



How do different approaches to collective activity in service relations call into question the plurality of ergonomic activity models?

En quoi différentes approches de l'activité collective des relations de services interrogent la pluralité des modèles de l'activité en ergonomie ?

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How do different approaches to collective activity in service relations call into question the plurality of ergonomic activity models?

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to show that the various characteristics of service relationships in public utilities and demands about them require careful thought concerning what we call "activity". Following task analysis (nurses, office clerks, policemen, funeral directors, crèche, nurses, educators...) don't do the same work: their aim, the types of interactions between "customers" and workers, work conditions and organization, possibilities of service relations. So, the problem is to precise what aspects of workers' activities, we have to take into account so that activity analysis can be oriented to a more adequate understanding of the job and relevant ergonomic interventions. In order to take action about health and efficiency, they can often require passing beyond a behavioral analysis which describes effective task or its observable components, according to work conditions. We need to have a better understanding of the internal activity component that is a better understanding of physiological, affective and cognitive mechanisms that direct and regulate this behaviour according to the operators' motives, goals and possibilities in interaction with the environmental conditions. To render an account of reality, this kind of pragmatic systemic analysis of activity has to be supported by different "activity theories" according to the research purpose and conditions.

KEYWORDS

Activity Theory, Service Activities, Regulations, Collaborative Work, Organization.

1.- Multiple viewpoints in analyzing service relations

The purpose of this paper is to show and to characterize, without to be exhaustive, that the diversity of the components of individual and collective activities asks some question on the concept "work activity" in service relations of the public sector.

The 'work analyses' we have conducted in various types of jobs reveal how varied the goals, tasks, type of "client" interactions, and working conditions and organization are. Our analysis methods and theories of activity therefore need to address this inherent diversity.

1.1.-Diversification of 'service relations' in ergonomic research

Ever since the first analyses of the work of "recording factors" (Pacaud, 1946), studies of 'service

relations' have been extended to a number of job areas (Weill-Fassina, & Caroly, 2003). This development should be linked to the growth of the service sector, and to managers' difficulties in defining and organizing tasks and in evaluating service quality, and difficulties encountered by the personnel. It is these difficulties that have prompted requests for research or consulting.

Due to the diversification of jobs, several types of relationship have been identified (Gonzalès, Weill-Fassina, & Claire-Louisor, 2001). They can be characterized in terms of goals, the people targeted, and the organizational context:

- funeral advisors in a commercial relationship with their customer (Caroly, & Trompette, 2006)
- office clerks in an administrative relationship with users (Caroly, 2002; Caroly, & Weill-Fassina, 2004a)
- hospital nurses who establish care relations with their patients (Caroly, 2005)
- infant care assistants in crèches who develop psychological, social and educational relationships with the children involved (Gonzalez, 2004; Gonzalez, & Weill-Fassina, 2005)
- educators who develop psychological, social and educational relations with problem children and adolescents (Claire-Louisor, 2004; Claire-Louisor, & Weill-Fassina, 2005)
- policemen in a civic relationship of surveillance, prevention, protection, and repression with various people they work with (Boussard, Lorient, & Caroly, 2006).

In all these cases, « personal services » form a vital dimension of the activity and its main 'purpose'. These are 'intangible, relationship-centric activities' (...) in so far as they cannot be measured (Du Tertre, 2005).

1.2.-Evolution of theoretical perspectives for analyzing service activities

The role of the person in the dynamic work process has guided the ergonomic analysis of the service provider's work in order to identify which aspects and difficulties are specific to different jobs.

This focus of analysis is based on three main theoretic approaches:

- The behaviorist approach studies the effects of situational variables on observable behaviors. This approach is relevant for analyzing the impact of work conditions on effectiveness and health, but cannot provide help in understanding the mental processes underpinning behavior. Yet these processes have been shown to be important in service activities.
- The interactionist approach puts the network of interactions between members of a work group (rather than the individual operator) at the heart of the analysis. The organization of such groups emerges precisely from these interactions.
- The dialogic approach places the user as actor in the midst of a co-production situation. From 1968, Goffman modelled the interactions between operator and 'client' by distinguishing between technical, contractual and relational types of communication. This implies a co-production situation involving cooperative work (Falzon, & Lapeyrière, 1998).

