Chapter I: Production, Work Organization and Work Flexibility Models

Introduction
Since the 1980s, the controversy about the crisis and future of production and industrialization models has become a major issue. This controversy is related to the transformation of the economic model, about which each theory has a different level of analysis and takes different variables into account (Freyssenet, 2001).

Although a great deal has been written about the future of the forms of production, there is no consensus of opinion regarding the attributes of the particular production models. In fact, there are different ways of understanding what a model is. The first problem is that there are different criteria for establishing which levels of reality should be taken into account, both in and outside the company, and, above all, which core criteria should define a production model. The second problem is of a more methodological nature, i.e., whether a model is an ideal type, a norm to follow even if in most cases it is not checked whether it is being followed or not, or an empirical average present in reality (Berggren, 1994). On the other hand, the concept of production model is linked to the industrialization model, which, apart from being a productive form, tends to include macroeconomic regulatory institutions - state, local or regional - as well as the social subjects involved (De la Garza, 1998).

The current most important theories that make reference to the future of production models are as follows:

a. The three Post-Fordist modalities: Neo-Schumpeterianism, regulationism and flexible specialization
b. Toyotism
c. Lean Production
d. New Production Concepts
e. Systemic Manufacturing
f. New Industrial Relations
g. Industrial Governance
Some of these theories are not based on the productive process, even some of them may take it into account, while others almost exclusively refer to the productive process.

The levels of analysis that privilege these theories overlap without fully coinciding about what variables should be taken into account and, above all, their respective hierarchy.

The post-Fordist theories coincide in considering that standard mass production, which characterized the post-war period (even though in some countries this production method has existed since the beginning of the century), has come to an end, and has entered a new phase based on flexibility. As follows we shall see the most important theories that explain productive transformation:

a) Neo-Schumpeterianism: a theoretical tradition based on Schumpeter's work. It incorporates some elements of the long wave theory that Kondratiev set forth and Schumpeter continued. This theory proposes economic development should be based on innovation, learning processes and technological adaptation, as well as on institutions involved in research, development, education and training. In this theory, work organization is related to technological innovation, but its important theoretical development is in the line that goes from invention - to innovation - to investment, and in the institutions that mediate these processes. The productive paradigm is the core concept of this theory. By productive paradigm this theory understands the body of knowledge on which the techniques for productive, circulatory or consumption processes are based. Whenever there is a change in the core productive paradigm, there is a technological revolution. We have already entered a third technological revolution mainly characterized by the introduction and dissemination of computer and information-related technology at productive, circulatory and consumption levels. Product and process life cycles are concepts that are also associated with the above, as well as technological trajectory and technological learning (Dosi, et al., 1988).

b) Regulationism: a development theory analyzed through the main concepts found in accumulation regimes (the articulation between production and consumption) and regulatory modes (institutions that harmonize production and consumption). The analysis focuses on the institutions regulating production and consumption. Fordism is thus defined as an accumulation regime characterized by the articulation between production and mass consumption (Boyer, 1989). However, in contrast to other conventional development theories, special importance is given to transformations in the productive process, particularly in forms of work organization.
and labor relations. On another level, Fordism would be characterized as a type of productive process that would add to the Taylorist principles of separating conception and execution, simplification, standardization and the measuring of work, separation between production and maintenance, quality control and supervision, the assembly chain and the idea of 'one worker - one job', where the input is conveyed in front of the worker who transforms it. For this school of thought, a new flexible regulatory mode is emerging; in the mean time, however, there is a transition period in which several production models co-exist, such as Toyotism, Hondaism, and Sloanism, among others (Boyer, 1988).

c) Flexible Specialization: comes from recognizing market variability and the pressure on companies to make frequent changes in presentation and products, which leads to producing in small lots. In this way, small and medium-sized companies could be competitive by applying re-programmable microelectronic technology, and by the new relations between workers and employers based on consensus, including re-qualifying the labor force. The favorable panorama for small and medium-sized companies is reinforced by the notion of industrial districts, i.e., a mutual support network of small and medium-sized companies that create their own local institutions, thereby cooperating with each other, which gives them an additional and different competitive advantage in relation to the large companies (Piore, 1988).

d) Toyotism and Lean Production: Two theories strictly focused on the productive process and its organizational transformation, synthesized in the application of Total Quality Control and 'Just in Time'. The emphasis in each of these two theories varies: in Toyotism the main emphasis would be on changing the social relations in the production process by generating a re-qualified worker who is participatory, envolved, multi-skilled, and above all, identifies with the company. In other words, the core point in Toyotism is the new labor culture (Womack, 1990). The lean production theory (Tolliday, 1992) also takes similar aspects into account, but they are articulated within the goal of attaining leaner production, with minimum stockpiling, waste, labor force and dead time.

e) The New Production Concepts (Kern and Schuman, 1997) discuss whether productive tendencies are moving toward systemic integration of a technical type using computer technology and information science in the production process, or whether it is actually a new form of anthropocentric production.
f) Systemic Manufacturing: emphasizes the integrated, i.e., systemic character of the new technologies by applying information science to the productive process (Kaplinsky, 1994).

g) New Industrial Relations: although this theory does not focus on the productive process, it touches it when it refers to labor relations in the workplace. This theory argues that industrial and labor relations are tending toward decentralization and flexibilization. However, decentralization and flexibility attempt to join democratizing alternatives for consensus-based decision-making, and with collective bargaining of a new type (Simonazzi, 1999). Having entered the controversy regarding the convergence or divergence of labor relations at an international level, this school of thought adopted an intermediate position when it considered convergence toward a small number of alternative labor relation models (Boissonat, 1996).

h) Industrial Governance: it is related to flexible specialization, but goes beyond small and medium-sized enterprises. Industrial Governance theory analyzes the institutions that rule the economy by coordinating different sectors through concepts such as social capital (an advantage a company receives from relationships of cooperation that are not strictly confined to trading), clusters (chains of cooperation among companies), hierarchies, bureaucracies, informal associations and networks, along with markets, including the power struggles waged within these networks. Strictly speaking, this theory actually moves away from concerns about production models, and focuses on outside the company and the relations between companies, the State and other associations (Ruiz Duran and Dussel, 1999).

