Angelika Schmidt*

The Implications of Flexible Work: Membership in Organizations Revisited**

The erosion of standard forms of employment is creating new needs and management requirements in organizations. This article examines the polarization within the workforce. The classical approach of the core and marginal workforce based on the work of Doeringer and Piore (1971) will be reshaped by looking at conceptions of organizational boundaries. Moreover, the impact of shifting employment relations on coupling and membership in organizations will be discussed to conclude that the loosening of coupling has implications for the willingness of members to integrate in organizations.

Key words: **flexibility, organizational boundaries, structural coupling, membership** (JEL: M12, M51, M54)

* Angelika Schmidt, PD Dr., Associate Professor, WU Vienna – Vienna University of Economics and Business, Department Management, Institute for Change Management and Management Development, Augasse 2-6, 1090 Vienna, Austria.
E-mail: Angelika.Schmidt@wu.ac.at

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Introduction and overview

Greg Oldham and Richard Hackman, two doyens in the field of organizational behaviour, ended their recent article about the accuracy of their 1980s findings on work redesign with the words: 'We presently are in the midst of what we believe are fundamental changes in relationship among people, the work they do and the organization for which they do it.' (Oldham & Hackman, 2010, p. 466)

Sweeping economic, technological and social changes during the last two decades have transformed the organization of work. In the past few years, the proportion of atypical employees has grown immensely. In the European Union, 42 million people (27 per cent of the total working population) have so-called atypical employment relationships (CIETT, 2000): non-permanent or temporary contracts, freelance contracts and temporary employment relationships. At the same time, the gap between various groups of employees has broadened. The structures of economy have been yielding to new forms of work organization where jobs disappear and projects are on the rise, and design and production become simultaneous processes than ordinary sequential steps (Powell, 2001), indicating that the boundaries of organizational entities become porous. Within these entities, processes and forms of innovations depend on deeper engagement from core employees (Lewis, 2007). The focus on topics like enhancing the employees' engagement, with onboarding and retention on new hiring having a renaissance as the results of a new survey conducted by the Boston Consulting Group shows. In their ranking list, strategic workforce planning on the one hand and enhancing employee engagement, onboarding and the retention of new hires on the other are the newcomers in the top-five-topics for great current and future importance (Strack et al., 2011).

This paper deals with the issue of attachment and will discuss types of ties between organizations and individuals based on the concept of structural coupling and membership. The core assumption is that coupling has changed dramatically during the last decades. On the one hand, it has tightened for core staff members. On the other hand, it has loosened for marginal staff members. This leads to a polarization within the workforce and new management requirements. In this paper we give support to this view, point out major problems in the field which contribute to this state of affairs, and offer a new understanding of membership and coupling in organizations as key concepts in this field.

The erosion of standard forms of employment and reasons for workforce flexibility in organizations will be discussed, and the consequences of flexibility regarding the boundaries of and in organizations will be addressed. In this section, the classical approach of core and marginal workforce, based on the work of Doeringer and Piore (1971), will be reshaped according to the conceptions of organizational boundaries introduced by Santos and Eisenhardt (2005).

These marked changes call for a re-examination of classic arguments about coupling and a richer conceptual understanding of how, when and why coupling occurs, as well as its consequences (Bromley & Powell, 2012). Coupling affects how decisions are made in organizations, and thereby influences selectivity and the outcomes, such as performance improvement in organizations. We introduce the concept of structural

coupling , because this focuses on the closeness of relationship and the degree of mutual influence between organizations and individual actors (Orton & Weick, 1990; Staehle, 1991; Weick, 1969, 1976). Humans have a 'longing to belong' and usually the criterion for 'belonging to the organization' is membership. At the same time, organizations make their boundaries clear to their environment by signalling who belongs 'inside' and who does not via membership. Thus, organizations can act as 'collective actors' (Luhmann, 1994; for a similar perspective, see Coleman, 1986, who talks about corporate actors) that make their drawings of boundaries highly visible and plausible for their environment.

Our contribution to this field is not only a challenge to existing employment relations research, which still assumes mostly long-lasting, stable employer-employee relationships, but also an analysis of companies' current workforce practices and their impact on the molding of membership in organizations.

We start by looking at changing organizational practices and dimensions of flexibility. We are challenging the assumptions underlying these organizational practices and find novel approaches toward the refinement of membership in organizations and other ways of theorizing the phenomena of membership and coupling. We conclude the paper by drawing out future lines of research and some implications for putting it into practice.