However, this "cooperation" does not only have positive meaning-it can reveal conflictual features. In an analysis of customs officers' work, tensions with users (during more or less expected custom checks depending on the departments involved), had a varying stressful effect on the officers' health (Prunier, 1997).

1.3.-A four dimensional model for service relations

According to this tree-pronged approach, service activities result from a compromise between four contrasting dimensions (Flageul-Caroly, 2001; Weill-Fassina, & Pastré, 2004) :

- a 'system' dimension, referring to an undertaking's goals and resources (materiel, equipment,

- rules, procedures, management structure)
- a ‘self’ dimension, referring to the agents and their personal goals, subjectivity, training, experience, physiological and psychological possibilities, and the meaning they give their work,
- an ‘others’ dimension, concerned with the goals, obligations and demands of other people (colleagues in the same job, cross-job teams, partner networks)
- a ‘person the service addresses’ dimension, such as a ‘customer’, ‘patient’, ‘beneficiary’, ‘user’, ‘the public’, entourage, family, etc.

Service activities are incorporated inside ‘complex systems’ (Lemoigne, 1995), characterized by interacting units, dynamic processes; uncertainty about the evolving situation, and a problematic evaluation of these service. Activity is ‘situated’ in a constantly changing social and environmental context. For service providers, it is vital to understand others, build the strategies to be adopted, and decide on which compromises to make to reach their goals. For ergonomists, these demands entail understanding the affective and cognitive mechanisms that channel and regulate interactions with the immediate environment, by taking into account the collective work in which they participate (Weill-Fassina, & Benckekroun, 2000).

However, analyses rarely bring the four dimensions together simultaneously. What usually happens is that the multi-dimensional model is pushed into the background, and job-specific and request-specific relations are given centre stage.

1.4.-Orientations of analyses of processes underpinning ‘personal service type activities’

Driving the research presented here are requests from operators describing their problems (musculoskeletal disorders (MSD), stress, lack of recognition, etc.). The organization sets work goals, but the descriptions of these jobs put far more emphasis on their material, visible aspects than on the foundations of the service supplier’s relationship with users, and the resources, rules and procedures required to attain their goals. This leaves any potential room for manoeuvre up to the operators themselves.

The aim of ergonomic analyses is to identify the essential properties of these activities underling the observed behaviors, so that a diagnosis can be made of the situation and respond to demand. From a psychological and/or organizational perspective, the hypothesis that actors make a compromise between the different demands of these four dimensions has led to questions about operators’ representations and strategies, and how their competencies develop in the collective work processes they take part in. These studies show that the individual or collective activities to consist in” elaborating “or” reelaborating” of the diagnosis, of the plans of action, of the rules to adapt their actions to the circumstances and to assure the quality of service waited. We will take some of our research to illustrate it.

2.- The self - beneficiary/system- other relationship: developing a representation of the child in care to create a social-educational project

The job of an educator is to welcome, observe and put minors with problems on the right track. Educators take charge of children, address their needs and develop a plan with them that forms the main purpose of their job. This development is carried out in collaboration with a team of colleagues, legal authorities, social workers, teachers, doctors, and the family, and is based on close observation of the child.

Historically, “activity analysis” has focused on the impact of work conditions on educators’ behavior; the impact of the political decisions on the adoption of expensive strategies for family and social auxiliaries (Cloutier, David, Teiger, & Prévost, 1999); the impact of interview length on collecting social-educational data for the judge, rather than responding to the child’s questions about the project (Villatte, 2000); the effect of the social environment on the stress of street educators (Messenti, & Kurth, 2004). Other research study how they behave with respect to the child, how relational distance with children varies with the age of educators (Caroly, 1997).

