

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault comments that “a stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly with the chains of their own ideas”. How is this comment relevant for a discussion of work in contemporary organisations?

“I doubt that all the philosophy in the world would manage to erase slavery: the most we will erase is the name” (Yourcenar, 2005). Slavery takes an integral part of History. From Ancient Greece to the 19th century, it corresponds to a person’s state of complete dependence to a master who can use him as a material good. Even after its legal abolition, some consider that slavery perpetuated but taking on new aspects. For instance, Marx (1974) underlines the domination of the bourgeoisie (the owning class of capital) over the proletariat (the working class) in the industrial era. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault illustrates and explains how the changing structure of prison and of the punitive system during the 18th century reveals a shift towards the establishment of a disciplinary society of control. “Control” is inevitably synonymous with the terms of “domination” and “dependence”. Therefore, Foucault draws a clear parallel between slavery and today’s society. However, he states that this aspect is now less perceptible than before because of the non-use of physical chains to constrain, but rather “chains of people’s own ideas”. Thereafter, we will understand how Foucault’s idea characterises our society and especially the field of work in today’s organisations. First, we will linger over the importance of discipline in organisations. How it is constituted and how does it manifest itself. In a second part, we will study the question of its tool: technology, to understand what its role and effects are. Finally, we will attempt to deduce the consequences of a such condition on individuals constituting the organisation.

To begin with, it is important to define the term “organisation”. According to Weber (1978), what constitutes an organisation is mainly the presence of one or several persons in authority. He or they have the power to enforce rules in order to govern the organisation and to reach a purpose. To this extent an organisation can take many forms such as a private company, an association, a state or a religious structure. Our study will be based on organisations as a whole.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault argues that the only purpose of prison is to create delinquency and to increase control over the population. In fact, prison as we know it today emerged during the 18th and 19th centuries. The intended effect of this policy of control, of which prison is the clearer illustration but which extends to other institutions, would be to create a “docile” and “useful” population. The sentences must be determined in advance and be known by the population so that a criminal would know what he risks before he commits a crime. Of course the sentence must be repulsive and its application must be visible, so that it can serve as a public lesson. This “new” model rests on discipline which requires a distribution of tasks to control individuals in time and space. Thus, prisoners are assigned a clear schedule including work to make them become a “profitable property”. This work is monitored, timed and includes physical exercises. The purpose of it, according to Foucault, is to create “slaves in

the service of all” and to “compose forces to obtain an effective machine” (Foucault, 1977, p.166). In fact, this method aims to give a number of “signals” which expect a single and obliged response to it. Taylorism is a clear example of this method put into practice. It is a scientific management method that emerged in the beginning of the 20th century. It uses the same principles as enounced before being the calculation of time and motion and a clear timetable. Workers are monitored and react to these “signals”: for instance the bell announcing break times. Discipline is what creates a “docile” behaviour, it is also part of the framework of a military structure. In *The Art of War* (2000), Sun Tzu highlights the importance of discipline within an army. As Foucault argues, “there has been a military dream of the society” during the Age of Enlightenment. Where every body of the organisation works as a part of the machine, with a continuous tame of its constituents. Thus, Foucault emphasises the will of putting in practice a certain discipline in the society as a whole, and therefore in organisations that compose it. This one is firstly visible in the area of work, would it be in prison or in industries as we saw thereupon. In *Seneca’s Letters to Lucilius* (1932), Seneca argues that the cruellest obligation of servitude is not to execute an order but to do it against one’s will. This “cruelty” seems therefore possible to be avoided.

