

Editorial: Temporary Organization and Workers' Representation

Temporary forms of organization are a growing phenomenon of increasing relevance, not in the least for labor relations and workers' representation. Across all sectors and in all parts of the world, traditional organizational forms for the creation of economic value are being complemented or even replaced by projects and other forms of temporary organization (e.g. events, contract work). While the construction industry certainly remains the original point of reference for this development (e.g. Bresnen et al. 2004), other economic sectors such as the creative industries (e.g. DeFillippi and Arthur 1998), have become equally emblematic for this form of value creation. Perhaps most interestingly, however, is that even value creation processes within traditional organizations such as automobile manufacturers have been diagnosed as being "projectified" (Midler 1995). While it is still too early to determine whether such a development is indicative of an irreversible trend toward what some have labeled a 'Project Economy' or even 'Project Society', such a development in its many facets is certainly worthy of broad discussion and more in-depth theoretical and empirical understanding. Not only is there a need to capture the essence and the spread of temporary organizations as their impact on forms of value creation varies across sectors; equally, we need to raise questions and begin to find answers as to how project-based work in and across organizations is being responded to by traditional institutions of workers' representation, works councils as well as unions. Indeed, we have only begun to understand and analyze the myriad of new challenges this kind of organizational change may pose. How, for example, can the interests of project workers be collectively defined and then represented, given the limited co-presence not only of the works council or union members but of the project workers themselves.

Against this backdrop, *Industrielle Beziehungen – The German Journal of Industrial Relations* announced a call for papers for this Special Issue devoted to temporary organization and workers' representation. In the call, we formulated a number of questions relevant to the broader contours of the topic, including such aspects as the concentration of project-based work in particular industries or regions and the response of the traditional institutions of participation and codetermination; policies of unions, whether on the local, the national, or the global level, which are particularly confronted with temporary and fluid forms of work; the role of network forms of interest representation in industries or regions populated by projects; representation of the interests of permanent-temporary workers; the challenges of the growing popularity of interim or temporary management to the interest representation of workers; and the extent to which workers representatives locally, nationally, or globally regard themselves as project-organizers.

Despite the increasing academic interest that this topic is beginning to generate and the serious empirical and theoretical research on this topic from a managerial perspective (cf. Bakker 2010 for an excellent review), its implication for work and

workers' representation has yet to receive as much attention as we had assumed when drafting the call for papers. Although we received close to ten scholarly submissions, we found only three of them acceptable for inclusion in this Special Issue. The three academic papers that were selected are indicative of both the pertinence of the topic and the "novelty" of research in its pursuit. All of them address key aspects of the topic while at the same time concluding that they have only begun to scratch the surface of the research agenda on this topic. We certainly agree with this conclusion.

Applying a contract theoretical approach, *Peter Kalkowski and Otfried Mickler* use case studies on highly qualified employees in R&D projects in the automotive and ICT industries as well as in the media sector to explore the challenges posed by "projectified" contracts for the established institutions of regulation. Their research points to the increasing individualization of project work with a concomitant and foreseeable impact on procedural regulations.

For *Birgit Apitzsch*, this process of contract individualization coincides with a growing detachment of workers from organizations and from traditional forms of interest representation. In her article she investigates the role of social networks as a means of coping with this experience of risk. Empirically, her analysis is based on research on the forms and functions of personal networks in the German film and television industry, in which the incidence of individual strategizing is widespread and debates on the collective organization or fragmentation of the workforce are emblematic of projectification. The importance of understanding these patterns and responses for developments in other sectors of the economy in which such processes are rapidly beginning to spread should not be underestimated.

As *Markus Helfen and Manuel Nicklich* point out in their study of the German metal engineering industry, the temporary organization of value creation could very well undermine the still robust and historically-founded industry-wide collective wage-setting. Particularly in regard to labor-intensive service activities in general and in industrial services in particular, the authors illustrate how service-based projectification affects wage-setting and has a potential to fragment wage-setting in the manufacturing core of the German economy.

Finally, we included a fourth contribution from a practitioner in this Special Issue. In conjunction with our call for papers, we sent out inquiries to unions and employers' associations in the construction industry, which as we have noted above, is still a reference model for understanding the dimensions and dynamics of temporary organizations in other sectors. Our invitation to practitioners to participate in this debate was only partially successful. Despite numerous written requests and telephone calls to employers' associations, we remained empty-handed. In contrast, we were especially pleased that our inquiries on the union side were responded to promptly. Under the heading "Standpunkte" (Standpoints), *Marion Hellmann*, deputy general secretary of the Building and Wood Workers International (BWI), provides a rich and diverse overview of the multiplicity of temporary organizations in the construction industry worldwide and negative impacts of these patterns on labor and labor relations. As he concludes, precarious work in the construction industry is certainly not a new phenomenon, but its growing importance for the industry makes it an issue of

utmost priority for both, the global union BWI and its members in countries throughout the world.

References

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