However, the essential feature of their job is to construct a social-educational project with the child. This is why this analysis has been focused on how educators behave with respect to ‘beneficiaries’ (Weill-Fassina, Rabardel, & Dubois, 1993).

2.1.-“Understanding beneficiaries”- a key factor in an educator’s work

A central reason for taking a child into care is to observe it. But the recommendations about how to carry out such daily methods and notations are vague. Educators find it hard to explain what they actually observe, and how to select information that is relevant for understanding the child.

The aim of the research was to understand how educators made observations to build an ‘operative representation’ of how the child develops.

2.2.-Educators’ activities highlighted through various analysis techniques

Observation cannot by definition, be observed, especially when it consists in observing a child over an indeterminate time span, shared out among several educators and within different situations across a group of children. Daily notes made in log books are transcriptions of the educator’s observations and reflections, and emerge from a process of objectivation. These are the ‘activity traces’ that analysis then uses to make inferences about the interactions between educator and child.

An analysis of the content of notes on 13 child cases (Claire-Louisior, 2004) led to the categorization of the educator’s topics and objects of observation. This information constitutes their representations, and since it is decontextualized, it cannot be interpreted by the analyst.

Self-confrontation is designed to create a posteriori reflection about these observations, and engender awareness about their meaning in order to “understand” the child’s history. Collections of verbal protocols shows that this reflexive activity leads to reinterpretations, new discoveries, and new questions that suggest that the act of representation is constructed during the actions, through the difficulties of working things out, building a new representation of the child’s history at home and a better understanding of the obstacles encountered in developing the project as a whole.

By comparing several different histories of children, it is possible to deduce a four-phase adaptation process for children in care (discovering, installing, stabilizing, waiting). The end criteria are marked by changes in behaviors, and alarm criteria are linked to the duration of certain steps. The lack of clear phase markers suggests non-congruous aims between a target project for the child that has not been identified, and the educators’ programmatic project. This development of a model of the process of adaptation of the children gives a reference to take into account the socio-educational project in situation.

3.- Self-other/ patient-system relations: Collective planning of an activity by care personnel

Many earlier studies focused on the effects of work conditions of nurses (time tables, responsibilities, time pressure, interruptions, etc.) on their health and their relations with patients. In hospitals, seve-

ral professionals work in the same space, on more or less specific patient-centric tasks. The object produced out of the service relation emerges from the interaction between agent and patient inside the work system (environment, tools, resources, goals) (Falzon, 1997). Studies have evolved from looking at interactions with patients to how collective work is organized. Interaction is shared by all members in a team (Borzeix, 1992; Darteville, 1992; Grosjean, & Lacoste, 2002), which means that there is a collective organizational arrangement based on a border dynamic between different work processes.

The purpose of analyzing self-other relationships in a system-patient structure is to understand how the organization of collective activities can cause dysfunctions and deterioration in the quality of service, and address problems of sharing out and planning services for patients among a team of professionals (nurses, care personnel, technical staff).

3.1.-“Different forms of collective work”, a key factor in care activity

The typical use of the term ‘cooperation’ is not a synonym of collective work (De la Garza, & Weill-Fassina, 2000). The different forms of collective activity depend on the operators’ goals, and on their space and time coordinates. The collective work of nursing staff illustrates these different forms.

- Co-action refers to situations where operators have different goals, integrated into a single long-term, joint activity (Savoyant, 1977). For example, care staff when one operator handles bandages while the other prepares the patient so they can leave the hospital.
- Collaboration refers to situations where short-term goals are identical, but in which each operator performs different actions (Rogalski, 1994). In order to bed a patient for a meal, one nurse raises the bed, while another brings the table closer.
- Cooperation refers to activities where operators work together on the same object with their eye on a single immediate goal (De la Garza, 1995). A nurse and a nursing aid help each other make the bed of a dependant person.
- Aid or mutual aid refers to situations where one professional helps another without being explicitly asked (Assunção, 1998). A nursing aid sees his/her colleague having a problem with a trolley in a crowded corridor and helps them as part of exchange.

