

# Workplace flexibility and employee well-being – Proposing a life conduct perspective on subjectified work<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

A large body of literature has detected fundamental changes in the world of work. In this context, „flexibilization“ functions as an umbrella term for processes and managerial strategies imposing new demands and requirements on employees. Examples are atypical employment arrangements, increased requirements for self-organization, and boundaryless work. Simultaneously, flexibility can be a positive resource for workers, offering increased working time autonomy and task-related control opportunities. This Janus-faced character of flexibility is reflected in ambiguous empirical results concerning its impact on employee health and well-being. Reviewing the interdisciplinary literature including a series of own empirical studies, flexibilization in post-Tayloristic societies is interpreted in terms of subjectified work intensification, work extensification, and shifting uncertainties from management to employees. A domain-integrating life conduct perspective for psychological research in this „new“ flexible, individualized, and subjectified world of work is suggested. The proposed framework may help to understand ambiguous results concerning the impact of diverse aspects of workplace flexibility on employee well-being. It may also be useful to empirically disentangle potentially health-supportive dimensions from negative implications.

## Keywords

Workplace flexibility – flexibilization – work intensification – work extensification – insecurity – life conduct

Since the 1990s the diagnosis of fundamental transformations in the world of work proliferated within the sociological and psychological literature. Buzzwords for this change are, for example, *flexibility* (Hudson, 2002), *flexible capitalism* (Sennett, 1999), *flexible labor* (Felstead & Jewson, 1999), *new / changing world of work* (Beck, 2000; Cascio, 1995) or *new working life* (Allvin, Aronsson, Hagström, Johannsson & Lundberg, 2011). Although it is mostly not explained what these terms mean exactly, there is a broad consensus that aggravated competition in globalized capitalism and technological progress are central causes of the stated profound transformations (Allvin et al., 2011). Moreover, some scholars stress that these transformations impose new demands and requirements, and that these demands and requirements do not only affect the domain of labor itself, but increasingly the entire

life of workers (Pongratz & Voß, 2005). The objective of this paper is to review the literature on workplace flexibility, health and well-being, and to propose a specific research perspective on this issue, which might be helpful for further research. First, based on the interdisciplinary literature and a series of own studies, causes, and characteristics of *flexibilization*<sup>1</sup> in the world of work will be presented. Second, flexibilization will be conceptualized as *subjectified* forms of *work intensification*, *work extensification*, and the transfer of *insecurity* from management and owners to workers. Third, a *life conduct perspective* in research will be proposed. It will be argued that psychological research of flexible labor, focusing solely on variables within the work domain, neglects important psychological aspects.

<sup>1</sup> This article is based upon the cumulative habilitation thesis of Thomas Höge (2016).

<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the term „flexibility“ the term „flexibilization“ should stress the underlying economic and societal intentions as well as the process towards increased workplace flexibility.

### Flexibilization in the world of work: Causes and characteristics

The term *flexibilization* subsumes interrelated developments at different levels: (1) the political-economic level, (2) the organizational level, and (3) the individual level. Flexibilization can be understood as a top-down process in which the logics and developments of globalized capitalism at the economic and societal level cause processes of flexibilization first at the organizational and then at the individual level (e.g., Sennett, 1999). However, it can also be assumed that changes at the individual level triggered by flexibilization, such as individualization, value change, changed needs and employment orientations (Beck, 1997; Bröckling, 2016; Pongratz & Voß, 2005), can have backward effects that, in turn, accelerate or „dynamize“ flexibilization processes at the organizational and social levels through individual and collective action. Such a reciprocal relationship between social and organizational structures and individual and collective action is, for example, theoretically described in the *morphogenetic* approach of social theory (Archer, 1995) and integrates the more one-sided approaches of structural-materialistic (e.g., orthodox Marxism) and action-focused social theory (e.g., orthodox Weberianism).

