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Changing Labour Market and Gender Equality: The Role of Policy

A GENDER PERSPECTIVE ON MOBILITY IN THE NEW ORGANISATIONAL ERA

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This attached paper has been prepared by Bjorg Aase Sorensen, Work Research Institute, Oslo, Norway. The views expressed are those of the author and do not commit either the Organisation or the national authorities concerned.

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SUMMARY

1. Towards the new millennium studies of emerging trends and scenarios for the future have been presented. These studies, although undertaken in different countries, seem to portray major processes and have striking similarities. Would an analysis of these new structures and the processes behind them with a gender perspective contribute to a deepened understanding of challenges ahead ?
2. This paper discusses the ongoing change process in working life and in the labour market with bearing on mobility and distribution. Do we now see the coming of a new organisational era?. Are the tendencies identified really something new? Are the changes going to have differentiating effects on men and women, constituting a gendering mechanism? Major changes captured by the concept of globalization may have different effects for men and women and materialise on the organisational level as well as in branches or the total labour market. Which strategies do we identify among women in different segments of the labour market and with different educational background? What are the implications of new demands for flexibility in working life? How do mergers, privatisation, down-sizing and new work contracts affect employees? Do these processes promote or impede careers, motivate or discourage investment in competence? These topics are dealt with in the discussion.
3. The role of policy may be clarified by analysing and comparing the strategies developed by the professions within varying socio-political contexts. Further research is called for. By distinguishing between conjunctural, national and structural, general changes, degrees of freedom for policy development may be identified. Seen from the perspective of women and men who are employed, the family structure represents another important factor in the new organisational era. Is it a myth or a glimpse of the changes in everyday life when it is contended that 'work becomes home and home becomes work')? Which are the options ahead, what kind of new challenges emerge in the interaction between the changing labour markets and the daily tasks and blessings of love and caring ? Demographic changes in Europe call for a clear policy not only on childcare, but to a high degree, also caring systems for the elderly.

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A GENDER PERSPECTIVE ON MOBILITY IN THE NEW ORGANISATIONAL ERA¹

A PORTRAIT OF WORKING LIFE TOWARDS THE NEW MILLENNIUM

1. The working life proves to be both static and dynamic in its features. Literature on working life towards the end of the millennium emphasises that there is an ongoing globalisation process. This process is described as driven by market forces, and it is believed to have more or less profound effects on the nation state, legislation, trade and industry, the enterprises and individuals. An extensive amount of international literature discusses these developmental tendencies. To some extent the literature also deals with the consequences that this development might involve for working conditions, professional groups, career patterns, mobility patterns, living conditions and life styles. The transnational corporations develop strong internal cultures and dynamics. There is an extensive spread of organisational and leadership concepts, technology and contract forms through these organisations. In hospitals all over the world professionals know the methods and rhetoric of "quality assuring" and "DRG", in hotel and restaurants consults have promoted systems like "Service Management" and thus doctors from Toronto and Tromsø can compare notes, as can receptionists in Brussels and Bornholm. The 1990s have been described as *the organisational decade*. Organisational change has been the main instrument in the transformation of profound economic regimes.

2. What is called "megatrends" create new contexts for economic enterprise and affects production organisations, social conditions and make up the basis for new organisations and relations. On the organisational level the major developmental tendencies materialise through interpretations of how each individual organisation must adapt to survive, and this involves strategic decisions about internal organisation, demands on service and performance and value orientation in the work force. Through the implementation of strategic behaviour framed by the globalised economy, the enterprise provides an operationalisation of abstract concepts. In the former decades it was a well know strategy to move industrial production to developing countries when the profit margins narrowed in the "old world". Currently the pressure on costs and cost containment has entered the public and private services, bringing the needs for organisational rethinking into our daily lives, as consumers, clients and professionals employed in flexible organisations. The reorganisation is by now taking place in our own quarters.

3. These organisational conditions are the reasons for changes in the psychological contract that the individual employee experiences. There are factors like abilities, experience, competence, suitability etc. Such factors will trigger different emotions in the individual, and life, the way it is led outside of work, will also affect and be affected by the mechanisms that influence health, well-being, aches and pains and disease. While research-literature describing the "megatrends" is abundant and widespread, there is yet

¹ This paper has been prepared by Bjørg Aase Sørensen, Work Research Institute, Oslo, Norway, in collaboration with Antje Rapmund and Anne Inga Hilsen. The authors would like to thank Jorun Solheim, Gjøril Seierstad and Mette Stenberg for their contribution.

relatively little empirical research describing the assumed and established consequences of these macro-features/tendencies. Since the changes take their toll we might ask "who benefits?" and if this is the best way to obtain changes? The tendency to apply "ethical budgets" and the like is an expression of some of the uneasiness with the unintended consequences of the development.

Recent studies in international literature and in Norwegian literature

4. When we look at recent studies in international literature and in Norwegian literature, an interesting pattern emerges. There seems to be two different sets of concepts that are used to describe the present situation in work life. Each set is relevant to one segment of the labour market and not the other.

5. One of the sets consists of concepts like flexible organisations, change mastering, virtual organisations, new technology and empowerment. All these concepts are relevant to the segment of the labour market that can be characterised by the features of post-industrial organisations, namely/

- a levelling of hierarchical distinctions,
- interpenetrating of units designed to enhance the integration and maximise the co-ordination of previously autonomous functions,
- a dramatic increase in the amount of behaviour that is not rule-bound,
- hiring and promoting people who are creative, committed and have a "feeling" for the job,
- shifting assignments in and out of flexible work teams, and
- more widespread access to information within and across organisations (Carnevale 1991 in Hage/Powers 1992).
- the employee is regarded as a representative of the core technology and competence of the firm and embodies the qualities of a brand name.

