What do we mean, when we say “work” in ergonomics?

Laerte Szelwar, François Hubault, Francisco Duarte, Pascal Béguin

This workshop proposes to clarify the ways we think and act in ergonomics when it is to intervene through/on work. How does ergonomics make a difference with other and various fields of knowledge as sociology, economics, or psychology when talking about work? Finally, what is the matter at issue through work activity, either regarding human being concerns, economic needs and society's requirements? When stating that ergonomics / human factors is mainly focused on adapting work to human being, what do we really mean? What models of human being are at stake through this position? Speaking more generally, which epistemology supports our approaches? Are our models of thinking, our tools for investigation and our proposals of actions linked that tight?

Do social changes, economic challenges, cultural evolutions, scientific development even improve ergonomics' specificity? Is ergonomics’ foundation secure enough to allow us to keep doing the same ergonomics from yesterday to tomorrow? Does anything happen to impulse ergonomics to change?

We believe these questions are central questions in both macroergonomics and activity centered ergonomics, the reason why we propose to deepen how far both ATWAD and ODAM technical groups can meet on this questioning that very way we think and act as ergonomists.

Some questions that will be developed in this paper:

1. Work and the relationship to reality - the invisibility of the reality of work pose serious problems to management which are increasing when to acknowledge and to evaluate what is actually performed by workers in the immaterial-non tangible service economy.
2. The commitment of the person, his body, his cognition, his subjectivity - the development of different fields and approaches related to work and attached epistemological issues.

3. The relationship between autonomy and heteronomy – the challenges to consider the discrepancies between the prescriptions and the activity.

4. The approaches in managerial field and the risks for workers health – emergence of mental problems.

5. Work as “subjectivating activity” in relation to new management practices.

6. Work as collective or individual action – the relationship and importance of cooperation and the risk to focus mainly in competition.

7. The challenges related to the development of transformation in work scenarios and work content – Ergonomics as a technique, ergonomics as an approach, ergonomics as a political action.

8. The legitimization of participatory approaches and the involvement of different actors in working situations.

9. Work as a resource for the development of people, companies and society. Resource" that is focused on the sustainable development of the power to act. Work and sustainable policies – is it something to consider?

According to us, ergonomics indeed, is concerned with the way the world raising from the activity resounds with the world wished-awaited by the culture, the society – that is the political value of the activity. Since, grounded on this basis, the centrality of work emphasizes this added statement: the activity of work is not any activity. For at least three reasons which makes a difference:

- The judgment on its contribution to the common good –i.e. the specific utility of the work activity-, and the stake of the judgment of the peers on the manner of carrying it out;

- The mode of domination/subordination experienced in this activity, and the mode of subversion/insubordination which is opposed through this activity;

- The mode of remuneration/affiliation/counterpart, which assesses the “performance” (i.e. the success of the activity).