At the economic and societal level, the fundamental cause of flexibilization is commonly detected in the increased competition in globalized capitalism characterized by an international division of labor (Allvin et al., 2011; Beck, 2000). In Western economies, highly standardized mass production is increasingly being replaced by knowledge- and technology-intensive forms of production and services that are more customized (Rousseau, 1997). These in turn require more flexible organizational structures in order to increase efficiency, for example by a better adaptability to order fluctuations. As a reaction to increasing unemployment figures, already in the 1980s a higher flexibility of company structures, employment relationships and a deregulation of labor politics were formulated as possible solutions. Examples are the concept of the „Flexible Firm“ by Atkinson (1984) with its separation into core and peripheral workforces, concepts such as „Lean Production“ and „Lean Management“ (Womack, Jones & Roos, 1990) as well as a deregulation of the labor markets, e.g. by a de-evaluation of collective bargaining agreements, dismissal protection and other labor laws.

*Atypical employment* often plays a crucial role in increasing corporate flexibility in this new world of work. Atypical employment is usually defined as employment that deviate from „standard“ employment in the sense of full-time employment for an indefinite period that is fully integrated into the social security system. In many European countries, an increase in

atypical employment (e.g., fixed-term employment, temporary agency work, marginal employment) can be observed since the 1990s, even if developments vary considerably between countries (Allmendinger, Hipp & Stuth, 2015). However, terms such as „flexibilization“ or „new world of work“ usually include further developments that go beyond an increase in atypical employment and their utilization to increase the flexibility of organizations. German industrial sociologists Kern and Schumann (1985) argued that labor process theory (Braverman, 1974), proposing that a reduction in autonomy and a de-qualification of employees are inevitable developments in capitalism, must be modified. In classical industrial production productivity gains and a more efficient utilization of capital could indeed be achieved through a stronger division of labor, rigid external worker control and the de-skilling of parts of the workforce. However, according to Kern and Schumann (1985) this Tayloristic strategy for a more efficient utilization of capital reaches its limits in highly developed economies with its requirements for knowledge intensive innovations and more flexible, customized production modes. Thus, it is replaced by other forms of increasing efficiency heading in the opposite direction. The focus here is not on aggravation but on a reduction of the division of labor, an increase of qualification, and the design of more holistic and self-organized work task.

Contemporaneously, the Tayloristic paradigm was also challenged by arguments in work and organizational psychology calling for a human-oriented, healthy and personality developing work design. More complete work tasks through reduced division of labor as well as increased worker autonomy are central elements of all psychological human-oriented work design approaches. Prominent approaches are, the *action regulation theory* and the concept of complete vs. partialized work tasks (Frese & Zapf, 1994; Hacker, 2005; Volpert, 1987), the *job characteristics model* (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and the *demand-control model* (Karasek & Theorell, 1992). However, in the current context of increased organizational flexibility as described above, the aspect of designing more humane and healthy work seems to have receded into background when challenging the Tayloristic production paradigm, especially in companies' everyday practice. Here, reducing rigid external worker control and division of labor as well as increasing autonomy are primarily regarded as operational strategies to increase efficiency and not health, which often even counteract humanization efforts (Littek & Charles, 1995; Moldaschl, 2001).

Pongratz and Voß (2005) further developed the argumentation of Kern and Schumann (1985) and proposed their so-called *entreplooyee* concept. In line with Kern and Schumann (1985) they argued that rigid con-

control strategies in the exploitation of labor are at least insufficient, sometimes even counterproductive in an economic context that strongly requires organizational flexibility and innovation. In Taylorism rationalization and productivity increases were to be achieved primarily through *organizing, controlling, and standardizing*, thus following a logic of *objectification* while suppressing all individual needs and differences. In contrast, post-Tayloristic management strategies are increasingly aim at the *subjectification* of labor (Kleemann, Matuschek & Voß, 2002). In this context, „subjectification“ denotes that workers’ individuality and subjectivity are no longer evaluated as potential disruptive factors in labor, but become a resource for rationalization and profit. Accordingly, companies implement structures and HRM practices (e.g., „High Performance Work Systems“, cf. Boxall & Macky, 2009) that aim to exploit the subjective potentials which should lead to more individual involvement and commitment of workers for the benefit of management and owners (cf. also Allvin et al., 2011). According to Voß and Pongratz (2005) the core of this strategy consists in transferring the *fundamental transformation problem* (Braverman, 1974) of converting potential labor power into actual work performance from management to workers themselves. This is essentially achieved through intra-organizational de-regulation (Allvin et al., 2011) and the implementation of *indirect* forms of control. This means that employees are given more autonomy at work. Management is here less concerned with controlling the *execution* of work, but rather with controlling its *outcomes*. For example, performance or outcome objectives are regularly agreed between worker and management and systematically evaluated („management by objectives“). Furthermore, a trend towards more individualized industrial relations can be observed, which may result in a decline of collective and common interests of workers, reducing their solidarity and power. In such new approaches in work design and human resource management the normative role model propagated to workers is the self-employed or *entrepreneur* as far as the concrete execution of work and the acceptance of risks are concerned. Of course, this does not apply to decisions with a wider scope that go beyond the specific workplace and address tactical or strategic decisions of the company or even company ownership and resulting property rights. In other words: the worker should think, act and cope with risks like self-employed entrepreneurs, but in fact remains the same dependent employee as before.