These forms of collective activity illustrate the variety of relationships between agents and their colleagues. By observing the way professionals coordinate with each other, it is possible to assess the quality of the service provided to patients.

3.2.-Coordinating care staff activities around patients: analysis techniques and the transformation of work

The methodology is based on identifying dysfunctions and their causes, as well as on a group discussion between professionals so as to consult together and coordinate. This meta-functional activity is designed to reorganize their work around a common system of references.

The results are as follows:

- The major dysfunctions caused by the lack of collective organization of work are health problems (wear and tear, tiredness, MSD, etc.) as well as the difficulties involved in delivering quality of service to patients.
- One of the conditions of coordination is how long prior consultation takes in the space and time available outside of interactions with patients (transmission or relief).
- The planning of services presupposes that cross-job coordination is an effective mode of operating for the team. For example, serving breakfast means coordinating nurses, nursing aids and hospital service agents. Consultation offers the opportunity to act on the basis of discretion

- in an organization with unclear rules.
- The operating modes applied individually with reference to a work collective offset the disturbances linked to conditions that are external to tasks and their environment.
- The work collective does not pre-exist; it is constructed out collective thinking. Simulating coordinated work sequences and confrontations inside the group will encourage members to learn about each others' work, bring out common references to collective action, and foster the birth of a collective organization.

4.- Self – system and interlocutor – other relations. Reelaborated rules in action by police officers to take into account the risks incurred

The job of police officers is to keep order, provide safety and fight crime. Their task definitions include strict procedures for acting with respect to assailants, and administrative rules for applying the Law.

Since 1996, service relations have been studied in relation to “rules transgression» and their different application methods (Girin, & Grosjean, 1996). Analyzing relations to rules is based on the study of contractual relations between agents, their interlocutors and the organization. Highlighting group forms, bending the rules strategies and client tricks when applying the rules, is a new way to explore service activities (Montjardet, 1996; Caroly, & Scheller, 1999). By exploring the relations between self, interlocutor and the system in a team-centric approach, it is possible to reconstruct the strategies as part of a dynamic of “regulating the work process”, with reference to Organizational Action theory (Maggi, 2003).

Among police officers, the relations between self, system, assailant and/or victim have been analyzed with reference to the team and its partners (judge, firemen, doctors, etc). The purpose of ergonomic analysis is to understand the methods used for “contextual regulating action,” i.e. the methods for rewriting or bending the rules to handle potentially conflictual situations between police officers and their interlocutors depending on the context of the interaction.

4.1.-Different forms of reelaboration the rules – a key factor in police activity

By observing police activities in the field and holding later interviews, it has been possible to show that police officers “bend the rules” according to the population they deal with, the social context and the circumstances. There is no point in putting this deviation from formal rules down to insufficient training, or individual error or a deviation from the norm, if modifying rules is understood as a way of regulating disturbances from interlocutors and as a collective method for managing high-risk situations.

The observed forms of rule reelaborating vary with the operator’s personal conceptions and relationships with the interlocutor and their colleagues:

- Non-respect of the Law: if a police officer breaks the Law, their colleagues often judge this negatively and do not back him up. For example, in a chase to catch a delinquent, exceeding the speed limit could increase the risk that the person being pursued also speeds up and causes or has an accident. For the police hierarchy, this non-respect would be equivalent to breaking traffic rules.
- Non-application of the law: in practice, police officers do not apply administrative rules in certain difficult crime situations. If non-application becomes current practice throughout the whole team, it could become a “control rule.” For example, contrary to official rules, police officers organize controlled deliveries of drugs to infiltrate dealer networks (Montjardet, 1996).

