

## **What are Fordism and Post-fordism?**

### **Compare and contrast the working and production arrangements typical to each.**

Fordism and Post-fordism are key concepts in industrial/organisational development as they have had a large impact on universal organisational practices and still do in the contemporary era. In the USA between 1880 and 1910 the rapid industrialisation period produced the early large organisations whereby Ford (motor company) was one of them. (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001:414). They are types of job design which involve both the workers and management – workers how they carry out work procedures and management of how they design and organise tasks. The two concepts are often misunderstood and this paper seeks to address detailed definitions before providing comparisons and distinctions between them. Fordism was first obviously so need 2 concentrate on how this developed first. I will also focus on Taylor's scientific mgt principles as they were highly influential to how Fordism developed. Thorough definitions of the two types of work production are required before identifying and analysing similarities and differences between them. Any analysis of Post-fordism cannot be made without considering Fordism first, then the two modes of production can be compared.

Fordism is a form of industrial production was born developed from F.W. Taylor's scientific management methods Fordism. Ford developed Taylor's idea of fragmenting and simplifying work tasks, was developed from Henry Ford's application of mass production which had above average wages (as Ford introduced the \$5 day), however, generally was low paid due to lowly skilled repetitive tasks, has autocratic management, low business overheads, strict division of labour and little empowerment/decision making for employees. A standardised production method producing standardised goods for the mass industrial and consumer markets. It is often associated with F.W. Taylor's scientific management methods where the main aim is product maximisation through tight control over the employee's every task movements.

Machine dominates the worker – the worker is subordinated to the machine's pace. hegemony

Henry Ford became famous for both his Model T motor car invention and his 'revolutionary techniques of mass production'. His company based on a highly productive, mechanistic and continuous production method, formed in 1903 as he believed craftsmen (original car producers) could not possibly meet the consumer demand Ford would create with their original job production methods. He believed the deskilling of car production was required to achieve 'continuous improvement' and mass production. Whilst other observers argue Ford had the motive for the ease of controlling labour and substituting it should it be uncontrollable. The skilled mechanical craftsman then became the lowly-skilled, specialised machine operator (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001:426). Like Taylor's scientific management, Ford wished to further his control by establishing certainty in work practices, which would increase productive efficiency.

Ford developed three main methods, enabling him to achieve his mass production methods. Firstly, the implementation of time-and-motion techniques to allow job analysis was based on scientific management as it was a rational and calculable method to organise work tasks, which involved observing worker's motions and recording the time taken to complete a specific task and the motion used. This established causal laws – e.g. a worker may take 10 seconds to cap

a bottle and so in general, so should other workers. This shows how Ford's continuous improvement thesis could be applied as opportunities for improvement could be observed and thus increased efficiency e.g. reducing the time taken to cap a bottle. A further method was to use single-purpose machine tools allowing the production of standardized motor parts and so quick machine operation – unskilled, machine-bound workers were required as the skill was transferred from the craftsmen to the machines. Hence, workers from agriculture backgrounds could easily form as the new industrial labour. Finally, the important creation of the assembly line (invented later) allowed Ford to control the speed of production to his liking. The cars then moved passed the workers – each worker was a small cog in the overall production where car parts moved along the conveyor waiting for task application. Ford's objective of efficiency maximisation was being achieved as in 1908 27 cars produced per day increased to 2000 in 1923. Although Ford takes credit for this unique invention, Heizer (1998) provides strong evidence that others are responsible.

Like Taylor, Ford wished to transfer control from the workers to management and he achieved this, creating an authoritarian management system overseeing supervision and machine-led repetitive tasks. The threat of an increasing labour turnover rate led him to slashing the hours worked per day and doubling the wage rate to \$5.00 per day. Although this placed Ford in favourable light, a further motive was so that workers could afford to purchase his cars.

Scientific management principles were applied to Ford's River Rouge plant. Which were successfully applied universally across many companies. Ford and his followers were influenced largely by the theory of rationalism. This means that work actions and cognition are based upon reason and knowledge as opposed to emotion and religion. A logical approach is taken characterised by calculability in all decision making and that laws can be written (i.e. task procedures) to enable predictability which supposedly creates order in organisations. However, some sociologists argue this is over-implemented, creating irrationality. Rationality according to Weber was the defining point of modernity (Lawson & Garrod 2000:232), therefore, scientific management and so Fordism are associated with modernity development.