Changing organizational practices: Dimensions of flexibility

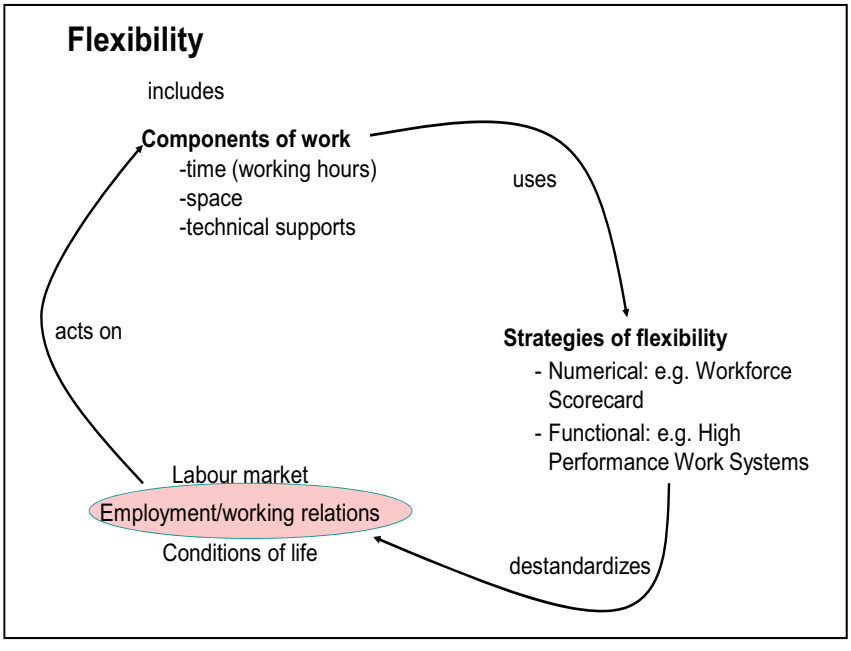
So far, research from different disciplines, with various perspectives and different foci and levels of analysis, has contributed to the understanding of what happens during the employment phases of individuals (for overviews, see e.g. Arthur et al., 1989; Schein, 1980). However, empirically and theoretically little is still known about the emergence of organizational practices such as new work arrangements and their impact on different forms of employee outcomes and employee behavior, e.g. organizational commitment (King, 2003; Marler et al., 2002), negative effects on employer-employee relationships (Davis-Blake et al., 2003) or negative impacts on levels of innovativeness (Michie & Sheehan, 2005; Beugelsdijk, 2008).

Organizational employment policies and employment modes might serve as indicators for organizational practices, since these, like routines, are units of analysis that capture change on a micro-level. Such practices allow for 'zooming in', thus making change and its driving forces more visible to the eye of researchers and practitioners (Becker et al., 2005). Therefore, they also play a crucial role for analyzing organizational influences on employment outcomes like employee behavior.

Much of the growth in the use of flexible contracts has been attributed to organizational policy initiatives like cost-cutting and increasing coordination and resource flexibility (Lepak et al., 2003). High-cooperation firms may have more opportunities to take advantage of flexibility for innovation performance because it facilitates the access and dispersion of knowledge within the firm (Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2009). Apart from the growth of an organization, however, the policy chosen depends greatly on the situation. When dealing with a scope of functions, which require fewer skills, outsourcing will be preferred; in contrast, strategies such as partnering tend to be used in areas where higher skills are required.

The discussion around flexibility now not only focuses on the deregulation of working hours, but also includes the flexibility of qualifications or job variations. Organizations no longer create new forms of task assignments to bring their employees qualifications or a better work–life balance, but in order to enable flexibilization (e.g. Breedveld, 1998; Coyle, 2006). In the current discussion, flexibilization also refers to spatial facets – an aspect which was not important in the 1980s (Hamel, 1985; Anderer, 1997). These various trends of flexibilization can be seen in the following summary:

Figure 1: Dimension and consequences of flexibility (Heinrich & Schmidt, 2004, p. 105)



As part of a corporation's strategies, flexibility is a basis for competitive advantage. As pointed out earlier, the ability to organize flexibility within the system will become a more and more important factor for success in corporate action (Golden & Powell, 2000; Mitchie & Sheehan, 2005; Quinn, 1999).

A popular expression in this respect has been the idea of the 'flexible firm' (Atkinson, 1984), which denotes the kind of organizational forms that enable employers to obtain the flexibility they need. Recent research on organizational flexibility has proceeded along two relatively distinct lines, each focusing on one of the two flexible labour utilization strategies proposed by Atkinson (1984). One stream examines processes of externalization designed to reduce costs and provide organizations with *numerical* flexibility. This form is characterized by using peripheral workers as a buffer to protect core workers from fluctuations in demands. A numerical strategy is the ability of firms to vary the amount of labour employed by making use of part-time, temporary and seasonal employees, short fixed-term contracts, agency labour, freelance work or outwork (De Grip et al., 1997; Haunschild, 2004; Mühlberger, 2002). The use of

this type of labour is also commonly referred to as 'flexible employment contracts' or contingent work. Tools like the workforce scorecard maintain this approach (Huselid et al., 2005).