- Getting round the rules: to get in tune with the victim and/or assailant's environment, and social and family context, police officers have to "cheat" with the rules to carry out prevention. For example, during a check, they may overlook the lack of ID for people in an illegal situation, since they know the interlocutor is armed and the situation would become more risky.
- Collective reelaborating of the rules: in certain situations where the rules contradict each other, or conflict with the interlocutor, police officers collectively set up new rules to reach tacit agreement with their interlocutors. For example, when a young person is seen riding a scooter without a helmet, the police officer is faced with a conflict between the rule that requires them to stop the rider and the risk that the rider will try to get away, and cause an accident for which the police officer would be responsible. The rule can be rewritten and accepted by the team as 'don't stop a young rider without a helmet', and offenders know this.

In this way police officers produce their own rules for action to adapt them to the context of intervention. These reelaborations are the result of a compromise between the organization's existing rules and the risks incurred under specific circumstances. These regulations characterize autonomous conducts of the police officers in relation to the previous rules. These regulatory processes take into account the negotiations within their group and the constraints of the contextual situation and in particular the risks for interlocutor, environment, colleagues and oneself.

4.2.-Individual and collective factors affecting rule reelaborations

The analysis underscores the influence on the various ways of rule reelaborations of a number of factors - the difficulties encountered in applying rules and official instructions, the relationships within the team, environmental constraints, the behavior of the interlocutor, and the agents' goals:

- The personal conception of the work in question plays a role in reelaborations the rules, depending on the population in question. The emotional dimension can take the form of rule by-passing.
- There are generational differences. Rule conflicts tend to be more acute among older, experienced agents who know the old rule system than among newly trained young people.
- Taking the rules on board evolves over time. Older agents have a greater capacity to discuss the weaknesses of certain rules with the group (including their superiors) and talk about the need to reinvent them.
- The number of rule non-applications doubles when the team is stable (low turn-over) and patrols are regular (continuity of police officers in cars, etc). These non-applications concern regulations for high risk situation.
- Collective rule rewritings partly depend on cross-departmental collaboration (back office / front office, local police / crime squad, etc.).
- The interlocutor tries to compromise with the rules by drawing on their knowledge of the law and negotiating the application of rules they know well.

5.- Self – client – system – others relations. Long-term rule reelaborations as a symptom of the evolution of counter clerk skills

Post Office counter clerks perform a variety of tasks, including selling products and receiving a socially disadvantaged public; advising clients and handling queues, etc., and cover a number of different dimensions – commercial (in selling financial and postal products); contractual (by using administrative rules in transactions), and relational (through behavioral scripts developed to receive

users).

Research into service relations have shown that there are conflicts between ends and means interactions with users (Cloutier, David, Teiger, & Prévost, 1999; Flageul-Caroly, 2001). These conflicts generate critical situations for the operator's choices and values, rather than in their actual relations with users.

For counter clerks, relations between the activity dimensions poles create critical situations. The regulations applied to resolve these conflicts are based on balancing things out and making a compromise between self – client – system – others. Analysis of their service activities has focused first on the way individual strategies are evolved to handle ends and means conflicts between the four activity poles, and second on the development of their skills as they grow older and gain seniority, depending on their degree of participation in a work collective.

5.1.-Changes in the regulation of critical situations

The method for analyzing the activity to account for the way skills evolve goes beyond simply describing strategies, and attempts to infer the evolution of the way action is organized as experience grows. Hence the comparison between novices and old hands.