As we have briefly seen, current theories that one way or another refer to production models privilege different aspects of reality. Some of them are actually theories of industrialization models, rather than of production. These theories marginalize work in relation to other variables, especially those linked to inter-company relations. However, they all have some points in common: first, they accept flexibility as a new situation vis-à-vis open and global markets (Amadeo, 1997). It should nevertheless be noted that not only does the concept of flexibility change from one theory to the other, but they also refer to different levels of reality: work flexibility in production, in the labor market, the product, the process, the company and its relationship with other companies. The second point they share is that empirical studies based on these theories appear to be more normative than diagnostic: searching for examples that support relations based on consensual agreement de-centralized toward the establishment’s 'floor' (Bosch, 1999).
From the point of view of predicting which production models will predominate, these theories can be divided into two streams: a structuralist stream that considers that the pressures of the globalized market will finally lead to a production model which is set forth as the most desirable. In other words, it is the structures, particularly the market structures that will determine the actors in the medium- and long-term. These actors may well take incorrect decisions at any given moment, but in the long run, trial and error in the market will lead them toward what is set forth as the future production model. It should be noted that these theories explicitly criticize the notion of a rational actor, and tend to introduce moral factors into production performance. However, they insist that cooperative forms of production (with their respective components of identity) are more efficient that the strictly rational forms (Bronstein, 1995).

Other of these theories tend to allow the actors to act, and due to this, the future is relatively open, since local factors are taken into account and not only the factors that are supposedly universal and linked with globalization. From this perspective, the actors are not rational either. Therefore, the tendencies for change would not lean toward one production model only, even though the notion of consensus-based flexibility is usually included (Capelli, 1997).

One common problem with these theories is the confusion existing between diagnosis and normativity. Empirical research normally chooses cases that it knows beforehand will at least partly justify the tendencies that are desirable for these theories, but none of them can claim to be have been representatively confirmed in any country. However, the fact that these theories have not been confirmed does not imply they are false; but instead, it leads to explain that we are going through a period of transition that will finally follow the desired course (Maurice, Sellier and Silvester, 1986). These theories use another two resources to affirm their validity: the concept of functional equivalents and the concept of hybridization. The former says that if one of the features of a model is not present in reality, it is because there is another feature that does not belong to the model and is fulfilling a similar function to the missing one. The concept of hybridization is a combination of models. This is the best way to restrict the research into production models to those currently used in the intellectual market, in other words, to make it impossible for other non-theorized models to exist. In Latin America, for example, it is common for modern companies to apply partial aspects of Total Quality or Just in Time. This situation would tend to be conceptualized as a blend of Taylorism, Fordism and Toyotism (a hybrid), or
they would also tend to consider that certain Taylorist aspects are functional equivalents to other missing Toyotist aspects, which is an elementary contradiction of formal logic. It is true that the function of a theory is not only to explain or predict; it is also a guide for action. It is even a discourse for which one fights, even if one does not strictly believe in its hypotheses (Novick and Gallart, 1997). However, it is important to be clear about the main function a theory is fulfilling in a specific moment and time.

In the face of these methodological traps and of empirical evidence in Latin America of the existence of multiple anomalies regarding the most commonly accepted production models, one option is to open up empirical observation and theorization to reality. The traditional approach is to postulate concepts and their relationships, set them forth as hypotheses, and proceed to test them. This hypothetical deductive form, however, has two disadvantages: First, it does not provide guidelines for the construction of a concept. In the best of cases, it accepts or discards a theory, but it does not reconstruct it; second, when diagnosis is confused with normativity, the logic of the hypotheses is stronger than the tests, and therefore, when the theories are not tested, they are not simply discarded since the failure in the testing process is always attributed to ad hoc circumstances, or it is claimed that there will be testing in the future.

An alternative to this is to use the notion of configuration (De la Garza, 2001) instead of the notion of concept: before being tested a concept possesses a priori contents; a configuration is a network, or an arrangement or a vector of characteristics that are drawn from reality itself. In other words, it is a result rather than an a priori subject to testing. This has an influence on the empirical approach process. The conceptual pathway is via the hypothesis in which the relationship between concepts and their contents must be clear, whereas the configuration pathway, without limiting itself to one sole concept, sets forth a broad spectrum of dimensions referred to the problem at hand, the relationships or exclusions of which are not known a priori. This does not mean that it is an empirical proposal; on the contrary, it sets out from all the theories in play, not just one theory, so as to not close itself to different options. The factors to be considered in a Configuration initially come from the theories themselves, but they do not constitute a concept, nor are their relationships with other concepts accepted beforehand. The deductive hypothetical method goes from concept to data, and may then be tested or not; this alternative goes from dimensions to data, and in this confrontation it decides whether to accept, discard or incorporate other dimensions that were not considered at the beginning. In the first
method, the process ends with testing the hypothesis. In the option we sustain, confrontation with the empirical world should be complemented by the discovery of new relationships between configurations, and should refine its dimensions, analyze its functionalities, contradictions, discontinuities or dark spots. In the former option, the result may be the testing of a production or industrial model, for example. The latter results in the construction of a configuration of configurations, with potential, limitations and uncertainties to be resolved by the action of the subjects in such a way that the future is not entirely predictable - at most, it is definable as a space for viable action during the moment at hand.

The previous methodological considerations are related to the controversy as to whether productive configurations tend toward convergence (Toyotism or Lean Production, for example), or if they are also determined by local conditions, subjectivities and actions, in which case, different configurations may be found under similar market conditions. It is also necessary to consider the level of complexity to be taken into account; one way of reducing the complexity involved in these themes is considering limits to time and space, that is to say, the shorter the time and space, the greater local influence will be.

The above discussion leads us to propose the concept of sociotechnical configuration of the productive processes (network of technology, organization and labor force negotiations, labor relations, labor force profiling and labor cultures) instead of model of production; and the socioeconomic production unit (which for the socioeconomic production unit implies certain links between clients and/or suppliers, ties with the labor markets, technology and finance, with the government, other institutions or 'actors', and with industrial relations at local, regional or national level) as alternatives to the industrialization model. The configurations of socioeconomic units could form an industrial configuration, which together with configurations related to agricultural and services in a macro-economic, macro-political environment of industrial and cultural relations may constitute a socioeconomic formation understood as a configuration of configurations.
1. **Company Strategies and Labor Relations**

From the perspective we have adopted that views industrial change as a result of structures that place pressure on industry, but also of the subjects’ decisions and actions, the problem regarding company strategies becomes important since the actors involved are usually central to these changes (Chandler, 1974).