This is what Crozier (1951) highlights when he attempts to explain the evolution of management during the 20th century. According to him, the application of Taylorism’s principles resulted in several protests of the workers. Working conditions were hard and some blamed a lack of “humanity” in factories. Crozier argues that the “Big Business” had to reinvent itself to put an end to these protests that threatened the interests of Capitalism as a whole. This is why new forms of management emerged in the 1940s such as Human Relations. According to him, communication has a critical importance in organisations. It is the first need of every human and henceforth needs to draw companies’ attention. In order to adapt themselves to this assessment, organisations changed their spirit of management and reorganised the hierarchy. Since, the function of the manager is not to give orders but “to give ideas”. They no longer govern by fear but by comradeship (Crozier, 1951, p.66-67). The reorganisation of hierarchy had to facilitate communication. In this way, the worker would not execute orders against his will. He finds a greater purpose in his work, he feels listened and understood. He is part of an organisation he can be proud of. We also find this element in *The Art of War*. Sun Tzu emphasises the importance of “Tao” which can be translated as “moral influence”. He states: “by moral influence I mean that which causes the people to be in harmony with their leaders, so that they will accompany them in life and unto death without fear of mortal peril” (Sun Tzu, 2000). Thus, we can clearly see the strategic aspect of modern organisations and especially companies. It is essential for today’s enterprises to develop a “corporate culture” which comes very close to this notion of “moral influence”. People working in a company with a strong culture share a common purpose, the same values and practices. It is no longer simply a matter of financial gain but also of self-actualization and well-being. According to Chen (n.d.), pay is not the main incentive for Google employees. In fact, it is actually lower than other companies for equal jobs. Yet, Google is one of the most attractive companies in the world: it ranks first in the *Fortune Magazine*’s “top 100 best companies to work for”. The strength of Google is its culture.

The company grants a high importance to its employees' satisfaction. People there feel respected and listened. They underline the multiple non-monetary benefits they acquire such as the autonomy, the friendly atmosphere and the several leisure activities they can take part in. Google provides almost everything for their employees such as apartments, transportation and appreciated meals. The workplace is also described as relaxing and pleasant. Cooperation between the employees takes a central part in the organisation as well. All of these elements aim to increase motivation and productivity within the company. However, despite the fact that it is usually described as a place of liberty where nothing except results is expected, another analysis can be made. Indeed, we are far from the classic embodiment of discipline as described before. Employees can make their own timetables and can work wherever they want and the way they decide to. But this does not mean that strategic discipline within organisations have disappeared. One would say it has just changed its form. Indeed, the discipline of the members of an organisation is directly linked to their control. One can only be managed and taught a certain behaviour by being controlled, in order to punish deviant action and reward proper ones. Actually, technology constitutes its tool.

Technology is the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes. It is therefore produced and used. Yet, the purpose for which it is produced is not always only the purpose for what it is used. Winner (1980) argues that technology actually has political purposes, meaning that it inevitably influences people's behaviour either sociologically, economically or both. He takes the example of bridges in New York city with particularly low clearance. He explains that the first purpose of its construction was obviously to enable people to get from a side to another and this was the only purpose of its use. But the other purpose, the one we can consider as political, was to prevent buses to pass through because of their height. Buses were generally used by people with modest income, so this particular choice in architecture ultimately reduced the flow of people from this social class in particular and therefore exercised a social control over the population. Despite that, it is always possible to find a political aspect in every technology even if its creator did not consider it. In fact, everything that "is" implies the absence of certain characteristics: what "is not". Considering that everything in a technology has been chosen for a particular purpose would imply that its creator possesses a limitless knowledge and access to materials without constraints (for example financial, geographic or related to time). Yet, the fact that technology is a mean to exert power is undeniable.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault illustrates this power of technology with the example of the panopticon. Elaborated by the English philosopher Bentham in the late 18th century, this type of circular building allows all the inmates of an institution to be monitored by a single individual without them to be able to know whether they actually are or not. This technique, according to Foucault, creates a behaviour of self-monitoring within the inmates. Even unconsciously, people assimilate the discipline we want them to by exercising control. The panopticon was put into practice for prisons but Bentham also adapted it for other institutions such as schools or hospitals. In that, the will of establishing a

