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## How Personal Relations Work: Individual Market Adaptation and Collective Action in Flexible Labour Markets\*\*

**Abstract** – In the context of a growing detachment of workers from organizations and from traditional forms of interest representation, social networks are considered as an important means of individual risk-coping and for union strategies to improve working conditions and organize workers' interests. To contribute to a better understanding of industrial relations in flexible labour markets, this paper studies the forms and functions of personal networks in the German film and television industry. The findings of this qualitative study provide insights into the institutional and organizational conditions under which networks facilitate individual strategies, the collective organization or fragmentation of the workforce. Particularly important here are not only the strength of ties, but also vertical versus horizontal relations, and interactions between individual and collective strategies of using personal networks.

### Wie persönliche Netzwerke funktionieren: Individuelle Marktanpassung und kollektives Handeln in flexiblen Arbeitsmärkten

**Zusammenfassung** – Im Kontext der zunehmenden Lockerung der Bindung zwischen Beschäftigten und Unternehmen wie auch traditionellen Mitbestimmungsformen werden Netzwerke als wichtige Möglichkeit der individuellen Risikobewältigung gesehen. Ebenso wird ihnen das Potenzial zugeschrieben, die Interessen temporär Beschäftigter zu organisieren und ihre Arbeitsbedingungen zu verbessern. Dieser Beitrag zielt mit einer Untersuchung der Formen und Funktionen persönlicher Netzwerke in der deutschen Film- und Fernsehbranche auf ein besseres Verständnis der Arbeitsbeziehungen in flexiblen Arbeitsmärkten. Die Ergebnisse der qualitativen Untersuchung zeigen organisationale und institutionelle Bedingungen auf, unter denen Netzwerke zum individuellen Interessenhandeln, zu einer Organisation oder auch zu einer Fragmentierung der Beschäftigteninteressen beitragen. Von besonderer Bedeutung ist hier die Unterscheidung nicht nur nach der Stärke sozialer Beziehungen, sondern auch zwischen vertikalen und horizontalen Beziehungen, sowie die Interaktionen zwischen individuellen und kollektiven Strategien der Netzwerknutzung.

**Key words:** networks, projects, flexible labour markets, individual risk-coping, union strategies (JEL: J51, J53, J63, J81, L14, L82)

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## 1. Introduction

Current changes in the sphere of work hint at an on-going process in which the institutional shielding of social integration, livelihood and employment prospects from market volatility loses strength. Project and network forms of work organisation as well as atypical forms of employment gain momentum, resulting in an increasing detachment of workers from firms and a more direct impact of market volatility on employment, income and career prospects. Departing from these observations, there are two literatures which seem to converge on the notion that in order to adjust to changing labour markets and growing volatility, individual workers and unions alike can profit from drawing on existing and building new networks.

Research into new “post-Fordist” work and creative industries in particular tends to emphasise the agency of labour market actors in deregulated and flexible work settings, and focuses on their instrumental action in response to increasing market uncertainties (Jones 2002; Haunschild/Eikhof 2009; O’Mahony/Bechky 2006; Menger 1999; Haak 2006).<sup>1</sup> Here, professional and creative workers, who are frequently reckoned to be the frontrunners in new and flexible work (Haak 2006; Haunschild/Eikhof 2009), are considered to favour individual strategies of securing employment and income in the absence of internal labour markets. They are seen as able to instrumentalise networks to secure employment and move ahead in their careers, to change their occupational specialisation and adjust their qualifications on the basis of anticipated changes in market demands, or to hold multiple jobs in different areas more or less related to their original occupation (Voß 2001). These strategies are considered to contribute to a diversification of employment and income risks (Menger 1999; O’Mahony/Bechky 2006; Haak 2006). In addition, it is assumed that especially highly qualified workers prefer individual to collective negotiations (Abel et al. 2005; for a more finely grained analysis which considers the employment context of knowledge workers, see Pernicka et al. 2010), thereby superseding collective forms of interest representation.