Similar mechanisms as analyzed above are also described by scholars from the field of post-structuralist *governmentality studies* (e.g., Bröckling, 2016; Knights & Willmott, 2002; Rose, 1992). Referring to the French philosopher Foucault (2009, orig. 1978), this

stream of theorizing adopts a perspective of *power* and (*self-*)*discipline* rather than a perspective of rationalization. The main focus is less on a description of the structural changes in the world of work than on the analysis of the social, organizational and individual processes that lead to an internalization of external demands and shape the so-called *entrepreneurial self* (Bröckling, 2016). Particular importance is attached to post-Tayloristic management and controlling strategies, which – according to this governmentalist interpretation – aim above all at the continuous self-optimization and self-discipline of individuals for the benefit of those institutions and social groups in society having the power. Because of the internalization of external power and interest individual failure in this new world of work is prevalently attributed not to external factors (e.g., lack of given resources) but own inadequacy and a lack of individual effort. This can elicit feelings of guilt and subsequent self-exploiting behaviors, which can ultimately lead to a depressed, *exhausted self* (Ehrenberg, 2008). However, such a clearly negative view on flexibilization is by no means consensual in the literature. For example, other authors also emphasize opportunities such as better possibilities for self-determination, unconventional life plans and career paths, an easier integration of work and private life, and individual learning and personal growth (Giddens, 1991; Reilly, 1998). This hypothetical *ambivalence* of flexibilization processes will be elaborated in the next two sections.

### **Flexibilization as subjectified work intensification and work extensification**

Against the background of the approaches described above, it can be argued that flexibilization can be interpreted as a new (i.e., subjectified) form of work intensification and work extensification. According to Marx (1967, orig. published 1894), in capitalism, work intensification and extensification are, besides technological innovation and progress, the most important means to achieve a constant increase in the surplus value rate that is economically necessary because of the law of the profit rate tending to fall. Building on his observations in the English textile industry during early capitalism, Marx argued that the increase in the surplus value rate was initially achieved primarily through an *extensification* of work, i.e. the extension of working hours at the same wage. After the enactment of the first working time laws, however, the increase in the surplus value rate was particularly achieved by faster-running, technologically more developed machines, shorter task cycles and shorter time targets, and a more standardized and more strictly monitoring of workers. According to Marx, work was thus

*intensified* by a „filling-up the pores of working times more densely“ (orig: „dichtere Ausfüllung der Poren der Arbeitszeit“; Marx, 1967, p. 418) while total working hours remained the same or were even shortened. This development culminated in the Tayloristic production method (Braverman, 1974). However, Marx already pointed out the limits of this strategy: He argued that on the long run this development can lead to an excessive exhaustion of the working power reducing the economic efficiency of this strategy (Marx, 1974, orig. published 1910).

Certainly, in the „new“ world of work the phenotypes of work intensification and -extensification are more complex and often more „hidden“. As pointed out before, the strategies to increase the surplus value rate described by Marx (i.e., technological innovation and progress, work intensification and -extensification) are supplemented by increasing the flexibility of organizations for the purpose of faster adaptation to changing market requirements. The postulated paradigm shift from objectifying to subjectifying rationalization suggests a kind of *metamorphosis* of the forms of work intensification and -extensification. Work intensification here is no longer primarily the result of shorter task cycles, time targets, and a more standardized and more strictly monitoring of worker. In contrast, a central characteristic of many flexibility-oriented management strategies is the transfer of classic management tasks to the employees themselves (Pongratz & Voß, 2005). On the one hand, this should result in an increase of personal job control which can be an important work-related resource. On the other hand, increased requirements for self-organization can lead to an expansion of work tasks without an increase of time resources, which is able to intensify everyday work.

