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What Makes a Job Good or Poor?

What are the characteristics of a good or, alternatively, a poor job? Since the experiments in the Bethlehem Steel Company and the Hawthorne Factories, researchers from different fields such as business administration, (work and organization) psychology and sociology have agreed to the following: good work is characterized by a high degree of variety, a holistic perspective and decision-making autonomy regarding the tasks to be fulfilled. Fast feedback regarding achieved results and – connected to this – the recognition of good performance were added as criteria later. This unexpected fraternization of different disciplines and interests originated last but not least from the expectation that human job design would not only be advantageous for the employees but also profitable for the organization. It is claimed that greater scope and variety of work and more holistic tasks would lead to more enjoyment of work on the one hand and create intrinsic motivation on the other hand. These elements would, in turn, increase the efficiency of reaching organizational goals. A poor job in contrast is seen as one that lacks all or most of the aforementioned characteristics.

The engineering sciences as well as advocates of a pure machine model of organization with their focus on organizational efficiency, especially the proficiency of the production process, acted as antagonists to this understanding of good and poor work. These alone seemed bound to the tayloristic model of “Bethlehem Steel”, aiming at the ideal of a ‘people-less’ factory and organization. However, this ideal faded for different reasons. From a certain point onwards only minimal additional efficiency advantages could be realized by taylorising the workplace. The decline of tayloristic structures was further fostered by the shift from relatively static seller markets to rapid changing, dynamic buyer markets in many industries. Such markets cannot be served by highly specialized, tayloristic production lines with a high degree of built-in inflexibility as the price for high productivity. Adaptive buyer markets demand less standardized mass products. Thus flexibility in both the production side and organization becomes necessary which tayloristic structures cannot support. Customer orientation, modularization and the revitalization of *manufacturing* as well as the re-professionalization of occupations are therefore the buzz words that characterize the emerged concepts of flexible production and organization. Finally services gain rele-

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vance versus goods since the balance between sectors have shifted in favor of services in all industrialized countries.

The victory of the “Hawthorne” model has unfortunately not entailed the hoped-for break from the “iron cage”. On the contrary: it is increasingly being suggested that the organizational flexibility won is leading to a retraction of organization and that resulting gaps must be filled with “flexible people”. What started out as a demand for human job design in order to liberate the “organizational man”, has ended with the occupation of (wo)men – in their more or less binding role of organizational citizens – and in their private lives. Has the movement for a human organizational design thus only achieved a pyrrhic victory?

The consequences of the outlined development of organizational design in terms of good or poor work remain to be seen. In respect to flexible organization, the categories of good and poor work may have to be redefined. This redefinition process was the topic of an international conference held at the University of Flensburg this summer. Some contributions which resulted from the intense discussions of empirically-oriented personnel and organization researchers at this conference comprise this issue of Management Revue. Submissions to our call for papers complement the issue. We hope that the selection of papers presented in this issue contributes to a better understanding of organization in terms of good work and poor work.

The issue starts with a paper by *Neal Ryan, Anthony Pink, Craig Furneaux and Kerry Brown* that deals with public sector out-contracting in Australia. The authors examine the findings of a case study of contracting-out of building maintenance services by the Western Australia Building Maintenance Authority. The study focuses on the impact of such a contracting-out from the public to the private sector on employees’ wages and work conditions. The study thereby finds differences in the employment conditions of white collar and blue collar workers. While the conditions of white collar workers generally improved there was a marginal decline in the conditions of blue collar workers. The findings are based on primary as well as secondary qualitative data. The authors reach the conclusion that contracting-out created budgetary savings for government. However, these savings result partly from a reduction in wages and benefits of former blue collar staff. The paper in this context argues that the impact of contracting-out on staff wages, benefits and conditions is conditional upon the level of competition in the labor market for worker’s expertise. While employees in “thick markets” probably have to cope with a reduction of wages, benefits and conditions since there is hard competition for expertise, whereas in “thin markets”, wages, benefits and conditions are likely to grow because of weak competition for expertise. This paper thus contributes a fruitful perspective regarding contracting-out of public service tasks to private suppliers.