Two controversies arise here: structure or strategy, and strategy or contingency (Chandler, 1962) (Peck, 1996). The former asks the pertinent question as to whether structural changes determine the actors’ strategies, especially businessmen’s strategies, or the other way round, whether strategy creates structures. Regarding this point, we could set forth that structural changes produce and are produced by action. Action, however, does not arise as a mechanical result of structural change; instead, it goes through a process of giving meaning and creating interaction between the actors, who also determine the course of action. As far as contingency or strategy are concerned, this controversy sets forth whether businessmen actually have a general plan for change in sociotechnical configurations, which may coincide, for example, with some of the new "production models", or whether their actions respond to specific situations to which they simply react, without having a general plan for productive or organizational re-structuring (Hyman, 1987). To begin with, one could not state that every single company has a strategy, in the sense of a large-scale long-term restructuring plan, nor that employers are totally rational actors: they make decisions, but these are influenced by different sciences and beliefs, as well as by cultural aspects with all their relevant norms and values, esthetics, feelings and every day forms of reasoning, accompanied by discourse structures, traditions, myths, rituals, the definition of friends and enemies (Le Goff, 1992). Employers, like all real actors, do not possess full knowledge of either the market or possible actions others may take. Although they do not possess a total science for optimizing their business, they make attempts at optimizing after simplifying reality again and again. In addition, management may be divided over their respective conceptions and power struggles. To this extent, the strategies are not totally coherent and may present dark spots or uncertainties that are overcome through practice. In other words, strategies more than the conscious grand plans of the employers would be the resulting middle lines, the end result of which can only be seen a posteriori, even if elements for their design might exist a priori.

Organizational and labor relation strategies might be included among the employers’
productive re-structuring strategies. Labor relations might be understood as the relationship between employers and employees within the companies, and are very closely related to collective bargaining, but also to labor force organization and negotiation, as well as control over the productive process. In order to avoid confusion, however, between organization / negotiation, and labor relations, one would have to distinguish between them, not because they are different spheres of action, but because they are 'cut' or analyzed from different angles. In other words, the relations of the workers with middle and top management levels in the work process could be analyzed from an organizational and human resources management perspective, or from a labor relations perspective (Freyssenet, 1995). In the latter, a primary basic dimension in the labor relation is the decision-making power held by the company, the workers or the trade unions on employment, wages, work conditions and labor force negotiations, changes in organization and technology, clients, suppliers, machinery and equipment, raw materials, and broader strategic company issues (sales, alliances, relocations, exports, finances, etc.). The connections with the industrial relations system are made through institutions that regulate labor relations, social security, labor politics, state employment and corporate agreements. One specific problem with power in the current company is the bilateral or unilateral form of making decisions about the company; the other current problem in labor relations is their rigidity or flexibility; yet another is the type of relationship between the different actors in the company regarding labor relations vis-à-vis bilaterality and flexibility in a consensual, negotiated or conflictive sense (Buroway, 1985).

The problems involving productive restructuring and the possible set-up of new production or industrialization models in an important way include work organization and labor flexibility, without being limited to them (Carnoy and Castell). In this study, however, we will mainly devote our analysis to these first two dimensions, which, in Latin America, are much more wide-spread than the new technologies, without leaving them aside as well as to the profile of the labor force used (Bronstein, 1997) (Dombois and Pries, 1993).

2. New Forms of Work Organization

During the 20th Century, Taylorism, which refers to personnel management and work organization, was the dominant management doctrine (Kochan and Useem, 1992). This doctrine did not disseminate equally among all companies. It spread much more among large and medium-sized companies than in small and micro-companies. It spread much more in assembly
and machine productive processes than in those of a continuous flow type. However, Taylorism was essential in the sense that it was the doctrine that guided the employer strategies in the core branches, such as the automobile industry. It was based on the following principles:

a) A clear separation between conception and execution. In other words, leaving the physical production tasks to the worker and separating them from supervision, organization and production planning, which are tasks of the middle and top management.

b) The strictest regulation possible of tasks, work methods, use of tools and the moments the workers intervene in the productive process.

c) Specifically, the measurement of work through breaking down simple, standard operations into small parts, which allow the work to be carried out more intensively.

d) Separating production tasks from maintenance, supervision and quality control, which should correspond to specialized personnel different from the production staff.

To Taylorism, Fordism added the continuous circulation of the materials to be transformed in front of a fixed worker. It is the assembly line that establishes the pace of work, facilitates standardization and the transition from small-scale to mass-scale production with new production and productivity norms, which takes work segmentation to the extreme.

We prefer to conserve Taylorism and Fordism, as concepts, as forms of work organization and personnel management, in contrast to the regulationism that extends these concepts to production regimes, understood as links between mass production and mass consumption. The disadvantage of this conceptualization of Fordism as an accumulation regime is its functionalism that obliges it to be accepted not only as an organization form, but also as a form of mass production, conditions for mass consumption and its periodicity corresponding to the Keynesian State. In other words, it is a very closed and functionalistic in relation to other levels. In contrast, the provisionally disarticulated definition of Taylorist and Fordist concepts allows greater freedom for exploring the different relationships with the marketplace, the State, the unions, etc. We also disagree with Frayssenet's (2001) radical distinction between Taylorism and Fordism. We think that Fordism is a continuation of Taylorism as a form of organization of work.

Taylorism-Fordism has been criticized since it first appeared. It was first expressed through Elton Mayo’s Human Relations trend. Since the 1920s Mayo felt it was unrealistic to attempt to separate conception from execution. Quite the opposite, the idea was for the workers’
consciousness to serve the company. So instead of setting forth how to bureaucratically regulate work through formal norms for each job, he proposed how to get the workers to consciously cooperate, including in the behavior analysis the field of feelings, as well as the creation of informal groups with all their respective customs, rituals and leaders.

Labor Sociology, from Friedman in the 1940s and the 1950s to Braverman (1980) in the 1970s, also criticized Taylorism and Fordism through the concept of control over the work process.

Nevertheless, the revolution in managerial doctrine did not come out of academic theories; it actually emerged from business theories generated at the Toyota company in Japan (Smith, 1989) (Wood, 1991) and from the British approach of the sociotechnical system. Both slowly gave rise in Europe to proposals for work’s enrichment, enlargement and involvement. However, these principles, which were available to all companies through the North American synthesis of Japanese experiences mainly, did not really spread until the economic crisis of the 1970s forced the restructuring of production and the international economy in the 1980s (Grosvahan and Stewart, 1992). Since then, the so-called "new wave" of management has become the dominant doctrine internationally. Its main field of action is the companies and it has also developed by criticizing Taylorism-Fordism. There is a myriad of concepts related to the new forms of work organization that were fashioned during the last decade (Lincoln and Kallberg, 1990) (Locke, Kochan and Piore, 1995) (Maurice, 1991, 1999). Organizational changes, however, may well first obey to core principles, and then adopt very diverse concrete forms (Wood, 1993):

a) If conception and execution are not sharply separated, a multi-skilled labor force is thus justified. In this case, a multi-skill model would imply expanding the functions of each job as well as the possibility of internal mobility between jobs or ranks. Justification, in Mayo's way, rules out that the worker be perceived as a machine that receives orders; the worker's consciousness is always present in the productive process and, in this sense, he is either willing to cooperate or not.