6. In this segment the employees are expected to create careers and grasp the opportunities offered to maximise their individual career promotion. We find almost no traces of a major issue in earlier organisational literature discussing conflicts of interest imbedded in the relationship between owners and employees. But some recent contributions question the outcome when new forms of commitment are encouraged in work life and the employees seem to comply by adapting their behaviour. The term from Coser (Coser 1974) discussing 'greedy' organisations has gained new actuality. And as the organisations adopt a range of rewards like flexible working hours, encouragement of data-commuting and extended autonomy to the employees, the workplace becomes an attractive social arena where the employees find it attractive to spend much time (Hochschild 1997).

Scenarios

7. By extrapolating the features of modern working life, as described above, one can construct different scenarios to more easily understand the challenges of the working life. At least three scenarios are identifiable:

- Post-industrial society, where the challenges of constant change and shifting work relations places strain on the employees, but also open up new possibilities.
- Traditional production of services and goods, where new forms of employment contracts or lacking stability in employment seem to increase.
- Segments with a combination of these features.

8. It may be said that we now find new opportunities, threats, variety and insecurity side by side in a pattern not yet fully understood. The complexities can not be met with neglect or denial, each and every actor in the labour market has to rethink old strategies. This collapse in established order may be perceived as threatening, but as the traditional paradigm was diagnosed as gendered, this could also enable innovation according to values of equality.

Norwegian working life

9. Norway with its open and vulnerable economy is heavily exposed to these new trends. This country has an open economy which is characterised by primary/basic industry and export of unrefined material. At the same time, the Norwegian population is small and of considerable internal homogeneity, norms of equality are central in the culture. To understand Norwegian working life it is important to see it in a historic perspective. Norwegian work life, like that in the neighbouring Sweden, is to a great extent regulated through the development of an interaction between organised partners and with a tradition of extensive state legislation regulating and defining the framework in the area of employee rights, protection of the environment and health (Bregn & Hvid 1993). Furthermore, the employment rates are high in Norway and in an international perspective, women are to a great extent participating in work life (Skrede & Tornes 1990, Holter & Sørensen 1982).

10. Internationalisation of Norwegian business, trade and industry has dramatically increased as a consequence of the Norwegian oil resources. The oil not only proved to be a new source of income, but it also involved development of high-tech competence and increased internal mobility. The share of foreign ownership in Norwegian trade and industry increased in the 90s as did Norwegian investments abroad.

11. In the course of the last thirty years Norway has evolved from being a country with traditional industry and primary industries into a post-industrial society. In contrast to other countries, Norway has kept an extensive public sector and has maintained the welfare state. The work force consists of 2,1 million workers from the age of 16 to the age of 67 of whom 5 per cent work in primary industry, 12 per cent in industry, 7 per cent in construction and about 75 per cent in service- and knowledge based branches. The share of self-employment increases. The educational capacity at the colleges and universities is quite large, and a very big share of the young people now receive higher education. More than half of the students in the universities are by now women.

12. In large surveys (ALI/ABU 1989/93, Levekårsundersøkelsen 1996, Grimsmo 1996) it is revealed that Norwegian employees are generally pleased with their work (9 out of 10 respondents): only a very small proportion say that they are not healthy, a small proportion say they are in average health, while most people report that they are in good health. However, many experience strains in their work environment and symptoms that give pain or reduced well-being. Almost quarter of a million former employees now live on different kinds of welfare/pensions, and there is a ever-lasting worry over the considerable number of absentees in working life.

13. Among those employed a very high proportion change jobs. A recently published study indicate that more than 400 000 (around 35 per cent) of the employed got a new employer while almost 50 per cent changed jobs during a year. The rate of unemployment is down to 3,5 per cent. The mobility rate is highest among those with 11 to 14 years of education (engineers, teachers, nurses and IT-personnel). The people in this category has an education which is not too specialised and they have proven to be the most flexible job-seekers. Further more, the growth in small and medium sized companies is very high and the mobility of personnel is also highest in this type of enterprises. Data covering all branches showed that only 36 per cent of the employed in 1989 remained in the same jobs when reinterviewed in 1993. The degree of changes within working life is demonstrated in surveys. During the years from 1989 to 1993, 6 out of ten employees said that they had got new colleagues at work, almost 50 per cent got new tasks, 20 per cent experienced new working hours and 10 per cent had received a warning that they might be made redundant.

NEW CAREER AND EMPLOYMENT FORMS

14. Although we will see that societies encounter the globalization process somewhat differently according to history, established patterns of labour relations and economic situation, it is contended that organisational restructuring and hyper-competition have revolutionised careers and destroyed the traditional blueprint for advancement and career success (Arthur & Rousseau 1996). A new concept "The Boundaryless career" has been coined. Traditionally careers have taken place as vertical movements within relatively stable, hierarchical organisations, public as well as private. And career is understood as "the unfolding sequence of a person's work experiences over time". In the "industrial state" the dynamics and logic of careers was common knowledge. As Arthur and Rousseau claims, we have now entered a "new organisational era". The anatomy of the careers of this area is far from comprehensively understood.

Lifelong employment

15. Few organisations can guarantee lifelong employment. For large groups of employees this implies the need for a major shift in orientation. Permanent appointment has traditionally represented safety. New activity forms and ownership-forms have over the course of time led to changes in these conditions. A downsizing of the welfare state for example, involves exposure to increased competition for employees in food production and laundry and cleaning services. Other services like for instance municipal renovation has already been turned into a private enterprise/privatised. Over time, there has been a certain "outsourcing" of services and tasks that the enterprises do not consider as their "core" activities. The same development is seen in large private corporations where catering, cleaning and sometimes clerical functions are the object of outsourcing, even functions demanding high skilled competence as IT - and data systems management is outsourced. Rather than employing permanent manpower some services are bought trough contract work. These processes have several effects, some of them might be positive. Others, like increased insecurity, might lead to reduced well-being in employees. Empirically speaking several of the functions we talk about here are covered by female workers. Downsizing and "slimming" of organisations may cause difficulties for those involved in getting re-employed. But it is also observed how these processes may stimulate to the creation of new companies and lead to successful self-employment.

