

Henri Savall

# WORK & PEOPLE

An Economic Evaluation  
of Job-Enrichment



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## An Economic Evaluation of Job-Enrichment

*by*

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## FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

The early steps toward job-enlargement and job-enrichment were focused on reversing the dehumanizing effects of Taylorism. Important as it was for the individuals involved, the work-structure issue was a local one, unconnected with the global strategic problems of the enterprise.

Today, some half-century after the seminal Hawthorne experiments, the purpose and design of work have become one of the central issues in society's transition into the post-Industrial Era. From a functional concern of the personnel manager, it has become one of the key issues in the design and the strategy of the firm.

The issue is conflict-laden as a result of several conflicting tendencies:

- (1) the disappearance of the Protestant ethic of hard work and its replacement by as yet poorly articulated expectations for self-fulfilment and positive non-economic rewards through work;
- (2) the inexorable march of technology which continues to make attractive automation, routinization, and standardization of work;
- (3) the emergence of the right to a job as a societal norm at a time when job formation is not keeping up with the growth of the labour pool;
- (4) the (frequently implicit) assumption that the economic standard of living in the Western world can continue to improve at the same time that the work-week is made shorter, work easier, and while full employment is maintained.

It is clear from these tendencies that the purpose and meaning of work in the post-Industrial society will be determined through a complex and subtle interplay of human, technological, and economic factors. But the historical progress in definition of work has been one-sided. Taylorism treated work as an economic-technological phenomenon. The post-Taylor development swung the pendulum to the other extreme and focused on the human variables. In industry this focus was frequently justified on an implicit assumption 'that the happy worker is a productive worker', and that new work participation and enrichment schemes will continue to bring about increased productivity. Outside industry, psychologists and sociologists, unfamiliar and unconcerned with problems of economic productivity and profitability, frequently neglected altogether the economic consequences of work redesign. They tended to treat work enrichment almost as 'wages of sin' which the firm must pay in order to atone for the excesses of Taylorism.

In this book Savall advocates a multi-disciplinary integration of the humanist and techno-economic perspectives. His focus is on an economist's contribution to this restructuring through two major aspects:

measuring the economic consequences, including all hidden social costs, of changes in the work structure

developing a measuring apparatus 'which spotlights the "real and complete" comparative costs of the different forms of the job-design'.

In the latter aspect he includes proxy criteria which assure 'proper and decent working conditions' (see page 00).

Thus his viewpoint is that of an economist who treats social aspects of work-satisfaction as constraints. When and if Savall's contribution is married to those of humanist job designers, the pendulum of the perspective on job design will move towards the centre position at which the trade-offs between the positive humanist and the economic criteria, which Savall advocates, can be made in an explicit and measured manner.

H. IGOR ANSOFF

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The major part of the present work was published in 1975 under the title *Enrichir le travail humain dans les entreprises et les organisations*. The book was written in the summer of 1974 at which time the socio-economic approach to working conditions was very much an innovation, in an area where psycho-sociology and ergonomics reigned supreme.

When, in 1976, the Délégation Générale à la Recherche Scientifique et Technique (DGRST) asked for projects dealing with the improvement of working conditions to be submitted, it made no specific mention of the economic aspect. Of the 120 research projects consequently submitted only very few mentioned an economic approach. Only one of a dozen or so research projects that were awarded DGRST grants was specifically concerned with a socio-economic analysis.<sup>1</sup>

Not until late 1976 did people become aware of the interest that a socio-economic approach to working conditions might have. One year later it was very satisfying to observe that my ideas had made headway and had gained a foothold in numerous sectors of the economy where decisions about encouragement and analysis of working conditions were taken.

In 1976 L. Stoleru, Secretary of State for manual workers, asked the French Foundation for Management Education (FNEGE) to set up a working party to examine the contribution made by compulsory schooling to the improvement of working conditions. The working party was led by the head of training, communication, and management of the Pechiny Ugine Kuhlmann group, M. Jacques Morin. It comprised industrialists, civil servants, and educationalists. It published its findings<sup>2</sup> in February 1977 and recommended that all the disciplines currently on the syllabus should be taught from an all-embracing *socio-economic* point of view. A working party of FNEGE teachers is currently continuing its investigations along these lines with the aim of producing concise details for the content of such a syllabus, and bringing them to the notice of the heads of institutes of higher education.

