

Importance of skills: standards of living + equality in the work place

Debate: is capitalism going to raise or diminish living standards?

Three views on capitalist employment: (which explain the historical direction of skill change)

1. **Deskilling** “pessimists”: skilled labour is eliminated due to the introduction of new technologies.
Skill: job content and task-specific training
Mechanization and management control
2. **Upskilling** “optimists”: technology lead to a rise in education
Skill: decision making and problem solving responsibilities.
3. **Polarization** combines elements of both upskilling and deskilling

Deskilling

Braverman:

- Book “*Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*”: analysis of the impact of capitalism on work. A critic of the growing degradation of work: the deskilling of job.
- Focused on American in the 20th century.
- Neomaxist: he applied the Marx’s theories: workers are constrained economically by the absence of alternatives to sell their labour powers to employers.

Industrial Capitalism: to create profit the capitalist must employ human labour to create value in commodities:

Labour process theory: process whereby labour is materialized to create goods and services (long-standing theory).



There may be unequal power and potential antagonistic relations

May lead to low effort from workers. → Effort is on manager’s interest.

Problem of labour control: workers sell their labour time but not effort.

In an attempt to solve this problem, capitalists turned to the developments in management and machinery. The concerns with labour control dictated the choice of technology.

Eg. Assembly line (the speed dictate efficiency) → This lead to **deskilling**

Main forces deriving deskilling

1. Automation: increasing use of technology replace labour
2. Taylorism: as the key strategy for labour control “how best to control alienated labour”
F.W. Taylor (1856) – American engineer who worked on efficiency → scientific management
He argued that managers should study the organization of work for optimization

Taylorism

Braverman distinguished 3 components:

1. Systematically gather knowledge of production processes
2. Break down process into its simple parts
(Knowledge in hands of managers)
3. Workers responsible for very simple, standardized tasks

Goal: Separation of conception from execution, higher efficiency, higher economic rerurns

Mechanism: task allocation + time study → motion study (later via the *Gilbreths*)

Today: widely adopted through the US and other industrialized economies (services as well as manufacturing)

Eg. McDonald’s brothers in 1948 divided the food preparation into separate tasks performed by different workers.

The principles of factory assembly line applied to a commercial kitchen.

Eric Schlosser “the new division of labour meant that a worker only had to be taught how to perform one task.”

However, it is argued that the ideas of Braverman are only one position/ view of M

Braverman → One view/position of Marx

Many Marxists disagreed: control imperative does not imply necessary deskilling

As managers need commitment from workers.