Employment contracts

16. In addition to legal terms of employment, employment contracts are also used when discussing the larger issue of bilateral arrangements between employers and employees that involve reciprocal expectations and behaviours (Kalleberg & Reve 1993). An organisational employment contract is "no more and no less than the relations among parties to the process of projecting exchanges into the future" (MacNeill 1980). The contract does not have to be formalised in writing, but can be expressed in several ways: exchange norms (MacNeill 1980, Kaufman & Stern 1988), implied understandings (Weick 1979), organisational actions toward employees (Rousseau & Parks 1992) and arrangements such as alliances between companies (Gulati 1995). Contracts regulate the exchange of money and other job rewards to employees in return for their efforts and sometimes loyalty. Employment contracts encompass the salient features of employment relations, including how work is organised, governed, evaluated and rewarded (Kalleberg & Reve 1993).

17. Used in this sense of the word, employment contracts lie within the field of economic as well as psychological and sociological theories. The individual in the organisation can be predicted to act according to economic theories or understood within the framework of sociological theory or psychological theories on human behaviour. An attempt to sort this field of mutual interest has resulted in a model of employment relations (Kalleberg & Reve 1993). Their model includes five main sets of concepts: conditions, control, incentives, commitment and context. Their assumption is that labour market transactions are characterised by *contractual conditions*, which largely determine the *control system* or governance structure of employment relations and the kind of *incentives* used to motivate work performance. Contractual conditions, control and incentives, in turn, influence employees' *commitment* to the organisation. Finally, they posit that employment transactions always take place within a *contractual content*, which affects each of the other dimensions of employment relations.

18. With this model of employment relations, studies have been conducted to assess the effect of employment contracts on the employee, mainly by studying the effect on their commitment. Whether the results of these studies have bearings on employee health does not lie within the scope of this field of research. Its relevance lies in the conceptualisation of the field of employment contracts. Further research must be carried out to answer the question of how the new organisational era affects the contractual aspects of employment and through this even the strategic acts of employees seeking to promote their careers.

19. The wave of downsizing, mergers and restructuring seem to amount to a systemic change that might have implications for the cultural understanding of the employment contract. It is not to be understood as monolithic downsizing (Gowing, Kraft & Campbell, 1998) but rather as an array of organisational responses to environmental change, including the privatisation of some previously public workloads, restructuring of intra- and inter-organisational resources, mergers and acquisitions, and divestitures and outsourcing (op cit 259). In the United States context the new systemic order is credited with positive changes in the employment rate, falling poverty rates and record levels of corporate profit and stock market performance. But the outcome for employees who lost their positions due to downsizing may have been occupational underemployment which is associated with poorer general mental health, lower overall life satisfaction and lower job satisfaction (Burke & Nelson 1998). Underemployment and career entrenchment as consequences of restructuring is now being the subject of several studies. New studies are called for to establish the consequences for groups already in a weak or marginal position in the labour market. While new opportunities undoubtedly are created we still do not know to which extent these opportunities are equally distributed. Later in this paper we will return to the issue about the effects of flexibility demands on vulnerable groups like young people, immigrants and women with family responsibilities. These groups may need strong formal rights in order to voice their interests.

20. A review of existing literature shows that the literature on formalised employment contracts mainly looks at how wide-spread the different kinds of contracts are and for what group of employees (Caire 1982, Teague 1989, Boje 1990, Davidson 1990, Das & Sekhar 1992, Davidson 1994, Batley 1996, Humphrey 1996). Age, gender, class and ethnicity are typical background variables that seem to influence the formal employment contract (Lichter 1989, Callaway, Fuller et al. 1996). We also find substantial work on the relationship between formal employment contracts and insecurity/stress (Ouchi & Johnson 1978, Vinokur Kaplan, Jayaratne et al. 1994). Employment contracts, formalised or not, are very much the product of the legal, cultural and economic regulation of work environment within each country.

21. Within the broader concept of employment contracts, that includes the non-formalised aspects of the contract, research has been done on the relational terms in employment contracts and their effect on individual outcomes. Contracts can be described on a continuum between transactional exchange and relational exchange. Transactional contracting implies an arms-length relationship involving a simple exchange of commodity for money. By contrast, relational exchange is complex, broad in scope, long term, developmental in nature and implies extensive communication and a high degree of mutual involvement (Kalleberg & Rognes 1996). An important and intriguing question is how the new labour market demands affect the relational aspects of the employment contracts.

22. The changes that take place through globalisation and new patterns of employee adjustments may lead to a shift in orientation: the individual may become more centred around his/her employability when deciding on entering in a contractual arrangement. When profitable companies downsize, merge or move in order to maximise economic output, local employees traditionally protest. In Norway we have recently seen serious propositions that the owners in such cases should compensate the loss of work with "a golden handshake" to each employee, as is the custom when high level managers have to leave their position. A company should, as traditionally understood, demonstrate social responsibility to the employees and the community. In this cultural context it is not considered legitimate to close down or move a sustainable firm, just to increase profitability.

23. Empirical data have been used to study the differential effects on individual outcomes by transactional vs. relational employment contracts in Norway (Kalleberg & Rognes 1996). The main conclusions are that relational contract terms are more common in larger establishments, in organisations with firm internal labour markets and in organisations with climates that emphasise trust. Relational contract terms are also more prevalent in higher prestige occupations, among persons with seniority, education, and among supervisors and full-time employees. The study also finds that persons with relational contracts are more committed to their organisations and satisfied with their jobs, less likely to leave the organisation and more apt to be promoted. An interesting part of the study experimented with analysis of absenteeism at the organisational level and found that the presence of relational contracts is correlated with less absenteeism. However, the negative relationship turned out not to be statistically significant when controlled for the explanatory variables (Kalleberg & Rognes 1996). Despite limitations in this study, it does demonstrate the possibilities of empirically investigating the effects of employment contracts on individual outcomes.