The Ministry of Employment has now inserted a clause into agreements made with companies which benefit from FACT grants (Fondation d'Amélioration des Conditions de Travail) to the effect that there should be an *economic* evaluation of the experiments carried out.

In 1977 ANACT (l'Agence Nationale pour l'Amélioration des Conditions de Travail) set up two study groups, one into the methodology of multi-disciplinary evaluation (*economic*, sociological, ergonomic) of job-restructuring in industry, the other into the *economic evaluation* of attempts to improve working conditions. Under the auspices of ANACT, methodologies are being worked out and applied in various companies. On the one hand are the companies which belong to the Institut Entreprise et Personnel, on the other hand are the companies

which are in receipt of FACT grants. In addition the Secretary of State has given ANACT and FNEGE the task of organizing a pilot course for training people in charge of training. A large part of this course is devoted to the *socio-economic* approach.

Since 1977 several large French firms and a number of training centres have been offering training courses which include a *socio-economic* approach (investment models, evaluation of working conditions, decision-making for projects dealing with the improvement of working conditions).

Trade-union journals and others gave a very favourable reception to the first edition of this book. It shows the extent to which all sides of industry are beginning to realize how important is the *economic aspect* of working conditions. Industrial negotiation is now, in fact, allocating a much more important role to the improvement of working conditions.

All the above results have led to the idea of a new edition of *Enrichir le travail humain* . . . with a new, more appropriate title. This new edition contains a new chapter devoted to the methodology which I have worked out and which is at present being tested. There is also a complementary bibliography. In the near future it is hoped to bring out a second volume containing a complete and operational methodology of socio-economic evaluation and giving the results obtained by a number of French companies which have agreed to apply the system of evaluation.

We should like to thank first of all Henri Bartoli, Alain Bienaymé, Jacques Delors, Jean-Daniel Reynaud, and Henri Tezenas du Montcel for all the advice given during the preprparation of this book.

We are indebted to Yves Delamotte, Pierre-Louis Remy, and Oscar Ortsman for their invitation to attend the March 1974 Royaumont conference on new forms of job design. This important conference was organized by the French Foundation for Management Education (FNEGE) under the auspices of the Minister of Employment. Participants included experts from the Tavistock Institute, London, and a number of their Dutch and Norwegian colleagues.

Finally our thanks are due to those industrialists, consultants, and researchers who supplied us with valuable documents and gave us the benefit of their practical experience.

## NOTES

- (1) Cf. the research programme run by H. Savall, 'Conditions de Travail' (University of Lyon II and École Supérieure de Commerce de Lyon), with the support of the DGRST and the FNEGE.
- (2) H. Savall was the general secretary of this working party. The report was compiled by H. Savall and Messrs Agid and Bernard of the FNEGE, and Mlle Théophile of the CFSM. Cf. also H. Savall, 'Formation et conditions de vie au travail', *Revue française de gestion*, May 1977, and 'Propositions en vue de développer la contribution de la formation initiale à l'amélioration des conditions de vie au travail', in *Enseignement et gestion*, no. 3, 1977.

## FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

In this book Henri Savall deals with a subject which has been at the forefront of discussion for several years. In spite of the vast quantity of documentation which the author so carefully refers to, this is an area which has not been the object of a great deal of close investigation. This is especially so in France.

Job-enrichment requires a multi-disciplinary scientific approach. Henri Savall is an economist by training and is well versed in the history of economic thought, as shown in his work on Bernacer, one of Keynes's forerunners. He has been able to put right a number of mistaken ideas about traditional doctrines, especially where F. W. Taylor is concerned.

If one were to keep to traditional presentations of the theory of labour supply and demand, the price of labour would be a mere caricature of the working conditions which workers are in reality faced with on the job. Seen from this angle, the sizeable and relatively continual increase in the purchasing power of the average wage hides the extent to which workers in their workshops, factories, and offices really perceive a deterioration in their condition.

The author examines a number of experiments that are being carried out and tries to determine the results which we can expect. He then endeavours to demonstrate how the economic approach to problems concerning work could be revised so as to enlighten management about the possibilities and advantages of modifying organization methods. Although the accounting techniques which the author suggests are open to discussion, his hypothesis is a most fruitful one. We have to analyse the performance of any organization from two points of view: the external performance which is expected by society at large based on the specific vocation of the particular enterprise (car-production, services, etc.) and the internal performance based on the aspirations of the workers. No enterprise can remain competitive unless it can offer attractive working conditions.

