Shaping and re-shaping boundaries of work

A framework for analysing complex and multifaceted change

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Introduction

Many have argued that the nature of work has changed fundamentally during recent decades. The golden years or "trente glorieuses" of full employment and generous welfare states ended by the late 1970s. Instead came neoliberalism, market-oriented reforms and permanent austerity (Pierson 2002). Globalisation, deindustrialisation and ageing populations have been shaping post-industrial economies and labour markets (Häusermann & Palier 2008, 561). Postindustrialism introduced "new social risks" resulting from deindustrialisation, tertiarisation of employment, the massive entry of women into the labour market, increasing instability in family structures and destandardisation of employment (Armingeon & Bonoli 2006; Emmenegger, Häusermann, Palier, & Seeleib-Kaiser 2012; Taylor-Gooby 2004). Globalisation has made capital and labour more

Nicol Foulkes Savinetti & Aart-Jan Riekhoff (Eds),
Shaping and re-shaping the boundaries of working life.
Tampere: Tampere University Press, 15–26.
http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-359-020-5

mobile, increasing pressures for companies to compete, innovate, and digitalise, while increasing the need for labour market flexibility (Buchholz et al. 2009). In Europe, EU integration has enabled more job mobility and harmonised labour standards, while the Euro-project has limited possibilities for fiscal policies. Worldwide, immigration is affecting both the top as well as the bottom segments of labour markets (Sassen 2008). Finally, the recent financial, economic and migration crises have not halted any of these developments but seem to have reinforced them.

Obviously, there is a risk of assuming a "special-times bias" and resorting to "grand narratives". In other words, we tend to overemphasise that we live in unique times as a result of magnifying specific phenomena while losing sight of the broader historical trends and overall stability. Observations and reflections on how large global processes are changing the nature of work are at least as old as Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and Karl Marx's *Capital*. Especially the influence of the latter continued to be felt throughout the twentieth century in critiques on Taylorism and Fordism and later through theories of the "degradation of work" and segmentation as a result of technological change (Braverman 1974; Piore & Doeringer 1971). In that sense, there is nothing new: work is changing all the time and at the same time, while looking back, past changes might not seem as drastic now as they seemed to contemporary observers. However, that should not stop researchers from observing and explaining changes in work. Still, of course, changes in work and specific labour market phenomena should be seen in their broader historical context.

In this volume, we look at the changes in work from various perspectives by using multiple methodological approaches at different levels of analysis. One shortcoming in the existing literature is that studies focus either on macrolevel changes or on microlevel practices but rarely recognise or make explicit the links between those. Macrolevel studies on changing labour markets and welfare

states often sketch broad developments and present aggregate data on how changes affect particular groups of people but shy away, for example, from telling what this means for a single mother who has to cope with an insecure job on a day-to-day basis. Microlevel studies on changing forms and practices of work are crucial in understanding how individuals are affected but often fail to explicate how individual-level changes are part of broader phenomena.

In this introductory chapter, we attempt to sketch an analytical framework that combines explaining broad developments and understanding everyday consequences. We emphasise the importance of institutional contexts, politics and ideas. Each of the following chapters of the book discusses different topics with different methodological approaches in a great variety of national contexts. The chapters are grouped according to four broad themes: women in the labour market, migration, new forms of work and policy responses to new challenges. However, as emphasised in this introduction, themes tend to overlap and cannot always strictly be separated.

How are the boundaries of work shaped and reshaped?

Exogenous pressures, macro-social processes and social mechanisms

There are ongoing processes taking place outside the labour market that are, nevertheless, fundamentally reshaping labour markets. These can be called exogenous pressures. Exogenous pressures appear in the literature as similar concepts under various names. Usually, the concepts have in common that they happen outside the direct influence of individuals or policy-makers and that they are expected to pose some kind of pressure or threat to work in its

current form. They are "exogenous" because they only include those pressures taking place outside the domain of routine policy-making. They cannot be adjusted directly unless rather drastic measures are taken. Sometimes exogeneity is confused with externality, or taking place outside of the country, as opposed to domestically. However, pressures like an ageing population, the feminisation of the workforce and deindustrialisation are exogenous. In other words, they cannot be counteracted with "routine" policy instruments even though they are predominantly domestic processes.

The most obvious cause of fundamental social or institutional change is the "exogenous shock" (Castles 2010; Streeck & Thelen 2005): an international or domestic economic or political crisis that poses a direct threat and opens a window of opportunity for radical changes. The logic behind exogenous pressures is different because pressure is constant and often insufficiently urgent for policy-makers to act upon. The term "pressure" is also different from "threat" or "risk" because a pressure is presumed to be present rather than just a hypothetical future event. Observations tell us that the pressures are there and affecting our welfare, whereas our advanced economic and demographic models can forecast how these pressures will develop. However, even though one cannot speak of "risk", we are dealing with highly uncertain outcomes (Blyth 2011).