Even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Fordism is still influential in organisations with the key concepts of system and control universally applied to achieve order and predictability. ( ) The value placed upon supervisor's roles in organisations shows control importance whilst the significance of information technology systems are vital for daily running of organisations. However, it was largely the assembly line which was the invisible control not supervisors, this directed the work pace whereby they were unable to slow the pace as other workers depended on their work performance; Huczynski & Buchanan (2001:430) state "one worker's output is another's input". Ford also gained control over the environment, namely his suppliers who would cause hold-ups whereby he bought land so to produce his own parts.( ) This also gave Ford the certainty he required with the elimination of unreliable suppliers.

Braverman (1974) believed this production style deskills work and so labour can be controlled easily by management. But this view is criticised as an obsolete view, as Fordism is being substituted for Post-fordism (Haralambos & Holborn 2000:713).

Alternatively, Post-fordism is flexible in its methods as it can respond appropriately to sudden increases in consumer demand by quickly increasing supply to meet it. Computer technology is relied upon heavily as mass demand diversification requires rapid design and production processes; computation allows this. This is especially important in contemporary western

climates which are characterised by volatile consumer product preferences. Clothing company Benetton is an example of this; it varies products frequently and uses different suppliers to compete in fashion markets (Haralambos & Holborn 2000:714). Piore (1986) supports this, identifying these Japanese principles of flexible specialisation as occurring in all capitalist economies now. The Japanese Just-In-Time (JIT) production method allows companies to gain supplies just before its intended use, hence flexibility to the economic conditions of demand. However, it could be argued that JIT is a Fordist regime. The view that industry has now become post-fordist is supported by Savage, Barlow, Dickens & Fielding (1992) whereby firms are less hierarchical and produce small batches of specialised commodities. (H&H :73), as opposed to Fordist massively produced homogeneous products.

Atkinson (1985) focused on Post-fordist firms, identifying that core and periphery workers are vital to their flexibility. Factors such as recessions, less trade union sovereignty, reduced working week and technology encouraged this flexibility (Haralambos & Holborn 2000:714). The core group are managers, designers, skilled workers who's jobs are relatively secure whilst the periphery group are less secure and closer controlled but may be full-time such as clerical and supervisory who have common labour skills so can be flexibly recruited. Likewise can the increasing proportion in labour markets of part-time, temporary, agency workers, etc. (Haralambos). Although this is not solely due to the firm's flexibility need, social changes in the family, require flexible work arrangements (e.g. around school duties).

It is associated with the development of modernity as the industrialisation period created

More written about fordism as we now in post fordist era.

### **Control freak like Taylor.**

Fordism production provided many benefits to society and industry one of which was the contribution made to the continuous improvement of production over time. Ford clearly discovered the most efficient method of job design and using space through scientifically organising work and assembly lines; he was an efficient organiser of time and space – costly resources. The contribution made to increasing the standard of living is evident as mass production led to mass consumption; Ford showed a complicated product could be mass produced and so could simpler ones. ( ). Between 1920-1970 living standards in the USA soared and of course 'America sneezes and other countries catch a cold' – countries following Fordist techniques also gained. However against Ford, Marxists such as... claim he ruined craft jobs through deskilling; meaningless work practices (to worker) – short cycle repetitive tasks. were formed believe this type of work organisation leads to work alienation. But, others argue Ford had to deskill jobs as there were insufficient skilled workers to undertake complex craft tasks.

Distinctions between Fordism and Post-fordism can be analysed on four levels; by the labour process, the regime of accumulation and the modes of regulation and societalisation (Jessop 1991:1). They can also be compared on the lines of .... In terms of the labour process, Fordism is a mechanistic, Taylorist, rigid and machine-paced production mode that is supply-led to produce as much as possible in one cycle to achieve productive economies of scale (low unit costs). Alternatively, Post-fordism is much more flexible in its approaches and systems; the development of information technology and communications facilitates this as 'real-time'