Henri Savall's study raises new questions. On the level of scientific knowledge we have to ask ourselves whether a strategy of organizational change which implies long-term expenditure on fixed assets can be based on such a fleeting reality as the workers' psychological satisfaction. At the risk of drifting into an exclusively 'functionalist' view of things, any in-depth research has to cover both the complex trade union attitude and the demands made by the reorganization of the enterprise.

At a time when government bodies are dealing with the conclusions drawn by the Sudreau Report, the publication of this book is most opportune. It will break new ground. It is our hope and belief that the author will carry on with the research he has begun, an undertaking which will



rightly throw out the artificial and 'disappointing' opposing of economic and social elements.

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## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

When Henri Savall decided to devote his complementary thesis to the enrichment of human work, he wanted, above all, to reintroduce the economic dimension to an area in which it appeared that psychology and sociology reigned supreme. He knew how difficult his task would be and that he could only hope to make a small contribution to a non-finite discourse. Although experiments in the improvement of working conditions are making rapid headway in certain countries, they are still rare in the world of the production of goods and services, a world which is dominated by Taylorism, automation, and constraints imposed by the computer.

This explains the author's chosen angle of attack. His aim has been to give a historical summary and explanation of the problems involved in job-design so as to give both researchers and practitioners the essential ideas and necessary bibliography. The former can thereby extend their research; the latter can deepen their knowledge with a view to taking action.

Three current experiments, each with its own specificity, have been used to focus the problem and to provide a useful basis for reflection: factories which are attempting to transcend the technological constraints imposed by job-fragmentation and production-line work; areas of the banking world which suffer from the demands made by computerization and which are consequently faced with the problems of an over-qualified, psychologically ill-at-ease workforce; a company which is looking for and experimenting with a method by which to involve its workers in a discussion about their own working conditions and enable them to participate in the actual improvement of those conditions. The sum total of these three cases is, of course, not representative of all the problems raised by the enrichment of human work. By examining them, however, we are able to understand in a more lively and precise way the major difficulties encountered by the people conducting the experiments.

From this basis, Henri Savall has attempted to draw up an inventory of the factors which have to be taken into account in organizational innovation. No doubt his analyses will lead to both reflection and controversy. In an area as new as this, where the ground is still virtually unbroken, there is not enough factual information to enable one to make a neat division between the different theses available. There are, at least to my mind, a number of questions to be answered: how will the various attitudes and behaviour patterns develop? What will be the function of work in society tomorrow? How strong will the rejection of fragmented, monotonous work be? Will those involved — Government, management, workers and their unions — have converging or radically opposing strategies?

It is a question of social change in the full sense of the term. It is easy to understand that the author did not want to introduce his practical proposals for

an economic and financial evaluation of the enrichment of human work without first having considered the central problem of the path to be taken and the strategy to be adopted.

For the same reasons he could do nothing more than erect a few signposts. By working in this way the author remained true to his initial motivation not to be afraid of taking paths which were still unclear, full of obstacles, and largely unexplored. This demanded a great deal of intellectual courage and a mind bent on action. As a result the author has been able to put forward an accounting system which is both simple and rigorous, and which will tempt a large number of potential users by its practical nature.

I find that Henri Savall's suggested procedure is all the more useful in that he has attempted to extend traditional limits and examine social indicators. I know well that very fruitful research has been carried out with a view to measuring working conditions by means of a battery of social indicators.<sup>1</sup> This has led to extensive progress in measuring large-scale social phenomena. It still remains, however, to integrate these findings into an accounting system which enables one to link means and objectives, to evaluate the results of policies where the cost of carrying them out is known.

The method suggested in this book is not a substitute for what has just been mentioned. It is at one and the same time simpler and more immediately operational. There are four elements which have been selected: absenteeism, turnover, rejects, physical productivity. It is relatively easy to evaluate their cost or monetary yield. Thereafter it is easy to integrate the quantified findings into a table which will allow one to measure the financial advantage accruing from new ways of working. Although such accounts may not reflect every aspect of economic, social, and psychological reality, they do provide a practical basis both for the problems involved in the decision and for the emergence of a social dialogue. In this way workers' and managements representatives can use these findings in discussing the experiments being undertaken and the sharing-out of the benefits arising from the new working conditions. Workers and unions are reticent about projects for improving working conditions where they are unable to measure the underlying aims, the means of implementation by the workers themselves, and the calculated advantages. Knowing this, it is important to underline the tangible contribution made by Henri Savall's suggested accounting system.

