Production Line Work Monotonous To Theorists

The production line worker is probably a lot happier in his specialized routine than social scientists give him credit for being, a special study indicates.

William P. Sexton, formerly of the labor relations staff of Western Electric Co. and now a management professor at the University of Notre Dame, suggests that theorists are more horrified by routine work than the people who perform it.

His study, he says, has convinced him that for many people such routine work is ideal.

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WRITING IN Management of Personnel Quarterly, published by the Bureau of Industrial Relations, University of Michigan Graduate School of Business Administration, Sexton notes that modern industrial growth has increased the need for managers to regulate and control workers for the sake of efficiency.

"So structured are such jobs that a worker may be required to do little more than tighten a bolt, check a dimension, or clean a surface on an inexhaustible stream of identical parts," the author writes. "Some thinkers contend that this structuring of behavior has a psychologically devastating effect on the worker."

Sexton sampled nearly 200 employes in a large Midwestern electronics firm, studied their reactions to routine work, and came up with these general conclusions:

1. A job structure perceived by a worker as being rigid has no devastating effect upon his satisfaction of his higher level egoistic needs (sense of independence, creativity, and the like).

2. The theory that the close restrictions required for effective production would tend to reduce individual job satisfactions should be rejected.

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WHILE SOME JOBS "offer little opportunity to express oneself and become involved," Sexton says, many things would lead toward a higher satisfaction.

He cites three: satisfaction of a need for security; the sensation of being "freed" by a highly structured job; and the existence of stable expectations.

Security for the average industrial worker means more than financial incentives, he explains. "It might include the need for highly predictable interaction patterns, for stability in the job, and for freedom from the personal threat of the unfamiliar or unusual.

"Scientists and engineers would probably be repulsed by this prospect, but certainly there is a great difference here in aptitude, in temperament, and, more basically, in value systems. Those who label present-day work monotonous and boring are speaking for themselves."

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IN A PRACTICAL way, the line worker may have more freedom and variety in his job than his counterpart, the staff assistant, Sexton maintains.

"For the most part, the staff assistant must concentrate upon his work. The line worker's concentration, in contrast, is not wholly required in the performance of his job; perhaps it is he who is actually enjoying a sense of freedom!"

Sexton emphasizes the confusion between monotony and habit. We dress, eat, and walk every day in much the same way, but these activities are not monotonous; they are habitual.

"The task is not monotonous unless the individual is forced to concentrate on it," he adds. "The worker whose job is highly structured can, in great measure, direct his mental processes to whatever he desires."

In such a job, the author explains, a worker "would be free to socialize with fellow workers and, after a fashion, initiate his own activities autonomously."

Classes Prepare For Jobs

To prepare college-bound students for interim employment, an intensified course in office procedures will be offered by the vocational education department of Farmington schools.

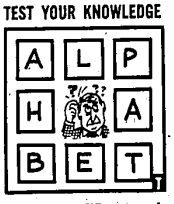
Included will be classes in electric typewriting, use of transcribing equipment, tenkey and full-keyboard adding machine operation, calculator operation, duplicating and copying equipment usage, data processing, filing techniques, office procedures, shorthand and transcription.

Required to enroll are one semester of typing, satisfactory grades, completion of 10th grade, a personal interview with the project director and approval by counselor and screening committee.

Special features of the program will be individualized instruction with class size limited to 20, use of electronic laboratory facilities, single concept films and programmed instruction designed to fit the individual.

Classes will be held from 8 a.m. to 12 noon Monday through Friday, June 19 to Aug. 9. Inquiries should be directed to the director of vocational education, 476-9215.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE



How many different words can you make with the letters above? Six is fair, 12 is good, 18 is excellent, and anything over 20 is brilliant. People's names don't count.

According to word experts at Milton Bradley, a leading game company, word games not only entertain but also help us to build up our vocabulary. Foresight, one of the company's most popular games, lets you test your ability to build words in an exciting, fun-filled way. The Foresight game is available from local merchants.

What is the maximum number of words that can be made from the above letters? No one can say for sure. But below (and upside down) are some of them.

Abate, able, ale, alp, ape, apt, ate, babe, bale, bate, bat, bath, blat, blast, bleat, bet, beta, blab, bla, bla, bla