b) It is not possible to reduce all activities to simple operations, which are segmented to the extreme, to standard operations and measures. There will always be holes in production time that the worker will fill in through his sense of knowing what to do.

c) Reducing work to impersonal rules generates bureaucracy; delegating the decision-making
capacity to the labor force is more efficient, and this, in turn, translates into putting the production workers themselves in charge of their own supervision, and of part of the maintenance and quality control tasks.

d) But, diminishing bureaucratic rigidity in production, expanding tasks, with the workers' participation in decision-making will not guarantee greater efficiency unless the labor force is involved with consciousness and conviction, i.e., that the labor force share the company's goals not simply out of obedience to the rules, or out of coercion, but mainly out of conviction.

e) The social vision of production as human cooperation is furthered toward teamwork, a concept that undermines Taylorist individualism.

f) The workers' conviction, their participation in decision-making and teamwork point toward a work culture, i.e. the processes which make the work, the company, the product, the social relationships within the company, the clients and the suppliers have meaning for the personnel. The objective is to go from a culture of obedience to rules, which is essential for work, to another culture based on cooperation, solidarity, dedication and satisfaction with the work achieved.

g) The organization’s new way of operating requires forms of communication that transmit orders in all directions and not only vertically, from top to bottom.

In other words, the core aspects of the new organization forms rather than being technical in nature, are more social and have to do with how power is managed within the work process.

Although we have stated that many concrete concepts materialize in the new forms of work organization, such as: zero mistakes, quality circles, teamwork, kan ban, statistical process control, problem-solving teams, just-in-time, quality audits, production cells, re-engineering, etc., some authors suggest that these concepts could be synthesized into two: total quality control and just-in-time.

The former would be the set of techniques directed toward total quality control that goes from the creation of quality circles, which discuss off the assembly line how to improve quality, work teams that are collectively responsible for ensuring quality and working with zero mistakes; the flattening of categories which broadens job functions; the use of statistical process control and quality auditing; transforming the forms supervision takes into group self-supervision, and replacing corrective with preventive quality control; new contents in training forms directed at work organization and a new labor culture - all with the idea of continuous improvement in production (Procter, et al., 1994). The articulation point with the just-in-time
model lies in the client-supplier philosophy which may function within the productive process, where each worker is a client of the worker before him and a supplier to the next one down the line, with the means for being supplied in time via, for example, the kan ban system. However, the just-in-time system can also be external, appearing as a new form of relationship with suppliers and clients. In this relationship, the suppliers are supervised by their client to ensure the productive process is operated with total quality and just-in-time, which may imply direct access of the supplier's staff to the precise point where inputs are being used, which in turn translates into the elimination of inventories (Rankin, 1990).

One of the works that has contributed most to popularizing new work organization forms is Womack's The Machine that Changed the World (1990), which focuses on what is called lean production, i.e., no waste of raw materials, energy, time, labor. According to Womack, Onhism combines just-in-time with suppliers of machines that in a simple way may be adjusted in order to change models, small lot production with highly qualified multi-skilled workers, a new relationship with the client. The whole system is permeated by a new labor culture. The main point in adjusted production would be to transfer the maximum number of tasks and responsibilities to production workers in order to detect defects with teamwork, simplified information management, adding a moral system of reciprocal obligations.

3. Theory on Work Organization and Flexibility

From the beginning of the 1980s, the concept of work flexibility has been the keyword in the transformation of labor relations and industrial relations systems at an international level (De la Garza and Bouzas, 1998). To all appearances, it was the old discussion between neo-Classicists, Keynesians and Institutionalists as to whether labor markets should be deregulated and left to the free forces of supply and demand (Locke, et al., 1995) (OECD, 1987). However, the current controversy is much more complex because it involves more actors than just economists and their theories. In practical terms, the controversy was updated by two apparently concordant phenomena arising from different sources: on the one hand, the advent of neo-liberal macroeconomic policies, with their respective components of market deregulation, including the labor market, privatizations and macroeconomic adjustments to control inflation and come closer to equilibrium (Reija, et al., 1990). On the other hand, the new managerial doctrines, originating in Japan but westernized, which seek to step up productivity and quality at a micro level (Ozaky,
Historically, both phenomena arose synchronistically. The crisis of the so-called Taylorism-Fordism brought the postwar regulatory establishments into question, as well as the dominant forms of work organization at the time. Economic liberalization implied a greater pressure on company productivity and quality in order to be able to survive in globalized markets. Nonetheless, the origins of flexibility at macro and microeconomic levels have implied different processes, and concepts about what is most important to flexibilize in the field of work: the labor market, or the use of the labor force in the productive process (Shaiken, 1993).

1) Flexibilizing the labor market. By labor market, we mean the meeting point between those who offer their labor force in exchange for wages and those who can and wish to purchase it. It is neo-classical economics that places an emphasis on the labor market and its flexibilization above everything else. From this perspective, the problems involved in the productive use of the labor force are relatively secondary, since it is considered that the moment the markets are left to free forces they would tend to move toward equilibrium. With that, the production methods with the different ways of using the labor force will automatically adjust to lead to the optimum result. In other words, what is important in work flexibilization is that the obstacles be eliminated so that the labor force suppliers and demanders may meet with the greatest degree of individual freedom. Freedom in the labor market is translated into two main variables: the number of workers to employ (jobs) and the wages they make. Therefore, the flexibilization of the labor market implies the elimination of rigidities in employing or being employed, as well as in fixing the wages. From this point of view, flexibilization policies move at the level of industrial relations systems, i.e., at the level of institutions, norms and subjects established during the period of the welfare state, which regulated the relations between employers and employees: labor laws, collective contracts and unionization, social security and labor justice, unions, employers and governments (Standing, 1999). Put another way, flexibilizing the labor market is the same as flexibilizing the industrial relations system, in the following ways:

a) In the mechanisms for fixing wages which were above and beyond the spontaneous allocation via supply and demand. Minimum wages, or wages that include the reproduction costs of the labor force, as well as union monopoly in hiring labor would be undesirable.

b) The hiring or firing mechanisms which are not governed by the supply and demand for jobs: labor laws which obstruct or impose compensation for personnel readjustment; contracts which oblige employment for an indefinite period; labor laws or collective bargaining agreements
which impede hiring or firing; union or government pressures against cutting back personnel.

c) In taxes, contributions or quotas which increase wage costs, such as social security payments, compensation quotas for loss of work, contributions toward housing funds, etc.

