International symposium, Paris, June 10-11, 2013

Changing our work and its conditions: relieve suffering, eradicate risk factors, « care for and cure our work » ?

Call for papers

Nowadays, the theme of “suffering at work” (Dejours C., 1980) is prominent in the public debate, in France as well as many other countries⁠¹. The vocabulary, categories, approaches vary depending on the environment as well as the actors: suffering, stress, psychosocial risks, harassment… But the question remains the same: can work still be endured? This question leads to another one: how can we change work? Here again, answers and approaches are different, and possibly divergent.

The study group on work and suffering at work (GESTES Groupe d’études sur le travail et la souffrance au travail), a research network backed by the French Ile de France region, is organizing an international symposium on this topic on June 10th and 11th, 2013.

Themes of the symposium

How can we and can we at all measure work as well as the pain it is inflicting on workers? How and why did that topic of “suffering at work” emerge? Has its visibility evolve over time. How does it differ from one country to another? Which knowledge, processes and tools allow us to identify, objectify and quantify them? Who implements them, with which authorities and stakes? Which debates did they contribute to raise? For what purpose, what effects? How do knowledge and objectification processes take into account the individual, collective, organizational, institutional, local and global levels?

The actions against suffering at work can be inspired by different approaches: equip workers with resources to help them cope with their work; identify, isolate and eradicate work related risk factors; or “caring for and curing” work: for instance, by trying to create a work environment leading to quality work for both workers and employers alike? What are the practices associated to these different conceptions? What are they attempting to achieve? Do they succeed? Do they have side effects, either desirable or perverse?

Numerous actors have been working for years to reform work, change its environment and eliminate “suffering” at work. They are acting in different capacities, management representatives, workers representatives, public authorities in their institutional diversity, they can also present themselves as experts: employer organizations, head of human resources, unions, work inspectors and doctors, prevention experts, consulting groups, health and safety committees… What practices are associated to these roles? What are actors’ goals? How if at all do they manage to reach them? How do actors interact? How do they involve workers in debates and actions?

What do public policies and initiative consist of? Do they need to rely on the right political, economic and social context? What instruments and combination of instruments do they use, whether legal rights, economic incentives, provision of advice and training? With which function? Do public policies on work interact with other policies? Do they matter and ultimately influence on the design of work? To what extent do they reflect the state of relationships between public authorities and corporate entities, between public authorities and citizens? Can we learn from national good practice from other countries? What lessons should we draw from such practices?

¹ Although it may be coined under a different name
How do such practices circulate?

Work situations ultimately result from a combination of legacy and experience. They are the result of a long chain of command and decisions starting from international economic policies down to individual station work design. Addressing and acting simultaneously on every level is impossible, acting on a single level is rarely enough. Possibilities for action are framed by these constraints. Can such actions alleviate these constraints and influence them in return? What is local action worth in the global context? Can global transformations alter the context of local actions?

**Program of the symposium**

The symposium will be divided into plenary sessions and parallel workshops. Each session will include discussion with the room.

Invited speakers include:
- Françoise Carré (University of Massachusetts, Boston),
- Philippe Davezies (University Claude-Bernard, Lyon),
- Antoine Jeammer (University Lumières, Lyon),
- Nicky Le Feuvre (University of Lausanne),
- Michael Piore (Massachusetts Institute of Technology),
- Richard Sennett (New York University),
- Johannes Siegrist (University of Düsseldorf) and
- Michel Vézina (University Laval, Québec).

**Languages : French, English, Spanish**

Oral communications can be delivered in French, English and Spanish. Associated slides should be detailed and translated according to the following scheme. In case of an oral communication in English, accompanying slides should be in French, in case of oral communications in French or Spanish, slides should be in English. Support on slides translation will be available to speakers, as long as their original version is sent early enough.

**How to submit an Abstract?**

To be eligible, the abstract (between 2500 and 5000) will be written in English, Spanish or French, and sent before January 15th to **bureaugestes@googlegroups.com**.

These submitted abstracts will be reviewed by the scientific comity of the symposium, whose decision will be communicated by mid-February.

The composition of the symposium’s scientific comity is accessible at **http://gestes.net/colloquejuin2013/comitescientifique**.

For additional information, please send an e-mail to **gestes_coordination@ensae.fr**.