UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Work and Human Capital

2122-2-E1601N069

Learning objectives

The main goals of this course are to develop an understanding of:

- main assumptions about work and the employment relationship
- job quality
- institutions and processes of industrial relations
- how working conditions (and job quality) are shaped by a variety of contextual factors (organizational, socio-economic, political and institutional)

Contents

Work and employment play a key role in most people's lives. They provide not just material rewards, but also opportunities for self-expression and fulfillment, identify and dignity, purpose and social relationships, development and overall wellbeing. Yet, work is often considered a commodity, that can be negotiated for the highest/lowest price and most people are generally viewed as being motivated just by material rewards. What are the main characteristics of what we term "work" and "employment"? What do people expect from their jobs? What makes a "good" job? Why are some people (or groups of people) more likely to get more enjoyable, meaningful and rewarding jobs while others are not able to have jobs that fit their needs and expectations? What actors, processes (such as "industrial relations") and forces (social, economic, and political) contribute to define the "working and

employment conditions” as well as “job quality”? Which actions and policies could improve job quality and support people throughout their working lives?

Detailed program

This course consists of three parts, as follows.

Part I: The meaning of work and work organization

- Labour power as a “peculiar commodity”
- The labour market as a social institution
- The social and the technical division of labour: scientific management, human relations approach, the socio-technical systems perspective, the new systems of production and management

Part II: Job quality

- Definition and dimensions of job quality
- Psycho-physical and social risk factors
- Workers’ participation and wellbeing
- Working time quality and work-life balance
- Job security vs. precariousness: fair earnings and financial security, career prospects, employer-provided welfare benefits (occupational welfare)
- The sustainability of work and the groups at risk

PART III: The impact of the context on working conditions

- Industrial relations: trade unions and employer organizations, collective bargaining, strikes and social conflicts, industrial relations at the enterprise level
- Varieties of capitalism, production regimes and employment regimes
- Policy and actions aimed at improving job quality

Prerequisites

Good logical reasoning ability; good comprehension and communication skills; basic knowledge of social, political

and economic issues. Basic data analysis skills.

Teaching methods

This course will address these topics and questions by reading textbooks and additional recommended resources, by lectures and class discussions. Students will also be asked to investigate job quality and understand inequalities in job quality by analyzing, with the support of a course tutor, information available in the European Working Conditions Survey, run by Eurofound.

Assessment methods

Written exam (100 minutes), with the opportunity to take an integrative oral exam. The written exam consists of:

- 5 multiple-choice questions
- 3 short-answer question (definitions, concepts, theories)
- 2 essay-type question

Each exam, written or oral, will be marked based on the ability to communicate effectively concepts, theories and empirical evidence by using the appropriate scientific language.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Bordogna, L. e Pedersini, R. (2019). Relazioni industriali. L'esperienza italiana nel contesto internazionale, il Mulino, Bologna [*only the following chapters: I, II, III, IV, V, VI*]

Semenza, R (a cura di) (2022). Manuale di sociologia del lavoro, Utet, Novara [*only the following chapters: Introduction, 1, 2, 6, 8*]

Additional reading and learning resources will be assigned and uploaded at the beginning of the course.