

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Sociología del trabajo

Idioma: EN

EXAM STATEMENT:

No materials may be used. The exam consists of two topics. The first must be summarised in an outline. The use of bullet points or numbering (with at least three levels of detail) is recommended to express the structure of the content. Your presentation should not exceed one side of a sheet of paper. The outline must contain the main theses of each section. The second topic should be as extensive and detailed as possible, taking into account the time available (90 minutes for the entire examination). Pay special attention to your handwriting and spelling. Repeated spelling mistakes may result in failure.

Question 1: To summarise in an outline: The reorganisation of work or Fordism after Fordism (I): Fordism in motion; subcontracting, offshoring and global production chains; Fordism 2.0; Fordism in services.

Question 2: To develop: The Coming of Post-Industrial Society

Question 1

To summarise in an outline: The reorganisation of work or Fordism after Fordism (I): Fordism in motion; subcontracting, offshoring and global production chains; Fordism 2.0; Fordism in services.

STUDENT RESPONSE:

I. Fordism in Motion

A. Limits of Traditional Fordism

1. Rigidity & Inflexibility: Inability to respond to market fluctuations.
2. Mass Production Saturation: Declining demand for standardized goods.
3. Labor Unrest: Increasing worker dissatisfaction with repetitive tasks.

B. Spatial Dispersion of Production

1. Breaking Down the Integrated Factory: Decentralization of production processes.
2. Increased Flexibility: Adapting to changing consumer demands and market conditions.
3. Rise of Specialized Producers: Focus on specific components or stages of production.

II. Subcontracting, Offshoring and Global Production Chains

A. Subcontracting

1. Outsourcing Non-Core Activities: Firms focus on core competencies.
2. Increased Flexibility & Reduced Costs: Adapting to demand, lowering labor expenses.
3. Weakening of Employment Bonds: Rise of precarious work arrangements.

B. Offshoring

1. Relocation to Lower-Cost Countries: Seeking cheaper labor, reduced regulation.
2. Global Commodity Chains (GCCs): Complex networks of production and distribution.
3. Fragmentation of Production: Dispersal of production across national borders.

C. Global Production Chains

1. Value Capture & Control: Uneven distribution of profits along the chain.
2. Race to the Bottom: Competition driving down labor standards and wages.
3. Increased Interdependence & Vulnerability: Supply chain disruptions impact.

III. Fordism 2.0

A. Technological Advancements

1. Automation & Robotics: Increased efficiency, reduced labor needs.
2. Flexible Manufacturing Systems (FMS): Adapting to diverse product lines.
3. Lean Production: Minimizing waste and maximizing efficiency.

B. Just-in-Time (JIT) Production

1. Reduced Inventory Costs: Minimizing storage and waste.
2. Close Supplier Relationships: Collaborative planning and coordination.
3. Increased Responsiveness to Demand: Adapting quickly to changing market needs.

C. Team-Based Work Structures

1. Empowered Workers: Increased worker autonomy and responsibility.
2. Multi-Skilled Workforce: Workers capable of performing multiple tasks.
3. Improved Communication & Collaboration: Enhanced problem-solving and innovation.

IV. Fordism in Services

A. Service Sector Expansion

1. Growth of Knowledge-Based Industries: Increasing demand for skilled service workers.
 2. Commodification of Services: Applying Fordist principles to service delivery.
 3. Standardization & Routinization: Streamlining service processes for efficiency.
- B. Call Centers & Customer Service
1. Scripted Interactions: Standardization of customer service interactions.
 2. Performance Metrics & Monitoring: Tracking employee productivity and efficiency.
 3. Emotional Labor: Managing emotions to meet customer expectations.
- C. Fast-Food & Retail
1. Standardization of Products & Processes: Ensuring consistency and efficiency.
 2. Assembly-Line Service: Applying Fordist principles to service delivery.
 3. Low-Wage, Low-Skill Jobs: Precarity and limited career advancement.

Question 2

To develop: The Coming of Post-Industrial Society

STUDENT RESPONSE:

The advent of post-industrial society, as theorized most prominently by Daniel Bell, represents a significant shift in the dominant economic and social structures, moving away from a manufacturing-based economy towards one centered on information, services, and intellectual technology. This transition isn't simply a sectoral change, but a fundamental reshaping of social stratification, occupational structure, and even knowledge itself as the most important resource.

Initially, Bell identified several key characteristics defining this new era. First, the pre-eminence of the service sector. While services always existed, they become the dominant portion of economic activity, surpassing both agriculture and manufacturing in terms of employment and contribution to GDP. This isn't merely an increase in traditional personal services, but the growth of professional and technical services, healthcare, education, research, and finance – sectors reliant on a highly skilled workforce.

Second, the centrality of theoretical knowledge. Unlike previous economic revolutions powered by empirical innovation, post-industrial society is driven by advancements in theoretical science and technology. This knowledge isn't simply applied; it *is* the source of innovation and economic growth. The codification of knowledge, its rapid dissemination, and its application to problem-solving become paramount. This leads to a rise in the importance of research and development, and the creation of “knowledge workers” as a new social class.

Third, the rise of a new “professional and technical class.” This class, comprising scientists, engineers, analysts, and other highly educated professionals, replaces the industrial working class as the key agent of economic production. Their skills are non-manual, abstract, and require extensive formal education. This shift dramatically alters the class structure, potentially leading to new forms of social stratification based on access to and control of knowledge.

However, the post-industrial thesis has faced significant critique. Some argue it overemphasized the decline of manufacturing and underestimated its continued importance, particularly in a globalized economy. The concept of “deindustrialization” was often presented as a universal trend, failing to account for regional variations and the resurgence of manufacturing in certain areas.

Furthermore, critics point to the persistence of inequalities within the post-industrial economy. While the demand for highly skilled labor increases, so too does the demand for low-skilled service jobs, often characterized by precarious employment conditions and low wages. This creates a polarization of the labor market, with a shrinking middle class and growing disparities between the “knowledge elite” and those employed in routine, low-paying service work.

The optimistic vision of a post-industrial society characterized by increased leisure, creativity, and social mobility has also been challenged. The reality for many is increased work intensity, job insecurity, and a constant need for reskilling

and adaptation to technological changes. The “information overload” and the demands of a knowledge-based economy can also lead to stress and alienation.

Moreover, the focus on knowledge as the primary driver of progress overlooks the role of power relations and social structures in shaping technological development and its distribution of benefits. Technology is not neutral; it is shaped by the interests of those who control its development and deployment.

Despite these criticisms, the concept of the post-industrial society remains a valuable framework for understanding the profound transformations occurring in contemporary economies and societies. It highlights the growing importance of knowledge, information, and services, and the challenges and opportunities associated with these changes. The ongoing evolution of digital technologies, automation, and artificial intelligence continues to reshape the landscape of work and society, making the questions raised by Bell’s thesis more relevant than ever. The focus now isn't simply on a *shift* to a post-industrial society, but on navigating the complexities and contradictions inherent in a world increasingly defined by information, technology, and its uneven distribution of power and opportunity.