In synthesis, from this point of view, flexibilizing the labor market is equal to flexibilizing labor laws, collective bargaining agreements and government policies (Tokman, 1999).

2) However, not all the current perspectives emphasize on the labor market. There is another dominant notion that is on a different level than those of macroeconomic policies: the new management doctrines. The arrival of liberalism in state policy spheres was combined with a new wave of management whose forms of organization and labor force are based on Toyotism. In this way, the market is an assumption that needs to be activated and transformed in the productive process. If the labor market is flexibilized, automatic adjustments are not operational here, quite the contrary, there has to be conscious, and organized action agreed to by consensus between management and workers regarding increasing productivity and quality, both of which are essential to move forward in a deregulated market. That is to say, flexibility inside a company is related to work organization and labor relations (Maurice, 1991) (Streek, 1992). Using traditional terminology, the most important flexibility would be of a functional and waged character, rather than numerical. On the functional side, it would fight for multiskilled work, internal mobility between jobs, categories, departments, shifts, adding the need for a new labor culture based on the workers enrolment and participation and on their identification with the company. When unions are considered, they are thought of in the same way, i.e., as a house union, a union committed to the company's goals (Kumazuawa, 1996). As far as wages are concerned, this theory differs from the first concept: it does not place an emphasis on labor force supply and demand in the labor market, but on the performance of the labor force that is already employed. In other words, wages are determined according to productivity and quality attained. The emphasis on flexibility is placed on the productive process rather than on the market. Although these two notions of flexibility – in the labor market and in production - can complement each other, the former moves more in a macro level, where the task of eliminating rigidities has been left to the government, while the latter moves in a micro level where it is management who has been in charge (Pollert, 1989).
3) The third position comes from the academic world. These are the Post-Fordist theories (Amin, 1994), which generally propose the replacement of Taylorism-Fordism by Post-Fordism, implying flexibility above all in production. It is similar to the Toyotist stance, but it is agreed to between management and unions. Besides it sets forth the need for a reform in industrial relations systems and not simply deregulation, as proposed by neo-classicism. This translates into the establishment of new institutions that are capable of regulating employee-employer relations in a world of open and globalized markets (Boyer, 1988).

In the reality of labor relations, it is notions 1) and 2) that prevail with various combinations: notion 1) is mainly promoted by governments, international financial institutions and employer organizations; notion 2) is promoted by company management, supported in various ways by government. Notion 3) is supported by academics coming from the Keynesian school, some Marxists, institutionalists and some unions. At any rate, these notions, each with its individual content, assumptions and practical measures for work flexibility, have been a battleground at an international level for the last 20 years, which has progressively been defined depending on the previous industrial relations systems in force and the field of forces between the actors involved (Pollert, 1991).

The concept of work flexibility thus does not have one unique meaning in the theoretical debate: its contents, as well as its implications for labor policies, depend on the conceptual source it emerges from. The concept of flexibility in use today comes from three main sources (Standing, 1986):
1) Neo-classicism, the oldest source,
2) Post-Fordism, arising at the beginning of the 1980s, and
3) The New Wave of Management, arising from modern management theories on company organization.

Apart from the definition of the concept of flexibility itself, the controversy around this definition has given rise to a complementary discussion about:

a) whether flexibility is associated with a new type of labor relations that would surpass those established during the welfare state,
b) whether there is only one form of flexibilization in labor relations and, if so, what would be the optimum level of flexibility achievable without affecting productivity growth,
c) whether the tendency toward work flexibilization is actually necessary vis-à-vis the
1. Flexibility and Neo-classical Theory

The specific idea of flexibility in the labor market comes from neo-classical economic theory, fundamentally understood as the removal of obstacles so that market mechanisms take charge of price and use of the work factor. This is congruent with three assumptions in this theory:

- that the agents are rational, i.e., that the economic agents are guided by the search for maximum yields; they must have complete information about the market (prices and movements of the other agents); and they must know the equations for calculating their utility function. Once they know all this, they will decide when there is an optimal relationship between the means that have been invested and the achieved ends;

- that control exists over exogenous variables, i.e., models are constructed under the assumption that there is control over variables such as extra economic establishments, cultures or social conflicts, which are considered externalities or market failures;

- that the conditions for perfect competition will be fulfilled, which will make the labor market tend towards balance.

For the neo-classical theory, the work supply depends on the size of the population, the rate of worker participation and the number of working hours the worker chooses to work. With the exception of the latter variable, the others are considered constant variables and the work supply is over all an individual decision through which the workers, as rational actors, will optimize the relationship between the goods their wages can buy, in terms of the pleasure these goods provide, in relation to the satisfaction they get from their leisure time. On the side of the work supply, workers are supposed to be fully informed about the labor market, wages, timetables, intensity and demand. They rationally act and decide where to work, optimizing their information as mentioned previously. Besides, it is assumed that they do not make decisions as a group that all workers are equal and interchangeable and, in accordance with our theme of labor flexibility, that absolute work mobility exists.
On the side of the demand for employment, it is assumed that the law of decreasing yields is in operation, in other words, after a certain point, the addition of another work unit to the productive process will translate into a decreasing amount of products. When exceeding numbers of workers are employed, wages surpass the marginal product (an increase in production in relation to an increase in work). In the equilibrium, the marginal product equals the wages, although balanced wages also vary inversely in relation to worker supply. If wages are increased and all other factors remain constant, capital profits will drop, which will make this capital migrate toward branches that offer larger yields. This in turn will bring about a drop in production, thus causing a decrease in the demand for workers and, finally a drop in wages until a balance is once more achieved.

From the perspective of the demand for employment, it is assumed that the employer has full knowledge of the labor market, employs or lays off workers in a rational way, and that there are no monopolies in the labor market or unions monopolizing the supply of workers.

To conclude, the theory of marginal productivity postulates that if its assumptions are complied with, wages will be equal to the price of the labor force as determined by the supply and the demand. Wages of equilibrium will be equal to the worker's marginal product (product generated by the last worker employed) and the demand for work will depend on production and the production method used, which in any case are taken for granted.

From this neo-classical perspective, the theoretical base for labor market flexibility is founded on marginal profitability. Since it is known that the labor market is among the most imperfect markets, owing to the existence of institutions, regulations and collective conflicts, it is a question of eliminating or reducing the influence of exogenous factors to the minimum in order to move towards equilibrium. To flexibilize the labor market is to flexibilize the work supply and the demand for employment, thereby facilitating employment and unemployment, the use of the labor force within the work process, and individualizing the forms of payment according to marginal profitability (Strath, 2000).

