4.2.4 Fordism

To some observers, the growing significance of die assembly line alongside the spreading influence of Taylorism is sufficient to warrant the recognition of a set of work design and management principles which exist in their own right. Henry Ford, in his car factories, is seen as introducing what amounts to a development of Taylorism in one respect and a departure from it in another.

Fordism refers to a pattern of industrial organization and employment policy in which

a) Mass production techniques and an associated deskilling of jobs is combined with

b) Treatment of employees which recognizes that workers are also consumers whose

earning power and consumption attitudes — as well as their workplace efficiency —

affect the success of the enterprise.

‘Fordism’ follows such scientific management principles as the use of a detailed division of

labour, intensive management work—planning and close supervision and, in fact, extends these considerably in the close attachment of the individual to the work station and in the mechanizing of work handling. But it goes beyond Taylorism, which tends to treat labour strictly as a commodity in making a connection between labour management policy and attention to markets. Fordism is essentially a mass production process which recognizes that the people which it employs are part of the market for its products. It therefore recognizes the necessity of taking an interest in the lives of workers as consumers as well as producers.The connection between production and consumption in Fordism is stressed by Aglietta (1979) who points to Fordism’s recognition of the need to develop working—class ‘social consumption norms’ which stabilize the markets for the products of mass production industries. The mass consumption on market has to be created and stabilized to fit the mass production organization of the factory. It is in this context that we can understand Ford’s particular innovation of the Five Dollar Day — a relatively high wage level which could be obtained once the worker had a minimum of six months continuous service and as long as they complied with certain standards of personal behavior. Ford’s policies in this latter respect are simply one example, appropriate to their time and place, of a more general feature of what has been labeled (Fordism: the recognition that the workforce should be treated as more than a commodity to be dealt with at arm’s length whilst, nevertheless, keeping it under the close control and instructions of the management in a machine—paced environment. Having considered some of the principles which underlie modern work organization and how it is designed at various levels, we can now consider how both theorists and organizational

practitioners have come to recognize the limits within which these principles can be applied.