

About relevant effects of subjectivated work¹
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1. Introduction

Since the 1980s the constitution of employment in the industrialized societies is changing basically. An important aspect in this context is the subjectivation of work. This development affects various groups of employees quite differently. In this article some of the most relevant *effects* of subjectivation will be discussed. So it's not about the reasons for the emergence of subjectivation and its relation to other developments of structural change in the working world. To analyse this broader theoretical background is not the intention of this essay. Instead of that it will be shown that the implications of subjectivation also can be discussed in connection with the decent work² debate. But first of all some necessary preliminary notes:

- a) The matter of this article is *gainful* employment. A great part of work in societies, for instance all kinds of unpaid work, can't be considered at this point. That would go far beyond the scope of this.
- b) The changes of the working environment mentioned here refer to the framing of Taylorism and its specification of Fordism. These kinds of scientific management were characteristic for the twentieth century. So the point of reference for the change in the working environment is an employment system, that was considered as 'normal' for a comparatively brief time period.
- c) The concept of subjectivation corresponds to complex processes that affect the individual micro-level of employees as well as the company level and developments in the entire society. In this article the focus lies on the individuals' point of view.
- d) Though subjectivation has ambivalent effects for employees, in this article the risks are in the forefront of the considerations. Some of these adverse developments can be discussed in the context of decent work. One basic assumption therefor is, that the employment conditions are getting harder for more and more people in 'modern'

1 This work was supported by a Fellowship of the International Research Center for social ethics in Salzburg.

2 As provided in the concept of 'decent work' by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (cf. Ghai 2006). The characteristics of decent work mentioned in the ILO concept are the basis for the understanding of 'decent work' in this article.

societies.

In the following the concept of subjectivation of work will be described in its basic aspects (2.). Then the main chances and risks of subjectivation will be discussed (3.), with emphasis on the risks for employees. Empirical findings will be used to exemplify various developments concerning working conditions. Finally the considerations will be summarized with regard to its relevance for decent work (4.).

2. Subjectivation of work

Generally 'subjectivation' is the process in which "... historic concrete subjectives – so individually different – attainments or acts are becoming increasingly functional for society". (Kleemann/Matuschek/Voß 2002, p. 57) Formerly seen as disturbing factors that should be eliminated, subjective potentials are increasingly identified as factors of success. Examples herefore are creativity, flexibility, empathy and emotionality. For the working environment it is essential, that since the 1990's the 'subjective factor' became more and more important in the working process as well as in the sociological debates (p. 53).

From the corporate point the requirements to the employees concerning their individual characteristics, actions and interpretations are growing. From the point of the staff members, the claim to bring in more individual behavior is getting more important. These as 'subjectivation of work' characterised developments imply a new form of subjectivity in the context of employment. That means a new requirement *and* a new potential factor of motivation for the individual subject (cf. Kutz 2008, p. 17). There are corresponding developments in the working environment as well as at the level of the entire society. In the work-related context the following variances can be observed (cf. Kratzer et al. 2003, pp. 37-38; Egbringhoff et al. 2003, pp. 10-15):

- In connection with the technical evolution, like the new information and communication technologies, there is evidence, that the 'subjective factor' is becoming more important. Concerning this matter it is essential, that the handling of not completely predictable and controllable as well as non-standardized tasks leads to higher requirements. Thereby "subjective factors like emotion and sensation [...] are not excluded but prove as important cognitive and practical fundamentals." (Böhle 2001, p. 3)