2. Flexibility and Post-Fordism

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, post-Fordism usually includes currents such as regulationism (Boyer, 1988), flexible specialization (Piore and Sabel, 1990) and Neo-Schumpeterianism (Dosi et al., 1988), all of which share the idea that mass production has come to an end and that we are moving toward a new productive paradigm, a new regulatory mode, or
a more or less flexible technical economic paradigm.

3. The New Wave of Management

Managerial doctrines for work organization have revolutionized since the last decade. These doctrines include the presence of the crisis of the 1970s as well as the Western adoption of Japanese organizational experiences and labor force management, both of which date from the 1950s. This view also criticizes Taylorism, but as opposed to regulationism, it focuses on the productive process. The new managerial doctrines have taken shape in concrete forms of work organization, synthesized in the concepts of Total Quality and Just-in-Time. These doctrines include a critical view of Taylorist rigidity, especially regarding the idea of a sharp separation between conception and execution. Special emphasis is placed on the cultural aspects of the workers' commitment and involvement with the company, productivity and quality, as well as on the retrieval of the worker's know-how, the reintegration of tasks and extensive training. The idea of an internal labor market is more important than the idea of an external market and its flexibility. Besides, individualism is replaced by the idea of belonging to a group. The company is conceived as a community in which the idea of collective action is based on values, and not just to economic yields. These doctrines claim that the success of the productive process is not a spontaneous result, but rather the consequence of consensus, of the creation of identities vis-à-vis the inevitable uncertainties in production. Flexibility in lean production (a term more often used in the new managerial doctrines) is over all internal, i.e., between jobs, categories, departments, shifts and work schedules; it is also found in the criteria for promotion according to the workers capacity (and not seniority), multi-skilled work, and in wages forms (wages dependant on performance). At least in this doctrine, there is no emphasis on external flexibility (hiring and firing of workers according to production needs), nor is there an explicit view of unions as a rigidity to be minimized.

Beyond the theoretical controversies (Toyotism, Japanese production system, lean production) with their diverse assumptions, since the 1980s, labor flexibility practices have spread within companies. A blend of implicit or explicit practices and concepts (a process defined as hybridization by both regulationism and Toyotism). The same may be said of labor policies proposed by governments as part of the measures taken to adjust an economy (Standing, 1988) (Standing, 1991) (Walterskirchen, 1991).

To conclude, flexibility is not a univocal concept, it designates different realities and
concepts of work. At present, we can find the following concepts of flexibility separately or in a combined form:
a) Pre-Taylorist flexibility, close to organizational arbitrariness.
b) Flexibility included in the practice of Taylorism.
c) Toyotist flexibility, centered on production, a new labor culture, internal mobility and re-qualification.
d) Post-Fordist flexibility concerned about new consensus and regulations between capital and work at micro and macro levels.
e) Neo-classical flexibility, deregulating the labor market.

From a technical point of view, we could also refer to product and procedure flexibility. And in work flexibility, an emphasis can be placed on adjusting employment volume (external numerical flexibility), on adjusting the amount of work (internal numerical flexibility), on using labor force in the work process (functional flexibility), and on forms of payment based on performance (wage flexibility) (Ozaki, 1999). Flexibility may work at a micro level (the workplace, department or company), at a middle level (corporation, branch, zone, national), or at a global level in the industrial relations system and the labor market. On the other hand, flexibility can accept a formal level, set down in laws, regulations or agreements, and an informal level corresponding to customs, traditions and daily interactions. To sum up, work flexibility as a form is management’s capacity to adjust employment, the use of the labor force in the productive process and wages to the ever changing conditions in production. This form, however, may include other contents, depending on the underlying concepts and, above all, on the interactions between the actors, institutions, norms and cultures inside and outside the workplace.

New work organization and labor flexibility forms have given rise to serious debates on the possibilities and impact of expansion on productivity, quality and competitiveness. Some of the most important ones may be summarized as follows:
a) The distinction between Japanization, which involves not only production models but also Japanese culture and society with its institutions which are impossible to transfer to another country, and Toyotism as a managerial doctrine which is synthesized in Total Quality Control and Just-in-Time. Regarding Toyotism, the distance between doctrine and reality in Japan, especially the influence of institutions of the industrial relations system that go beyond work organization and that together with Toyotism would explain the successes before the crisis of the
1990s, such as the duality of the Japanese labor market between large, small and medium-sized companies, the former with high wages, life-time employment, promotion according to seniority and union cooperation with management, and the latter with low wages, labor instability, no unions, female labor (Boyer and Yamada, 2000).

b) If Toyotism actually represents a rift from Fordism.
c) If Maximum flexibility translates into maximum productivity.
d) Empirical studies tend to show that neither new work organization forms nor flexibility have spread as much as some would think. Ozaki's study (1996) in developed countries found contradictory tendencies: fewer Taylorist-Fordist processes in industry, but more in the services. Katz came to the conclusion that work teams, except in Japan and Germany, are accepted more slowly in other countries since they appear to be alien from their cultural traditions and their industrialization experiences come across opposition from supervisors, managers, and union leaders.
e) The problems of partnership between new forms of organization and productivity are found in Capelli's report (1997) that questions the association between new forms of organization and productivity. Capelli came across studies that provide positive correlations, so long as other innovations and others with weak relationships are included.


There has been wide research on work organization and labor flexibility in Mexico. In particular, there have been extensive studies on flexibility in labor relations (which began in the mid-1980s), and these studies have included many different aspects in their analysis. In synthesis, five moments in the study on work flexibility and organization stand out:

First moment. The initial aim of the study on flexibility was to interpret flexibility in the light of structural variables with a large dose of determinism. Research was carried out at a macro level and, in spite of its insufficiencies, produced interesting results, especially as it helped direct attention to flexibility, involuntarily opening up new perspectives that were directly related to its very limitations.

A piece of research of this nature was done from a regulationist approach (Gutiérrez, 1988). Esthela Gutiérrez (1988) developed her thesis on the idea that "We face two concepts of crisis management. In the former, the solution to the productivity problem includes technological
innovation and the introduction of flexible teams in the machinery system. This obviously means substantial transformation of labor force conditions, aimed to the formation of multi-skilled workers, and also implies the search for a new rationality in company organization and the productive system. The latter, which is the political solution, tries to redistribute the newly created value toward profits, strengthening the investment fund in order to reactivate growth. This solution comes from a regulation based on the free play of market forces; a liberal notion that in the field of labor relations takes shape in the principle of work flexibility.