The development of skills involves searching for a balance between the system's obligations and the personal conception of quality of service (Caroly, & Weill-Fassina, 2004b), and is evidenced by the following:

- The set of dimensions factored into action expands with experience. For example, old hands sell in line with a customer's needs by integrating these needs into rule reelaborations.
- The time field increases as a corollary to the expansion of the dimensions taken in consideration. As experience develops, the initially narrow time field makes it possible to anticipate and therefore create pre-corrective regulations to offset the now predictable arbitrariness of events. This therefore explains the ways sequences of actions are reorganized. For example, since frequent trips to the back office to get money or valuable objects can generate conflict with users and make sales difficult, old hands use a mandatory trip to the cash desk to get new supplies they may need.
- Setting up rules. As they grow more experienced, counter clerks integrate the official rules they first applied strictly to the rest of their activity. They set them up in line with customer's needs, and with their knowledge of other constraints in the system. For example, when they find it impossible to sell packets of pre-stamped envelopes, they sell them piecemeal as different occasions present themselves.
- These long term changes can only occur within a collective dynamic of reorganizing work (Maggi, 2003; Caroly, & Clot, 2004).

5.2.-Collective activity as a medium for reelaborating the multifunctional strategies of counter clerks

Aiding ways to develop competencies depends of setting down the rules of job (Cru, 1995; Clot, 1999). Hence the comparison of the way several Post Office teams handle the application of collective regulations, and come up with a compromise between health, efficiency, quality, and other constraints.

The results show that:

- there are conditions on developing multifunctional strategies: e.g. peer recognition is needed to combine several different goals (quality of service, protecting one's health, handling queues, etc.)

- the development of meta-functional activities depends on spontaneous, reflexive and shared practices (notebooks, ways of counting banknotes to avoid errors, etc) and collective practices (new account guides, formal and informal tools for administrative or accounting instructions etc.).
- resolving conflicts between goals evolves with age and experience towards a broader organization of action, provided that collective work makes it easier to create room for manoeuvre in terms of autonomy and discretion.
- the work collective fosters the growth of individual skills provided it is based on transmitting knowledge, sharing know-how and mutual trust.
- the possibilities for developing individual styles encourages caution and saving strategies that are applied so that the operator can stay healthy.

6.- Conclusions about some properties of activity

1– The main idea that emerges from these four studies is that in personal service jobs, the elaborating or reelaborating representations of situations, action plans, and rules are an essential part of ‘service provider’s individual and collective activities to adapt them to circumstances and deliver the expected quality of service. In the organisational level, these reelaborations characterize themselves the regulations of the work’s process (Maggi, 2003). They are considered here of one point of ergonomic and psychological view to understand why and how the operators put them in place in the progress of their activities.

2– For the components of the individual activities, the analyses rest on two theoretical settings:

The research tried to integrate different elements of the activity, in reference to the theory developed by Leontiev: activity, actions, operations.

The work analyses, follow-up interviews and self-encounters that demand metafunctional activity from operators, underscore three levels of activity, in reference to the development of the conceptualization structuring describes by Piaget (1975):

- the action proper, which is the behavioral object actually observed
- the level of reflexive action on the properties of objects, interlocutors and the context which underlie the representations of situation and their developments
- the level of reflection on the properties and consequences of rules, procedures and actions and that seems central in the reelaborating process.

These different levels of the individual activities appear in the organization of the action that according to the cases, help to pass the direct use of concrete elements of the situation to transformations of representations and rules...to create the rooms for manoeuvre. or to increase taken it in account of elements of the action. The last two research show that this organization of the action develops itself all along the professional life. Contrary to the two first research where the evolutions are a direct consequence of analysis methods that asked the operators for a new reflection on their actions and their goal.

3– Moreover, the four dimensional model underlying our research into service activities, together with results, clearly demonstrate that these activities cannot make sense outside the collective work context in which they participate. The analysis of the different activities of service gives several shapes of collective activity:

- of co-action to cooperation
- of the group structured little, to the structured positively team, to the collective of work
- with their possibility of construction and evolution.

4– In relation to the present debate (Clot, 1999; Maggi, & Lagrange, 2002) on the interaction be-

tween individual and collective activities, the analyses of the service activities allow us to compare:

- the cases of the educators and nurses where the collective work emerges interactions of the different actors before the necessity to resolve problem.
- the cases of the police officers and Post Office clerks where the individual activities emerges a collective work or a collective of work.