The other group emphasizes the enhancement of *functional or internal* flexibility. It measures a firm's ability to vary the amount and type of labour used without resorting to the external labour market. Current examples of this second group would be Appelbaum et al.'s 'high-performance work system' correlates (Appelbaum et al., 2002). High Performance Work Organizations adopt post-bureaucratic organizational forms in their quest for flexibility and these new organizational forms cause alterations of the labor process (Lewis, 2007). To gain functional or internal flexibility, a firm must have a workforce within which there is a high degree of substitutability among workers, and where workers are versatile enough to be redeveloped when needed from one task to the other. Hence, flexibility is not a goal in itself but rather a driver of the development of organizational capabilities (Shafer et al., 2001) as one positive consequence.

In fields of activity requiring low skills, the numerical strategy and outsourcing are used most often. Within high-skilled sectors, a wider range of possible strategies combining the two dimensions of bonding and control on the one hand, and various skills on the other, can be found., These range from traditional qualification paths (= *functional flexibility*) to forms of 'partnering' (Lepak & Snell, 1999), more market-oriented options such as free-lancing, and professionalism (Wächter, 2002). Thus, there is reliance on externalized labor in all sectors and we see that employment arrangements are becoming more market- driven than organization -based (Cappelli, 1999). Especially the transition from one form to another is a critical matter. This is not purely a trend that is associated with a tight labor market. Rather, it represents a fundamental shift in employment relations that has far-reaching implications, as fFigure 1 shows. Changing employment relations acts on the components of work like the renumeration base, the time regime or the place of work. Besides Furthermore, workplace flexibility can contribute to deploy employees´' embedded knowledge and to broaden the access to knowledge-based resources that are needed, especially in innovation activities (Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the dark side of flexible employment forms are a 'new dualism' (Harrison, 1994) of the workforce, resulting in the growth of low-wage, insecure employment (Lewis, 2007) and gradual decline of task discretion (Gallie et al., 2004).

Considering the evidence of various forms of flexible work arrangements such as fixed-term contracts, temporary work or project work, it seems clear that the characteristics of employment relationships are changing.

Standard and hybrid employment relationships

In the light of new forms of relationships between organizations and individuals working for them, HRM systems and processes that still focus on full-time employees with standard work contracts need to be reconsidered, because more flexible working practices have significant effects on individuals. This is not only the case for 'contingent employees', 'newly self-employed', 'one-person-employer', 'dependent independents' or 'own account self-employed' (Marler et al., 2002). Even employees with open-

ended standard contracts face the challenge of flexibility in terms of time, location and work content or career perspectives.

In differentiating between traditional and new forms of employment, we argue that both of them have their very own set of characteristics. Traditional employment is based on a standard contract which runs for an unlimited period of time; employees have a fixed workplace as well as a 'clear cut' between leisure time and working time (Haunschild, 2004). This kind of long-term employment relationship ties careers and career rewards to employees' physical and psychological attachment to organizations; advancement, compensation and benefits are linked to seniority and loyalty to the firm (Ellig, 1998).

This is in sharp contrast to new non-standard forms of employment, which can be characterized by a fixed income, is probably discontinuous, and thus has consequences for social security. Furthermore, these forms of employment tend to be characterized by part-time work, a fixed-term contract, and people working outside the normal workplace (Haunschild, 2004). Finally, these contract forms lead to new psychological contracts, characterized by lower security and challenges for loyalty, as well as higher requirements of skills and performance (Raeder & Grote, 2004).

Recent years have seen the emergence of a whole range of non-standard or hybrid employment relationships. In these hybrids, the relationship between employer and employee has market-like features (see Table 1).

Table 1: Differences between standard and hybrid employment relationships

	Standard employment relationship	Hybrid employment relationship
Type of work	Continuous process	Projects with clear defined start and finish
Nature of appointment	Permanent	Temporary
Renumeration base	Based on job and age/experience	Based on results/performance
Time regime	Specified in detail	Not specified
Place to work	On site at employer´s	Multiple places (home, at customer´s)

(Source: Huiskamp & Kluytmans, 2004)

A shift is taking place in the types of work carried out within companies from continuous, process-oriented work characterized by repetition and efficiency towards a combination of client-driven and project-driven work focusing on achieving certain results within a certain time (Hinings, 2005; Morgeson et al., 2010). This approach is even reproduced at management levels in the form of contract management, where more and more fixed-term contracts are concluded. New types of work involve a mixture of increased autonomy and flexibility reflected in remuneration, the time regime and the place to work (Osterman & Burton, 2005).

Moreover, standard and hybrid employment relationships differ from each other in a relatively systematic way in terms of the extent of involvement of organized labour in decision-making and the results of different models of employment regimes. For example, Gallie (2007) distinguishes between inclusive and market regimes. Inclu-

sive regimes strengthen employees' power in the workplace and are conducive to greater worker participation, whereas market regimes are characterized by self-regulation and employees are excluded from significant role in decision-making.

