Unit Two: An Introduction to the Sociology of Organizations

The Sociology of organizations is regarded one of the modern branches of general sociology. A fact that is attributed to the recent emergence of organizations in the modern era that are closely associated with industrial societies, garnering, as a result to its developmental journey, the attention of the sociological researchers and scholars. The forthcoming unit is an attempt to highlight the concept of the sociology of organizations, its origins and evolution, its areas of study as a sociological branch, its main topics, and finally emphasis on its importance.

1   Definition of the Sociology of Organizations:

The Sociology of organizations is a substantive and relatively young branch of general sociology, which emergence was the byproduct of the modern era advent. The modern era was characterized by the establishment of organizations and institutions that congregated a significant number of individuals across various levels, thereby creating a relational network that accumulated into a small-scale society of the larger society.

After the presentation of the general sociology concept and its associated topics in the prior unit, it is possible to present the Sociology of Organizations and the existing overlap with Organizational Sociology in this unit. To avoid confusion, it is necessary to distinguish between the two concepts of an organization and the organization, as both pronounce the same either in English (Organization) or French (Organisation). From the one hand, an organization -as an entity- is a social unit of purpose, with a structured and coordinated social formation where individuals interact within shared boundaries through the use of specific resources, with considerations of the surrounding internal and external environment. On the other hand, the organization -as an act- is a fundamental administrative process that involves the specification of the organizational structure of an institution, and the determining of the activities and working aspects necessary to the achievement of the predefined goals (details of this particular matter will be provided in the next unit).

Regardless of the various definitions to the concepts of 'an organization' and 'the organization', Arab scholars have agreed to consider them as interchangeable synonymous. A reflected fact in the words of Qasim Al-Qaryuti, who stated that within the definition multiplicity of the concepts of an organization and the organization, whenever mentioned here, they are to be used as synonyms (Al-Qaryuti, 2008, p. 49).

As such, the concept is the scientific study of various forms of social organization, such as institutions, organizations, and federations, in light of the mechanisms that enhance their unity and cohesion from the one hand, and the regulative ethical values and social standards of these mechanisms in the broader society on the other hand. A scientific study that is of determinative aims of the kind of interactive forms between the components of the organization within a general structure and in its contextualized relationship with the surrounding society.

Alternatively defined, it is the science that focuses on the study of social phenomena within industrial, administrative, and service organizations in the scope of general sociology theories and organizational theories, drawing from other disciplines such as psychology, management sciences, and others (Qasimi, 2004, p. 92).

2   Emergence of the Sociology of Organizations

In the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution led to considerable changes in both social and economic structures in Europe and, subsequently, the world as a whole. Societies transitioned from an agricultural to an industrial model due to the emergence of factories and machinery, which resulted in noticeable changes in the individual's lifestyle; notably, a subside in extended family relations and replacement with that of the nuclear family, as well as women joining the workforce, as a contributor to the economic life.

Between Adam Smith's optimism about the future of the industrial movement and its positive effects on productivity increase and social well-being provision, and David Ricardo's pessimism, who considered it of threatening nature to the working force majority, as machines replaced manpower, which increased class disparity between employers and employees that in turn resulted in more hardships, poverty, and unemployment.

Within one of Sociology's branches dubbed "Industrial Sociology", numerous studies featured the analysis and discussion of this change and its social and economic impacts. The study area addresses industrial societies with all their functional and structural transformations and associated issues. To put it succinctly, this area of knowledge was defined in the writings of Miller and Form in their book "Industrial Sociology", Friedmann in his book "Sociology of Work", and Warner in his book 'The Social System of the Modern Factory,' among other researchers who have been specialized contributors through their study and analysis.

Subsequently and from this particular area of study (i.e., Industrial Sociology), a broader field emerged known as "Organizational Sociology", which extends beyond the industrial domain to study various types of organizations, including educational, cultural, service, recreational, among other.

The origins of the Sociology of Organizations can be traced back to 1927 with the studies presented by Elton Mayo and colleagues. The studies focused on industrial organizations (textile mills, aircraft factories, metal industries, and telephone equipment factories in the United States). At the outset, this area was closely associated with Industrial Sociology, which investigated all phenomena occurring in the factory setting. After study completion, researchers began applying their findings, which led to the expansion of research to include commercial sectors, hospitals, government agencies, prisons, libraries, and more. An expansion that led sociologists to refer to the modern era as the "organizational society".

On the subject, the scholar "Breithaupt" mentions that the human is currently living within the largest organization, referred to as the state. Organizations to which he was born, through which he communicates, in which he works the majority of his life, within which most of his leisure time and worship is spent, and where he might eventually perish.

3   Fields of the Sociology of Organizations

3.1   Production Organizations

Industrial and commercial companies with the aims of achieving financial profits.

3.2   Service Organizations

Services provided by the state, such as educational and research institutions, healthcare institutions, hospitals, and charitable organizations... Some of which are non-profit, while others are for profit, such as private hospitals, private universities, and so on.

3.3   Cultural and Media Organizations

Institutions with the prime aim of influencing the public opinion and disseminate knowledge according to the needs of society and its cultural and civilizational norms and standards.

3.4   Political Organizations

Such as political parties, organizations, and unions of political purposes with the aims of participating in political decision-making either directly or indirectly.

3.5 Security Organizations

Organizations responsible for ensuring security of citizens, the state, and its institutions, such as the police and the military...

3.6 Social Organizations with Specific Objectives

Organization, such as labor unions, agricultural unions, and artisan associations, and any organization that plays a significant role in the economy in general.

3.7 Informal Social Organizations (Non-Governmental)

Organizations with illicit objectives, such as corruption networks, prostitution, human and organ trafficking, drug trade, and arms trafficking.

4 Topics of the Sociology of Organizations

4.1 Social Analysis of the Organizational Performance

Organizational performance is considered one of the prime topics of the sociology of organizations. Such primacy is because public and private institutions, which are established to achieve specific goals and clear objectives for their establishers, often spend significant amounts of money and employ a large labor force for the attainment of such purposes. If the institutional performance does not align with the invested capabilities, the result can be both a financial and a moral loss.

4.2 Social Analysis of Leadership Styles

In the social organization, leadership styles are characterized by their impact on the level of organizational performance and the degree of alignment with the fundamental goals pursued by the organization. Leadership deviation can cause the organization to deviate from its aligned objectives while leadership alignment can contribute to harmony achievement among the organization components, which would result in more cohesion and interconnectedness within the entity.

4.3 Social Analysis of Decision-making Mechanisms

Decision-making is based on accurate data, in addition to effective leadership and employee involvement. The decision-making process is a fundamental, influential factor of organizational performance. A significant number of managers strive to develop criteria for

decision-making based on their varied in-depth experiences, as others rely on foundational failure indicators under the belief that the reasons for failure are due to external factors.

4.4   Social Analysis of Organizational Issues

Organizations may face numerous issues, which may be associated with leadership, decision-making processes, organizational interaction, internal and external environments, natural factors, social trends, and even political issues that could be hindering to organizational performance; a fact that paves the way for problems to spread to the extent that could be beyond repair by the organization alone.