discipline by control extends to the entire society. Google is, again, a good example to illustrate this point in modern society. What people are appreciating there is actually only elements of control. Behind this so-called “autonomy” is hiding a clear control of discipline operated by technology. Indeed, the workplace has become a place of living where work is mistaken with leisure. As long as Google provides everything a “modern human being” needs meaning accommodation, transportation, restaurants and leisure facilities as well as “self-actualization” or what some would call “happiness”, the worker or rather the “Googler” is entirely dependent to the organisation. Of course he could change company but Google’s corporate culture is strong and generally creates an attachment. One could even call it “affection”. Crozier wrote way before the creation of this company. Yet, he emphasises the “favour” done by the company to the worker. The organisation “that fills with life, raises and entertains thousands of people- who end thinking they owe it their life” (Crozier, 1951, p.65). The border between work and leisure is becoming thinner and thinner, permitting an increasing control over the individual with the use of technology. Firstly, the workplace is designed to increase control on the workers. From 1950, we have seen the emergence of open plans in companies. This type of architecture leverages the place and creates a friendly and cooperative atmosphere owing to the proximity of workers. Also, it increases mutual control within the organisation. Like in a panopticon, workers are always subject to the informal control of peers. As Foucault predicted, discipline has become the technique which gives itself the individuals as objects but also as instruments (Foucault, 1977, p.172). Everyone is both controlled and controlling, and anyone who deviates from the discipline risks a punishment, usually an informal one. For instance, if an employee is caught doing something else than working he is most likely to get a remark from his co-workers and therefore fear a rejection from the group. He will probably not lose his job because today’s legislation in most countries requires serious reasons to dismiss an employee. But rejection and non-recognition are sufficient informal sanctions that a worker would not risk. The evolution of legislation and the growing protection of workers is probably the reason why organisations have to use other means to enforce orders. Indeed, it is more difficult to blame the company of excessive discipline when it actually comes from and is produced by the employees. Crozier considers that the evolution of management is only the response to workers protests in order to keep the “big capital” in place. Ingeniously, it has succeeded in enforcing its rules becoming almost untouchable because power is no longer exerted by the manager on the employee but between the employees themselves.

Organisations can also produce means of control. For instance, all the virtual social networks increase and develop control by encouraging people to become more ostentatious, to show what before was considered private. And people accept it. Seneca stated: “We live in such a world that it is catching somebody out to see him unexpectedly” (Seneca and Barker, 1932). So people that have nothing to hide, people who conform to the common discipline prove it by using these technologies. It is not only rare to meet someone who does not use these social networks but can also be seen as suspicious. Thus, these people inevitably pay the price, are “punished” due to their non-conformity to the discipline. Technology as a mean of control and spreading discipline is therefore not only used by organisations but also created by them.

As we understand it, liberty of the people constituting such an organisation is being challenged. Work is no longer only a matter of vital necessity but also social. By building a career people seek a status, expect recognition from their peers and from society in general. Napoleon stated: “People are all the same. When we gild their chains, they do not hate servitude” (Napoleon and Balzac, 1999). This status is now part of someone’s personality and for some people even define it. It is not unusual for individuals to start presenting themselves by giving their work title. Thus, one does not simply separate its personality from its utility in society. This reminds us about the analogy given by Foucault, comparing society with a machine composed of subordinate cogs. Therefore, there has been a change of the function of work. Fulfilment seems to have a more important place than money, and for that creates dependence of organisations. Paul Valery argues that “our goods, our lives, our destinies, these are only precarious concessions it does to us” (Laurenti, 1993, p.25).

Authors like Marat and Huxley wrote about the consequences of this loss of liberty on people. In *The Chains of Slavery* (1774), Marat argues that reduction of liberty led in many regimes to the increase of the encouragement of “pleasant talents”. Nowadays we can witness the considerable development of entertainment, which is accessible everywhere on multiple platforms and devices. On YouTube, everybody can become an object of mass entertainment like on Snapchat where the life of our acquaintances is also a source of distraction. Huxley shares this idea in the preface of *Brave New World* (1950) and adds that it also leads to a sexual liberalisation. Indeed, this phenomenon has been noticeable since the 1960s as constantly increasing and concurs with people’s everyday life becoming more and more public.

To conclude, Foucault’s comment appears relevant regarding the situation of work in today’s organisations. People that constitute them suffer from a growing control operated by their peers and held by technology in order to establish an essential discipline. We can therefore consider that slavery has changed his name as Yourcenar stated, and is now similar to a servitude of the mind. Where the control of discipline occurs almost unconsciously, on and by individuals themselves, leading to a decrease of liberty among them.

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