In conclusion, these main trends influencing organizations and employment relationships are likely to continue and market forces will play an ever more important role within organizations, with significant implications for the organizational boundaries and the molding of membership. Guest (2004) pointed out that even though flexible employment and therefore hybrid employment relationships may not yet be a dominant form of employment, flexible contracts are important because of the range of workers affected by them. These environmental shifts have permanently altered the context for relationships between companies and their workforces and have changed the boundaries of and in organizations (Osterman, 2002).

Organizational boundaries

We have argued that organizations make their boundaries clear to their environment by signalling who belongs, or does not belong, via contracts. Consequently, in this section we will explore the different sides of the boundaries.

The debate concerning boundaries of and in organizations has a long tradition in organization studies. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's (1966) description of modern organizations as the enactment of societal beliefs, organizations become isomorphic with widely shared understandings of social reality. Formal elements of organizations are thus a reflection of the environment and internal and external boundaries cannot be clearly distinguished (Bromley & Powell, 2012). Some scholars even speak of 'boundaryless organizations' (Ashkenas et al., 2002), while others advance the idea of 'blurred boundaries' (Schultz et al., 2002). Boundaries and practices are distinct but interdependent phenomena, with neither reducible to the other, and each pointing to different features of a social scene (Goffman, 1974). Which social scene predominates depends on the guiding difference scheme. In this respect, the approach of Santos and Eisenhardt (2005) gives new insights, defining the organizational boundary simply as the demarcation between the organization and its environment. However, they also reveal a variety of different boundaries and discuss differing conceptions of boundaries. In their model, they predominantly look at efficiency (cost), power (autonomy) or identity (coherence). The conceptions have different environmental assumptions but they are to some extent complementary, co-evolutionary and synergistic. Building on these conceptions, we will now turn to the interaction of this expanded view on organizational boundaries with changing employment relations.

With regard to the first concept, *efficiency*, it is important to consider the locus of the transaction. This is grounded in a legal understanding of organizations as governance mechanisms distinct from markets. Organizational adaption and environmental selection eliminate non-optimal choices and misaligned organizations, leading to an efficient equilibrium in which organizational boundaries reflect the underlying costs of governance activities. Hybrid forms of employment relations are in line with market-driven governance and allow cost minimization in many industries.

In the second concept, *power*, the sphere of influence becomes relevant. Here the question arises as to how organizational members control the broader set of exchange

relations. The conception of power focuses on the boundary decision as the choice of the sphere of influence. A standard employment relationship operates in a predictable environment and thus focuses on stability. In this form, hierarchical control is the dominant control mechanism (Huiskamp & Kluytmans, 2004). By adopting the sphere of influence on the two different forms of employment relations, it becomes evident that the classical influence, which shapes structures and routines in standard forms of employment relations, is changing in the new forms of managing relationships as pointed out in the earlier discussion of different employment regimes. With regard to the effects of the duration of contracts, short contracts might be viewed as inherently less stable than longer contracts, since short-term contracts typically imply lower control over the continuance of employment and higher levels of economic uncertainty (Clinton et al., 2011). However, the dependence of the individual actors has been reduced and their power has been increased. Thus reducing dependence and increasing power are seen as two sides of the same coin.

In the third concept of *identity*, mindsets are units of analysis. Organizational boundaries should be set to achieve coherence between the identity of the organization and its activities. Organizational members actively perform collective 'sensemaking' (Weick, 1995) and this tends to crystallize into cognitive frames, which themselves create cognitive and emotional coherence in turn. As mentioned before, humans have a 'longing to belong' and may contribute to collective efforts solely because they identify with those around them (Gotschalg & Zollo, 2007; Osterloh & Frey, 2000). As a result, organizations have well-developed norms for cooperation, forms of work or fairness representing the boundaries of the firm and the identification provoking an efficient vehicle for shaping behavior (Zenger et al., 2011).

