

Factory and Other Production Institutions as Social Systems and Agents of Development in Society

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ABSTRACT

The paper analysed factory as a social system, illustrating also the possibility of applying social system analysis to other production institutions such as family, community and organisation. It was explained that, though social systems approach is applicable to production institutions mentioned above, its suitability or quietness is limited due to its static nature and inability to accommodate change process taking place in the institutions that are dynamic. It was also emphasized that factory and other production institutions are agents of development in the society. Thus, should be a subject of constant study to ensure their sustainability, in view of dynamic nature of development.

Keywords: Factory, production, institution, social system, agents, development, society, family, community, organisation

INTRODUCTION

A system is a complete whole, consisting of interrelated parts that interact with one another in their activities towards the realisation of a unified goal (Varma, 1975). In the field of Sociology there exist social system as compared to the mechanical and biological systems in the physical and natural sciences. Production institutions are social systems as there are made up of various interrelated parts which interact towards the realisation of production goal. According to Hanson (1975:21) the aim (goal) of all production is to satisfy people's wants. Man's earliest wants were for food, clothing and shelter. Today man's wants expand to include industrial products and even services.

This paper focus primarily on factory, but other institutions concerned with productions in the history of human society development shall also be examined, such as; family, corporate Organisation, and community. The aim of this paper is to prove that factory and other production institutions are social systems, and contribute to the development of society. The paper is significant to the extent that it will widen our understanding of social system analysis as well as helping us to see the need for stability in production institutions as one of the most important variables for improving efficiency, effective, and higher productivity. It will be proper to analyse the social system framework to guide the discussion on production Institutions.

THE SOCIAL SYSTEM

Rapoport (1968:452,458) defined system as "Something consisting of a set (finite or infinite) of entities, among which a set of relations is specified, so that deductions are possible from some relations to others or from the relations among the entities to the behaviour or the history of the system. In terms of social system, the entities concerned are individuals, families and institutions, and the relationship among them, such as communication channels, influence and obligations which are often singled out for attention.

Parsons (1968: 658, 14.72) looked at system as "the concept that refers both to a complex of interdependence between parts, components, and processes that involves discernable regularities of relationship, and to a similar type of interdependency between such a complex and its surrounding environment. From Parsons' (1968) conception, it could be easily seen that the theory of system is a framework for organisation of knowledge in various discipline. Thus, any theoretical system is abstract. Therefore as a theoretical system, the social system according to Parsons (1968) is specifically adapted to describing and analysing social interaction considered as a class of empirical systems concerned with behaviour (human social interaction).

Accordingly, Parsons (1968) explained that the social system is inherently an open system engaged in process of interchange (or input-output relations) with its environment, as well as consisting of interchanges among its internal Units. It may be a subsystem of one or more super ordinate systems, it is interdependent with the other parts of the more comprehensive system or systems and hence, partly dependent on them for essential inputs.

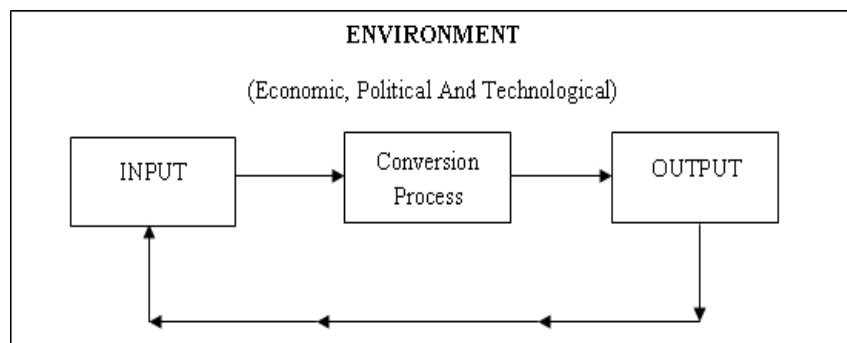
The social system is a very complex entity. An Organisation of human interest, activities and commitments, it must be viewed as a system and in functional perspective, which is the key to social systems line of organisation, its modes of differentiation, and its integration. It is both a structured and a process system. The idea of social system encompasses all types of collectivises. One specific and particularly important social system is the society.

Parsons in Ritzer (1996:242) stipulates seven major requirement of a social system thus:

1. Social systems must be structured so that they operate compatibly with other systems.
2. In order to survive, the social system must have the requisite support from other systems.
3. The social system must meet a significant proportion of the need of its actors.
4. The Social system must elicit adequate participation from its members.
5. It must have at least a minimum of control over potentially disruptive behaviour.
6. If conflict becomes sufficiently disruptive, it must be controlled.
7. A social system requires a language in order to survive.

The Social System is generally structured towards self-maintenance or equilibrium. The self-preservation goal of the system involves the maintenance of boundaries and of the relationships of parts to the whole, control of environmental variations, and control of tendencies to change the system from within.

Diagram of Social System



Source: Ritzer, 1996

One major criticism of the social system analysis is its inability to deal effectively with the process of social change (Cohen, 1968). The Social system is far more likely to deal with static structures than with Change processes. Cohen (1968) also states that social system analysis does not handle adequately a situation of conflict, but that of stability. It is historic, and many Scholars like Gouldner (1970) criticized it of conservative bias. But in the whole, social system analysis is very useful in ordering data for research (Ritzer, 1996).