- The growing significance of lifelong learning and professional training lead by trend to a subjectivation of the planning and controlling of further training and education. Empirical analysis show the quantitative importance of job-related further education in the working population. Especially in fields of work with rapid developing technologies and organisation modes this 'life long learning' has to be questioned critically. Volpert (2002, p. 270) for example asserts for the IT branch pessimistically: "The whole life long you are not 'up to date' and you know, that what you learn today, that's the rubbish of tomorrow, and you have to 'unlearn' it as soon as possible."
- An increasing relevance of emotional aspects and subjective characteristics of employees can also be observed in interactive work in service occupations. Thereby subjective sentiences and feelings should not be ignored but recognized as part of the working interaction. Therefore interactive work is frequently named as 'emotional work'³.
- In connection with new concepts of organisation - known under catchwords like decentralisation or indirect control – the active participation of the employees in the working process is a resource of economization. These developments can be seen positively for that part of employees who aspire more 'subjectivity' or 'individuality' in their job.
- With new modes of working – like group work or project work – the demands on employees concerning self-organisation and self-monitoring are growing. These increasing requirements can be sensed both as a kind of 'release' and as additional pressure. The achievement of self-monitoring is thereby in most cases an invisible one with accordingly no compensation, for example in the form of recognition.
- The relationship between work and life needs to be designed in a more and more subjective way. The reasons therefore are the flexibilisation and dislimitation of work. For instance time-based framings of working sphere and private sphere become less important. As a consequence new delineations become necessary, which mean for many individuals high efforts for structuring and control.

3 According to Hochschild (1990) 'emotional work' can be defined as "... the paid work, where a management of one's own emotions is necessary to express a certain emotion in mimic, voice and gesture, independently therefore, if that corresponds with one's inner sentiences or not." (Cited in Zapf et al. 2000, p. 2)

This last point leads to developments in the general social context, that further the subjectivation of work (cf. Kratzer et al. 2003, pp. 38-39):

- First there is the often quoted individualisation and pluralisation of the structures of households and families, of ways of life and lifestyles. As an example the increasing rate of divorces led to more and more so-called 'patchwork-families'.
- Secondly new scopes and necessities for organisation result from the declining importance of institutional arrangements, that were formative for the era of Fordism. That concerns for instance the 40-h-standard employment relationship or the male-breadwinner-family. Career histories are becoming increasingly precarious and their organisation requires more subjective efforts (cf. Kleemann/Matuschek/Voß 2002, p. 75).
- Thirdly there are increased tendencies of a 'normative subjectivation'⁴. That means that also the subjective-individual demands to work are changing, whereas aspects like self-development and self-fulfilment gain in importance. But that people want to have a job with the possibilities for self-development, that's also more and more expected by employers and the society. So normative subjectivation can be seen as a demand *and* a requirement. In this double subjectivation the compliance of extrinsic requirements can be expressed as one's own needs. And in this case it can be expected in a normative way.

After that brief description of the basic characteristics of subjectivation, in the following some of the most relevant consequences for employees shall be discussed. Thereby the main focus of attention is on aspects that imply adverse effects for the individuals. In doing so it's not intended to give a partial negative impression of the process of subjectivation. Many people benefit from these developments. At this point the disadvantageous factors are outlined more detailed, because in many cases they implicate some kind of new constraints for individuals. And that can be relevant in context of the decency of employment.

4 Although there are also some newer empirical studies, in which the "... thesis of the change of claims to employment – in the sense of an increasing normative subjectivation of work – can not be verified in its stringent form." (Hauff 2008, p. 72) According to that and depending on "... individual characteristics like gender, age, origin, qualification or job position and the employment opportunities and risks involved, there are still considerable inter-individual differences in the value orientations." (ibid.) If somebody has to be glad to have a job at all, she or he will not have such big claims – in the sense of normative subjectivation – to her or his job.