Part of this uncertainty is inherent to exogenous pressures and the reshaping of work because of these being "big and slow moving macro-social processes" (Pierson 2003). Retrospectively, we might say that we did not see many pressures coming or failed to recognise the impact they would have. Exogenous pressures are slow-moving causal processes that are incremental or cumulative. Also, the consequences of exogenous pressures are largely cumulative and path-dependent; little by little, the labour market changes in response to the changing exogenous environment and reforms that were enacted previously. Another possibility is that exogenous pressures have threshold

effects: pressure increases until a certain boiling point, leading to more immediate crisis or change (Pierson 2003, 182).

Problematic with the long-time horizons of causes (exogenous pressures) and outcomes (changing work) is that they obfuscate the causal chains and mechanisms that link them. How do we empirically prove that a macro-social process that started 30, 40 or 50 years ago has led to a certain outcome in the present, while an infinite number of other factors (exogenous or endogenous) might have played a role at the same time? Social scientists tend to think of stability as the standard in the social world and change as the exception, but what if we consider that change is in fact the standard (Blyth 2011, 84–85)?

Part of the problem is that, to quote David Hume, there is "too much action at a distance" (Pierson 2003, 200), meaning that we try to explain outcomes by looking at causes that are too distant, both in time and space (Hedström & Swedberg 1998). This applies to explaining how a macrolevel cause, for example globalisation, results in a macrolevel outcome, such as a restructuring of the labour market. Importantly for this book, this limitation also applies to macrolevel explanations for microlevel outcomes. How to provide the causal and empirical link between an exogenous pressure, such as globalisation, and, for example, a Polish posted worker's precariousness?

One solution is to focus on the social mechanisms that underlie change. Changes at a macrolevel should be supported by explanations at a microlevel. The literature on social mechanisms suggests that the aim should not be to draw an exclusive list of conditions for social change but to describe the crucial elements causing such change, given certain conditions and context (Hedström & Ylikoski 2010; Mayntz 2004). The aim is to arrive at a theory of the middle range that is clear, precise and simple (Hedström & Ylikoski 2010, 61).

Thinking in terms of "Coleman's boat" to explain macro-social phenomena might be instructive in this case (Coleman 1990). In Coleman's social theory, change on a macrolevel occurs according to

a macro-micro-macro scheme (Figure 1). First, factors at a macrolevel shape the situation or context in which individuals operate and which affect their behaviour. This might be, for example, the situation in a globalised world where borders are increasingly open and in which opportunities for cross-national migration arise. Second, individuals interact strategically at a microlevel in accordance with their own beliefs, attitudes and preferences, but also in relation to the behaviour of others. For example, if local firms in country A are not hiring low-skilled workers and a neighbour got a well-paid job in country B, this might be a strong incentive for other low-skilled workers to try their luck in country B. Third, the accumulation of interactions at a microlevel might lead to a transformation and a new equilibrium at the macrolevel. In our example, this may lead to mass migration of low-skilled workers from country A to country B.

Several of the contributions to this book show how situational mechanisms lead to individuals' actions. Matyska (Chapter 6) shows how Polish workers respond to the opening up of European borders and legal and economic constructions of posted work. Other contributions to this book illustrate how changing interactions at the microlevel transform into a new equilibrium at the macrolevel. Chapter 2 by Kangas, Palme and Kainu analyses how changes in employment patterns lead to differences in the sustainability of welfare states in European countries. Jonker-Hoffrén shows how groupthink processes and the focus on issues of economic competitiveness among

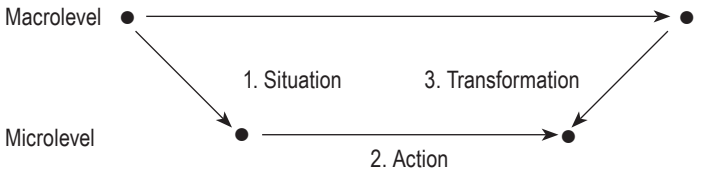

Figure 1. Macro-micro-macro approach to social change
(Coleman 1990)

trade unions in Finland have structurally weakened their position in collective bargaining structures (Chapter 10). Perkiö, however, shows that changes in microlevel actions are not always sufficient to result in transformation at the macrolevel (Chapter 11). Despite intensive debate throughout several decades on the introduction of a universal basic income, this has not resulted in any concrete change in policy-making in Finland.