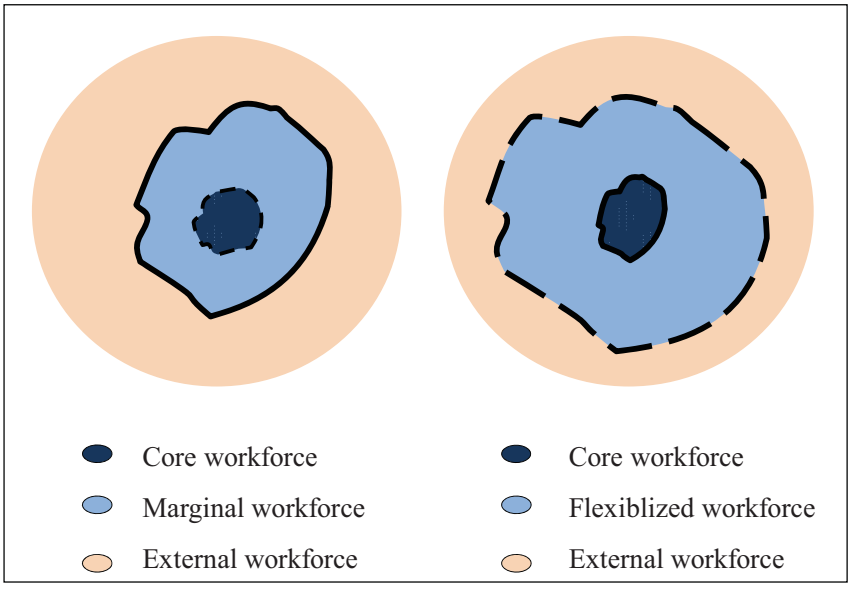
Organizations can never fully understand their complex environment and therefore have to model uncertainty and complexity on a template against which member can act. By creating such simplified interpretations, organizational members can physically and socially act on them, thereby building and replicating the organizational boundary and identity (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010). These boundaries are regulated through the definition of memberships, which are embodied in contracts. Here, the important role of the shift in formal boundaries caused by different forms of contracts comes into play – a shift that enables the creation of a distinctly different sociality within the form, including a reshaping of incentives that discourage opportunistically generated behavior (Zenger et al., 2011).

All members represent the workforce or so-called 'internal labor market', in contrast to the 'external labor market', as defined by Doeringer and Piore (1971). The internal labor market is constituted by a finite and definite system of jobs for which only people who belong to the system can apply.

The fragmentation of the established organizational and employment relationship is also reported elsewhere (Grimshaw et al., 2005). The contesting of boundaries and practices in organizations and the permeability of the boundaries within the staff in organizations illustrates this trend (see Figure 2). Due to environmental dynamics and intensified competition, organizations have taken up reorganizational activities such as outsourcing, downsizing and M&As in order to adapt to the situation (Hellgren & Sverke, 2003). These dynamics result, among other effects, in smaller core workforces

(Purcell & Purcell, 1998) and in some cases in reduced hierarchies (Rajan & Zingales, 2001).

Figure 2: The flexibility and boundaries of an organization



On the one hand, boundaries between the marginal workforce and the external labour market become more permeable through these various forms of contracts. The barriers of admittance still exist but flexible forms of contracts make these barriers more permeable in both directions: in and out. We now talk about a 'flexibilized workforce'. On the other hand, the boundary between the marginal and the core workforce becomes impenetrable because actors may innovate not by stepping outside of institutional influences but rather by constructing new boundaries that shield them from sanctions to which they would otherwise be exposed (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). When boundaries are removed through restructuring and contracting, actors frequently respond by seeking, often collectively, to construct and reinforce alternative boundaries (Currie et al., 2006).

In accordance with this development, firms now offer employability rather than employment security and it is interesting that within these new flexibilized workforces we find two different forms of coupling:

1) a group of tightly coupled employees, due to insecurity of their job perspectives and the lack of alternative job offers
2) another group of those loosely coupled with the organization.

These discussions around flexibility signal deep changes that influence the future framework for HRM within organizations and which have indeed been part of ongoing discussions (Boselie et al., 2009; Legnick-Hall, 2009; Lepak & Snell, 1999;

Wächter, 2002). However, these discussions have placed little focus on the forms of individual coupling and their consequences.

Grimshaw et al. (2005) argue that established models of organisation and employment, based on the assumption of a single employer and a unified organisation, have diminishing relevance and value. Indeed, standardised employment conditions based upon full-time, permanent contracts with a single employer are now being accompanied and supplanted by a plurality of other forms and arrangements. Modes of work are fragmenting and the boundaries between organizations are blurring. They are permeable at both the intra- and inter-organizational levels. Yan and Louis (1999) trace and highlight the migration of important boundary-related activity from the organizational to the work-unit level in the context of current organizational realities.

At first glance, the notion of blurring boundaries is associated with a tendency towards loose coupling: loosening the relationship between individuals and organizations by dissolving membership rules makes it more difficult for individual actors to distinguish between occupational and private spheres. Empirical results, however, show that tight forms of coupling remain important (Meyer et al., 2006). Even the way work is defined will gradually change as boundaries between jobs, between organizations, and between work and private life become more fluid and ambiguous (Schein, 1996). Organizations adopting high-performance practices also adopt flexible working times and career-break practices, thereby giving employees, for example, more scope to adapt work demands to family or non-work aims (Mayrhofer et al., 2008). However, tight coupling does not only mean an increase in commitment and energy spent on the job, but also losing alternatives and feeling locked-in.

Taking these ideas further, we can see that the decision concerning the dominant boundaries is not only a choice of 'who we are' and how loosely or tightly coupled we are to the organization. It is a reaction to multivariate external and institutional influencing factors. Nevertheless, it is important to identify the mechanism of coupling and possible implications on membership.