3. Chances and risks of subjectivation on individual level

At large the subjectivation of work can have ambivalent impacts to people. More freedom can also imply more pressure, more self-determination is attended by new restraints. The main chances of subjectivation of work from the individuals' point of view are greater scopes:

Possibilities of participation and self-development

In the segment of high and highest qualified employees, the demands *and* the chances for self-development respectively self-fulfilment are rising. The characteristics of this group of employees are a "... job orientation with high regard to content, high level of self-confidence, based on knowledge and professional competence; high level of sensibility concerning rigid structures in organisation and competences and a distinctive reflexion, that leads to an individual concept of interests and actions with demands to self-development and self-expression in the job and in the private life." (Baethge 1994, cited in Kratzer et al. 2003, p. 43)

Decline of external control and restraints

The organisation of work is becoming an individual issue more and more. For many people that may mean an ease not to have to do every procedure by directive. Indirect regulation supersedes direct control as well as the control of results supersedes the control of procedures. The employees get "... large-scale competences for decisions and organisation for the self-regulated handling with the requirements of costumers and market." (Pickshaus 2005, p. 2)

Realisation of individual interests and orientations

The decrease in importance of different institutional framings of Fordism and the accompanied pluralisation of life styles mean on the individual level new possibilities concerning the realisation of specific interests. The demands of *the subjects themselves* for meaningful and challenging work are becoming more and more realisable (cf. Moldaschl 2002, p. 33).

New possibilities concerning the arrangement of work and life

Mainly the flexibilisation of working times and places can be seen positive for certain

groups of employees, if they otherwise would be excluded from gainful employment at all. Among other things in this context the changed conditions for the participation of women in the labour market can be mentioned.

Beside these positive aspects there are also some new risks for individuals. 'New' is primarily the fact that these risks have to be managed increasingly in a subjective-individual way. The reduction of constraints means an increase of personal responsibility under (for many people) more difficult surrounding conditions:

Segmentation of employees

On the labour markets there are different groups of employees, which can deal in different ways with the new conditions of a subjectivated working world. A segmentation of employees can basically be conducted along various dimensions, for example: employed and unemployed, high and low qualified, 'normal' and atypical⁵ employed, younger and older, women and men. In the context of subjectivation of work the differences between high and low qualified⁶ employees concerning the realisation of 'good' work are of great importance. Very often it depends on the level of qualification if somebody can gain positive aspects for her- or himself from the subjectivation of work.

In many cases negative effects for lower qualified employees are stated. Because of less options they are altogether in a worse situation on the labour market. They are often in the situation to be glad to have a job at all. Subjectivation as a chance for contribution of individuality is mostly subject to higher qualified – and first of all younger – people. It is assumed that they are rather in the position to implement the change in values, that forms the basis of normative subjectivation. For less qualified employees there are explicitly less chances in this context. Frequently they feel the negative effects of the changing working environment.

In 2000 in Austria 21.0% of the working population (aged 15-64) had graduated compulsory school – and no professional training – as highest educational level (Statistik Austria 2009). Women are more affected (24.7%) than men (18.2%). In the following years this rate decreased, in 2008 it was at 17.1% (women 19.5%, men

5 The main forms of atypical employment are: part-time work, minor and temporary employment, (new) freelance work ('Me PLC') (cf. Schweiger 2009, p. 55).

6 'Qualification' can be defined in different modes. One possibility is to differentiate groups by their formal school leaving certificates and training qualifications. 'Low qualified' people could then be persons who graduated compulsory school, without any professional education (cf. also Schrattenecker 2004).

15.1%). There are comparable data for Germany, the quota of low qualified employees was 29.1% (West) and 20.9% (East) in 2002 (cf. Schrattenecker 2004, pp. 44 and 82). Some aspects of segmentation on the labour market shall be shown in the following, using the example of a survey conducted in the branch of trade in Austria 2007 (Arbeiterkammer Österreich 2009).

In trade the percentage of employees with compulsory school as highest graduation (18.8%) is higher than on the whole labour market (17.1%); and university graduation is more uncommon (5.3% compared to 12.7%). Thereby women are less educated than men and accordingly they own more often low qualified jobs. The rate of part-time-employees lies at 30.0% and is much higher than in the entire economy (22.6%). Only 2% of them are in a line function, in contrast 53% can be classified as 'non qualified' employees. People in the branch of trade are in some aspects less satisfied with their job situation than their colleagues in other branches. Only 31% are very satisfied with their working hours, compared to 42% in the other sectors.