Subsequently, Enrique Hernandez Laos and Jaime Aboites offered another interpretation, in which they maintained that since the 1980s, Mexico experienced serious economic, political and social transformations that tended to move the country toward modernization. These authors suggest that in order to speed up the process, there is a need to liberalize market forces and managerial capacity, liberalize trade, and rationalize the state’s participation in the economy. The main point of interest in this study was to understand what hindered labor mobility in the Mexican industry, maintaining that flexibility expresses the labor sector's capacity to respond to the restructuring of the productive apparatus and/or work conditions. The authors also maintain that wage flexibility, job mobility, professional mobility and geographical mobility of the labor force represent the main dimensions of labor flexibility at a macroeconomic level. From a microeconomic point of view, it is the requirements of flexibility that would derive in changes in technology and work organization, which led the authors to conclude that it is most convenient to set up flexible companies.

This study is based on the assumption that there is no consensus at an international level regarding the ideal procedures that should be followed to flexibilize labor markets; that industrial reconversion requires substantial modifications in the labor market; and that the crisis forced dramatic economic adjustments to take place, stimulated technological and organizational innovation in companies, and generated changes in the labor markets, changes which implied a new industrial development policy (liberalization) and a labor policy defined by a gradual development of a new work agreement model, characterized by lower union participation in decision-making (Hernandez and Aboites, 1990).

Second moment. Other studies set out defining the concept of flexibility, the space in labor relations in which the role of the social actors are more clearly manifested, as well as the peculiarities this phenomenon presents in Mexico.
In a previous piece of research (De la Garza, 1990) studying the flexibilization of labor relations, it was considered very important to first muse about the following concepts: industrial reconversion, modernization, productive restructuring and flexibilization of work and collective bargaining agreements. Industrial reconversion is said to be related to the economic crisis of the previous decade and to the fact that companies have gone through a series of changes aimed to increase productivity and product quality, thereby eliminating obstacles in the productive processes and labor relations.

It is argued that within the concept of productive restructuring it is not sufficient to only include technological changes in equipment, machinery and tools, and changes in work and production organization. It must also include modifications in labor relations, especially in hiring and legal aspects.

This study proposes that flexibilization synthesizes the restructuring of the labor force in three basic dimensions:

i) Numerical flexibility: adjusting employment to the fluctuating demand for production;

ii) Wage flexibility: wages are adjusted according to productivity;

iii) Functional flexibility: flexible use of the labor force within productive processes, which implies multiskilled work and internal mobility between jobs, departments, appointments, shifts, schedules, etc. (De la Garza, 1993a).

In these kinds of studies, one can appreciate the rigidities the employers observe, which the studies consider that must be eliminated, i.e., free mobility of workers; docket compression and simplification; freedom in hiring white-collar workers (employees); promotion through proven capacity and for not intervening in the union both in organization and technology. It can then be concluded that having begun the productive restructuring process in Mexico more than a decade ago, it is likely that the notion of flexibility will cross over the different restructuring modalities, even if it now only refers to flexibility in the use of the labor force.

With this approach, we enter into a distinction and a debate - completely different from the first studies on flexibility - one which attempts to cross-relate variables which were not taken into consideration before for various reasons, including the belief in univocal tendencies which made it impossible to see the very concrete differences and characteristics existing in the highly complex Mexican society.

Third moment. In this phase, there is great concern for the specific study of flexibility’s
sectorial and regional expressions and differences. The following questions stand out particularly: why does flexibilization find roots in some places more quickly than in others. If work flexibility takes on several forms, how do company and union strategies influence the type of capital and export capacity in different regions? In order to understand how flexibility is harmonized, the incidence of the labor union tradition in different sectors and the workers' labor and union experiences are also studied.

This piece of research came up with the following outstanding results:

(a) Flexibility is strongly associated with privatization of state enterprises and with the restructuring of large private companies (De la Garza, 1993a) in such a way that the most important changes focus on allowing the workers to move horizontally and vertically within the companies; on reducing union involvement in technological and organizational changes, as well as in the managing internal labor markets; on establishing a multiskilled labor force; and on liberalizing the rules for contracting, promotion and outsourcing.

(b) The export-oriented maquila industry located on the northern border of the country has inaugurated a new flexible bargaining agreement model that excludes unions from most decisions on the labor force. It grants management a considerable degree of freedom to hire white-collar workers (employees), as well as temporary or full-time workers. It authorizes the company to impose overtime, work on days off, promote according to the worker's capacity and other similar clauses (De la Garza, 1993a; Quintero and De la O, 1992; Carrillo, 1991).

(c) There are differences within the maquilas on the northern border. Based on the peculiarities of labor relations along the country's northern border in terms of flexibility, De la O Martínez and Quintero (1992) find that whereas in Matamoros collective bargaining actually protects the workers, in Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez they are sweetheart contracts for the companies, and the workers seldom even know they are unionized.

(d) Differences are found in the form and intensity of flexibility, depending on the power and culture of the labor actors. De la Garza (1993a) concludes that the concept of flexibility includes a wide diversity of phenomena with different forms, both situations of deregulation as models which are closer to Toyotism, thus establishing different segments of flexibilization: maximum and unilateral flexibilization as found in the border maquila; moderate flexibilization in the state companies; limited and stable flexibilization in medium-sized and small companies; flexibility without changes in the unions in Monterrey, and flexibility which is rigid by Law, but flexible
under the general labor conditions established for public administration employees.

(f) Internal mobility between functions, jobs, categories, shifts, departments and establishments is a trend in the manufacturing industry in the state of Sonora (Covarrubias, 1993). This author finds that there are different levels of intensity to increase productivity, stimulate multi-skillfulness, face absenteeism and frequent resignations, and promote wages in relation to the worker's know-how, thereby closing the path to blind promotion and fostering skill assessment.

(g) Labor relations are experienced as formalized and informalized relationships (Bouzas, 1996). The former regulate the work process, organization forms, decisions between workers and directives regarding the production process in a coded manner. The latter take concrete form on the factory floor: from the needs and uncertainties the productive process takes on each moment, in association with productivity goals and the market conditions for the product; from company strategies to meet these needs; from the existence or lack of norms; from the willingness, attitude and power of the actors to respect, establish, filter or negotiate these needs; from the presence or absence of workers' organizations, their goals, their identity and the breadth of their representation; from the configuration labor conflicts take on and their productive results; and from the collective and individual strategies of the workers to face and overcome these conflicts.

Fourth moment. It was natural to move into the case studies that have enriched empirical information on the problem, allowing a reformulation of the hypotheses arising from the global theoretical frameworks on productive restructuring.