For this reason I hope that management and unions will take up and experiment with the tool which Henri Savall is offering them. Without any doubt this would be the best test possible.

Later on it will be possible to improve and then extend our measuring instruments to cover all the findings, not merely economic, but also psychological and social. The test and the sanction will then be the operational value of the social indicators, something which has still to be demonstrated.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. Roustang *et al.*, *Pour une analyse des conditions de travail ouvrier dans L'entreprise*, Armand Colin, Paris, 1975. This publication is based on research carried out by the Laboratoire d'Économie et de Sociologie du Travail in Aix-en-Provence.

The present work is one which forces us, with good reason, to stop and think for a moment about the effort involved in reconciling the economic and the social aspect of man at work.

It is one of the author's merits that he attacks the unhealthy division which is to be found everywhere in numerous economic and social comments. It is not that harmony between the economic and the social aspect is a matter of course, or that harmony can come about without having to encounter and overcome certain conditions, but it is because the opposition between the two has given rise to forms of deviation which we have to condemn over and over again. The social aspect must never be thought of as the 'salvation army' of the economic aspect, as a sort of latter-day correction of certain excesses induced by a kind of purely rational economic reasoning. For my part I have always advocated integrating both dimensions, be it a question of planning development, or be it a question of dealing in a specific way with a social question. If the economic aspect produces social consequences, the social aspect in itself is both the condition of and reason for economic activity.

The present study of the enterprise brings us a new illustration of this debate.

Henri Savall is right to challenge the traditional concept of economic man. Of Taylor's 'vision of the world' he declares: 'There are three grounds for complaint against Taylor. He believes that work can be rationalized by reducing or suppressing initiative and stimulants (except wages), thereby ending up with another variety of a familiar monster: homo economicus at work, and thereby plagiarizing one of the most sterile creations of political economy of the last two centuries.'

Still speaking of Taylor, he adds: 'He believes that the impersonalization of the finality of work — productivity equally shared — should resolve *sui generis* the difficulty of social co-operation.'

This reductionist vision of man was bound to stir up political, social, and ideological disagreement. Marx criticized both the classical economists and Taylor when he contested the equity of the sharing between capital and labour. He also criticized the capitalist division of labour as something which 'cripples the worker and turns him into a sort of monster'. Writing about the working classes in England, Engels had already condemned the pitiable routine of endless toil, where the same mechanical process is repeated endlessly. He equated work with the labour of Sisyphus; like the rock, the weight of work falls back down on to the exhausted worker. Of the effects of capitalist production Marx said that the worker does not dominate his working conditions, but is dominated by them.

Such references are used to indicate the roots of a dispute which was to be taken up by the trade-union struggles of the late nineteenth century. By referring to man in his entirety, this movement was to take up arms in a never-ending battle for the defence of the worker's integrity, for the recognition of his whole personality. Even if, at certain moments in the history of labour or in certain countries, it has seemed as though a purely instrumentalist concept of

trade-union objectives has triumphed, i.e. the emphasis placed on the external advantages to be gained from paid employment (direct wage, social advantages, working hours, . . .), the defence of man's integrity has never been forgotten. This defence was based on, amongst other things, a non-reductionist concept and therefore on a rejection of *homo economicus*.

For a long time work-theoreticians were to reply to this action by workers with proposals based, albeit unconsciously, on the maintenance of the division between the economic and the social aspects.

Since it was not enough to satisfy workers' demands by raising the standard of living and cutting working hours, the idea of attacking the economic environment and not the content of work itself was introduced. In this way the division was accepted. Job-design could not be altered without leading to a decrease in economic effectiveness. So it was a question of looking for new objectives 'for a new salvation army'. In particular this is the origin of the human relations school and, more recently, the social systems school. Henri Savall is right to emphasize that neither really questions the command unit, the degree of subordination, or the extent of centralization.

It is really only a question of making certain amendments to Taylor's system by using external advantages. This is not negligible, but it does not call into question *homo economicus*, i.e. the man whose potential has been mutilated, a being stripped of autonomy, prevented from having any control whatsoever over his work.

Since the late fifties there has been a movement afoot to reconcile the economic and social aspects of work. It is one of Henry Savall's merits that he has given us an illustration of this idea through an analysis of the various problems of job-design.