Flexible, subjectifying HRM strategies including higher self-organization are a central component of so-called High Performance or High Involvement Work Systems (HPWS or HIWS; cf. Boxall & Macky, 2009; Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999). Empirical findings show that increased work performance in such systems is partly mediated by extra role behavior, i.e. walking the “extra mile”, and an overall higher work engagement (Messersmith, Patel, Lepak & Gould-Williams, 2011; Sun, Aryee & Law, 2007). When wages remain constant, which is usually the case, such mediating mechanisms of extra-role behavior and higher work engagement can – from an economic perspective – be interpreted as a special form of work intensification for the purpose of increasing the surplus value rate. In contrast to the classical forms of work intensification, this subjectified form of work intensification in terms of extra-role behavior and increased engagement is usually accompanied by positive psychological states such as general job satisfaction and affective commitment to the organization (Organ & Ryan, 1995). How-

ever, there is also empirical evidence that extra-role behavior and increased work engagement can be associated with the experience of stress, role overload and conflict between work and private life (Halbesleben, Harvey & Bolino, 2009; Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Moreover, empirical results show that participatory management practices typical for HPWS / HIWS can have ambivalent effects on employees. On the one hand, they are able to increase satisfaction and motivation but on the other hand impair health and workability through an intensification of work (Hornung, Höge, Glaser & Weigl 2017). Results of Höge and Hornung (2015) also confirm the ambivalent character of subjectified work intensification in terms of increased self-organization. They empirically confirmed a simultaneous positive and negative effect of the perceived requirement for self-organization at work (PFR-task) on well-being. PFR-task were positively related to the stress reaction *cognitive irritation*. As expected, this effect was mediated by *time pressure* („intensification path“). However, also a negative relation of PFR-task to the stress reaction *emotional irritation* was observed. This effect was mediated by the experience of more personal initiative at work („subjectification path“).

A further approach with relevance for the hypothesis of increased work intensification in the current world of work is the sociological concept of *acceleration* (Rosa, 2013). The core of this approach is the postulation of a continuous social acceleration circle in modern society including three mutually reinforcing dimensions: (1) *technological acceleration*, (2) *acceleration of social change*, and (3) *acceleration of the pace of life*. Furthermore, it is argued that acceleration is not only a descriptive phenomenon but acceleration becomes a general social norm. Referring to Marx', famous dictum that in capitalism all economy becomes *time economy* (Marx, 1983; first published 1939), Rosa (2013) postulates that the capitalist economy (besides cultural and socio-structural factors) is an important driver for starting and sustaining the acceleration circle. Alike the classical (Marxist) concept of work intensification also the theory of social acceleration is essentially based on the economic imperative of a compulsion to grow in capitalism (Rosa, 2009). Korunka and Kubicek (2013) described how the social acceleration circle expresses itself specifically within the world of work and – mediated by technological and organizational changes – impacts workers in the form of work intensification and increased requirements for an individualized uncertainty management.

However, the question arises, whether there is empirical evidence for work intensification and acceleration in the post-Tayloristic world of work. Indeed, data from panel and longitudinal studies confirm the hypothesis of work intensification in terms of an increase in time pressure at work over time, even if

there are considerable differences between countries (Kubicek, Korunka, Paškvan, Prem & Gerdenitsch, 2014). Additionally, findings with validated scales that directly capture the acceleration experience show that employees indeed actually experience social acceleration in the three dimensions postulated by Rosa (2013), (Ulferts, Korunka & Kubicek, 2015). Moreover, there are findings that perceived work intensification – in the sense of a retrospective assessed *increase* in work-related demands – explains variance in burnout symptoms, even if the currently experienced time pressure and other work characteristics are statistically controlled (Kubicek, Paškvan & Korunka, 2015).