This emphasis on individual strategies is in contrast to industrial relations research which considers collective forms of interest representation a means of overcoming power asymmetries in the labour market (for a more detailed overview, see Streeck 2005; Berger/Offe 1984) which interfere with individual attempts to enforce formal regulations, collective agreements, informal standards or individual claims. This contradiction may derive from contemporary challenges unions face in most Western countries. Changes in the organisation of production and in employment, and larger structural shifts such as the tertiarisation of the economy make the potential support for and clientele of unions more heterogeneous and fragmented (Streeck 2005: 276-

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<sup>1</sup> Yet another important stream of the sociological literature on labour market transformations focuses on structural changes which increase precariousness of employment (Kalleberg 2009). In its assumption that an improvement of the situation of precarious workers prerequisites political action and strong unions, this literature also can be related to the more general industrial relations research and the discussion on union revitalisation strategies.

278). They bring “new social risks” (e.g. Ebbinghaus 2006), new interests and identities to the fore which cut across class lines (Piore/Safford 2006). Indeed, unions face a decline in membership in many countries, and collective bargaining becomes more decentralised (Frege/Kelly 2003; Howell/Givan 2011; Rehder 2009). Accordingly, new coalitions with social movements and existing communities in liaison with or as a complement to traditional union strategies are considered a way to both stop the decline in union membership and to establish or improve standards of work and employment for groups hitherto neglected by existing unions (Heckscher/Carré 2006; Hurd et al. 2003; Osterman 2006; Heckscher 1996: XIX-XXIV). Especially the most vulnerable labour market groups, such as poorly qualified and immigrant workers, are considered to potentially profit from more informal forms of interest representation which go well beyond the scope of traditional unions (Milkman 2007; Brinkmann et al. 2008). This is because new alliances may connect unions to a potential new clientele and help them address the growing heterogeneity in interests and identities in the workforce (Piore/Safford 2006; Heckscher/Carré 2006; Heckscher 1996; Osterman 2006; for an overview see also Rehder 2008; Brinkmann et al. 2008).<sup>2</sup>

It is not clear yet whether personal networks provide viable substitutes for more formal collective forms of interest representation, and to what extent collective organisations can tie in with personal networks to further improve working conditions. Therefore, this article aims to further our understanding of the role that personal networks play for individual and collective strategies in volatile labour markets. Individual and collective strategies to access and make use of personal relations may support or hinder each other, with potentially lasting consequences for industrial relations and the regulation of flexible employment. The interaction of both therefore deserves further investigation. The focus is on the relationship between individual strategic use of informal networks, which is embedded in control relationships at the workplace, and the potential use of personal networks in collective forms of interest representation. Do they fulfil equivalent functions? Do personal networks facilitate or hamper individual or collective strategies to cope with flexible labour markets? How do workplace-related control structures shape these networks?

This paper addresses these questions by looking at a highly flexible labour market segment in Germany. The German television and film industry is a critical case for the study of individual strategies as well as possibilities of collective action in deregulated labour markets and the use they make of networks. First, firms and workers are strongly exposed to market volatility, working conditions are not (effectively) collectively regulated, income is highly insecure and unequal, and access to social insurance schemes is limited. The consequent difficulties of media workers in gaining access to unemployment benefits and non-private pension schemes direct the attention to at-

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<sup>2</sup> Also the broader institutional and political context impacts on the viability and benefits of cooperation with social movements or access to personal networks. Among the factors which vary systematically are: unions’ access to the workplace (e.g. through work councils), the centralisation of union activities, and the political and institutional support for unions in general (Frege/Kelly 2003; Rehder 2008; Baccaro et al. 2003; Ebbinghaus 2006).

tempts of reducing the coupling of livelihood and markets beyond the welfare state. Second, as existing research has shown and as is confirmed by the study presented here, networks matter crucially for the functioning of the market, and especially for recruitment in this industry (e.g. Blair 2009; Jones/Walsh 1997; Wirth 2010: 73-76; Marrs/Boes 2003; Baumann 2002a; for a stronger focus on organizational practices see Sydow/Windeler 1999; Windeler et al. 2000; Manning/Sydow 2007). On the basis of an empirical analysis of the functioning of this highly flexible labour market segment, I argue that an evaluation of both individual career and risk-coping strategies and collective strategies requires a better understanding of forms and functions of personal networks and their embeddedness in control relationships at the workplace. More specifically, my findings suggest that networks, when “overloaded” with functions and in both volatile and hierarchical organisational environments, contribute rather to individual investments into vertical relations, and to fragmentation and social closure at the level of the labour market.