FACTORY AS A SOCIAL SYSTEM

Before the 19th Century factory has a different meaning from its contemporary usage. It was a British term for what American called a trading post a fort or station in some wild or distant region where goods were bought and sold. The term factory is derived from a British word "factor" which stands for "an agent who bought and sold goods for his employer" (Cleland, 1997: 828). The modern factory emerged in England in the textile industry in the second half of 18th century and spread over the entire Europe, and was introduced into the United State of America USA in 1790 by Samuel Slater, an English textile Mechanic who migrated to Rhode Island and recreated from Memory Spinning Mill, the first in U.S.A.

The modern term factory refers to a building in which goods are manufactured, which originated from the Latin word "factorium". It is in this perspective that factory is used in this paper. Since factory is being considered as a social system, emphasis is on the factory system. The factory system refers to the process of carrying out production by a group of workers in a special building devoted to manufacturing. This replaced the domestic or putting-out systems in which work with the spinning wheel, handloom, or other such device was carried on in the individual workers home. The factory is a key element of the Industrial Revolution that began in the late 18th Century. Under the factory system, the employer owned the means and instrument of production (Akpuru-Aja, 1998). Power tools and machines replace hand tools. In factory system the factory owner controlled the hours and place of work. In contrast with the artisan working at home who had been more independent, so long as he produced enough to support himself and his family.

Though certain forms of factory existed in earlier time, such as the Egyptian Bricks factory, the growth of factory system is linked directly to Industrial Revolution. Factories were rare until the discovery of Sea route to Africa, Asia and New World (America), which opened vast new market and enormous wealth that encourages mass production and consumption. The factory is a social system, because there are various parts and units in the factory which interrelates in their activities towards the achievement of the goal of the factory. It is noted that the new factory system worsened the condition of working man, and put him out of work (artisan) first, forced to move to crowded towns and cities, separating families, and women and children utilized in textile mills under poor sanitation, and demoralizing working conditions.

The most inevitable results of the factory problem was the appearance of trade Unions movement. Factory taught workers cooperation and made them conscious of common problems. Workers then grouped together to regain through collective action some control of their own lives. From social system perspective, the analysis above shows that there existed various units within the factory which relate with one another. The factory relates with its environment as inputs in terms of factors of production such as Land, Labour, Capital and entrepreneurship are accepted into the factory and is sent out as output in terms of product or service to its numerous clients or customers. As seen earlier according to Parsons (1960) that a Social System may be a subsystem, the factory is a subsystem of a super ordinate system (Economic system).

Society as A System

Fiduciary System Societal Community

Economy (Factory) Polity

Source: George Ritzer (1996: 244)

A subsystem in one setting may be a super ordinate system and vice versa. To society, economy is a subsystem, while to factory; economy is a super ordinate system. The problems of system analysis limit its application to the factory, as a factory is not static but dynamic. Because the component are human being that are constantly subject to change. Secondly, there is high level of conflict within the factory, arising between the factory owners and the employee, which is likely to foster change. The social system theory aims rather at stability as against change and is not very fit for analysing factory dynamics. The factory operates within the confine of its boundary and relates with its environment.

In view of the foregoing explanation, factory is a social system as it comprises interrelated parts that interact or relates in their activities towards realising set goals. The weakness of social system analysis affects factory as it is factory is a dynamic social institution and marked by employee-employer conflict at which social system analysis lacks explanation.

Family and Community

The family and the community are basic social Institutions. According to Eisenstadt (1997), Social Institutions are "basic focuses of social organisations, common to all societies and dealing with some of the basic universal problems of ordered social life. Though family focuses on the regulation of the procreative and biological relations between individuals in the society and on initial socialization of new members, family is considered relevant in this discourse as family is one of the major production institutions in ancient time and in pre-industrial society (Agrarian society).

The family as a production based social system existed under the Domestic system, when the workman owned his tools and raw materials and work for himself. The Community existed during the communal period where everything was collectively owned by the small community and production carried out for the community good. Whether it is the family or community changes occurred and conflict arises as civilization set in and to this extent social system analysis is again limited just like in the factory system. Changes in pattern of family and community often herald development.

Modern Corporate Organisation

Organisations vary in purpose and in technology. Schools, hospitals, banks, end production industries are example of organisations with differing goals and needs. Common elements in all organisations are the existence of managers. The basic concepts of system theory can be applied to studying organisation which involved the complex interactions of internal and external environments. The organisation takes resources (inputs) from the larger system (the external environment), processes those resources within its internal environment, and returns them to the outside in changed form (output). The organisation influences and is being influenced by its environment. Human beings who interact are major resources or input of an Organisation. Organisation as an exponent of society is dynamic and not static, and conflict between management and staff *of organisation cannot be analysed using system model*. Therefore, though Modern Organisation aims at increase productivity, efficiency, effectiveness and profit marginalization, its ultimate goal is business survival. Though

organisation can be subjected to social system analyse, the limitation, of system analysis distort the very nature of modern organisation. No society can move forward without the contribution of organisation. As such, organisation contribution to production enhances society's development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper focuses specifically on factory as a social institution of production, though other production related social institutions like family, community and organisations were examined. An attempt had been made to provide a system analysis of this social production institution to prove that they can be considered as social systems on their own right.

The analysis in this paper highlighted the limitation of Social System theory in explaining and predicting social phenomenon due to the rigidity, staticness and inability of the framework to explained social change and conflict since the institutions are dynamic, though they fit as Social System, the limitations of the System framework provides a vacuum for further theorization. Production institutions are very useful in the society as they serve as agents of development by increasing output of service and products.

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