According to these different examples, it would be currently hazardous to define only a best way of the interactions between individual and collective activities of service. The various interactions depend as much the moment and the place of the observation as the problem met for the operator and observer.

5– Caused by demands noting difficulties in the realization of the service activities, this research have however all insisted on the possibilities and the modes of regulation of the situations by the “service provider”, and therefore on the positive aspects of “the adaptation to the constraints of situation or the context “. However, all operators don’t find the way to compensate critical situation. For these, the work conditions are at the origin of handicaps of situation, of stress, of burn-out, or even of suicide, mistakes, incidents or accidents. It would be necessary to understand why there are some differences.

6– According to these research, it was necessary to call on different theories of the activity and theories of the action to give account of the activity aspect’s various diversity. So this approach shows that there are a construction and a reelaboration of the representations, the rules and relations with others. In other words, it means moving ergonomic analyses of activity towards a multidisciplinary approach that can coordinate psychological, managerial, sociological and even economic view points on the work process in question.

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RÉSUMÉ

L'objectif de cet article est de montrer que la diversité des activités de relations de service selon leurs buts et les demandes d'intervention nécessite d'être prudent sur ce que l'on nomme « activité ». L'étude des tâches de différents métiers des services (soignant, guichetier, policier, conseiller funéraire, auxiliaire petite enfance, éducateurs spécialisés, ...) montre qu'ils ne font pas le même travail : leurs objectifs, le type d'interaction entre le « client » et l'agent, les conditions de travail et son organisation, correspondent à divers possibilités de relations de service. Dans un but de transformation de ces situations de travail pour améliorer la santé des agents et l'efficacité du système, il est nécessaire de dépasser une analyse behavioriste, basée sur la description des tâches ou l'observation des comportements pour accéder aux conditions de réalisation du travail. Pour cela, nous avons besoin de mieux prendre en compte des modèles internes de l'activité pour comprendre le fonctionnement physiologique, affectif et cognitif de l'agent. L'activité sera décrite par les régulations mises en œuvre par le travailleur en fonction de ses motivations, de ses buts et de ses possibilités d'interaction avec les conditions environnementales. Le cadre théorique mobilisé est celui de l'analyse pragmatique et systémique de l'activité, qui permet l'existence de différentes théories de l'activité, selon les objectifs de la recherche et de ces conditions.

MOTS CLÉ

Théorie de l'activité, Relations de services, Régulations, Travail Collectif, Organisation.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es mostrar que la diversidad de las actividades de relaciones de servicio, según sus objetivos y pedidos de intervención, requiere ser prudentes acerca de aquello que se da por llamar « actividad ». El estudio de las tareas de diferentes oficios de servicio (auxiliares de enfermería, agentes de atención al público, policías, consejeros de funerarias, auxiliares de guardería, educadores especializados,...) muestra que éstos no realizan el mismo trabajo: sus objetivos, el tipo de interacción entre el « cliente » y el agente, las condiciones de trabajo y su organización, corresponden a diferentes posibilidades de relaciones de servicio. Con el objetivo de transformar estas situaciones de trabajo a fines de mejorar la salud de los agentes y la eficacia del sistema, es necesario sobrepasar el análisis conductista, basado en la descripción de las tareas o en la observación de los comportamientos, para acceder a las condiciones de realización del trabajo. Para esto, necesitamos tomar en cuenta en forma más profunda los modelos internos de la actividad a fin de comprender el funcionamiento fisiológico, afectivo y cognitivo del agente. La actividad será descrita mediante las regulaciones desplegadas por el trabajador en función de sus motivaciones, sus objetivos y sus posibilidades de interacción con las condiciones del medio ambiente. El marco teórico retenido es el del análisis pragmático y sistémico de la actividad el que, de acuerdo a los objetivos de la investigación y de sus condiciones, permite la existencia de diferentes teorías de la actividad.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Teoría de la actividad, Relación de servicios, Regulaciones, Trabajo colectivo, Organización.