Beyond automatic responses: politics, institutions and ideas

The macro-micro-level scheme helps explain the relations between macrolevel phenomena and interactions at the microlevel. There is a risk, however, of oversimplifying social mechanisms and assuming that they apply universally as automated processes. This approach leaves out one crucial element: politics in their institutional and historical contexts (Emmenegger et al. 2012). Globalisation, technological change and deindustrialisation do not need to result in the deterioration of work or greater inequality. Rather, their outcomes result from decisions that governments and other policy actors make. One common political strategy to respond to exogenous pressures has been to deregulate labour markets and retrench social rights, resulting in some of the growing inequalities that are analysed in this book. Liberalisation is, however, as various authors argue, not the only possible policy response. Instead of Thatcher's famous TINA (There Is No Alternative), perhaps it is time to think in terms of WITA: What is The Alternative?

Riekhoff (Chapter 9) shows that European governments tend to choose similar types of labour market reform in response to globalisation, but that domestic economic, political and institutional factors play a dominant role as well. Jokela (Chapter 5) emphasises the contradictory politics of not regulating migrant labour because

it might be profitable to do so in neoliberal markets. These cases highlight that labour market outcomes are such because governments act or refrain from acting in a certain way. In addition, institutions and history strongly exert influence on the contextual situation, individual actions and transformation of work. In her comparative study on women attorneys' pro bono work, Choroszewicz shows that the incentives to provide such work differ between Poland and Finland (Chapter 7). Kudo investigates whether family policies, on a national level, have an effect on women's economic contribution in the household, concluding that the availability of public education for pre-school children can have positive effects (Chapter 3).

Finally, various contributions emphasise the importance of ideas in the context of the politics of changing work (Béland & Cox 2011). Exogenous pressures might not always be a problem, unless the idea takes hold that they are. Moreover, political actors and decision-makers do not just have objective and material interests, but their interests are being shaped by ideas. Mustosmäki, Oinas and Anttila examine the how the idea of lean management has been transposed from the private sector to the public sector in the Nordic countries, arguing that such practices might be a wrong solution to the wrong problem (Chapter 8). Jonker-Hoffrén critically argues in Chapter 10 that the ideas of neoliberalism and competitiveness are particularly strong in shaping trade union policies in Finland, even if these can be seen to conflict with their direct interests. Ideas are also important for changing the dominant paradigm. However, as Perkiö shows, the political arguments behind the idea of a universal basic income have evolved over the years following trends in the public debate (Chapter 11). Still, this need not be a problem, because over time a radical idea can become a realistic solution to contemporary worries.

Structure of the book

The chapters of this book are short essay-style contributions with the aim of covering a broad range of themes and reaching a wide reader audience. Many of the contributions are based on theses, articles and other scientific work of the authors that can be consulted if the reader is interested in deepening the topic. All contributions to this volume handle complex and multifaceted problems in work and working life and can, therefore, not easily be grouped under one thematic header. We have grouped the chapters by broad themes but acknowledge that in several contributions the themes overlap. We also consider this part of the strength of this book.

The first part focuses on the life course and gender in the labour market and the consequences and implications of demographic changes in the working population. Kangas, Palme and Kainu (Chapter 2) offer a broad overview on the implications of changing employment patterns on the sustainability of the welfare state. Kudo (Chapter 3) empirically investigates the factors that contribute to women's household economic contribution across countries. The second part of the book focuses on varieties of work and migration. In line with Sassen's (2008) work, the authors show that there are two labour migration circuits. Koikkalainen (Chapter 4) analyses the transnational market for high-level talent within the European Union. Jokela (Chapter 5) analyses the role of national institutions in the regulation of low-skilled and mostly informal types of migration. Matyska (Chapter 6) shows that there is not always a clear boundary between formally and informally regulated forms of labour migration.

In Part Three, the authors analyse how new ways of working are taking shape. Although pro bono work has a long history among lawyers, Choroszewicz (Chapter 7) analyses why women attorneys in Poland and Finland offer part of their services for free. Mustosmäki, Oinas and Anttila (Chapter 8) describe how the introduction of lean practices are changing work in the public sector in Nordic countries.

The final Part Four focuses on the the politics and possibilities of changing work. Riekhoff (Chapter 9) empirically investigates the policy responses to globalisation in unemployment benefits and employment protection legislation in Europe. Jonker-Hoffrén (Chapter 10) critically analyses the trade union movement in Finland and their focus on unit labour costs and competitiveness issues. Finally, Perkiö (Chapter 11) analyses how the idea of a universal basic income has taken root in the Finnish public debate, but how arguments in favour have changed over time along with political trends.

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