The income satisfaction is 51% (compared to 64%). Among part-time-employees and low qualified people the sorrow concerning loss of job is much higher (27% compared to 13%). At the same time people in the branch of trade feel dependent on their job. Especially part-time- and female employees worry about finding a comparable job, if it would be necessary. This aspect shows quite explicitly in which dilemma many employees in the branch of trade are: Despite a high grade of dissatisfaction concerning their working conditions, employees see for themselves no or only few alternatives. In this context the educational level plays an important role. Due to a basic change of job specifications, the problems concerning the integration of low qualified people on the labour market are on the increase.

From 1999 the rate of unemployed people with compulsory school as highest graduation in Austria was always at least twice as high as in the entire economy (cf. Bock-Schappelwein/Falk 2009, p. 7). And there are considerable income-related differences between the qualification levels. On the highest educational level ('university') the income is nearly twice as high as on the lowest level ('compulsory school'). With regard to the topic of decent work there is especially one aspect of great importance: people with very limited options have to work under poor conditions. And it has to be stated, that a part of the not or low qualified people is not or low qualifiable.

In a knowledge-based society these employees will get more and more problems to live a decent life without poverty (cf. Wilke 2001, p. 363, cited in Schweiger 2009, p.

71). These people are in need of public transfer payments to close the gap for a decent life. This dependency on the state of some parts of the population is not new; but the circumstances are getting tougher, because the state will less be able to afford its dependants in the future. The main reason for that is the changing age distribution of the population in 'modern' states. Other developments, like the present economic crisis, cause additional higher unemployment data. Altogether the pressure on low qualified people is raising and the segmentation along the dimension of 'qualification' is getting more deepened.

Increasing requirements and higher pressure to perform

Employees are more and more confronted with customer and market requirements. Goal-oriented behavior, where only the frame of the working process is regulated, requires entrepreneurial thinking from the employees (cf. Pickshaus 2005). The results of empirical studies show, that people under that conditions often work more and feel a subjective higher pressure to perform (cf. for example Glißmann 2002). This development is caused by the change from direct to indirect control and the change from control of processes to control of results. Companies ask increasingly for *active self-control* in terms of company needs (cf. Pongratz/Voß 2001, p. 3). By the implementation of new modes of working, for instance network and teamwork, the requirements for employees concerning self-organisation and self-control are rising (cf. Kratzer et al. 2003).

Using the example of project work, typical risks for employees can be shown: Because projects often are specific or almost unique, it's not possible to use experiences of former projects. Thus several operational procedures and working hours can't be calculated. As a consequence working hours can become a flexible parameter (cf. Wagner 2001, p. 372). That tendency of an 'erosion' of labour contracts was mainly important for higher qualified employees until now, but in the future it will affect also other groups of jobholders (p. 373). For the single person that often means a rigorous higher pressure to perform, because the constant producing of a quasi 'normal' or 'standardised' achievement is not enough anymore.

The reaction of the employees is frequently for the benefit of the enterprises: (Self)Extensification and (Self)Intensification of work. In a survey conducted by the Institut zur Erforschung sozialer Chancen (ISO) in Cologne, 73% of the respondents stated to work longer when the pressure of time or to perform is high (cf. Bauer et al. 2004, p. 162). 95% work with higher concentration, 70% heighten the work pace and

62% work without breaks. All in all employees in the countries of the former EU-15 are of the opinion that the intensity of labour has gone up continuously in the last twenty years (cf. Eurofound 2008, p. 63). It seems that the new, post-tayloristic concepts of organisation take place in jobholders' minds.

