



Organisations Without Employers, Reflection on Future Work in Workplaces

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Abstract. During the 1980s and 1990s Argentine economy was unstable until finally in early 2000s the economic model collapsed. People demonstrated in the streets. Many factories closed down or went broke. In 2001, the President resigned. Under urgency and uncertainty a new social movement emerged. Workers could face unemployment developing the so-called recovered factories.

In 2020, the pandemic reveals an unpredictable world, where it is no longer possible to rely on structures based on certainties. I resumed my research on recovered factories conducted during 2008/2011, looking for clues, traces and creative practices undertaken by workers in the face of sudden and unexpected events, I chose the terms urgency, uncertainty, inhabiting, trace, prospection and emancipation as useful elements in times of crisis.

Thinking about the future of work in the context of a pandemic or crisis led me to analyze the practices carried out in the recovered factories and then address our own practices as ergonomists. I seek through a new theoretical approach to enrich the transition to future work in general and ours in particular.

Keywords: Crisis · Urgency · Uncertainty · Ergonomics · Self-management

1 Recovered Factories (RF)

In the early 1990s, the first evident symptoms of deindustrialisation process and loss of jobs appeared. In this context, the productive system ceased to be the driving force of national economy, resulting in the collapse of several productive activities. When companies started to close down or go bankrupt, workers started taking over those companies. This mechanism of appropriation became the only alternative to structural unemployment and a way of recovering and maintaining work sources. The first experiences of factory takeovers took place in large industries with more than 300 workers. There were many recovery circumstances: those collecting and/or repairing what former owners had left behind; those returning to old production practices because their owners had sold the new machinery; those taking up production as usual and those closing down due to lack of raw materials and supplies. At the same time, small significant initiatives were arising among the sectors already excluded from the labor market. All these experiences turned into a new struggling tool for this new “social movements” and new social actors promoting a different behavior and implementing the concept of “social economy”.

Recovered factories attracted the interest of local and international researchers who wanted to know and understand the phenomenon. A link was established between the recovered factories and national and provincial universities and institutions that made possible the transfer of technological and scientific knowledge to the productive environment through research and programs created to these workers' needs. During 2008–2011 our research-action generated a link between the University-Recovered Factories that allowed us to work with and for the workers. The result -product of a collective construction- allowed the workers to become the owners of what was produced. (Cuenca, Zotta 2012).

2 Approach

Based on my own research on recovered factories, I intend to create a new network relating some theoretical viewpoint.

To build the future of work, I developed two concepts: inhabiting and thinking time.

I choose Heidegger's notion of "inhabit", I continue with "inhabiting the world" (Béguin 2007), I develop the term uncertainty, I focus on "inhabiting uncertainty" (Cuenca 2020) and "inhabiting time" (Chesnaux 1996) as well. I continue with the binomial emancipation/alienation concepts by Marx. I recover the past by investigating the "unrealised potentialities", as they represent "what is still at a project stage" (Harshaw 1997). I am interested in Marc Bloch's approach (2001), who rescues the past through traces taken from a historical consciousness that can explain the causes, motives and reasons why someone did something. I understand the present as "an opportunity to rethink work from a prospective viewpoint" and the need to present real alternatives beyond the existing ones (Valérie Pueyo 2020). I decide to take up Heidegger's notion on the future and I take Pueyo's "prospective" concept as well.

3 Theoretical Issues

3.1 Building the Future of Work

I choose Heidegger's notion of "inhabiting". In his 1951 lecture "Building, Inhabiting, Thinking", the author explains that man is, insofar as he inhabits. The essence of man, his way of being, is to inhabit. In inhabiting, we find the matrix of all others. Each man's only option for being is to be in the world. One of Heidegger's structures that describes inhabiting is "being-in-the-world" (*In-der-Welt-sein*). Being-in-the-world implies being with others and sustaining a common world.

Inhabiting the World: I take the structure "being-in-the-world" to introduce Pascal Béguin's (2007) concept "Inhabiting the world", in which there are heterogeneous professional worlds related through a process where a group of actors use their skills, their competences, their strategies to organise these worlds and therefore, build a common world. "*Actors do not negotiate their worlds but reaffirm their identities*". Hence, the need for a common world where professional worlds are coordinated and can inhabit it from their conceptual frameworks but constructing a common operational framework. "*The concept of world postulates a situated creativity*".

In these recovered factories, there is the world of the workers, which initially replicates the previous system, and the world of the former owners, which endures through their practices. The ways of inhabiting each world differ in knowledge, experience, seniority and interests. Through a process of appropriation that integrates both worlds, a common world emerges.

