



A SOCIOLOGIST IN THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

By:

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I: Background



Objectives:

- To discuss with the students the options available to them in the labour market
- To discuss with the students the unique perspective which a sociologist brings to the table
- To discuss the features of the changing world of work and show the increased relevance of the sociological perspective in coping with the changes
- To share my personal experiences as a sociologist who had navigated successfully through different careers and sectors of the Nigerian economy in the last thirty eight years.



II: Dealing with the Myths of University Education



- For far too long, many felt that a university education, especially at the first degree level, is about acquiring a set of knowledge, which you apply directly in some work roles when you graduate.
- While that may be true to a limited extent; that, to my mind, is not the essence of university education
- University education is about acquiring some discipline and some skills, which equip the graduate to succeed in the world of work and in life generally.
- For a student of sociology, the curriculum is designed to leave the students with some knowledge, orientation, tendencies and competences.



III: Dealing with the Myths Cont'd



- An average sociology student, at graduation, should have acquired:
 - An appreciation of how knowledge is developed, acquired and disseminated
 - Some conceptual skills
 - Social research method: data gathering, analysis and report writing skills
 - An understanding of social dynamics
 - A liberal disposition



IV: The Sociologist and Traditional Career Prospects



What is Sociology?

- The scientific study of man in society
- An academic discipline that seeks to unravel, among other things:
 - How social groups are formed
 - How social groups acquire their essence, which always transcends a mechanical aggregation of the will and preferences of the individual members of the group
 - How social institutions develop in man's quest to deal with the exigencies of daily life in society
 - How groups and societies create order and identity that survive across generations of its members.
 - How cultures evolve, change and transform over time, without losing its uniqueness and authenticity.
 - How culture shapes human behaviour and performance and, in turn, is shaped by the activities of man.



IV: The Sociologist and Traditional Career Prospects.....Cont'd



Who is a sociologist?

- That individual who devotes his intellectual energy to learning about the various manifestations of the responses and adaptations that man makes in the groups, communities and societies that he finds himself
- The individual who applies his knowledge of social existence, social dynamics, and the cross-functional influences of man, culture and society to solve problems in different aspects of life and improve performance.



IV: The Sociologist and Traditional Career Prospects.... Cont'd



- A question many students of Sociology ask frequently is:
 - What job role could I fit in when I graduate?
- That question often comes from a misunderstanding of the purpose of university education, which we spoke of initially.
- In answering that question, the tendency had been to look at the body of knowledge we regularly dispense in the different specializations that had developed in the study of Sociology and provide the answer that meets the yearnings of the students.
- Thus, we said things like:
 - Medical Sociology
 - Criminology
 - Urban Sociology
 - Industrial Sociology
 - Political Sociology
 - Sociology of Education
 - Default
 - Medical Social Worker
 - Correction Officer
 - Urban and City Planner
 - HR Officer; Industrial Relations Officer
 - Administrative Officer
 - Education Officer
 - Teaching Social Studies, Research Work
- The point must be made that this description captures only a minute proportion of what the sociologist does and is capable of doing today.



V: The Changing World of Work



Basic Features

- The world of work had changed dramatically in the last twenty years from what we used to know.
- To understand this change and its ramifications, we need to consider some of the features of today's world of work. These include:
 - Widespread enterprise restructuring
 - Greater job instability and insecurity and increased reliance on non-standard forms of work, including contingent work, outsourcing and temporary employment firms.
 - Flattened management structures and truncated career ladders
 - Weakened unions and dated industrial relations systems
 - The demise of the 'social contract' under which workers traditionally received career advancement and training opportunities, earnings growth, employee benefits and lifetime security in exchange for abiding commitment to a single employer
 - Increased labour market segmentation and widening earnings and inequality
 - Demographic changes: improvement in life expectancy, the emergence of the knowledge society, the knowledge work and the knowledge worker.



V: The Changing World of WorkCont'd



Implications

- A marked premium on education and skills in the labour market
- Rising demand for broad-based work-place competencies
- Need for continued skill upgrading, imposed by the speed of economic changes
- Increased job 'churning' and labour market volatility due to the dynamism of the new economy
- Individuals are now responsible for arranging and financing their own skill development with the government and employers as partners.
- Higher premium being placed on values and attitudes over and above technical competence



VI: Today's World of Work and the Sociologist's Edge



- Today, certain competencies are in great demand, irrespective of the body of knowledge or the certificate a graduate carries.
- Incidentally, these competencies are the very ones that the sociologist, by the nature of his studies and preparation, is best suited to develop
- That is the reason that many sociologists today are serving and excelling in job roles that are far removed from the traditional conception of the role of the sociologist.
- As we discuss these competencies, I invite you to think back and review your preparation till date to see nuggets of that in your curriculum



VII: Today's World of Work and the Sociologist's Edge..... Cont'd



- The competencies in great demand in the world of work today, which the sociologist is best suited to develop include:
- Conceptual Skill
- Change management competencies
- Adaptability
- People management competencies
- Leadership skills
- Soft Skills
- Communication skills
- Listening skills
- Emotional Intelligence



VIII: Conclusion



- As you round up your training in sociology, think less of the applicability of specific theories and explanations that you have learnt to date.
- Those theories may be good for passing your examinations and coming out in top grades
- For the world of work, and for life, think more of the general principles behind those theories and how those could be utilized in solving pressing societal problems that stare us in the face daily.
- Also, take with you the habit of suspending your judgment until you have gathered all the facts relevant to the situation at hand, which sociology teaches us as students.
- Adopt a liberal attitude in seeking to understand man's daily struggle for existence in society and how that shapes his disposition, behaviors and responses.
- Acquire the habit of life-long learning that should give you a broad-based knowledge, which you need to deal with challenges as they come.
- I wish you all the best as you prepare to enter the exciting world of work