Beside a quantitative enhancement of the scope of work there is also a new quality of the use of employees' skills. On the one hand by the increasing requirements concerning independent job designs, on the other hand by an extended access to specific potentials of manpower. That can be qualities like the capacity of innovation and creativity, social and communication competences, enthusiasm and ultimate motivation, loyalty, solidarity and so on (cf. Kleemann/Matuschek/Voß 2002, p. 67). Now the goal is the almost 'total' access to employees' personality. In a difficult employment situation, as we currently experience it, the demand of that requirements for the enterprises is quite easy (p. 68).

Where this new quality of the 'good of work force' leads to, is being discussed among concepts like 'self-entrepreneurial work force' (cf. Voß/Pongratz 1998) or 'voluntary self-exploitation'⁷ (cf. Moosbrugger 2008). In the context of decent work the fact is important that no longer only superior employees⁸ are affected by increasing requirements and higher pressure to perform. The analytical differentiation we have to conduct can be found along the question, if somebody still has alternatives under that more difficult conditions. Simplified it's about the issue, if somebody gets higher reward (like more income or self-fulfilment through work) for higher achievement, or if that positive aspects are not existent.

According to empirical findings the former is the case more often: In Germany thus 56% of the employees with a high company-internal status work regularly under high pressure concerning time and performance, jobholders with a low status do it in 31% of the conducted cases (cf. Bauer et al. 2004, p. 154). At least for that third of the employees, who are likely in a situation with low income and only few options, the issue of the realisation of 'good' work is an important one.

Growing uncertainties and precarity

The decrease in importance of the so-called 'standard employment relationship' (SER) carries certain risks for the people involved. New modes of employment become more

7 Whereas it can be basically discussed, in what way 'self-exploitation' can exist at all. In many cases it could be an foreign-induced mode of exploitation, that is perceived as self-induced.

8 The subjectivation of work in terms of changing and increasing requirements was initially empirical proven in that segment of employees.

important: part-time employment, minor and temporary jobs, labour leasing and different modes of 'new' self-employment. According to Brinkmann et al. (2006, pp. 17-18) there are five dimensions in which precarity can become noticeable for employees by adverse impacts: reproductive/material, social/communicative, legal/institutional, status/recognition and contents of work. The analysis of precarious occupation is done by the comparison of basic aspects of the SER (with regard to concrete historical circumstances) with new working methods.

According to the SER gainful employment should provide a 'living wage' and the participation in social life, social protection by the access to employment rights, a minimum of social recognition and it should be neither connected with the loss of meaning nor too much identification with the job. The quantitative decline of the SER is now considered to be a forerunner of a society, in which gainful employment loses its integrative and identity-building function by and by (cf. Brinkmann et al. 2006, p. 9). In that point the varied analyses concerning the structural change in working environment mainly agree. But that loss in importance is (in quantitative terms) obviously not easy to find out.

There are quite different data, for example for Germany 2007 once it is 66.3% SER (Sachverständigenrat 2008), another time it's 74.5% (Statistisches Bundesamt 2008). Nevertheless in either case the empirical findings identify a decreasing rate of people who are all-season and full-time employed since the beginning of the 1990s. But to capture the real extent of precarity, the individual-subjective modes of dealing with precarious employment have to be considered. Because the feeling of uncertainty is not accurately equal to the real risks. The analysis of precarity should therefore "... be conceived as interdependency of working and life circumstances." (Rademacher/Lobato 2008, p. 125)

Then the basic condition 'atypical employment' is only one aspect of the life situation and so it means not necessarily precarious circumstances. In that context Robert Castel (2000) describes 'areas of the post-fordistic labour societies'. He identifies the areas of integration, precarity and isolation. On that basis, Dörre, Krämer and Speidel (2004) found nine typical modes of dealing with uncertainty. The quantitative distribution of that modes for Germany is shown in Table 1⁹.