The motor has been wound up. How far will it run? If it is possible to integrate economic and social aspects in new concepts of job-design, will it also be easy by the same token to reconcile political projects and ideologies?

This is an area which I for one would like to discuss with the author in greater depth.

This is the way he describes the universality of the present situation: 'The economies of the Western industrialized countries, of the countries of Eastern Europe, and of Yugoslavia are all organized on the Taylor model . . . The logical conclusion is that the form of job-design appears to be independent of *existing* political, social, and economic systems and that the management of human resources towards economic ends poses universal problems, in the same way that reputedly more "objective" arts and science subjects do.'

This assertion is doubtless acceptable. The proof can be seen in the degree of interest shown by delegations from all nations of whatever political colour in the report presented by the Director General of the ILO at the 1974 Geneva Conference.

We must not, however, underestimate what one might call the socio-political

working environment or the social motivators. Although I have no wish to enter into a comparison of the various systems, I would like to stress the importance of the political and ideological dimension, be it only for the sake of a better understanding of the phenomena observed.

In other words, and to return to France, it is not possible to analyse the findings of our situation without bearing in mind the reality of our system of industrial relations: the impact of the class struggle both on the facts and on people's minds, opposition to projects from both employers and unions, the diversity of employers' concepts, the plurality of trade-union organization, the effective role of the Government . . .

For this reason I cannot agree with Henri Savall's analysis of French trade-union behaviour. He deals too summarily with the social aspect. Although he is right in saying that union attitudes are not yet fixed, he does not lay enough stress on the strategic difficulties which face trade unions at the present time.

It is, for example, not enough to illustrate his statement with the fact that neither the CGT nor the CFDT wanted to sign the national employer-union agreement on working conditions. Just before this point Henri Savall mentions the ideological reticence of the CGT. But did he ask himself about the effective value of this agreement, as did the two unions in question? It is only a matter of an outline agreement, interspersed with declarations of intent. There are, though, no concise agreements on the burning questions of shift work or piece-work. This makes it easier to understand why the two groups are opposed to the agreement. They are well acquainted with the political context they have to operate in. They know very well how their signature to the agreement would have been exploited and that their members would have been given no tangible counterpart.

It seems to me that it is impossible to appreciate the trade-union context as regards the problem of working conditions unless one bears in mind the two principal dilemmas faced by workers' representatives.

The first arises from the technique of industrial relations: which is the right level for dealing with the problem? National level, sector level, company level? A national agreement is not useful and effective unless it contains concrete undertakings which can be applied in all companies. This was the case for the July 1970 agreement on Continuing Education, which all the unions signed. The details of the study-leave system were sufficiently simple to enable them to be applied in all companies. This was not the case for the 1975 agreement on working conditions. It was vague on topics which required homogeneity; it was by its very nature incapable of touching on the other subjects, the diversity of which prevented their being dealt with at national level. It would have been more sensible to have envisaged another strategy based on experimentation at company level and to have allocated the necessary means to help and encourage any action which aimed at job-enrichment. Lessons could then have been learnt from facts and results.

As for the second dilemma, it is the trade unions themselves who will have to

solve it. It is too easy to criticize the ideological opposition of certain unions. In reality such unions have to take account of the workers' state of mind, their awareness of the problems, the risks of mystification which threaten them. The French trade-union movement has always been faced by the following alternatives: it can either bolster up its ideological critique of society by stressing the shortcomings of capitalist society, at the risk of seeing the workers criticize the ineffectiveness of its action; or it can risk weakening its own role by obtaining, through struggle and negotiation, substantial improvements in workers' moral and material well-being. Depending on the time, depending on the problems, the trade-union movement has taken one or other of these risks. It has certainly been guilty of errors of judgement. It has sometimes underestimated the importance of a problem raised by the Government or by employers. But it has, on the other hand, often been right, either because the facts have justified *a posteriori* its refusal to enter into a particular kind of co-operation, or because it knew the way things would turn out.

Be that as it may, the important thing is that the person engaged on research in economics and social sciences in our country does not forget, whatever his personal preferences are, the trade-union and industrial-relations dimension. I make so bold as to add that this remark is equally applicable to those politicians and industrialists who are genuinely interested in undertaking some form of realistic and effective action and at the same time respecting the political and ideological pluralism on which our society is founded.