Coupling in organizations / membership

The concept of coupling focuses on the closeness of relationships and the degree of mutual influence between organizations and individual actors (Orton & Weick, 1990; Staehle, 1991; Weick, 1969, 1976). Tight coupling indicates that they are closely intertwined in their decisions.

Roberts (2004) describes the degree of coupling as a trade-off between optimal efficiency and resilience. Weick (1976) went on to observe a benefit of loosely coupled systems. New units could be added to organizations with little disruption to existing operations, which can be advantageous to organizational survival. Loose coupling, indicates a type of relationship where the decisions of one actor have very few consequences for the decisions of the other. Thus, in a tightly coupled relationship the decisions of one partner reduce the other's degree of freedom much more than in a loosely coupled relationship.

According to Social Systems Theory, which postulates the basic closure of organizations and members as parts of the organizational environment, *structural coupling*

is the mode relating autopoietically closed systems[1] to the environment, thus combining self-reference and external reference. Structural coupling enables social systems to disregard many parts of the environment, e.g. many aspects of their members' psychic systems. Given the enormous number of possibilities, they are impressed only by very few 'instances', e.g. by role behavior and individual task performance. Indifference is the standard reaction to most environmental incidents. It is very sharply selective towards the environment as well as towards its own possibilities of 'reaction' (Luhmann, 1988). Structural coupling can therefore be understood as a complement to the concepts of interdependency breaks (Drepper, 2005). In structural coupling, the expectations that function-systems have from each other condense and become institutionalized. Specific societal conditioning structures preselect the communicational possibilities and make expectations probable, insofar that organizations can attach the programming of specialized expectations, which then function as decision-premises. These kinds of structures, preconditions for building organizations, are symbolic generalized media (Luhmann, 1976). Structural coupling between organizations and psychological systems rests on established symbolic generalized media such as membership role. Members of organizations are recruited and selected by a decision, and membership roles embrace only a fraction of possible individual behavior (Drepper, 2005, p. 178). In this respect membership alters the picture of a person. Membership is associated with interaction attributes and these attributes provide the interaction with a point of reference for establishing structures (Seidl, 2005). In organizations, these structures are evident in prescribed positions (e.g. CEO) and therefore these positions serve as abstracted points of identification. Nevertheless, membership does not only consider identification but it also influences the extent of integration. Integration can be seen as a reciprocal constraint on one's degree of freedom and an indicator of the level of engagement (Luhmann, 2000).

Accordingly, the criterion for 'belonging to the organization' is membership. In other words, organizations make their boundaries clear to their environment by signalling who belongs 'inside' and who does not via membership. Thus, organizations can act as 'collective actors' (Luhmann, 1994; for a similar perspective see Coleman, 1986 who talks about corporate actors) that make the drawing of boundaries highly visible and plausible for their environment. Moreover, a boundary becomes a vehicle for governance and coordination within an organization (Williamson, 1996). Coordination within an organization involves a more active, deliberate and centrally controlled effort to orchestrate value from particular combinations of assets and activities including access to authority, control and ownership or shaping knowledge exchange and complex coordination within the organization (Zenger et al., 2011). Simon (1947) and

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1 Luhmann (1990) called the process of reproduction from elements previously filtered from an over-complex environment autopoiesis using a term based in cognitive biology. In order to exist over time a system needs to be able to re-reproduce itself: "Everything that is used as a unit by the system is produced by the system itself. This applies to the elements, processes, boundaries, and other structures, and, last but not least, the unit of the system itself. Autopoietic systems, then, are sovereign with respect to the constitution of identities and differences." (Luhmann, 1990, p. 3)

Barnard (1938) describe employees as essentially granting their employers a 'zone of acceptance' or 'zone of indifference' within which employees will essentially accept directives. In this regard, Luhmann (1982) pointed out that everybody is excluded from organizational communication except those who have been appointed members of the organizations. Furthermore, organizations as functional systems have evolved symbolically generalized media that function as media for any kind of communication about anything (Andersen, 2003). In a traditional context, three types of media are primarily used to develop a highly complex system of jobs:

1) law, especially the working contract
2) power, especially subordination
3) trade-off, i.e. transactional (short-term, market-based) or relational (long-term, organizational-based with personnel development and career options).

We assume that this will not be the rule any more. Even if organizations still prefer the tight coupling of personnel, they will use different media, or, to be more precise, different media and/or different means within the existing media. Metaphors used in career research like the 'nomadic career' (Cadin et al., 2000a; Cadin et al., 2000b), the 'boundaryless career' (Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) or the 'protean career' (Briscoe & Hall, 2002; Hall, 1996, 2002; Hall & Mirvis, 1996) emphasize the decline of organizational commitment, job stability and career predictability. Rather than an overall loosening, we expect a polarization within the workforce: a proportion of employees with tight coupling on the one hand, and an increasing number with rather loose coupling on the other. As Weick (1969, 1976, 1985) points out, the form of coupling is always a form of influence.

