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Work as a Formative Experience

In one's work, the individual uses knowledge which belongs to his potential but this is done in a structured context where the required knowledge is specified and recognized through systems of classification. The realm of abilities is therefore separated into four areas: potential, use of knowledge, required knowledge and recognized knowledge. Thus the difficulty comes from the fact that the coding of abilities is complex and that the process of negotiation accompanies every form of recognition.

Nevertheless, such an outline assumes a certain stability within the organized universes that the transformations of work and the evolution of technologies have made difficult today. Thus, in the company, employment statutes are reformed, career paths are complicated and the logic of the work station breaks down in the face of the greater importance given to event management which calls into question traditional systems of reference and modes of operation. How, in this highly progressive context, does the organization meet the challenge of constructing specific abilities from the mechanisms of learning? Is the essential element located in the "knowledge of action" used in the workplace? In other words, is that which is fundamental to the analysis of knowledge in the workplace precisely the work, that is to say, the action rather than the response to the task at hand?

We propose to analyze the training methods in a company, and more specifically, in the area of supervision requiring rapid action within a wide geographical diversity. The article takes as its subject the forms (but also the practical difficulties) of the use of systems firmly established in workplace situation, which attempt to "give meaning to" new activities and tend to privilege exchanges of knowledge about common activities.

Indeed, in providing a "frame of reference" (Simon, 1947), training participates in the process of orientation: thus one could imagine that it is organized beforehand towards actions. In other words, our hypothesis is that training is prolonged in the course of action, through clarification of knowledge in use. The question is particularly important for unusual situations, non-nominal, in short, all those "crisis situations" which are common in today's companies.