work” is a multifacetic domain with relevant impact on economy, mental health and social structure (Peiró, Prieto y Roe, 1996). Both domains are dynamic realities that are being modified by means of societal advances.

In early stages, work and family domains were seen as two separated worlds and researchers did not consider any kind of interaction among them. This vision was strengthened by Industrial Revolution as it forced men and women to attend separate roles in different domains (Worsley, 1977). Therefore men were in charge of the family economical supplies while the maintenance of the house and the children rearing was a lonely duty for their wives. The formers were known as *breadwinners* and the latters were commonly named as *housekeepers*. Both of them performed specific roles in a single place with no chance for interfering with other roles. Men were settled in industrial scenarios and women were placed in rural settings or at home in perfect mutual equilibrium. The productive activity were then moved towards early cities allowing the social distortion of masculine labour activity – defined as productive, serious, rational, artificial, strong- from feminene family activity -defined as reproductive, afective, pleasant, socialised, delicated -. Women subordination to men , defined by maxists as the historical defeat of femenine sex, is socially admitted by linking women to nature because of her physiological and psychological aptitudes¹. Consequently, men dominates women as technology and science do to nature. (Ortner, 1974). Anthropological theories explained that gender division was reinforced by a classical Victorian mentality by which men was associated with culture, public scenarios and (labour) production while women was socially linked to nature, private scenarios and reproduction (Ortner, 1974; Rosaldo, 1980; Sacks, 1979). The scientific argument that feed this dychotomic mentality was the biological capacity of women to give birth that naturally enables them to physically move themselves from the time they are pregnant. Other argument to support this historical dichotomy is

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¹ It is widely stated among various sources of literature the diferential scietific value given to hunting activities made by men from the haverst ones in primitive societies although it was latter confirmed that 80% of proteine ingest by that time came from fruits and crops (Service, ; Zihlman & Godall, ). For instance, neoevolutionist theories have considered hunting as the first adaptive human strategy and the starting point of language, tool creation, group organization, culture (eg. Prehistoric paintings) and even brain development (Washburn, White, Harris, Steward ).
culturally created to dominate women inside an androcentric world vision. Consequently, gender roles are symbolic constructions created for men’s interests whose discourses were progressively denied since feminist movements of nineteenth Century. The more released are women from biological functions (eg. Delaying having a baby thanks to medical advances) the weaker is the idea of a genderesed society and higher the freedom they gain.

From a historical materialism point of view (Marx, Godelier), the economical relationships derived from the development of informational technology (infra-structure) impact on the rest of the social systems, that is, political and familiar (structure), and ideological (super-structure). Therefore, new technologies and economical constrains that affected work and labour markets have impacted on non-work spheres such as family.

According to Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977), the traditional sexual division of roles describes a “myth of separate worlds” which can no longer be assumed. With the introduction of technologies work and family systems have increased their links and exchange ideas, energies and behaviours at a daily basis. Links between these two human developmental domains are frequent and continuous because of role exchanges among members. Curie & Hajjar (1987) once renamed these domains as “systems of activities”, which describes the idea that work and family domains frequently exchange energies, information, perceptions and experiences in and within (family/work) group’s members. Post-industrial values guide society to think about diffuse boundaries of work and family spheres and to elaborate integrative strategies between both of them (Ester & halman, 1994; Orizo, 1991). This boundariless reality merge work and non-work activities that should be carefully addressed by individuals in their multiple roles as conflict may arise among them. Power imbalance between men and women is desaparing and therefore traditional complementary roles has to be altered.

It is widely believed that continuous rates of women participation on the labour market has deeply altered the meaning of work and family relations of contemporary societies (Voydanoff, 1989; Higgins & Duxbury, 1992). We can think of two kinds of processes that depicted this fact. Firstly, the feminization of organizations in which employers are demanding attributes and qualities traditionally associated to women such us communication skills, loyalty, team work, delegation, personal attendance, commitment, sensitiveness,…“soft” solutions to present problems. Secondly, the counterpart of the latter process named as the masculinization of home. Although it is a brand new process at a lower pace, contemporary families face life with new contents such as competitiveness (eg. When schooling children), formal education, function delegation to institutions (family outsourcing?), self-steam, leadership, problem solving and decision making, and power motivation. While femenine strategies deal with emotions and familiar relationships, masculine strategies act with rationality and formalization. In this sense, organizations gain effectiveness by using semi-autonomous groups of work, stimulating creativity, allowing delegation and empowerment, being flexible and communicative. On the other hand, family effectiveness due to rationalizacion can be achieved by outsourcing strategies, role flexibility and interchange, and allowing independence among its members.