Inhabiting Uncertainty

After the pandemic or any other types of crisis, it seems necessary to think about the future of work in this kind of contingency. I therefore introduce a few words such as “urgency” and “uncertainty” to express two variables that will be present in our future work. Urgency corresponds to unthinkable or unexpected events. Reinforcing this idea Dewey (1952) says that in an immutable order, the object of knowledge, other than finding certainty, is to pursue certainty so as to direct change in line with genuinely human goals and interests. However in a changing world, where absolute certainty disappears, intelligence constitutes the main function to direct change and adapt it to our purposes. In novel and complex situations that cannot be solved with existing knowledge, we ignore what is at stake or what we are risking with every decision taken, that’s when uncertainty appears.

In 1927, Heisenberg formulated the “uncertainty principle”, which revealed to physics that the mere fact of observing a phenomenon in order to measure it causes its conditions to change; i.e., reality is modified when we try to observe it. In other words, the observer intervenes and modifies the object conditions each time he wants to study it. Following Jonas (1996) about responsible action, I propose the concept “Inhabiting uncertainty”. We are as responsible for actions taken in the past as in the present since with both of them we are building the future.

Inhabiting uncertainty, we must be responsible for what we observe and what we fail to observe; for what we reject and what we aspire to. We should appeal to creativity and inventiveness in order to build this desired future collectively.

In our research on recovered factories carried out in 2008, our responsible action was when trimming was focused on jobs analysis. For this presentation, I recover socioeconomic data obtained at that time and I intend to point out their value. In 2001, fearing losing their jobs, workers at recovered factories were – unawarely – inhabiting uncertainty and giving rise to a new way of producing goods, know-how, a new group identity, all this was achieved through their creativity, and which is more relevant, collectively.

Inhabiting Today: in his doctoral thesis, Ramón Vanaquen Navarro (2018) states that in globalisation times and in contemporary inhabiting a new habit emerges: virtualisation. Globally connected, virtual reality enables to experience multiple habits of inhabiting, such as playing, learning, teaching, communicating, organising and producing.

Inhabiting Time: Chesnaux’s (1996) tells us that man “*inhabits his time*” when he lives his present, looking at his past and at his future as well. He argues for a democratic temporality involving “a present as an opening to the future through resourcing in the past”, a true dialectic between “field of experience” and “horizon of expectation”. Pierre Bourdieu says, “the presence of the past in the present makes possible the presence of the present in the future”.

Thinking the Past. Paul Ricoeur (1985) says that one way of restoring the past and not forgetting it is to work with the notion of collective memory. He also proposes the need to write the past so that the burden of the past falls on the future.

Another view belongs to Marc Bloch (2001) who proposes rescuing the past through footprints obtained from a historical consciousness that can explain the causes, motives and reasons why someone did something. And Finally, according to Harshaw (1997), to think these traces towards the future, - and from a literary point of view - is to consider “unrealised potentialities” in the past, as they represent “what still remains as a project”.

In recovered factories, workers inhabited their “past” by reproducing previous organisation and practices, their “present” by learning to manage and their “future” by constructing innovative ways of inhabiting it. The re-reading of our work has allowed us to update the forgotten and to collectively reconstruct the workers’ experiences and our own ones. Finally, I consider unrealized potentialities in the past when I take this research and extract only socio-economical and self-management processes to give them deeper analysis.

Thinking the present from the prospective of the present, I choose Valéry Pueyo (2020) who tells us that “*Prospective does not try to promise a better world but to build, experiment and support alternatives starting from the experiences of the “present” and in the present*”. “*The purpose of the prospective of the present is to experiment, to face the challenges of daily life, to identify the tensions that, in the mismatches, appear between the macro and micro levels*”. Prospective seeks to innovate by describing future needs.

My proposition regarding prospective and the present is to inhabit uncertainty. By living the present as it presents itself without looking away from the past and the future, we can inhabit time in “full length” through experience and through hope in the realization of projects that give meaning to uncertainty.

Thinking the Future: For Heidegger, the main phenomenon of time is the future. The human being is not confined to the present, but always projects himself into the future. OECD defines prospective as a set of systematic attempts to take a long-term view of the future of science, technology, economy and society in order to identify emerging technologies that are likely to produce the greatest economic and/or social benefits. I agree with Valerie Pueyo (2020), who, based on Berger, says that *in times of crisis, prospective helps us to think about and create desirable futures*. By observing the action deployed in recovered factories, it is possible to project a proposal for the future, because the self-managed economy is not only a way out that the working class has developed to face crisis, but it must be seen as a perspective of a future economy as an alternative to neoliberal capitalism.