As Marx already mentioned, a more efficient exploitation of labor cannot only be achieved by work intensification, but also work extensification. The classic and simplest form of work extensification is the extension of regular working hours with equal pay. This *objectified* form of work extensification was limited early in the history of capitalism by the enactment of work time laws. However, *subjectified* forms of work extensification in the flexible, more individually self-organized „new“ world of work may unfold beyond the scope of this legislative regulation. For example, this should be the case, when employees working in highly flexible working time systems such as trust-based or zero-hour working time schedules work more hours per week than employees with a fixed hours contract (Wingen, 2004). The same applies to the „outsourcing“ of standard employment into flexible, atypical employment such as „self-employment“, for which statutory, collective working time regulations no longer apply. This often also results in working hours that are significantly longer than those of permanent employees with similar task profiles (Jamal, 1997).

Further forms of subjectified work extensification are addressed in psychological and sociological discourses on the character and effects of *blurred boundaries* between work and private life (e.g., Nippert-Eng, 1996; Kossek & Lambert, 2005; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). These include a wide variety of phenomena in which work-related activities, cognitions or emotions intendedly or unintendedly cross the border into private life (Höge & Hornung, 2015). This can range from taking work at home and work outside official working hours, work-related communication in private life via modern information and communication technologies (ICT), over ruminating about work related problems in leisure time, to the regulation of work-related emotions outside working hours. Blurred boundaries between work and private life, require new efforts from employees in the sense of an active *boundary management* (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012), which, however, can also fail.

Höge (2009) addressed aspects of work intensification and -extensification simultaneously in an em-

pirical study. He identified that in the highly flexible sector of home care the impact of the intensification-related stressor *time pressure on somatic complaints* was partially mediated by the spill-over or „boundary transcending“ of strain from work into private life in terms of emotional irritation and cognitive irritation in leisure time, which can interpreted as one of the described „new“ forms of extensification, that in turn were positively related to strain-based work-family conflict. In contrast to classical objectified work extensification, the described new forms of subjectified work extensification are probably not always to be appraised negatively per se, but ambivalently. On the one hand, for various phenomena, e.g., taking work at home or the work-related ICT-use outside regular working hours, research established effects on experiencing higher work-home conflicts, impaired recovery and higher stress reactions (e.g., Derks & Bakker, 2014; Voydanoff, 2005). For *on-call work*, recovery-reducing effects could be identified that did not only result from additional work but from the mere expectation of a possible call (Bamberg, Dettmers, Funck, Krähe & Vahle-Hinz, 2012).

On the other hand, there are findings that suggest that with regard to work related ICT-use outside regular working hours it must be distinguished between passive, *externally initiated*, and active, *self-initiated* ICT use. Höge, Palm and Strecker (2016) showed that requirements for self-organization at work are positively related to both forms of ICT-use. However, while the passive, externally initiated ICT-use was in turn positively related to more *conflict* between work and private life, the active, *self-initiated* ICT-use was positively related to more work-private life *enrichment*. The ambivalence of work related smartphone use outside the official working time was also confirmed in an earlier study that showed that an *autonomous motivation* (Deci & Ryan, 2000) for smartphone use was positively related to positive outcomes, whereas *controlled motivation* was significantly related to negative outcomes (Ohly & Latour, 2014).

### Flexibilization and insecurity

Intensified global competition, labor market de-regulation, economic crises, as well as organizational flexibilization processes have led to an increased significance of job and biographical insecurity in the workforce (e.g., Burchell, Ladipo & Wilkinson, 2002; Kalleberg, 2009). Indeed, survey data from various nations confirm an increase in job and career insecurity (Kubicek et al., 2014). Fixed-term employment and other forms of atypical employment such as temporary agency work seems to be of particular importance. For example, empirical findings show that atypical work-



ers often experience more job insecurity than workers in standard employment (de Cuyper & de Witte, 2006; Sora, Höge, Caballer & Peiró, 2018). Faster circles of company re-structuring (e.g., downsizing, outsourcing, mergers & acquisitions), are also often associated with increased job insecurity (Greenglass & Burke, 2001). Increased insecurity in a flexible world of work influence employees not only in their employee role as employees (e.g., reduced performance, job satisfaction and commitment; Sverke, Hellgren & Näswall, 2002), but also have impacts beyond. Negative effects on health are empirically well proven (Cheng & Chan, 2008; de Witte, Pienaar & de Cuyper, 2016). Cross-domain effects, i.e. negative effects of job insecurity on variables outside the work domain, such as family satisfaction or partnership quality, are also evident (Larson, Wilson & Beley, 1994; Sora & Höge, 2014).

