



## Volume 2, Issue no. 1

### Introduction

**B**y coincidence four of the five articles in this issue are interconnected as they are all related to computer based work. Work which has went through major changes as a result of the IT development. Yet, they analyze very different kinds of IT work: developers and designers in the IT field, IT-based administrative work and work in call centers. The four articles all analyze changes in identity, motivation and control at work related to changing work conditions. All four articles are based on case studies and use qualitative methods. The last article takes up a very relevant theme given the present financial and economic crisis, namely the re-employment of employees who become unemployed as a result of mass layoffs. In turn the articles are:

#### **Permanent temporariness? Changes in social contracts in knowledge work**

Knowledge work is not as stable as it has been. For many knowledge workers employment relations are increasingly temporary. Why is this so? Rasmussen and Håpnes argue that it is not because of changes in the formal employment contract – at least not in Norway where the study has been conducted as employment contracts have not been more flexible. Another possible explanation, which has been promoted by several researchers, is that more knowledge workers are ‘disloyal portfolio workers’, who have one aspiration: to improve their value on the labor market. They are always ready to leave their present employer if somebody else offers new opportunities that will improve their CVs. Rasmussen and Håpnes however find other explanations. They have interviewed knowledge workers in the financial services, public relations, web-designers, employees in an international research institution and laboratory workers at an international company. The main reason for leaving the company was not related to personal gains. Those who left the company did so even though they strongly identified themselves with the work they were doing. They left because they felt that they no longer could carry out their work in a proper manner: One reason was that the employees could no longer do a good job and they gave up trying to change things. Another reason for leaving was that they were not chosen for a permanent position and were ‘counseled out’. A third reason could be that they realized that it was difficult to sell their expertise on the market, and they realized that they had to find something else. Rasmussen and Håpnes argue that it is not individualism and egoism that create the temporariness, but difficulties in a continuous performance of good work that is the main reason for permanent temporariness.



## **Work organization and professionalization in new media industry – the case of a Finnish company**

Haapakorpi is concerned with the development of current knowledge work within the new media business. She examines what happened in relation to work when the sector went from the pioneer phase in the 1990s to well-established business in the 2000s. Her article is based on a case study of a middle sized Finnish company making multimedia and Internet-based service solutions. In line with Rasmussen and Håpnes, Haapakorpi finds that engagement in work is a very important factor for the employees. In the case company, management asks the employees to lower their professional standards. The employees however prefer to work longer hours to get a more satisfactory result. Haapakorpi examines how professional governance is introduced in the company. All employees work in temporary teams. The frame for the individual team's work is specified through advanced financial management, but the work in itself is self-governed though in accordance with developed production standards. This standardization reduces creativity. Management wants to avoid professional specialization because it will avoid dependence on individual employees. Uncertainty is met with increased control, for example quality control. The development of skills, creativity and job satisfaction is harmed by this development, and unproductive boundaries between professional groups are created.

## **“The Staircase Model” – motivating and controlling practices in temporary agency work**

The article explores how extensive uses of temporary work agencies affect motivation and how labor control practices develop. The article refers to other studies on the same issue, and the article is based on theoretical discussion of labor control. Empirically, the article presents a case study of a call centre situated in the northern Sweden. The call centre mainly employs younger people, and the turn over is quite high. However, the centre does not recruit new staff. New people are ‘delivered’ by work agencies, and the work agency is the employer. From those who are employed by the agency, the company selects some for permanent employment. In the company, the personal policy is presented as a staircase: The first step belongs to employees of the work agencies. The company then selects some people to proceed to the next step of the permanently employed staff at the call center. They have better working conditions. Those who do not get the opportunity to take a step upwards are, after a while, no longer allocated to the call centre by the work agency. Steps three and four concern gradually more specialized and competent jobs. This staircase seems to have created a system that both create motivation and control.

## **The Naturalization of gender Segregation in a Danish Bank**

The article of Grosen, Holt and Lund was triggered by a simple observation of gender segregation in a Danish bank. In a newly established IT based administrative department of 70 employees almost all are women even though 40% of the employed in the

sector are men. Why is it that gender segregation is reconstructed in modern organizations? That was the main question put to managers and employees in the department. The answers gave data for an analysis of the ascription of meaning given to current gender segregation. One kind of meaning found in the interviews is in line with Joan Acker's argument saying that the full time male employee is constructed as the 'ideal employee': jobs in the department are low status jobs, and are consequently below the level of those taken by male employees. However, the opposite argument was also found: qualifications such as accuracy and multitasking are needed in the jobs at the department, and it is said that these qualifications are specifically female. A third explanation refers to the traditional division of labor in the family: Women have the main responsibility for care in the family, and the jobs in the department were said to be family friendly. It is, however, very difficult to see why work in the department should be more family friendly than work in many male dominated parts of the bank. Taken together these arguments create a 'naturalization' of the gender segregation, where women have the low status and low paid jobs. However some of the arguments contain elements of pride and self-confidence, which potentially could increase the status of the jobs.

### **Re-employment of Displaced Workers – The Closing of the Perlos Plants in Finland**

In early 1990s, Perlos Corporation was a smaller Nokia sub-contractor, but very quickly it became a globally operating company with totally 13,000 workers worldwide and almost 2,000 workers in North Karelia in the eastern part of Finland. In 2007, Perlos decided to close down all its activities in Finland. It was expected that it would have very serious consequences for the thinly populated area where the company was located. Especially for those who lost their work. However, the results were not as bad as expected, which Jolkkonen, Koistinen and Kurvinen's article documents. They conducted a survey among 1,250 workers who had lost their work at Perlos. After one year, 57% of the respondents were re-employed. 22% were in vocational training or education and 18% were unemployed. However, the chance of re-employment and the risk of unemployment varied a lot between different sub-groups. The most important factors are gender, age, education and, also, the family situation. The article contributes to the comprehensive and very relevant research on re-employment after mass-layoffs. The article refers extensively to this research.

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