In the following, I will review the different strands of literature which more or less implicitly suggest viewing personal networks as an important means of adapting to volatile environments for both individual and collective actors. Then I will provide a brief overview on the evolution and characteristics of the film and television industry in Germany. Finally, I will depict mobility patterns and workers’ strategies to cope with the uncertainties of employment and income and relate them to problems collective actors face in organising project workers.

## **2. The use of personal networks for individual employment and collective interest representation**

Gottschall, Kroos and Betzelt (Gottschall/Kroos 2007; Betzelt/Gottschall 2004; Schnell 2007) have pointed to the role of both collective action and the individual risk-coping strategies of freelancers in the flexible labour markets of cultural industries. Personal networks figure prominently in these strategies (see also Windeler/Wirth 2004), but the possible interactions, overlap or competition between individual and collective uses of personal networks are not yet fully understood. Therefore, the following section will briefly review the arguments on the employment-enhancing effects of personal networks, and on their role in strategies of collective interest representation, and finally discuss the possible interactions between individual and collective network use.

### ***2.1 Personal networks and individual employment prospects***

While personal networks can reduce dependency on market income through material support provided by the household or family (Betzelt/Gottschall 2004: 274; Gottschall/Kroos 2007: 179), the notion that networks first and foremost enhance individual marketability is more prominent. For instance, personal networks can help individuals to adjust to flexibility requirements, e.g. by helping them to be available for short-term job spells by providing support in the sphere of reproduction (Betzelt/Gottschall 2004: 274). Networks are also considered to be crucial for access to employment. Since Granovetter’s (1995) seminal study of matching processes in the labour market it has been well established that networks allow workers to communicate

their suitability and availability for vacancies, and that they allow the demand side of the labour market to spread information about these positions and to learn about possible matching candidates. Indirect connections, or weak individual ties, have in particular proven to be helpful for information exchange related to recruitment in labour markets (Granovetter 2002; see, for an overview on research on networks in labour markets, Marsden/Gorman 2001). Research on *intra-organisational* networks has pointed to the importance of dense, multiplex and hierarchical relations with peers and supervisors for mentoring and promotion (Ibarra 1995; Kanter 1977: 181-186; Kram/Isabella 1985). Such vertical relations, i.e. relations between persons higher and those lower in the hierarchy of the work organisation such as supervisors and subordinates, and horizontal or peer relations so far have received less attention from research into networks in labour markets than the strength of ties.

In flexible labour markets, personal networks can be considered particularly important for supporting individual strategies of securing employment and income. In the absence of stable employment in one firm, information spread through personal networks, or recruitment through former employers can ease the transition between jobs. Furthermore, networks can facilitate “diversification” strategies (O’Mahony/Bechky 2006; Menger 1999), i.e. the adjustment of individual labour supply to changing market demands. They can bring together demand and supply for services from different fields or enable holding multiple jobs by bridging occupational or organisational boundaries. The importance of these individual networking strategies is emphasised by research on highly qualified and flexible work, especially in cultural and creative industries (Jones 2002; Haunschild/Eikhof 2009; O’Mahony/Bechky 2006; Menger 1999; Haak 2006; and for a balanced analysis of both individual and collective strategies see Betzelt/Gottschall 2004; Gottschall/Kroos 2007). Not least, personal informal exchange with colleagues is important for coping with changing market demand and for getting access to information about professional standards or wage levels (Gottschall/Kroos 2007: 177).

As of yet, the role of networks in individual negotiations and for collective action, especially in settings where there are neither firm-internal nor craft labour market structures, is not well understood. So far, this has been discussed mainly in line with the emphasis on individual strategies of market-adaptation: whether those integrated into flexible work organisations prefer individual negotiations and informal participation practices to being represented by works councils and unions and to being covered by collective agreements (Abel/Ittermann/Pries 2005; Müller-Jentsch 2006: 421; for objections to this view see Boes 2004; Boes/Baukrowitz 2002; Boes et al. 2005). However, these discussions centre on knowledge workers in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector, who enjoy transferable human capital and more autonomy at work and who can potentially rely better on their own capacity to regulate their terms of work and employment. Moreover, as employment in the German ICT sector resembles the so-called standard employment relationship (Mayer-Ahuja/Wolf 2004), interest representation can potentially still tie in with the German dual system of co-determination and draw on identities-as-employees (Boes 2004; Boes/Baukrowitz 2002; Boes/Kämpf/Marrs 2005). The analysis of knowledge workers’ propensity to organize collectively (Pernicka et al. 2010) takes the employment

situation into account, but does not consider the role of personal networks, either. Two studies from the US and from the UK media industry, however, point to possible negative consequences of obligations in networks for the negotiation of wages when those offering poorly paid jobs also provide access to employment in the future (O'Mahony/Bechky 2006: 930-931; Platman 2004: 583-585).

