

**Grasset Yves** (about to be published), "*Collectif de travail / Work Team*", in Agnès Vandeveldé-Rougale & Pascal Fugier (eds.), *Dictionnaire de sociologie clinique/ Dictionary of Clinical Sociology*.

## **Work team**

Working means partaking of a collective, inserting one's contribution into a whole, and - most often - having team members, pairs or not, sharing a common job or not.

The team is much more than a collection of added individuals, or – to borrow Aristotle's stance – "the whole means far more than the sum of its parts". It largely contributes to giving sense and value to work. The team allows each working individual to dialog, to feel comforted, to apprehend, to put things into perspective, to adjust one's practice. When faced to difficulties, one can dig into shared experience, to bring forth pragmatic solutions allowing at times to move away from prescriptions, to think and distance more from what one lives or feels. The team grants security. When active, it develops its own rituals and key moments : it has traditions and codes.

Yet the team confines us as much as it supports us, for a linking is dual: it makes us dependant on it, it ties us.

### **A threatened cohesive link**

Sociologists belonging to organisations have long considered that links very much depended on what workers imported to work from their strong identity belonging (their social, geographical, religious, political, or trade union... origins), Things are quite reversed nowadays : the links strongly depend on work itself. Though "*the end of work*" has been proclaimed, after Jeremy Rifkin's - the American economist - word had been relayed by diverse thinkers during the 1990s, the reinforcement of the position of work is more and more testified. "After which progress could work have been interpreted as the privileged means of self realization for individuals and as the root of social linking for society ? " asks Dominique Meda (1995) for instance. The centrality of work, its hold, the subjective implication expected from us enforce the need for team work. It becomes precisely essential to limit the dependance on work and allow to breathe and digest, whether in an ordinary or a constrained situation.

The psychosocial consequences of the change to a 35 hours a week work in the hospital sector in France have, for example, just pointed out that need for a time of exchange for nursing staffs outside their task situations with patients. The drastic reduction of those more or less formal moments between team members (rest times, debriefings, user-friendly sequences) concretely generated by the process of evolving worktime has in that precise case largely contributed to the retreat of cooperation and the downgrading of links in a field that, besides, is so much faced with professional wearing.

However the fast changings in organisations now wanting to be "agile " such as a cult to urgency, ceaseless sollicitations from the management, the incited rivalry between workers, the acquired part of new technologies, the development of virtual communities, the multiplied ephemeral links, after the sociologist François Ascher's word, fragilize the stable and durable links up to turning the deficit of team work into a major concern as far as health and safety at work are concerned.

## Revitalize teams to efficiently fight against risks at work

Recessing team work contributes to a rise of psychosocial risks at work (Grasset *et al.* 2011) in a sense that a worker or an agent confronted to a difficulty or to violence cannot often refer of what one feels or notices to the practice or judgement of one's team workers. The declining sense of a common destiny previously generated by a longtime lasting work - eventually an all lifelong one – the generalized merchandization of services (child charge, maintaining aged people at home... ) formerly assumed by the family or a relational network (Linhart 2009) further degrade links, and further act against living together. Intervening on those risks with their obvious psychic consequences puts the deletion of collectives at the centre of the findings. What is worse, it henceforth frequently occurs that the collective precisely represents the apparent source of one's problems in the mind of a worker.

Some managing practices accelerate the fragilisation, particularly when they sharpen the rivalry between wage-earners or agents. Thus, the client/provider relationship developing between services within a single company, the permanent 'benchmarking' (Dujarier 2015), the individual evaluation interview of operators, the "taste for figures" (the overpowering measuring tendency to evaluate and define work) all have an effect that devitalizes the collectives, checks the development of confidence links which, on the contrary, require stability and shared experience to develop. However, the weakening of collectives prove counter-productive for a firm as long as the wage-earners lose the opportunity to adapt to difficulties due to the want of exchange spaces. They, thus, remain alone and sometimes powerless and distraught with their interpretations.

The good health and the development of collectives only can constitute a priority goal for intervening in a firm, that intervention being or not linked to the goal of solving a crisis. To last, work requires a breathing, an ability to share between team-workers, if only to confront the destructive paradoxes for mental health that the evolution of the always wanting more economy generates, (Gaulejac & Hanique 2015)

Recreating timeless conditions of exchange on work, on the difficulties to carry that out, anticipating the effects of the transformations to maintain the confidence and cooperation links between wage-earners must become a central concern in the very interest of the firm, to tend to a quality of life at work.

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### Correlative themes :

The culture of urgency, group dynamics, social linking, PSR (Psychosocial risks), meaning, the meaning of work, acts of violence in the field of work.