Emancipation/Alienation

I choose to explain Marx’s emancipation/alienation binomial because in recovered factories workers managed to emancipate themselves. To the author, alienation resides in the strangeness of the work performed by a worker and emancipation in the use of his free and creative time. Work is external to the worker and only satisfies his essential needs. Alienation then has to do with the relation of the worker to the object of his work and to his own activity, which in both cases are alien to him and do not belong to him. The process of these recovered factories went from alienation to emancipation when

their workers became owners of their actions and of their decisions. Both, the object of work and the process become meaningful through their appropriation. The ability to negotiate constitutes a form of emancipation of work from the domination of capital and are at the heart of the political debate on the future of work.

But above all it appears the essential of emancipation which is the creativity and inventiveness put in value to solve a complex and adverse situation.

Why is Self-Management the Key in the Recovered Factories?

The self-management experience allows the appropriation of material resources and transforms the old capitalist management into a management technique at the service of workers. Production-units self-management processes contributed to the development of a new management model that linked the factories with other actors and social movements. A new proposal for cooperativism appeared and modified the inherited work processes. Workers' control over the production process strengthens a new management technology that encompasses all aspects. Through their actions, these organisations recovered terms such as "common wellbeing" and "citizenship".

Palomino (2020) says that currently, much of business literature on personal management, under the title of "new form of management" reflects this relationship between capital and labor proposed in the recovered factories. Expert advise delegating and empowering. The authority and control of workers should be exercised with a view to ensuring their loyalty and the organisations of work should be a responsibility and commitment of each one.

4 Result

Recovered factories are part of a collective experience in the midst of a violent economic, productive and social crisis. Those recovered factories are a reflection of the impossibility of postponing. The actions taken were necessary in order to keep their jobs, clients, colleagues, knowledge, skills, raw materials, among others. The urgency appears in the face of the crisis through unthinkable or non-existent events, which led them to change the paradigm since the system was put in check.

As for the initial question of what the transition will be like after crisis' times, one possible answer is what happened in the recovered factories as they moved from a pyramidal and hierarchical organisational culture to cooperative and solidarity-based forms. To stop obeying and to make their own decisions. By building a collective identity from their labor practices. By transforming alienation into labor emancipation by negotiating their working conditions. By making their own decisions about work processes. By directing change and adapting it to their purposes through inventiveness and creativity.

The most common words used by them are self-management and autonomy, masters of their destiny, but also cooperation, learning and inventiveness. All these actions contribute to think and build our future work.

5 Discussion

With the Pandemic, processes that were in developing stage or embryonic state had to be implemented urgently. Making the parallelism with the approach to recovered factories,

a possibility of analysis appears here to take into account in future labor situations. If we think of the Argentine case as a test laboratory on an event that transformed the reference situation and that was replicated in our continent and in Europe, it may help us to inhabit other crises.

But, as ergonomists, what have we learned while going through this experience under urgency?

Some ideas -that must continue to evolve-, have shown us that the possibility of projecting ourselves towards a new horizon should not be based on prescription but on proscription. We must use prospective to think the future because prospective ergonomics is concerned with future needs. As ergonomists our work is built with each client. The impossibility of going to the field leads us to create new and hybrid ways of approach. We were also able to see which professional sectors, with protocolized urgency, had to resort to the non-protocolized knowledge of experience so that the system would not collapse. In urgency, action is reactive, so, the novelty in urgency will be our inventive capacity. To inhabit uncertainty, ergonomists should be able to rethink our own work collectively.

6 Conclusion

In the face of the crisis, it seems necessary to build a “culture of exception”, based on cooperation, solidarity, self-management, assembly and care for others.

A democratic use of scientific knowledge appears as central in the linkage of researchers and workers, but more important is the product of this linkage, since the idea of action-research allows the appropriation of knowledge. One way of thinking about current and future work is to analyze the actions implemented by workers facing urgency and uncertainty produced by the paradigm shift and the globalized conflict. The object of knowledge is to pursue certainty so as to direct change according to genuinely human goals and interests.

Although crises change in scale, urgency and uncertainty will be repeated, it will then be necessary for us to integrate them as a constant in life and work. Future work will be variable, contextually mutable, articulated with other knowledge, circumstantial and labile. Workers will be more creative and will absorb change more quickly. Apparently, change will be the constant.

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