24. Further research on this topic is needed to positively relate employment contracts to individual careers and mobility under the new organisational reality, but the existing research at least establishes the topic as possible to investigate empirically. This topic typically demands a multi-disciplinary approach in order to combine at least the economic, sociological and psychological theories. Much has been done to assess the effect of employment contracts on the organisation, but significantly less on the effect on employee career and career strategies.

25. Regulation of employment contracts are thought to be beneficial to employees, but we need more research to establish under what conditions contracts are beneficial and what kind of employment contracts have which effect. The research needs to be conducted within the country or culture one wants to study, as research on this topic seems to have a strong national, economic and cultural bias that affects the possibility of comparison across these kind of borders.

Regional and firm models

26. Several elements are important to complete the picture of the ongoing structural changes with bearing on careers and mobility. The fact that small and medium sized enterprises represent the major growth in economic activity fill in into this pattern. And at the same time we see how regions become important frameworks for developing networks of new industries who join forces in flexible specialisation. This is the context where employees have to develop their employability strategies.

27. Comparisons according to employment rate is often conducted by comparing unemployment rates in countries, but such average numbers may mask important internal differences within the countries. By now it is as important to focus on regional differences in order to harvest from positive examples of developmental strategies on behalf of employers as well as the employees. Italy has attracted attention because of some striking experiences, pointing to new strategies in developing successful entrepreneurial cultures. Finland and Sweden can also demonstrate such innovative regional examples. Studies done about the success history of the Gnosjø region have concluded that the emerging and viable new enterprises are fostered in an interplay between several developmental factors:

- the creation of companies that refine the competence and natural advantages of the region,
- loyalty to the local enterprises and their demand for competence in selection of education and career development; and
- investment in regional colleges and universities to match the needs of the local economic institutions.

28. Data from the United States and Canada demonstrate that there is a relationship between the duration, or 'lifetime' of the product manufactured and the level of competence demanded within the work force. When the product is aimed at a market with rapid changes and innovations, like the new information technology, the demand for high and continuously developed and maintained competence is at its highest. A high commitment to participate with production with high end user values seem to call for heavy investment in research and development activities on behalf of the companies. This demands intensified emphasis on long term nurturing of talent and continuous education. But such new insights also point to the needs of a new understanding of the relationship between competence and work organisation. In Sweden a major program has been launched to further a broad development in work life involving 25 000 companies. According to an evaluation of results obtained (Gustavsen, Hofmaier & Ekman Philips 1997) this program has contributed to new understanding of the salient importance of designing a work organisation that may promote development of skills at work. The learning from this study is especially important because the data come from all sectors, industry as well as for instance hospitals and service enterprises.

29. A rich and developing economic region, with strong entrepreneurial culture provides for an environment where boundaryless careers may be chosen rather than seen as a threatening necessity of adjustment to turbulent conditions. The boundaryless organisation is described by Handy (Handy 1989)

who describes this type of organisation as constituted by three groups, the core staff, the contractors and the contingent labour. The contractors perform tasks that can be provided with less costs from a smaller, specialised and independent unit who stabilise their relations by contracts of delivery. The contingent labour force constitute an important, buffer, not permanent in numbers and membership. This organisational design allow for high degree of flexibility and redesign according to new demands from the environment. On the individual level the employee has to develop skills in presenting their competence while moving between different types of contractual relations over time. It is important that the person can change statuses for instance move from being part of the 'buffer' layer through an initiative to develop skills or engage in formal education. If the three groups are constituting fixed segments this may prove to have subversive or counterproductive effects on the motivation to develop knowledge and competence. In a gender perspective this is a threat to be taken seriously, women may, under less favourable conditions, end up as permanently located in the contingent group.

30. A report from an Expert Working Group following up the EU White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness, Employment (Bosch 1994) acknowledges the dangers of focusing exclusively on flexibility in the labour market. The risk is that 'the need to adjust in other spheres (as a result of inadequate innovative capacity, for example) will be underestimated and the whole burden of adjustment shifted on to employees' (op cit page 2). The danger of undermining workers' motivation and willingness to participate is underscored. The threat to proper investment in training is also mentioned.

EMPLOYABILITY AND COMPETENCE

31. By competence we understand knowledge, skills and attitudes which can contribute to solve problems and execute tasks (Larsen, Longva et al. 1997). Neither motivation nor willingness are included in the concept of competence, but in reality competence can be influenced by them. We can distinguish between general and professional competence. General competence is attached to social and psychological skills like co-operation, leadership, creativity, flexibility, independence, learning abilities and compromise skills. Professional competence can be divided into formal competence with certificates or examinations, and practical experience. It is also useful to distinguish between formal competence and actual competence, the latter includes not only the outcome of education, but also the learning outcome of work and other activities (Ellström 1997). We get a dynamic view on competence if we emphasise the use of competence by the individual worker at work and in the labour market.

Investment in competence development

32. Today competence is a main resource, for some enterprises it is the only meaningful resource, not just another resource alongside labour, capital and land (Drucker 1993, Larsen, Longva et al. 1997, NOU 1997:25, Ulrich 1998). High competence of workers combined with high commitment to the goals of a company constitute a firm's intellectual capital. We need high competence in more complex and flexibility demanding processes in working life. In more and more branches competence gets obsolete very quickly and people have to learn continuously. Competence has to grow if a company is to succeed. But the problem is how to use competence, how to make competence productive. This is a challenge for the companies, but in the new organisational era this is as pressing a challenge for the individual. Maintaining ones' own competence is the core of employability. The pressing question then is linked to how the conditions in the flexible and ever changing worklife contribute to maintenance of competence. What happens to an individual who experiences job loss once or several times? Will frequent experiences of lay off or reorganisation lead to a plateau in career development? Some studies indicate that the anticipation or fear of job loss may be as damaging as job loss itself. An interesting study by Marks and

Mirivis (referred to in Burke & Nelson 1998) identified a characteristic response to mergers called the 'merger syndrome'. The experience of uncertainty and stress in a merger process provoked a defensive attitude where the involved developed a persistent "fear of the worst". High and low in the organisation managers and employees reacted with stress and rumours started circulating. The merger syndrome leads to increased centralisation and decreased communication that leaves employees in uncertainty (op cit 25). People start acting on the alternative information provided by rumours and while some hurry to leave the enterprise other develop passivity. A merger situation is contesting the established order and managers have to prove their value to new owner, employees become uncertain about relocation, lay off and new bosses. Downsizing implies a wide range of threatening scenarios, being laid off, cuts in payment, shortened work week are some of them.

