

# EMILE DURKHEIM'S THEORY OF DIVISION OF LABOUR

## INTRODUCTION

According to Emile Durkheim, Division of labour is seen as the separation and specialization of work among people. By separation, it is meant that various components of the work process are separated. By this is meant that the various aspects that make up the work are set up into various component and co-functioning processes

## MECHANICAL SOLIDARITY

In Mechanical solidarity social cohesion and integration occurs as a result of the commonness or the homogeneity of the individuals i.e. individuals believe they are connected through similar work, value systems, family, kinship, religion etc. As defined by Durkheim, mechanical solidarity refers to

“Social solidarity based upon homogeneity of values and behaviour, strong social constraint, and loyalty to tradition and kinship. The term applied to small, non-literate societies characterised by a simple division of labour, very little specialisation of function, only a few social roles and very little tolerance of individuality.”

As Durkheim has stated mechanical solidarity is solidarity of resemblance. It is rooted in the similarity of the individual members of a society who might share same desires, feelings and ideas towards the production of any given product. In the society where this kind of solidarity prevails individuals do not differ from one another much. They are the members of the same collectivity and resemble one another because

“they feel the same emotions, cherish the same values, and hold the same things sacred.”

They are really similar in thought and activity. The society is coherent because the individuals are united by a common bond that unites them towards a common goal. They are not yet differentiated. “Here we find the strong states of the Collective Conscience. As the term suggests itself, it refers to the conscience of a group who would probably share the same ideals as presupposed in the notion of mechanical solidarity.

According to Durkheim, he defines Collective conscience as “... the sum total of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of the society.” This prevails mostly in primitive societies. The common conscience completely covers individual mentality and morality. By this, it is implied that the common or collective conscience takes into view or consideration individual opinions or ideas.

## ORGANIC SOLIDARITY

According to Durkheim when the density of individuals increases to such a level that a new system of organization takes its place, where each of them are highly specialized in their respective areas but have to depend on the others to sustain their work interests is called organic solidarity. According to Durkheim, organic solidarity refers to “a type of social solidarity typical of modern industrial society, in which unity is based on the interdependence of a very large number of highly specialised roles in a system involving a complex division of labour that requires the co-operation of almost all the groups and individuals of the society. This type of solidarity is called organic because it is similar to the unity of a biological organism in which highly specialised parts or organs, must work in coordination if the organism [or any one of its parts] is to survive”

It is quite clear from the above quote that organic solidarity is in opposition to the concept of mechanical solidarity. While in mechanical solidarity there is no differentiation, in organic solidarity, just like in

differentiated biological cells, there is high level of specialization and specificity of differentiated organs designated for specific functions for the completion of a given function or task that when combined makes the organism a complete functioning unit. Organic solidarity is almost the opposite of mechanical solidarity. According to Durkheim, "Increasing density of population is the major key to the development of division of labour."

By this, the explanation is quite clear. In places where the population density is high, that is many more people per a given space, it is but obvious that some will be more suited for specific functions than others. So automatically there is division of labour so as to maximize production and profits in the corporate world. Organic solidarity emerges with the growth of the division of labour. This especially is witnessed in the modern industrial societies. Division of labour and the consequent dissimilarities among men bring about increasing interdependence in society. The interdependence is reflected in human mentality and morality and in the fact of organic solidarity itself. In organic solidarity, consensus results from differentiation itself. By this we mean that a general agreement can be arrived at because each person is an expertise and specialize in his/her area of differentiation. The individuals are no longer similar, but different.

In this way, each possesses complete autonomy in his area of expertise. Unless the individual errs, then there would be no difficulty of arriving at any given consensus. Because it is easy to arrive at a consensus, then decision making becomes easy and production and profit can be maximized. It is precisely because the individuals are different that consensus is achieved. According to Durkheim with the increase of the division of labour the collective conscience lessens. This has been explained above since collective conscience occurs as a result of lack of differentiation in mechanical solidarity. An increase in organic solidarity would represent moral progress stressing the higher values

of equality, liberty, fraternity, and justice. This greatly highlights the ethical dimension for division of labour and it's a call for an evaluation. Even here, the social constraints in the form of contracts and laws continue to play a major role

The cause of the division of labour according to Durkheim must be sought in some social contexts. Durkheim said how the organized structure (and thus the division of labour) develops as the segmental structure disappears; thus, either the disappearance of the segmental structure is the cause of the division of labour. Therefore according to Robert Alun analysis, since, as we have seen, the segmental structure is an insurmountable obstacle to the division of labour, the latter hypothesis is clearly false; the division of labour can thus appear only in proportion as the segmental structure has already begun to disappear. This means that instead of social life being concentrated in a number of small, identical individual segments, these parts begin to extend beyond their limits, exchange movements, and act and react upon one another. Durkheim calls this dynamic or moral density, and suggests that it increases in direct ratio to the progress of the division of labour. But what produces this "moral density"? Durkheim points out two causes.

First, the real, material distance between members of a society must be reduced both spatially (e.g., the growth of cities) and technologically, for such "material density" multiplies the number of intrasocietal relations.

Second, this effect is reinforced by the sheer "social volume" of a society (the total number of its members).

Thus, Durkheim argues that the division of labour varies in direct ratio to the dynamic or moral density of society, which is itself an effect of both material density and social volume.

Through a greater division of labour, those organs which disappear may establish themselves further by specialization in some other ways to adapt to

changing situations and responding to needs. Thus, the conflict and competition resulting from an increase in social volume and density produces advances in the division of labour just as the latter mitigates against the negative consequences of the former. In the modern city, for example, large and highly condensed populations can coexist peacefully as a consequence of occupational differentiation: “The soldier seeks military glory, the priest moral authority, the statesman power, the businessman riches, the

Durkheim thus argues forcefully that the division of labour is caused by changes in the volume and density of societies.