## ***2.2 Personal networks and collective interest representation***

It is not clear yet to what extent and under which conditions such individual strategies of instrumentalising personal relations are indeed superior or functionally equivalent to collective regulation in flexible labour markets, and when both are complementary or supporting each other. Especially in the German context, industrial unions predominate and – in contrast to professional associations and professional chambers – traditionally play no role in mediating the access to employment (beyond their role in regulations of vocational training, which, however, was exceptionally small in the media industry, see Baumann/Voelzkow 2004: 277). Regarding the transparency of standards, trade unions or professional associations can play an important role by spreading information on wages and other employment-related standards which are useful for individuals, or by facilitating informal professional exchange among workers, especially in locally clustered industries (Gottschall/Kroos 2007: 181; Windeler/Wirth 2004: 311-312). Finally, there is only little research on the advantages and limits of individual negotiations, and even less so on the role of personal relations. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate whether and under which conditions individual negotiations are more suitable to volatile environments than collective negotiations, and whether both support or compete with each other. Yet, there are some hints to the problematic role of power asymmetries in these individual negotiations which are traditionally addressed by collective interest representation<sup>3</sup>: informal standards and results of individual negotiations are more vulnerable to changes in the market or a clients' situation (Platman 2004; Windeler/Wirth 2004: 314) than formal collective agreements which cannot be easily abandoned, and unions are better able to control labour supply and to coordinate negotiations as well as protests against unfavourable working conditions, than individuals who need to secure their livelihood (Streeck 2005: 262).

Industrial relations research also hints at a possible symbiosis of individual networking and collective action. First, drawing on exchange and loyalties in personal networks might help unions to build up strategies which are in close correspondence to workers' needs. More specifically, the literature on worker mobilisation and social movements considered networks crucial in processes of collective interest definition, and in particular in the processes of identifying and attributing injustice (Kelly 1998: 127). Opportunities and inclinations to talk about these issues, and therefore possibly also the opinion formation and engagement in collective forms of interest representa-

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<sup>3</sup> This power asymmetry results from the fictitious commodity character of labour (Polanyi 2001): different from other market suppliers workers can hardly withdraw their labour supply for long to wait for more favourable market conditions as this endangers their livelihood and future employment opportunities, not least in tight labour markets with strong competition.

tion, depend, among other things such as a strong occupational identity, on whether work organisation allows for non-task-related, informal interaction, whether work contacts develop into friendship relations, and whether interaction continues outside the workplace (Lipset et al. 1956; Lipset 1960: 226-227). The emergence of occupational communities (ibid.), which could function as “pre-organisational mechanisms of organisation” (“vororganisatorische Organisationsmechanismen”, Streeck 1981: 62) has thus been traced back also to patterns of interaction between workers. Yet, labour market segregation and the dispersion of social risks along lines which also constitute non-work-related identities, such as ethnicity, age and gender (Ebbinghaus 2006; Ebbinghaus et al. 2008: 19) might also pose problems to organising workers (Piore/Safford 2006), as stable networks based on identities and commonalities may not necessarily feed into workers movements, but might cut across class lines. These findings raise questions as to what extent it is possible and necessary to include hitherto neglected social risks, identities and interests in union politics, and whether this is better done by relying on informal forms of representation and mobilization through personal networks.

Second, personal exchange can also strengthen mobilisation and recruitment into labour and other social movements, e.g. when repeated contacts or stable ties between activists and potential new members provide the social context for the discussion of a movements’ goal (McAdam 1986). In a study of the successful mobilisation and organisation of immigrant workers in Los Angeles, stable ethnic communities have proven to be a crucial backbone of workers’ movements (Milkman 2002). Stable social relationships might therefore support the organisation and articulation of interests (Rehder 2008) and help dispersed workers to speak with one voice (Milkman 2002; Osterman 2006).