33. Mergers, downsizing and privatisation have several consequences for those who lose their jobs, but even for those who keep their jobs but have to find new adjustment in a changed organisational design. Reports document increased calls for medical help, negative effects on self esteem and job satisfaction. Some of the reactions have been called "survivor syndrome" (Noer 1998). Even if laid off workers become reemployed a substantial number are reported not to work full time, to obtain lower wages with fewer fringes.

34. Going through a turbulent period where uncertainty prevails may affect the motivation to invest in developing competence, indeed an extensive number of studies demonstrate how employees on all levels experience this as highly stressful. It may be contended that the studies often include employees who did enter the labour marked with traditional expectations and attitudes concerning career development, expecting to be able to pursue a life long career wit one or a few companies. It remains to be seen whether young people develop more successful coping strategies, investing in their own competence and constructing a new type of employability skills.

The increasing service economy and the proliferation of knowledge- based, interactive production

35. Instead of a Tayloristic industry which produced huge amounts of one article, we have today smaller service oriented businesses, which must be very flexible and directed toward the customer. "Service generally comes from relationships founded on the competence and commitment of individuals" (Ulrich 1998). In the Second European Survey on Working Conditions 69 per cent of workers report direct contact with people outside of the organisation like customers or patients (Paoli 1997). We also have to consider a more flexible work organisation in traditional industries like car production, where assembly lines still dominate (Schumann 1990).

36. Traditional professional competence is changing much faster than before and no one escapes a constant pressure to adapt to new conditions in working life. This is why people have to develop and to maintain their competence continuously after school, vocational training, high school and university (Reichborn, Pape et al. 1998). By this people are enabled and tempted to choose jobs which permit the best chances using their competence. Maintaining their own competence and hence their employability becomes a strong motivation. Wages are less important for job satisfaction than the possibility of developing their competence (Ilardi, Leone et al. 1993, Birdi, Allan et al. 1997) What does this implicate? In spite of all the attempts to make monotonous and repetitive jobs complex and challenging, we have to consider that a huge part of existing jobs are still monotonous and repetitive. According to the Second European survey on working conditions in Europe 45 per cent of workers "consider their tasks as being monotonous, especially young workers, temporary workers, low skilled workers, and blue collar workers. (...) Monotony can be linked to repetitiveness: 37 per cent of workers say they job consist of short repetitive tasks ..." (Paoli 1997). Task rotation is experienced by 55 per cent of the workers.

37. A mismatch in terms of underutilization between one's own skills and skills demanded in a specific job, is a cause of job dissatisfaction and boredom (Terry, Nielsen et al. 1993). A good match between working tasks and competence is important for job satisfaction (Petterson, Arnetz et al. 1995). According to the European survey 10 per cent of the workers consider the job demands too low (Paoli, 1997). These people experience their skills and competence as wasted and unrewarded (Penn, Rose et al., 1994). Highly educated workers tend to be less satisfied with their work, they have higher, but often unfilled, expectations of their jobs. Only if competent workers have a positive view of the meaningfulness of their work will they feel satisfied with their work (Mutran, Reitzes et al. 1997).

38. Permanent under-qualification can be a job stressor. The European survey showed that 7 per cent of the workers considered the job demands too high (Paoli, 1997). The lack of career and competence development possibilities and skills obsolescence, especially in connection with new technologies or organisational changes increase fear and the risk of stress reactions and decreases job satisfaction; participation in required continuing education on the other hand can increase job satisfaction (Young 199.; Petterson, Arnetz et al. 1995; Waluyo, Ekberg et al. 1996; Ylipää, Arnetz et al. 1996; Zapf 1996; Birdi, Allan et al. 1997; Eikeland & Berg 1997).

39. Continuing education should be considered as a main task to develop competence. The European survey showed that there is room for considerable improvement in this field: "71 per cent of workers have not received any corporate training over the last 12 months (...) Extremes can be found between countries: half the workers receive training in Finland, Sweden and Denmark, while more than 80 per cent receive no training in Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Belgium." (Paoli 1997). But 74 per cent of the workers confirm learning opportunities at the workplace". The percentages are lowest in the catering sector, among blue collar and temporary workers.

40. Organisational decisions around the definition and use of job skills and automation affect the implementation of new technologies in the production process. Managers define job skills, employment level or positions and wages of the workers, but job descriptions very often under-evaluate the competence a worker really needs to fulfil a job. Managers fail to recognise workers' competence: clerical work especially, mainly done by women, is under-evaluated (Reimer 1995).

41. Important for job satisfaction and self esteem are not only the existing competence of a worker and the possibilities to use and develop them at work, but also the acknowledgement of the use of competence by superiors and by the level of wages. Organisational changes which lead to downgrading of employees as well as de-skilling impair job satisfaction. Stagnation in a career caused by a lack of possibilities to develop skills and to advance have a negative impact on job satisfaction. People feel dislocated, unhappy, maladjusted or underemployed (Herr 1989; Cramer 1993).