technologies allow the flexibility to respond to different conditions that the Fordism era could only dream of. Roobeek (1987) identifies that contemporary technologies e.g. electronics can be a key element in overcoming Fordist control problems e.g. alienation. Jessop (1991) argues that 'the influence Post-fordism has in influencing the emerging economic system is far greater than Fordism's'. Therefore, Post-fordism allows flexibility in both the manufacturing and service economies both in the public and private fields. (Jessop 1991: 13). Post-fordism is also demand-led; levels of consumer demand depicts levels of supply as supply excess is very inefficient. The Japanese Just-In-Time (JIT) production method allows companies to gain supplies just before its intended use, hence flexibility to the economic conditions of demand. Also JIT requires a skilled and trained workforce due to varied work and quality circles requiring discussion as to how to improve production; thus Post-fordism requires a higher trained workforce than Fordist management strictly controlled labour. However, it could be argued that JIT is a Fordist regime. Also, Fordism had resource usage problems e.g. extreme use of natural resources (fuel, energy, etc); Post-fordism sought to address these problems with new technologies. (Jessop 1991: 13). The labour market are more flexible in post fordist – have to be.

With the accumulation regime, Fordism is involved in the growth cycle based upon mass production and consumption with the objectives of gaining economies of scale and increasing productivity linked to rising incomes which increases demand (Jessop 1991:2). Alike Weber's 'Protestant Work Ethic' notion, profits gained are then reinvested from wages and business activity. Reinvestment is also characterised in Post-fordism, however the emphasis is on stable economic growth. Fordism focused upon the expansion of the domestic market whilst Post-fordism concentrates on global markets and competition. (Jessop 1991: 14). However, it would be a tragedy for any mode of production to completely ignore domestic markets. For Post-fordism to succeed it should recognise this. Post-fordism does indeed recognise the Fordist predicaments and differentiates itself by renovating methods and extending them by new market segmentation and is unrestrained by domestic demand conditions. (Jessop 1991: 14). This is questionable as explained above.

Distinctions between production forms can be viewed through regulation modes; the norms, social networks/conduct and institutions that direct production regimes. Fordism has large, hierarchical, bureaucratic plants with semi-skilled labour and little creativity seek the need for trade unions and collective bargaining (Jessop 1991:3). Whilst in Post-fordism, flat and leaner structures are present (Jessop 1991:14). Flexible conditions allow various innovations by skilled/professional workers and there is emphasis on core workers, also important are peripheral labour (temporary, part-time, etc) who are generally low-paid and insecure. Continuous innovation from Post-fordism is required to satisfy increasingly diverse consumer demands. Some corporations will target niches; others will produce a diverse product range. Hypermarkets and shopping centres are viewed as Post-fordist (Jessop 1991:15).

Finally, societalisation modes; 'patterns of social cohesion and integration' show that Fordism highlighted increasing personal consumption of uniform mass-produced items (Jessop 1991:4); the hegemony of personal indulgence (e.g. cars, tourism, etc) was significant in Fordist production and economic growth. As Fordism extended living standards, it could be argued a growth in the middle class was evident, but not everyone benefited. It is unclear yet how Post-fordism affects societalization; it is too early to evaluate its effects on society, class, etc.

## **Conc – Differences**

### **flexibility**

Skills of worker – diff cos of tech, flexibility and multi skilled. not resistant to prod changes.  
technology  
diff historical epochs  
global & domestic mkt  
training & qual

### Similarities

A type of production

Increased efficiency – both aim to achieve this  
reinvestment

Ford = little training skill. Machine controls pace, repetitive assembler tasks. Cheap products –  
costs standardised. Labour costs low costs don't need skilled workers, overheads low eg  
machines low costs large no of products, easier to control process

One negative effect of the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist production is provided by  
Mingione (1996); the shift to the service sector and smaller production cycles from mass  
production increases the number of temporary and part-time jobs thus increasing job  
insecurity. Taylor (1998) also supports this believing insecure employment increases crime.

Conc Most important re flexibility and rigidity – comparisons.

Post-Fordism results from stagnation of Fordist /Taylorist production techniques and the growing  
demand for differentiated products maybe stemmed from Ford as they wanted different colour cars.

In conclusion More differences???????

Scientific mgt = Ford

Much easier to analyse Fordism as it's a historical construct – Post-Fordism is still at the early  
stages of development and faces competition from other models such as Japanese production  
models.

Future of work???

The mode of production depends on economic conditions at the time

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