For a long time, tight coupling between the individual and the organization and a stable configuration of individuals and relevant collective actors, especially employers, was the rule. Although there were national differences, the implicit assumption was that stability and mutual loyalty were essential ingredients of a well-functioning working relationship. The concept of life-long employment in Japan (Coles, 1979) or the reward of high seniority in firms, are examples of this. The exclusivity of inclusion – comprehensive whenever possible – was the implicit or explicit ideal or even rule. The concept of the 'company man' (Maccoby, 1978), organizational socialization procedures (Kasper, 1992; Schein, 1984; Hall, 1987) that result in culture-appropriate 'indoctrination' ('I am an IBMer'), or career concepts which rely more or less solely on internal labour markets, internal advancement and few changes between organizations are illustrations of these assumptions.

The growth of personnel leasing, fragile employment relationships, outsourcing/subcontracting, virtual organizations, IT mercenaries and the like are indicators of this change (D'Amours & Crespo, 2004; Houseman, 2001; Marsden, 2004). Organizations, as well as individuals, increasingly (have to) substitute tight coupling in favour of more flexible and free-floating forms of working relationships. Hybrid employment relations seem to be on the rise. Even under these conditions, organizations have to solve the core problems of using personnel in the context of a market economy, following capitalistic principles like securing a high degree of influence and control on the – ideally high, continuous and reliable – performance behavior of these individu-

als. Another challenge is using hidden reserves and tacit potential while at the same time being able to adapt smoothly and flexibly to changing demands. Organizations applying hybrid employment forms are confronted with a less clear picture of themselves for the sake of cost advantages linked with more flexible forms of coupling and less stable arrangements of configuration. Alternatively, an organization may not want to be associated with its personnel for reasons of marketing or liability.

Thus, crucial determinants for the survival and success of organizations, such as committing individuals to the organization, getting a good performance from them and controlling their behavior, will still be a major consideration – but reached by a different route. Functional equivalents replace the means used most prominently in the past, namely: contracts of employment, directives/subordination, and power.

Within the medium of law, performance-based contracts replace the labour contract. Thus, organizations no longer merely look for performance potential, but relate their own input into the relationship in exchange for actual performance and/or achievements.

As a consequence, the medium of transactional trade-offs, especially money, gains importance. A rise in the proportion of transactional contracts will likely be associated with greater precariousness as these contracts reduce organizational citizenship rights, allowing market power and status-based claims to become more important in local negotiations (Kalleberg, 2008). It can be used with a high degree of variability and in a very finely tuned way. Concrete performance, and not performance potential and subordination, is bought (Luhmann, 1988). Thus, money is the functional equivalent to hierarchical subordination or directives in exerting micro-control.

The medium of power is used less frequently, or, to put it more precisely, power is more disguised because money takes over the role of the fine-tuning instrument. In terms of the Luhmannian differentiation between personnel power and organizational power (Luhmann, 1975), personnel power is mainly affected by these developments. Organizational power, on the other hand, which relies much more on the specific situation of the labor market, is less influenced by that and still exerts macro-control in the sense of Hirschman's exit option (Hirschman, 1970).

One medium of fine-tuning – organizational power via attractive positions – is replaced by another: money. New types of membership and new types of jobs seem to be emerging. As a consequence, the hitherto clear binary coding of member/non-member is replaced by a more gradual and differentiated model that knows different types of (new) members/(new) jobs. Models like the coalition approach or the concept of a stakeholder can be regarded as early heralds of such developments. The consequences of this new membership role are other forms and degrees of integration, as Dörre (2009) points out. First of all, members with tenured positions in an organization represent *integrated* employees. The second type of integration is *precarious* employees – mostly represented by contingent work arrangements or fixed term contracts. There may be an opportunity for temporal integration, but in most of the cases precariousness is a permanent arrangement. Finally, Dörre talks about *decoupling*, represented, for example, in freelancing arrangements. Belonging to this category means to be excluded from the work context and it also means hardly any form of representa-

tion. Consequently, these changing levels of integration will have implications for the engagement of organizational members.

These new forms do not change the fact that organizations still demand commitment and loyalty from their personnel; they still want to use their potential. The 'rhetoric of inclusion' (Bardmann, 1995) is still *en vogue*: individuals are recruited as entrepreneurs, decision makers, as heroes or scapegoats. Nevertheless, from a systems theoretical perspective, they are 'only' a topic of communication that secures redundancy and latency (Luhmann, 1988). This leads to a kind of camouflage. It is the expectation structures and not individuals that are crucial for organizational decisions.