The negative effects of job insecurity on health and well-being unfold partially via a so-called *anticipated deprivation mechanism* (Höge, Sora, Weber, Peiró & Caballer, 2015) which also includes cognitions and emotions concerning the private life. Höge et al. (2015) confirmed in a Spanish and an Austrian sample that worries about material (financial) deprivation and especially worries about a decline of social relationships in the future mediate the relationship between job insecurity and somatic complaints in both country samples but with different strength. This study illustrated the role of biographical cognitions and emotions about the anticipated personal future for actual job insecurity and actual perceived impaired health. In addition, the results demonstrate the importance of considering the economic and cultural context. A future oriented, biographical approach for explaining the detrimental effects of job insecurity was also taken in the study by Höge, Brucculeri and Iwanowa (2012) on young scientists at universities in Austria, Germany and the UK. The results illustrated that the impact of job insecurity in the current (mostly temporary) employment relationship on well-being develops via the more long-term and future oriented *career* insecurity and experiencing conflicts between occupational and private life goals. Career insecurity and conflicts between occupational and private life goals were higher among female young scientists than male, and in Germany and Austria than in the UK, caused by the much higher proportion of temporary employment in Germany and Austria. Again, these results illustrate the potential role of future orientations and societal aspects. However, the findings on the consequences of temporary employment in general are less clear compared to the consequence of job insecurity, even if, as already mentioned, temporary employment is usually associated with higher job insecurity (de Cuyper, de Jong, de Witte, Isaksson, Rigotti & Schalk, 2008). Contextual conditions such as the *voluntariness* of working

in a temporary employment relationship (Marler, Barringer & Milkovitch, 2002) or changed psychological contracts seem to play a crucial role and can buffer detrimental effects (Bernhard-Oettel, Rigotti, Clinton & de Jong, 2013).

### **A life conduct perspective in work and organizational psychology**

Against the described background, in this section it will be argued that for analyzing the flexible „new“ world of work a specific perspective is particularly appropriate: A *life conduct perspective*. It is by no means claimed that this is a completely new perspective in work and organizational psychology. It can be found, for example, in the extensive literature on concepts like work-family conflict, work-home conflict, work-home enrichment or boundary management. In particular, a life conduct perspective was already taken in research that deals with aspects of an *active* and *intentional* coordination of potentially conflicting goals from various life domains (e.g., Wiese, Freund & Baltes, 2000; Wiese & Salmela-Aro, 2008). However, the term „life conduct perspective“ requires an explanation, since „life conduct“ is not a common concept in psychology. The term „life conduct“ became popular in the 19th century through a small volume of essays entitled „The Conduct of Life“ by the American philosopher and writer Ralph W. Emerson (Emerson, 1860). Written in a literary language Emerson described general principles of a coherent „good life“ in different life domains. Inspired by his colleague and friend Henry D. Thoreau (1817 - 1862), the author of famous „Walden; or, Life in the Woods“ (Thoreau, 1854) Emerson emphasized the role of self-reliance, self-direction and a deep connection with nature for accomplishing a conscious, meaningful, satisfying conduct of life.

In modern sociology, the term „life conduct“ („Lebensführung“) prominently appears in Max Weber's seminal work „Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft“ (Weber, 1922). In contrast to Emerson's use of the term, in Weber's work „life conduct“ has a less individualistic and normative connotation. Weber's „life conduct“ denotes also the influences of social factors such as belonging to a class, religion, culture, and the specific *rationality* and *restrictions* associated with these social groups. Furthermore, Weber stressed that life conduct in turn has retroactive effects on these social groups and the entire society. Weber (1922) also introduced the concepts of „lifestyle“ („Lebensstil“) and „life opportunities“ („Lebenschancen“), which represent the collective, social point of reference: „*Lebensführung* means life conduct, which refers to self-direction and choice in behavior. Used in connection with lifestyles, *Lebensführung* means lifestyle choices (...), but these