Points of disagreement or lack of resolution in the literature

42. The effects of technology in the workplace have been reflected differently by researchers, the debate resulted in an unresolved de-skilling versus upgrading controversy. The upgrading side suggests that machines do repetitive and simple physical movements and decisions best, so machines easily replace already de-skilled monotonous and repetitious labour. Workers' skills get upgraded. Zuboff suggested that computer technologies require intellectual skills from workers, which leads to increasing levels of job satisfaction. The de-skilling side of the controversy argues that mechanisation and automation lead to de-skilling of a part of the workforce, and therefore to alienation (Reuter 1991). Recent studies suggest that both processes can be observed, but that the detrimental effects of de-skilling processes in computerised working places are underestimated and need further research (Marchewka 1993, Donahue 1995).

According to our understanding the labour transformation process is a result of the combination of economical, organisational and technological processes, not only a result of technological changes.

POLARISATION AND FEMINISATION

Increased polarisation in the workforce

43. When examining the pictures of the future provided in studies like Scenarier 2000, 'Worklife towards 2010', the NIOSH agenda for the future, the heterogeneity of the labour force is emphasised as a major feature. Data about the participation of men and women in working life is discussed even from the perspective of equality. But an underlying concern is the a worry about the relationship between the burdens at work and the tasks at home, care for children and the elderly. Data shows, for Norway, that while men work a substantial number of hours overtime in the period where they have small children, women still limit their working hours in this phase of life. But this also depends on the degree of education (Sørensen & Grimsmo 1993, Kvande 1994).

44. Still, it is a myth that women are a reserve labour force army. It is female participation in the labour market that has increased - and in a period in the beginning of the 1990s with recession, it was primarily the male dominated branches that were hit by unemployment. But parts of the literature has been dominated by opinions that women currently suffer fatigue, are so tired because of their labour market participation: "Everything was better in earlier days". But as the Norwegian sociologist Elin Kvande has described, this is a discussion which has led politicians to believe that women has to reduce their activity in working life (Kvande 1994). Less attention has been paid to the working conditions offered to women employed in care in hospitals, institutions for the elderly or other services which now accounts for the fact that more women than men perform tasks that are physically strenuous.

45. When taking a closer look at the processes in working life we disclose an increased polarisation within the workforce. This polarisation occurs in ways which creates increased inequality within the female and male segments of the labour market. Here we again encounter what we earlier labelled the "megatrends", international competition and the ways companies restructure in order to meet the increased competition. The demands to make more flexible organisations have resulted in more use of temporary positions, short-time contracts, part-time, overtime, on call- arrangements, replacements and outsourcing (Kvande 1994, Ellingsæter 1992). An investigation has shown that job announcements in public sector often offers 20 per cent positions (LIKT & ULIKT 1993). Certain researchers has interpreted this as the creation of a welfare-state proletariat (Kvande 1994, Esping-Andersen 1993). Joan Acker has analysed the development in the USA, and in accordance with the scenario from NIOSH, she describes a feminisation of working conditions in USA. This implies that more women enter the workforce because the structure of business changes, but also because the working conditions are impoverished and job-security is diminished as well as offered on a lowered wage-rate. Even for men the working conditions are more polarised, with men in well paid jobs working a lot overtime in the one end and young men with difficulties in entering the workforce in the other.

Employment, flexibility and gender

46. Women's activity rates have increased in all countries within the EU, at the same time men's activity rate has declines in most countries. Figures for Norway show that while the number of women employed increased by 185 000 in the years from 1980 to 1995, the number of men employed decreased

by 21 000. Women form an increasing part of the labour force in all countries - on average 42 per cent for all member states (36 per cent in Luxembourg - 48 per cent in Sweden). This is an increase in about 10 per cent in most countries over the last 10 years. This growth corresponds to a growth in part time (Drew & Emerek 1998).

47. The strong increase in female employment has occurred in a decade where the "new organisational era" or as it is also labelled "the new organisational reality" has demanded higher degrees of flexibility from the workforce. Emerek & Drew contend that under increased competition enterprises demand changes in the way work is performed. This undermines the "male model" of work, the 40-hour week, full-time, permanent employment throughout a continuous and unbroken working life, which necessitated a cleavage from any home-based activities and family concerns. Has this been a development which has given gender neutral results? According to Drew and Emerek the flexibility requirements of employers have led to gendered forms of "atypical" work in which women predominate in part-time employment, while men are more heavily represented in shift work, night/evening and weekend forms of "atypical" work. The employment patterns have had a differential impact on segregation, pay and conditions and the career prospects of men and women in the EU labour market.

48. Part time work is the most common form of atypical work, and has seen a strong development over the last ten years. While 27 per cent of women aged 16 to 66 in Norway defined themselves as housewives in 1980, by 1996 the number had decreased to some 8 per cent. In the same period the number of women working full-time has reached new highs: by now 46 per cent of the women work part time, 54 per cent work full time and totally 76 per cent of the women are gainfully employed. In France, the UK, Belgium, and the Netherlands around 60 per cent of the women are employed and around 30 per cent have part-time working contracts.

49. Behind this development lies the earlier mentioned shift to service economies, service occupations now predominate. The service industries advocate new forms of working values and ideologies like "service management", customer orientation and the like. In the service based economies new types of working hours have spread and this has become a major element alongside part-time. With the growth in the service sector, there has been an increasing demand for uneven, extended working hours that may vary throughout the week. In 1998 30 per cent of the employees in Norway work irregular hours (evenings, night, weekends, shifts and other arrangements). In Sweden some 65 per cent of the labour force now work normal daytime hours (Åkerstedt 1996). In the EU 28 per cent of men and women usually work on Saturdays, and an additional 25 per cent of men and 17 per cent of women some-times work on Saturdays. There are important differences between the countries.