Third, more stable local understandings and expectations of workers and employers regarding pay and working conditions (Windeler/Wirth 2004: 313) may also be a by-product of locally clustered organisational and personal relations in regional economies (Piore/Sabel 1985). Here, in addition to organisational cooperation which safeguards employment in an environment of small firms without stable internal labour markets, and which aids the organization of work in volatile environments (Sydow/Windeler 1999), personal networks and commitment to local production are considered to enhance trust in industrial relations. This ‘district’-model of industrial relations (Streeck 1993) is characterised by less antagonism in employer-employee negotiations and their shared focus on local economic prosperity. In line with this, while acknowledging the delicacy of power relations in labour markets with a high share of atypical employment and small firms, such as the locally clustered television and film industry, Windeler and Wirth (2004) point to the local standards which are shaped and maintained in repeated negotiations between workers and employers. The dissemination of information on wage and employment standards provided by unions and professional associations might impact on such processes, but also profit from networks for transmitting such information and embedding it in local discourses, especially those which are difficult to reach for unions.

### ***2.3 Possible interactions and overlaps between individual and collective uses of personal networks***

The review of research on personal networks points to a variety of possible individual and collective uses of personal relations: they might help those working in flexible labour markets by compensating for irregular income with material support, they might help short-notice availability by taking over care work, they might help getting access to jobs and applying standards in professional work and negotiations by providing information. However, the literature reviewed above also pointed to limits of personal network use, such as power asymmetries which relate employment chances to individual negotiation strategies.

For unions, personal networks potentially aid the establishment and consolidation of standards by making them known and relevant in personal exchange, and they might help to get to know and shape interests and identities, to develop strategies which are closer to workers' needs and enhance the recruitment and mobilisation of members. So far, these various uses have not been related to each other, and their interaction is not well understood. However, it is possible to derive three dimensions in which both can possibly support or hinder each other, or be complementary or compete with each other.

The controversial arguments about the workplace as a medium of class-based identities point, first, to the *structural* conditions of network formation. Both social networks used for access to employment and to employment-relevant information and networks favouring collective action can be rooted in the workplace, in the region, or in non-work-related interactions. Also within these contexts, they might rest on the same or on different relations, and the structural conditions there might support different types of interaction. They may involve horizontal or peer contacts, or vertical contacts that cut across hierarchical levels, such as the relation between supervisors and subordinates, or clients and freelancers. Second, relations that help individuals to cope with flexibility demands in labour markets might stipulate *identities* that are in favour or are in opposition to unions. Third, they might fulfil *functions* and give rise to *interests* that unions are perceived to serve and support, or not. For instance, access to informal material support, by reducing dependency on market income, but also access to jobs provided by clients, supervisors, or other professional contacts, can potentially decrease the interest in collective action that aims to improve wages and to regulate employment conditions. Alternatively, reference to standards set by unions in individual negotiations or in informal exchange can help to consolidate them.

By analytically differentiating between these dimensions of personal relations in flexible labour markets, a more finely grained investigation of the interplay between employment-relevant networks and relations favourable to collective action should be possible. Do they complement each other, or is there a tension between individuals' use of networks for coping with employment instability and collective strategies to organize and mobilize workers (via networks), and if so, under which conditions?

### **3. Work organisation, employment, social security, training and recruitment in the German film and television industry**

The deviations of the film and television industry labour market from the standard German employment regime (Baumann/Voelzkow 2004) were aggravated by a pivotal historical event. The break-up of the public broadcasting monopoly in Germany and the approval of private broadcasters in the 1980s led to processes of decentralisation, outsourcing, and subcontracting of production. This marked a change from the vertically integrated broadcaster to the publisher-broadcaster model and witnessed the erosion of internal labour markets in media production (Baumann 2002a; Baumann/Voelzkow 2004; Tunstall 1993; for a detailed analysis of the turn towards production in project networks, see also Wirth 2010: 48-72; Baumann 2002b). When entering the market, the new private broadcasters first bought content from the US market, but then increasingly commissioned the production of their content from networks of production firms and service providers. At first, they made use of the few already existing production firms, but gradually increased demand for these services. With rising competition, public broadcasters also opted more and more for contract production in networks (Elbing/Voelzkow 2006; Windeler/Sydow 2004). Accordingly, after the emergence of private broadcasters, labour demand in the private production market rose throughout the 1990s (Baumann 2002a: 29; Baumann/Voelzkow 2004), right up to the economic crisis of 2000/2001. The share of self-employed and temporary workers increased significantly (Hans-Bredow-Institut für Medienforschung 2006); project-based employment – fixed-term contracts and self-employment – make up more than half of the 42.400 persons working for film production firms (DIW 2002: 9).<sup>4</sup> These changes, while historically idiosyncratic to the film and television industry, point to more generally discussed labour market trends, such as the decentralisation of control within firms, the erosion of internal labour markets, and the spread of atypical employment.