John Burgess, Lindy Henderson and Glenda Strachan deal with women workers in male dominated manufacturing organizations in Australia. Based on anti-discrimination legislation this study compares women’s roles, expectations and experiences in such firms. The research focuses on differences concerning organizational Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO). In order to examine the mechanisms by which EEO policies are developed, implemented, evaluated, reviewed and modified, two privately owned manufacturers with similar characteristics and location are studied. The results

reveal that good jobs and poor jobs exist in the same legislative and industrial framework and in the same local labor market. The case studies show that formal EEO procedures, anti-discrimination legislation and a commitment by management to EEO are not sufficient to realize the stated goals or attract women workers into organizations. The differences are located in a combination of organizational and cultural conditions, such as consulting employees, providing them with opportunities for training and career advancement and, offering choices about working arrangements.

Dorothea Alenell, Katrin Bäbring and Kirsten Thommes analyze institutional structures of the flexible assignment of personnel between enterprises from an economic perspective. Temporary agency work, interim management and consulting are three variants of flexible assignment of personnel between enterprises. Although the different forms reveal more or less similar institutional structures, different contractual and legal regulations in Germany put these variants into three different segments of the market. The paper aims at comparing these forms of flexible personnel assignment. Based on gathered secondary empirical data concerning temporary agency work, interim management and consulting in Germany the crucial characteristics of markets and relationships are outlined. The role of job agencies, employees and employers as well as typical patterns of developing relationships among these three is presented. Finally, the main differences of the three variants of flexible assignment of personnel between enterprises can be explained by considerations of exploitation of labor contracts from staff policy perspective and solution of different personnel-based challenges, particularly, risk-allocation and selection.

Florian Schramm and Michael Schlese deal with good work and poor work by analyzing the changes in collective bargaining policy in the German cleaning industry in recent years, taking the example of the situation in the industry in Berlin. By using the Socio-economic Panel (SOEP) to survey employees on employment conditions and specialist interviews with key members of the industry the authors investigate the development of the whole industry and analyze the adherent different attitudes of the actors involved. A special focus lies on the socio-demographic characteristics of the employees in the industry. Further, phenomena such as temporary employment and the EU Eastern enlargement in an economically difficult time are analyzed. By looking at the cleaning industry a relatively sparsely researched field is in the center of this paper, which, however, gives an interesting example for the consequences of changing economic and legal conditions on employment and industrial relations.

Interim Management as a phenomenon of the flexible firm is focused in the study presented by *Jürgen Bruns and Rüdiger Kabst*. In general, managerial tasks are viewed as a core competency of the enterprise. From this point of view, the externalization of managerial tasks would be a contradiction in itself. Bruns and Kabst, however, demonstrate based on the German sample of the Cranfield Network (CRANET) that the utilization of Interim Management can be explained by established organizational theory. In particular, transaction cost economics as well as resource-based view help explain the utilization of Interim Management. Furthermore, the authors show that Interim Management constitutes a response to reduced investments in human resources.

The last paper of this issue deals with commitment in so called “new” flexible employment relationships. *Nicole Torke, Jan Kees Looise and Maarten van Riemsdijk* are fo-

cusing a forgotten perspective in the area of commitment research: The employer's commitment to the employees. Accordingly, as a first step of their argument they are discussing elements of employer's commitment. The "old" regime of employee relations was characterized by aspects such as permanent job security, job broadening, and a system of function and seniority related pay. Elements of employer's commitment under the new regime instead are permanent employability, job enrichment, and performance related pay. In a qualitative empirical study Torke and Looise explore the employees' view of "old" and "new" employer's commitment. One of their findings is, that employees reflect employer's commitment strict in a way appropriate for them: pay, direct employee influence, and decent treatment in general seem to be relevant. Another important aspect of employer's commitment in the view of employees is organizational justice. Distributive, procedural, and interpersonal justice are seen as commitment of the employer, regardless whether the regime is "old" or "new".

We hope you will see this issue of Management Revue as good work rather than as poor work and enjoy the selected contributions.