choices are dependent upon the individual's potential (Lebenschancen) for realizing them.“ (Abel & Cockermham, 1993, p. 553f.). Explicitly referring to Weber (1922), in more recent times „life conduct“ appeared within German industrial sociology in form of the „everyday life conduct“ approach („alltägliche Lebensführung“; e.g., Kudera & Voß, 2000). However, the term „everyday life conduct“ is much narrower here. It describes the daily active coordination of the different life domains and roles in an overall arrangement of a coherent life. The focus here is not so much on a biographical or life course perspective but on the micro-structures of such everyday coordination processes. Similar to Weber (1922), the concrete „everyday life conduct“ is understood as a reciprocal mediating factor between social structures and individual subjects.

However, in this paper the term „life conduct“ is much broader than the sociological, micro-analytical concept of „everyday life conduct“. A life conduct perspective in work and organizational psychology – as it is suggested here – contains perspectives in which it is taken into account that all behavior and experiences of individuals at work are always the behavior and experience of *subjects* who *actively* strive to realize their ideas and desires of a good, self-directed meaningful life. This includes an everyday coordination of goals and activities of life domains as well as biographical cognitions, emotions, orientations and actions directed towards the future. It is assumed that behavior and experience at work can be best understood if the social environment in different domains at different levels (e.g., organizations, economy, society), in which the employee tries to shape his or her life is reflected. This implies that specific criteria or dependent variables are of particular interest in a work and organizational psychology committed to a life conduct perspective: Variables that go beyond behavior and experience that only refer to the work domain and can serve as indicators of the extent to which specific conditions of work contribute to or restrict a self-directed, self-determined conduct of a „good“ life. These are, for example, mental and physical health, (eudaimonic) well-being, personality development and especially the experience of meaning (cf. Schnell, Höge & Pollet, 2015). Such a perspective should provide a more „holistic“ picture of our research *objects* which are – somewhat paradoxically – *subjects* at work. In contrast, work and organizational psychological studies not seldom focus exclusively on effects of characteristics of the *work* domain (e.g., task characteristics, leadership) on workers' behaviors and experiences also exclusively related to the work domain (e.g., job satisfaction, work performance, work engagement, organizational commitment). Such a research analyzes dependent employees only in their role as dependent employees. However, all employees are always and at every time more than

dependent employees but human actors striving for a self-determined good life within different domains and environments fostering or hindering their endeavor.

## Conclusion and outlook

Answering the fundamental question whether the described developments in the „new“ world of work should be evaluated as positive or negative in general is difficult or even impossible. This is even true if only consequences for health and well-being of workers are chosen as the relevant criteria. While in the non-empirical sociological and philosophical literature a critical to pessimistic conclusion dominates, quantitative-empirical data from work and organizational psychology or organizational behavior research speak more for an ambivalent, Janus-faced character of contemporary flexibilization processes. (cf. Dettmers, Kaiser & Fietze, 2013; Höge & Hornung, 2015). The proposal to conceptualize processes of flexibilization on the level of political economy as new *subjectified* forms of a systemic work intensification and -extensification and a shift of insecurity from management and company owners to workers may help to understand this ambivalence and the ambiguous empirical results: The risks for well-being and health may arise primarily from the *intensification* and *extensification* aspects and the increased experience of insecurity, while the *subjectification* aspect offers opportunities such as improved conditions for individual self-determination and self-actualization in realizing the good life (see Figure 1). Moreover, a theoretical perspective including an idea concerning the causes of contemporary workplace flexibility on the level of political economy reduces the danger of falling into an uncritical individualism that either ignores or naturalizes social and economic causes and constraints.