JACQUES DELORS

## CONTENTS

<b>Foreword to the second edition</b>	v
<b>Preface to the second edition</b>	vii
<b>Foreword to the first edition</b>	ix
<b>Preface to the first edition</b>	xi
 <b>INTRODUCTION</b>	 1
A. Factual Observation: a troubled present	1
i. <i>The recent disputes</i>	1
ii. <i>The conditions of life at work</i>	2
iii. <i>The universality of the situation</i>	4
B. The economic approach to new forms of job-design	6
i. <i>The historical precedence of the contribution from psychologists and sociologists</i>	6
ii. <i>The theoretical insufficiency of the socio-psychological view</i>	6
iii. <i>The pragmatic insufficiency of the socio-psychological method</i>	8
iv. <i>The area of our study</i>	9
 <b>CHAPTER 1 – THE PROBLEM OF JOB DESIGN</b>	 13
1. The heritage of the past	13
A. The dominant theory questioned	13
i. <i>Taylorism and its substitutes</i>	13
(a) <i>F. W. Taylor's theory</i>	13
(b) <i>Scientific management or the classical school of organization</i>	16
ii. <i>The criticisms</i>	18
(a) <i>Taylorism and its deviations or caricatures</i>	18
(b) <i>The effects of Taylorism</i>	19
<i>The instrumental concept of man at work</i>	19
<i>Technological hegemony</i>	19
<i>The reasons for progressive deviationism</i>	20
(c) <i>The Taylor paradox and the internal contradictions of Taylorism</i>	21
<i>The development of the perverse effects of Taylorism</i>	22
<i>Unavoided wastage</i>	22
<i>The entropy of the work system</i>	23
iii. <i>The palliatives</i>	24
(a) <i>Compensations-deviations</i>	24
<i>Time spent at work and productivity</i>	25
<i>Reduction in the number of hours worked – a necessary and insufficient condition</i>	28
(b) <i>The incorporation of categories of less-qualified and/or more docile workers</i>	29



B.	The theories inspired by human and social sciences	32
i.	<i>The amendments to Taylorism</i>	32
	(a) <i>The need to understand the enterprise in its entirety, as a really living being</i>	32
	(b) <i>The school of human relations</i>	33
	(c) <i>The social systems school</i>	35
ii.	<i>Taylorism overtaken</i>	36
	(a) <i>The French forerunners</i>	36
	(b) <i>The dichotomy of motivation to work: F. Herzberg</i>	39
	(c) <i>A synthetic vocation theory: the socio-technical approach</i>	43
2.	The present and the future of work	47
A.	The duality of the work universe	47
i.	<i>A growing gap between the quality of the world of work and economic performance</i>	47
ii.	<i>The myth of the incompatibility between the quality of life and productivity</i>	49
iii.	<i>The heterogeneity of the work milieu</i>	49
B.	A refusal to accept the gap and the duality	50
i.	<i>Towards a reconciliation of the old contradictions</i>	50
ii.	<i>A twofold difficulty to overcome</i>	51
	(a) <i>Forces of inertia: education, mentality, economic interests</i>	51
	(b) <i>The necessity for change to be reckoned in economic terms</i>	52

## CHAPTER 2 – EXPERIMENTAL SOLUTIONS 60

1.	Descriptive study: attempt at a concise typology	60
A.	The conflictual origin of the experiments	60
B.	Typology of the experimented solutions	60
i.	<i>Timorous solutions: job-enlargement and job-rotation</i>	60
ii.	<i>Job-enrichment</i>	62
iii.	<i>Semi-autonomous groups</i>	63
iv.	<i>Diverse solutions relating to the environment</i>	71
	(a) <i>Arrangement of working-time</i>	71
	(b) <i>The decline of the payment-by-results system</i>	74
C.	Three French examples	76
i.	<i>The Renault projects</i>	76
	(a) <i>The circumstances</i>	76
	(b) <i>Running the experiments</i>	76
	(c) <i>The over-all evaluation of working conditions</i>	79
ii.	<i>The Crédit Lyonnais projects</i>	83
	(a) <i>The circumstances</i>	83
	(b) <i>Two job-enrichment experiments</i>	84
iii.	<i>The BSN-Gervais-Danone projects</i>	86
	(a) <i>The circumstances</i>	86
	(b) <i>The planning of new forms of job-design</i>	87
D.	The methods of experimentation	89
i.	<i>The field</i>	90
	(a) <i>The definition of the experiments</i>	90