Jorge Carrillo's work (1993) is among this type of experience. Through his comparative studies on sectors as well as on companies located in northern Mexico, he provides interesting observations, such as the following:

- In the maquila plants, with or without a collective bargaining, the situation is very similar, given that contracts are very simple and flexibility has been introduced and disseminated in contexts without conflict since the 1970s.
- Regionally, and for northern Mexico, companies with collective bargaining agreements have lower working conditions than companies without contracts.
- Labor relations that are already flexible in the maquila, automotive and mining sectors, will become more flexible as a result of the NAFTA deregulation process, the introduction of new technologies and new forms of work organization.

In this fourth moment, the transformation of the automotive industry came up with the following
results:
- As strategies in the automotive industry, modernization and flexibility are applied in different ways, even within the same company, as in the Volkswagen plant where important differences exist between the supply plant and distribution agencies, impacting on quality aspects due to the heterogeneous nature of the sector (Herrera, 1993).
- In the Volkswagen case, the collective bargaining agreement includes important flexibility elements related to productivity, competitiveness and quality, as well as greater freedom in the use of the labor force, mobility, permanence and remuneration.
- In this sector, the flexibilizing changes have in general been unilateral processes and respond to the need to reformulate productivity and competitive strategies (Arteaga, 1992).
- In the Nissan case, the process was mediated in the 1980s by a crisis in the labor union, the modification of the collective bargaining agreement and the establishment of new clauses to the contract implying the tacit acceptance of the changes, company decisions, internal mobility and freedom to hire personnel, along with training regulations and the management’s freedom to apply technological changes.
- In the case of General Motors - Mexico, there have been changes in the labor qualification, linked to the company's restructuring strategy, and with loss of jobs as a consequence of compressing and restructuring jobs and work categories. It is a process that involves technological changes that calls for re-operationalizing the Fordist organization, as well as the union’s self-exclusion due to its incapacity to make viable proposals and participate in the productive process itself (Micheli, 1993).
- The Ford case shows a tendency toward adopting just-in-time and total quality control principles both in new, automated plants (Hermosillo), and in older plants (Cuautitlan) and in maquila plants (Favesa) (Carrillo, 1993). However, the trajectory to introduce flexibility is dissimilar in these cases, as well as the final result: in Hermosillo, we find ample, far-reaching flexibility of a functional type, due to an arrangement between the company and the union which was agreed before the plant was installed, which was initially resisted by the workers; in Cuautitlan, there is limited, short-range flexibility of a quantitative type, owing to the deterioration of the union, and a great deal of union and worker resistance; Favesa presents a quasi-functional type of flexibility, where the workers have not shown any resistance at all, but no real involvement either.
Fernando Herrera reviews the case of a former public company (DINA), which is now privatized, and finds that, in answer to the crisis, a policy was designed which required changes in ownership systems, healthy finances and a substantial transformation in labor relations, which implied an intensive use of the labor force, a reduction and flexibilization of collective bargaining, market flexibilization and de-unionizing. Alejandro Covarrubias (1992) did a comparative study on the expressions, intensities and changes flexibility assumes in collective bargaining agreements in industries in Sonora during the 1980s, where he tried to explain the possible connections between contracting flexibility and other related dimensions of industrial reconversion, such as technology, work process organization, labor force characteristics and union-company relations. He concludes that reconversion used to adopt a wide diversity of modalities, with or without debate and without modifying the norms, that changes were initially established through substantial cuts in the clauses that held back productivity and quality, as well as those that involved lowering production costs.

Fifth moment. Finally, studies were carried out with a different perspective on flexibility: the labor law framework. This level of analysis is entwined with employer's aspiration to modify Federal Labor Law and adopt a more flexible law in its place.

This is a level of discussion where political parties, employer organizations and unions have entered into the debate. At first, the changes in the labor law framework were seen as if it were a contract revision, more within a political context and a struggle between employers and unions seeking to deregulate the labor relations. Deregulation was claimed to be a basic condition to reach competitiveness at an international level, to enter into modernity and, under the assumption that current labor norms are rigid, changes in the labor law framework were being requested.

This debate began in 1989 when the Salinas administration called for a forum discussion on reforms to Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution and the Federal Labor Law, in response to petitions from the employers. However, the proposals made by the participants lacked a guiding thread. Studies were presented which looked at particular aspects of labor regulations (employment of minors, retirement, maternity leave and others), or others that presented such specific analyses that they were reduced to referring to a particular article in the Law to point out its deficiencies or excesses. The studies that stood out were those referring to aspects of political importance, such as the removal of section B in Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution,
rejection of union certification and other themes. Nonetheless, the discussion at these fora naturally focused on certain basic topics and gradually a more polished agenda began to be take shape: variations in working days according to company requirements (work by the hour, for example); setting up wages in accordance with productivity; flexibility in areas related to stability in order to broaden the spectrum of work opportunities; promotion by performance; revision of the labor courts, their structure, their links with the Executive branch and their professionalism; the role the State plays in labor relations, as 'guardian' of labor and social security.

Other important themes also came up in the employers proposals: restrictions to strikes, restrictions to the right to association and limitations to collective bargaining; and for the labor union counterpart: full exercise of the right to strike and rejection of the procedural strike; respect for the full exercise of the right to association and collective bargaining, and widening of the spaces for bilateral negotiation. In spite of the fact that none of the previous proposals have actually taken concrete form, the debate has been fruitful and has allowed attention to be given to general questions of extreme importance, such as:

- There is a real abuse of labor norms. It is necessary to establish minimum norms that are as general as possible, and that these norms contain the fundamental principles that are considered valid in the labor relations, along with specific regulations that do not go against them. This means that the large number of laws of exception that currently exist are not justified, such as section B, Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution; casuistic laws such as those regarding the military and the police force; special chapters included in the Federal Labor Law; labor regulations for workers in the Federal Electoral Institute; and many others.

- During a second phase, the analysis level became enriched and De Buen (1989), Bouzas (1996) and others studying the theme took it up again. We can say that this second phase of analysis ended with a proposal for a Code of Work, written by Nestor De Buen, which gave rise to important comments.

In synthesis, work flexibility linked to new organizational forms has been one of the most important topics in Mexico for at least the last ten years. It has occupied academics and union leaders, as well a government officials and employers. Nevertheless, there is still no diagnosis available on the state of flexibility and work organization in Mexico, which apart from being general, would be based on concrete experiences based on regional and sectorial diversity. On
the one hand, there are national public opinion surveys, such as ENESTYC, which can provide material for the construction of work organization and flexibility models, still missing in the specialized literature. On the other hand, there are multiple cases that present restructuring trajectories, but have not yet been systematized. These issues will be precisely the core objective of this proposal, as will be seen further on.