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A Task-Function Heuristics for Production Dynamics

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Abstract

Analytical attempts at opening the black box of production have in most cases addressed quantitative relationships of complementarity and proportionality among components of the production process in specific domains. The aim of this paper is to move beyond the analytical representation of production structure as a set of proportions among production elements, and to provide a visualization of the production process that sheds light on qualitative features of production structures. The building blocks of our approach are: (i) the distinction between tasks (as realized productive operations) and functions (as abilities, dispositions or states of readiness needed for productive transformation); (ii) the reconstruction of selected episodes in production history in terms of the dynamic tension between tasks and functions that is inherent to any given production structure; (iii) the outline of a conceptual framework for the analysis of the dynamic relationship between tasks and functions. The paper is concluded by a discussion of lines of further research in which changing relationships between functions and tasks are seen as a fundamental structural condition at the origin of both the transformation of patterns of division of labour and the increase in the number of intermediate products in the economic system.