50. Another trend in "atypical work" is "temporary work". The Swedish researchers Gunnar Aronsson and Sara Göransson have studied some important aspects of temporary work (Aronsson & Göransson 1997). In Sweden 14 per cent of the labour force is temporarily employed (in Norway 13 per cent). Women are overrepresented in the temporary work in Sweden while men are slightly more often temporary employed in the EU. According to international research (Mayhew, Quinlan & Bennet 1996) there are some characteristic features of companies which employ people in short term contracts, namely wage systems based on achievement/performance, low interest in health and safety, weak interest in implementing rules and regulations. Aronssons' and Göranssons' study demonstrated that those temporarily employed were marginalised in the working environment and were seldom included in training for instance. Female temporary employees had the weakest position. It seems harder for people employed under such conditions to voice critics and to gain support for their suggestions in the work place.

51. Temporary workers engaged to participate in certain projects were often well educated and they experienced less problems. As carriers of competence important to the firm they enjoyed a better position. This indicates that it is important to observe the ambiguity of the term "temporary" employment. The well educated may find more meaningful and exiting ways of gaining experience and improve their competence by engaging in project-related employment. Large projects are excellent opportunities to develop networks, encounter new challenges and collect valuable experiences, strengthening the bargaining positions when new positions are opened. Through this type of adjustment the already well qualified can tailor an interesting portfolio of engagements, be mobile and enjoy independence. These employees already have embarked on career patterns suiting the label 'boundaryless careers'.

52. In order to understand the possibilities for a positive development through employment in contingent positions for women engaged in service it is important to examine the potential of growth in relational jobs. Competence, actual knowledge, may be understood as personal capital on the hands of the employee. We need research that conceptualises the current changes in the interface between employment groups who can offer personal capital and the organisations demanding such capital in order to be flexible. With the growth of the service sector we may see an improved bargaining position for those so far regarded as weak groups in the labour market. When the customers demand better service at a lower price and have a wide range of selection, awareness of new qualities may emerge and in turn this may affect the evaluation of qualities shepherded in what has been called the 'female culture'?

53. The new organisational era brings forward new images of working life and points to changes in demands and possibilities. When discussing the dual roles of women, at work in the market and as homemakers, focus is often at young women at the outset of their career. Remarkably little attention is paid to the youngest in the labour market, and we find little reference to this group in the extensive literature on the new labour market dynamics. They virtually are invisible. An interesting Swedish study demonstrates that we indeed need more knowledge about the conditions of this group, often temporary employed, facing the challenges of the emerging new organisational forms. Part-time may be a temporary solution or as stated by Bosch (Bosch 1994) 'young people accept part-time work when it constitutes a pathway into full employment'. The challenge is to open opportunities for learning and career promotion even for people working part-time. Policy efforts to promote employers responsibility for encouraging these women to invest in education and programmes of competence could take many forms. First and foremost stimulation to link workplace education with formal training for certificates may meet the need of this group and help them plan ahead. Here Germany may provide United States with an encouraging example. Young people and female returners in Germany have for several years been able to combine publicly -funded further training with part-time employment (Bosch 1994). Denmark exhibits other, very interesting initiatives (Deichmann & Sørensen 1997).

54. Drew and Emerek conclude that overall a gendered pattern of atypical work shows that men and women today are situated in very different forms of alternative work patterns. Men are much more likely to be engaged in atypical work to maximise their take-home pay, by working at times and on shifts which attract a premium, bonus or overtime payments. If women's atypical work is examined collectively and part-time/evening shifts are interwoven, it is more likely that these options will reduce rather than raise their net earnings.

55. Under the conditions of flexibility in the new organisational era, women and men must meet very different demands in their private lives. For women it is still important to find a way to combine homemaking with wage-earning. Pursuing a career and optimising working hours in order to benefit economically is still a challenging jigsaw. The role of men on the home front did not change that much leaving them with a possibility to maintain established strategies as employees.

THE NEW ORGANISATIONAL ERA, BOUNDARYLESS CAREERS AND THE BREAKDOWN OF THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF TIME

New issues in combining work and family

56. The changes in work organisation occur in interplay with society, families, voluntary organisations. Advocates of the advantages of new technology, information technology, emphasise the options to take part in virtual teams and organisations while working at home. Tele-commuting is a hot issue, and diffused as a new type of adjustment. A mobile phone and a PC is all you need to be in touch with your work organisation wherever you are found physically. The dual career family and its male and female partners may find promising openings in the openings offered by the information technology. Someone can be at home and available for children returning from school. But the technology is open in all directions, the employee is also made available for the work organisation while at home. This calls for new strategies to bargain new roles as "home work": being there, but tuned in to the calls from the work organisation of course may create new role ambiguities. Going to work meant, for women, to leave an arena where "work is never done" to another where the tasks are defined as well as the demands and expectations defining a "honest days work" (Sørensen 1981). The new organisational era has developed with greedy organisations, organisations of today expect and demand ambitious and self - managed employees who compete with themselves. During the life span the cross pressure from work and family may constitute different dilemmas. The career may present you with "once in a life chance", but so do family events and phases of development within the lifecycle of the family. When careers and demands/possibilities penetrate into the family life it opens for flexibility, but may eventually complicate the negotiation over time which take place in modern families (Gullvåg & Holter 1990). Since participation in work life harbours so many gratifications for the professional, job oriented person, localising work to the home may mean bringing more intensified awareness of the "needs" of the job into the family, thus flattening or trivialising it. This is an ambiguous option.

57. As pointed to by Tian Sørhaug (Sørhaug 1998) families are envisaged as cyclic organisations, while organisations are understood in terms of growth phases. We use to stop dealing with the "job - family" dilemma when the children have reached mature age. But modern family life, with dual careers, meet a much neglected challenge, that of the needs for taking care of the elderly (Salvage 1995, Ungerson 1990). When children leave the nest, old parents are in line for attention and care. This means that working with the personal computer (PC) at home may be an option for later stages in life as well as for the childrearing period. A more or less continuous need to adjust to a different conceptualisation of "working time" may become the reality. Who will be ready to stay at home and meet the "second shift" in care work? This is indeed an interesting policy question as the demographics tell their clear story. On the policy side it seems to be crucial to develop satisfactory ways of caring for the elderly in order not to see a new development where women must or choose to take a break in their careers twice, when having young children and when nursing old parents.