However, a final answer may also be difficult or even impossible because it would negate the principal *dialectics* of social processes. For example, Adler (2007) formulated the provocative thesis, that Taylorism – with all its evident and undisputed negative effects on workers – has historically also represented a field of *socialization* with positive implications for workers. He argues, for example, that Taylorism promoted the experience of workers as collectives with common interests. This was an important prerequisite for the emergence of influential, powerful trade unions. The „scientification“ of large-scale industrial production has brought the collective of workers into contact with a special form of *rationality* and the associated objective knowledge, which may have broadened the mental horizon of working class and thus also made their collective actions to assert their interests more effective. Even though this theoretical approach

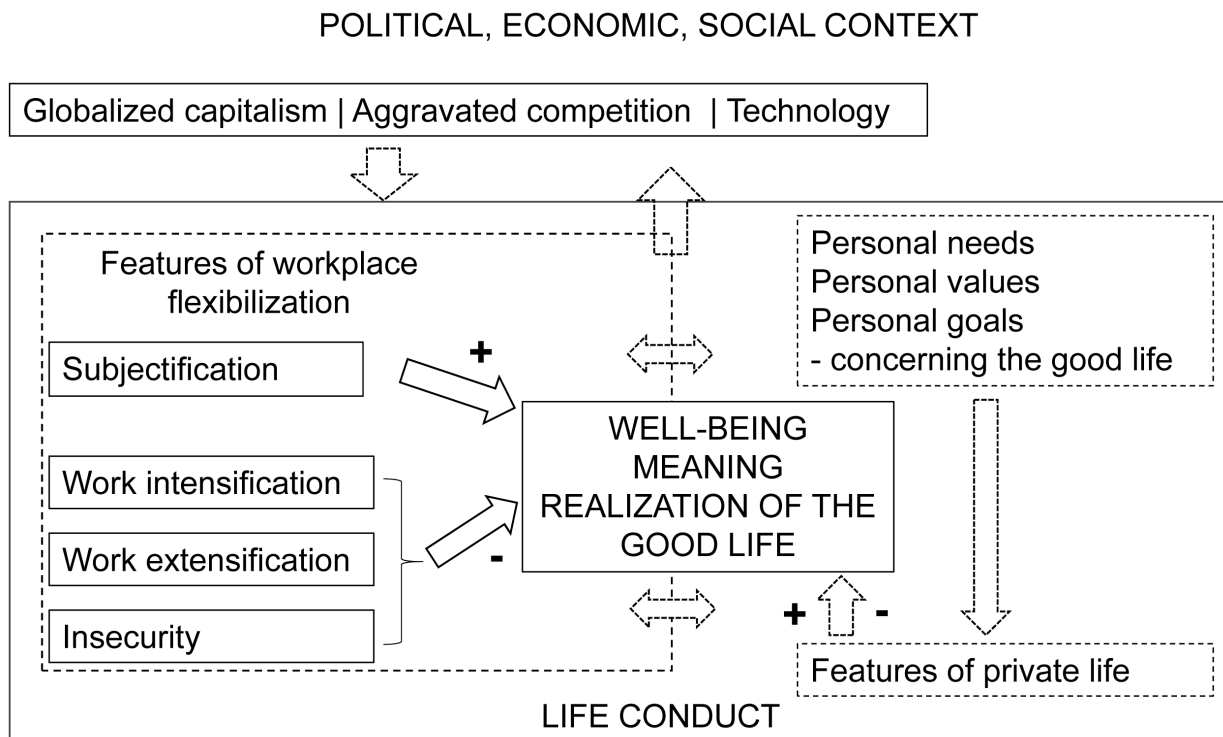


Figure 1: A life conduct perspective on flexible, subjectified work.

is for sure not unproblematic and was heavily criticized (Thompson, 2007), this dialectical approach is worth discussing and may inspire future research. It directs the focus of future research on flexibilization more strongly towards the potential positive effects such as stronger self-determination, self-actualization and creating a meaningful life by the realization of individual and collective life plans, and the question of how these in turn re-affect the world of work and society. This includes, above all, the analysis of individual, organizational and societal framework conditions that promote, hinder or even reverse potentially positive effects and lead to self-exploitation, burnout, alienation and loss of meaning. In any case, a dialectical view as presented by Adler (2007) gives hope that the „new“, post-Tayloristic, flexible world of work will also create new spaces and forms of collective socialization in which something can emerge that counteracts a „colonialization“ of the „Lebenswelt“ through the „system“ (Habermas, 1984) or even contributes to the transformation of the system itself.

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