Ungenderised processes of contemporary societies

The continuous increase of female participation in the labour force market is modifying the traditional family structure and inner dynamic. Double-income families (DIF) are the most
frequent emerging families of postindustrial countries whose comprehension is crucial for positive adaptation of present-day (Gilbert, 1985; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz, and Beutell, 1989; Zedeck, 1992). These families are forced to solve new problems inside every day communications and related to work and family balance such as work-family conflict (WFC). The mutual influence of work and family interface brings out the following facts:

1. **Feminization of the labour market**: the progressive presence of women in the labour market together with the entry of new workers from diverse countries -specially South Americans and Eastern countries- force us to to bear in mind qualitative and affective factors in human resources management such us culture, diversity, communication skills, or team-work. da de 1990.

2. **Labour flexibility**: a flexible modification of the inner aspects of work is being promoted by the Government to help organisations to adapt themselves to social environment. Flexible timetables, part-time jobs, geographical and functional mobility, outplacement, salary structure, professional classifications, early retirement, among others are common strategies of nowadays.

3. **Irrational behaviour**: Important enquiries of modern organisations refer to different forms of creativity, action-research, innovation, effective negotiation, organizational health and development, blended learning, and so on.

4. **New labour locus**: According to Ch. Handy (1997), offices will be as necessary during the New Century as churches. With the help of new telematic technology workers will avoid going to the office and develop their duties at home or even anywhere just in from of a laptop. Tele-work design of the working activity certainly impact on family responsibilities (Olson, 1981). In this sense, workers will have to learn to switch off and on work and family duties with effectiveness taking the best from their time management.

5. **Free-time and leisure increment**: Some authors have already announced the end of the working society (Ruiz-Quintanilla y Wilpert, 1991; Habermas, 1996; Labarde & Maris, 1999). Although work is a socially valued domain, other humans activities compete for time and effort resources. Family duties may be used as an excuse but personnal matters and interests are important “time thieves”. As citizens, we a embedded in a neo-consumist society primarily located in service economy. As parents, we found great difficulties in drawing a line between work and non-work activities. More over, people are sometimes involved in voluntary work or in NGOs that may also be rewarded but are separated from daily work. Our society is looking for new ways of salaries no connected with contractual relationships.

6. **Self-employment encouragement**: Present youngsters percibe an insecure labour future with little work options and opportunities. Therefore self-employment may be a good alternative for unemployment. At home this fact
is seen in the do-it-yourself phylosophy. However, to attend this form of work we need to learn to be self-confident and self-manager.

**Androgynous role as the reconciliation framework**

We have already proved that complement division of roles between sexes is desapering as men and women learn to self-govern themselves. We need to be skilful to manage multiple roles independently through constant negotiations between parts. For that purpose, it seems to be useful for any male or female worker to act using gender roles when needed, that is, being androgynous. The androgynous role was first used in Plato’s “Banquet” classic book and described a imaginative creature both male and female with four legs and four arms but with a single head. The myth state that androgynous creatures were so powerful that Zeus order to split the bodies in two complementary halves. Androgynous role can be defined as the group of behaviours, attitudes or actions that are socially expected in men and women at the same time and used in accordance with the context. The concept is full of confusion and the literature in relation is hard to find. Androgynous role is a form of enrichment process between men and women that allows great adaptability using “male” and “female” resources. For instance, one of the most popular androgynous role is said to be the metro-sexual role in which males shows great interest to dress and make up elegantly. This role is not connected with homosexuality but it does come from a commercial consumist ideology. According to sociologist the gender interchange is a symbolic inversion of the power positions normally mantained by the counterpart. A recent investigation on the apparence of androgynous role in television programmes (Infante y Matos, 2004) have observed that working women are critised when adopting male roles and are described as rude and less atractive. Consequently, men are discouraged to adopt female roles by being described as homosexualsor by losing their sexual power.

**Bibliografia**