58. Usually women have been considering the "time-bind" period as a transient phase, "afterwards" women expect to be more visible in the organisational landscape. Research literature has shown how important visibility is for promotion and career opportunities. To women part-time work has been a disadvantage in this respect. Notions of women as less eligible for promotion are hard to fight. Empirical studies tell their stories about a complex pattern of hindrances to equality. Burton (Burton 1992) brings evidence to the role of attitudes among supervisors interfering with a fair treatment for women workers applying for continuous education. The comments by supervisors reviewing applications for the Study Assistance Scheme were examined. Applications from women and men in routine jobs and applications from women and men in jobs from which people normally advance, were compared. Approval for study

assistance was according to Burton given more to men in routine jobs on basis of expected career development than to women in positions where the likelihood of promotion was higher. Burton concludes that sex of the applicant was a more salient factor than the organisational position.

Family-friendly workplaces in the new organisational area

59. In Denmark a research and development project on family friendly workplaces has been recently implemented. Five organisations participated and provide interesting and concrete examples of innovations in family oriented adjustments made possible by involvement from the employer. The approach was based on a "bottom up"- methodology. The results are encouraging: in two of the companies major achievements were made in order to create a family friendly policy. One of the companies, a metal factory, highly exposed to international competition succeeded to develop a work place culture characterised by openness. The project centred around three major themes, all formulated by the participating employees: working time/hours, content of the work and the organisational culture. A central aim was to facilitate improved possibilities on behalf of the employees to meet the needs of the family and family life. No proposals to involve the companies in solving practical tasks like childcare, summer camps for children or food services were put forward.

60. Improved influence over scheduling, breaks, vacations and the like turned out to have high priority. Women and men presented somewhat different suggestions : The gendered division of labour within the family as well as on the labour market were reflected in the conceptualisation of 'a family friendly workplace'. Suggestions to improve their scheduling and work demands to comply with the needs of the family were given highest priority by the women. For all employees who work in monotonous and tightly governed jobs there was a strong wish to change the work organisation. For these groups the negative spill over from work was connected to physical and mental stress and strain in the job. Employees performing skilled work and professional work described how they carried the mental aspects of their job demands with them into the family. Deadlines and achievement orientation sneak into their private lives. Both groups emphasised the value of developing openness about the needs to adjust work and family life. Although it takes practical steps to implement a family friendly company policy this is only possible if the culture has been developed to promote a common understanding of what it takes.

61. A salient finding in this study was that there should be a thorough analysis about the advantages to the economic performance of the firm to be achieved through the promotion of family friendliness. This strategy is appealing because of its practical ways of approaching complex and important issues. The idea of flexibility is translated to degrees of freedom to seek joint optimisation of values often thought of as irreconcilable.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

62. The gender issue is only now being brought into the research agenda on the new organisational era. Studies of the gendering aspects of relational and transactional contracts will be important under the conditions of a more flexible, boundaryless labour market. Women are now gaining a different economic role in many regions and countries in Europe. This is partly due to ongoing structural changes . The development is ambiguous : While the development opens new arenas for women it is at the same time a challenge to the social partners to find agreements that will give the individual employee a sense of fairness, predictability and access to contracts where competence can be developed. This may imply a rethinking about the relationship between formal education and the processes whereby actual competence is acquired. Studies indicate that women tend to be strong believers in the instrumentality of formal

education in promoting careers. Likewise, results question this hypothesis. Formal education is in many instances increasing the likelihood to get access to a branch or a field of work. But getting the possibility to develop a career seem to depend for a substantial part, on other mechanisms.

63. This demonstrates the complexities and ambiguities in the social transformation at the work place where formal qualifications and gendering mechanisms interplay. Creating a firm, individually anchored interpretation of own competence and bargaining position is fundamental to every actor in the new organisational era. How we get there is a main challenge to research, to the social partners and policy makers. Little is known about the double 'boundarylessness', e. g that of the careers and the families. Yet this is an issue with great importance to women who often report a need to find a balance between demands in their paid work and in their home as a prerequisite to maintain health and well-being. Studies of inequality in promotion and career development focus the importance of visibility, being a part of the networks that are seen as important actors in the workplace. Women who take breaks in their careers to stay at home for instance after child birth or when children start school, may pay by suffering a setback in expected promotion, being put on a side track or just defined out of the group of eligible candidates for further education. It may be questioned whether the relational contract of the former organisational environment really included women, and it is an open question if new and boundaryless careers will make a difference in this respect.

64. Employment contracts affect job motivation, individual need for security and job-satisfaction, even if more research is needed to establish the situational variables that account for the results. How this affects career development and mobility differently for men and women is rarely discussed in studies conducted on employment contracts. Uncertainty may affect the prognosis of redefining psychological success for employees as they embark on boundaryless careers. Psychological success is defined by Hall (Hall 1996) as the experience of achieving goals that are personally meaningful to the individual, rather than those set by parents, peers, an organisation, or society. Encountering a continuously changing work life, the individual has to make an effort to integrate shifts and reassessments of opportunities in a coherent pattern. The traditional criteria of success have to be replaced with qualitatively new dimensions. To maintain a sense of control, being a subject pursuing consistent goals calls for reflection and active stand on values and issues. The individual employee has to find a new work identity without clear role models, peer groups and a firm organisational culture. At the core of this reorientation stands the ability to 'learn how to learn', to acquire an ability to harvest from experience and develop skills in strategic presentation of self in ever changing environments. This could be seen as an exhausting but necessary navigating in more or less hostile and competitive environments. But it may also be interpreted as a meaningful journey where the 'work life project' and 'the life project' can find innovative solutions. An important role for policy is to help the partners in working life to give priority to an agenda where experiences gained in the new organisational era and with boundaryless careers may be discussed to facilitate the identification of social responsibility and new choices to be made.

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