9 Probability sample n = 5388; weighted data.

Table 1: Potentials of (dis-)integration of gainful employment - data in percent

Area of integration	
1. Secure integration ("The secured")	31.5
2. Atypical integration ("The self-manager")	3.1
3. Insecure integration ("The insecured")	12.9
4. Integration at risk ("The from social decline threatened")	33.1
Area of precarity	
5. Precarious employment as a chance/temporary integration ("The hoping")	3.1
6. Precarious employment as a permanent arrangement ("The realistic")	4.8
7. Mitigated precarity ("The satisfied")	5.9
Area of isolation	
8. Superable exclusion ("The change-willing")	1.7
9. Controlled exclusion/staged integration ("The overtaken")	
Not relatable (missing data)	3.9
	100.0

Source: Brinkmann et al. 2006, p. 57

The main criteria for the differentiation between precarity and integration are the limited options for future planning in the former case. Unemployment and temporary jobs make it difficult to make plans for the future. That aspect is also important for the 'insecured' and the 'from social decline threatened'. Employees in these groups are worried by the fear of social decline. Their ability for a long-term life planning is in no way lost; but there is the more or less substantiated concern that the necessary calculation basis could get lost (cf. Brinkmann et al. 2006, p. 58). In contrast people in the group of 'isolation' have already lost the ability to make an acceptable and realistic scheme of life. Many of them are resigned to an 'underclass-life'.

What do these findings now mean in view of a 'decent labour society'? What does it imply, when only one third of the people at work live in a (subjective felt) secure existence? Is it thus far, that we have to state with regard to Bourdieu (1998): "Precarity is everywhere"? That question can't be answered at this point. But it can be noted that the structural change in the working environment causes uncertainties, that affect no longer only a marginal group of the society. Nowadays more and more people have to accept the fact that a planning of the own biography is getting more difficult or even impossible. That negative aspects of the much acclaimed

'individualisation' and 'pluralisation' of lifecourses now are getting more important. Concerning the ILO guidelines for decent work these developments imply that we are not on a good way. But thereby we should not forget the fact that in 'modern' societies we still have a very high standard of social protection.

4. Conclusion

Subjectivation is one part of a structural change that leads to new conditions in employment. The connection between the process of subjectivation and decent work is getting clear when we think of the main dimensions of decent work, as described by the ILO (Anker et al. 2002, cited in Godfrey 2006, pp. 78-79): a) opportunities for all to find any kind of work, b) freedom of choice of employment, c) productive work, providing adequate incomes, d) equity in work, e) security at work and f) dignity at work. Each of the positive and negative aspects of subjectivation mentioned above concerns at least one of these dimensions.

We don't want to forget that subjectivation stands for a change for the better for many individuals. But it is a fact that beneficial effects like self-development, decline of restraints, realisation of individual interests or more options concerning the arrangement of work and life are usually restricted to certain groups of employees. The increasing importance of subjective-individual potentials and skills results in a new 'quality' of segmentation of employees. In the knowledge society 'education' in the broadest sense is the distinguishing feature. When we want to provide 'decent work' for everyone in industrialized societies, we have to think of the not or low qualified and above all the not or low qualifiable. They are exposed to the market conditions. They are the losers of recent developments in the working environment, because they are generally less flexible and less able to cope with new conditions.

They are those who are most confronted with unemployment, growing uncertainties and precarity. From the socially viewpoint we have to consider that such groups have always existed and will always exist. But with the quantitative decrease of the standard employment relationship the access to the regular labour market is limited anyway. So in the future an independent life enabled by employment could be out of reach for more and more people in our 'modern' societies. In this process the subjectivation of work is only one component. It's the part of the development that points out the increasing importance of individual responsibility. For many employees

the subjectivation of work really stands for improved working conditions and their transformation from an 'object' to a 'subject' of the working process. But for a significant number of people it stands primarily for adverse effects like higher pressure to perform or a new type of instrumentalisation of one's own individual characteristics and skills. In view of that fact the subjectivation of work can be seen as part of a development that makes employment not exactly more 'decent'.

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