Organizations are authorized to exclude by their own means, arranging the relation of included and excluded persons (Nassehi, 2005) and membership is regulated by institutions. The selectivity of institutions constitutes a realm of normality – the normality of an organization. Exclusion from and inclusion into this realm of normality are driven by interests in belonging to it and participating in its advantages. Therefore, inclusion and exclusion are both questions to do with the mode of operation of institutions. Differentiated societal systems like organizations operate by distinguishing between inclusion and exclusion, excluding individuals from participating according to system-specific criteria (Scherr, 1999).

Nevertheless, organizations demand inclusion from their members, most often exclusive inclusion: 'Thou shalt have no other firm beside me.' This fiction – if shared – leads to positive effects. Closeness is associated with collective functions such as mutuality, trust and regulating deviant behavior (Antcliff et al., 2007). Belonging to an organization and being included can provide the individual with support necessary for 'getting by' (Putnam, 2000) and ensures that obligations are honoured (Coleman, 1988).

The professional performance of individuals can be used 'exclusively' and the coupling between individuals and other social systems can be defined as a joint blind spot, thus avoiding too complicated and conflicting expectation structures. Of course, this inclusion is a temporary one even in so-called standard or traditional working arrangements. This temporary component has become more prominent because of the new developments and the semantics of flexibility and deregulation mentioned above. Organizations provide rather exclusionary contracts, but still expect the integration of their employees. For organizations, this means that in the future they will have to face additional forms of self-employment and membership as well as the 'traditional' versions. The additional forms resemble self-seeking individualism. Individuals build ties in other forms of networks and not exclusively within the organization because it seems useful for 'getting ahead' (Putnam, 2000), maximizing the effectiveness of information (Burt, 1997) and increasing mobility opportunities (Granovetter, 1973). This can be seen with project-based work. Freelancers in a project wore are more tightly coupled to their tasks and teams but loosely coupled or even decoupled to the organization.

Nevertheless, organizations still try to develop tight coupling and stable configuration through the illusion or fiction of exclusivity of inclusion in order to secure crucial contributions from their personnel. Thus, they transcend the 'traditional' binary

options of market logic – membership/non-membership, payment/non-payment (Luhmann, 1988), loyalty/exit (Hirschman, 1970).

Concluding remarks

Stepping back, the literature of organizational boundaries on the one hand and coupling on the other essentially can be seen as an effort to understand the multilevel and multiprocess nature of the role of membership. The purpose of this work has been to proffer and develop the concept of coupling and discuss the implications for the willingness of members to integrate in organizations. This kind of problematization can be considered an innovative point of departures for theory development.

During the last two decades, the economies of most industrialized countries have moved towards increased flexibility. Powell (2001) calls attention to ways in which the structures of economy have been yielding the new forms of work organization in which jobs disappear and projects increase, and design and production become simultaneous processes rather than ordinary sequential steps. Changes in employment relations reflect the transformations in managerial regimes and systems of control (Kalleberg, 2008). As discussed earlier, these changes have an impact on organizational structures and practices and, moreover, on the working conditions and the forms of how individuals practise their membership role.

We find a trend towards even more segmentation within organizational staff. The widespread duality of standard and hybrid employment modes is leading to polarization within the workforce. In this climate, the boundaries of organizational entities become porous and within them innovations depend on the deeper engagement of core employees. Employees struggle in a context of greater labor market uncertainty, occasioned by downsizing and restructuring and with increased resorts of contingence (Lewis, 2007).

Although hybrids are commonly framed as 'intermediate' forms, market-hierarchy hybrids attempt to selectively infuse market features and mechanisms into the organization (Zenger et al., 2011). Moreover, they are triggering a shift in the relevancy of organizational boundaries: boundaries of power are shifting from personal power to the steering mechanism concerning relations, while identity boundaries are experiencing a shift from tight to loose coupling.

With regard to the implications of understanding membership and membership roles, it can be seen that the constituting elements and media of membership have altered. Among the legal aspects, regulations have been loosened and several forms of work contracts can be found. The forms of subordination, as well as the forms of trade-off, are varied – but not without consequences: one implication is the effect on the strength of integration.

Therefore the erosion of standard employment forms are leading to new needs and management requirements, as the Boston Consulting Group's latest study has suggested. Nevertheless, we are not sure if these requirements should only be related to extending onboarding, because the mindset of belonging to an organization is changing and therefore the dynamics and the individual's active part in the processes are going to change as well. These ongoing changes bear inherent sources of tensions,

but the morphing of membership roles could also be seen as a source of refining established management practices.

One source lies in the opposing demands and perspectives of loosely and tightly coupled membership roles. These polarities are underlying sources of paradoxical tension, but the acceptance, confrontation and transcendence of them could be seen as one way of managing such a paradox within an organization (Lewis, 2000). The direct experience of paradox is threatening to people and institutions; but as a topic of reflection it seems to lead to renewal (Czarniawska, 2005). Critical self- and social reflection might help actors reframe their assumptions, learn from existing tensions, and develop a more complicated repertoire of understandings and behavior – such as the understanding of standard and hybrid employment relationships.

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