As a result, the shift from the large internal labour markets of broadcasters to temporary employment offered by private production firms has left media workers with little protection from the vagaries of the market and increased the importance of networks in recruitment. The biographical planning prospects for project workers in such an employment context are short: the main staff for a production are usually employed or their services commissioned for the duration of the project only. As a result, the size of a production firm varies dramatically and multiplies during a project, from a core staff of two to ten people to more than fifty during the production (Apitzsch 2010; see also Baumann/Voelzkow 2004: 274). Consequently, training and careers are usually not structured by firms, but by short-term projects. In addition to the uncertainty of employment and income, the work load is hard to predict. Positions are frequently filled at short notice. Also, while the number of days the filming will take is usually defined in advance – ranging from a few days for commercials to six or eight weeks for a movie, or several months for a television series – the daily working hours can vary according to unforeseen delays, such as bad weather during outside

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<sup>4</sup> In total, the media sector included 101.442 workers in the audio-visual media sector in 1997 (DIW 1998: 21ff., as cited in Baumann 2002b).

filming, etc. During the filming, the working hours are usually very long, ranging from 10 to more than 15 hours a day, thus frequently exceeding the limits set by the labour protection laws (Marrs/Boes 2003). In addition, projects frequently require geographical mobility of the staff: except for series that are produced in a studio, film projects (particularly the filming) are carried out at places chosen according to the script. As a result of unpredictable but intense project involvement, non-work-related activities and commitments are hard to maintain (Apitzsch 2010).

When it comes to the regulation of the terms of employment, the situation of project workers in the private production market differs significantly from that of the self-employed at broadcasters, where employees and even freelancers are covered by collective agreements (Wirth 2010: 142-147). However, much of the content production is now carried out by independent production firms, which are usually not covered by collective agreements and lack work councils. Furthermore, those working for independent production firms are somewhat detached from the firms, and the firms are predominantly small, making it difficult to establish works councils to help enforce labour protection laws and collective agreements. In addition, collective interest representation for media workers is quite fragmented, consisting of the union for services and various small professional associations, and collective agreements cover only a small share of media workers and the unionization rate is low (see also Windeler/Wirth 2005; Windeler/Wirth 2004; Elbing/Voelzkow 2006; Bleses 2005).

Deviations from standard employment pose also problems of access to social insurance. Only the smaller share of media workers who occupy supervisory positions in teams, such as the director and the director of photography, work as self-employed and can, if their work is classified as artistic and independent, gain access to the health and pension insurance scheme provided by the artists' social insurance (*Künstler-sozialkasse*) (Schnell 2007). In contrast, project workers in assistant positions are subject to social insurance contributions, and therefore are entitled to unemployment benefits if they have worked for at least 360 days in the two years prior to unemployment. However, due to the seasonality – film projects are rarely carried out in winter – and the unpredictability of employment on film projects, it is hard to work enough to become eligible for unemployment benefits (Wirth 2010: 140). Furthermore, projects in the television and film industry are usually so intense that it is impossible to carry out more than one at a time. Livelihood between two projects therefore depends not only on what has been earned for a project, but also on the regularity of employment, and on the ways in which access to project employment is mediated.

Labour market entry in the television and film industry is also only marginally regulated. Entry paths into employment by independent production firms are extremely heterogeneous, with an emphasis on experience rather than credentials. Training is conducted rather informally and on-the-job, under the supervision of the relevant supervisors (Apitzsch 2010; Baumann 2002a). However, during the 1990s, several universities and vocational schools established degree programmes for occupations such as director of photography (DoP), focus puller, director, or scriptwriter, thus challenging the established model of informal training and gradual advancement through assistant positions (Baumann/Voelzkow 2004). These different and compet-

ing training and entry opportunities result in a highly heterogeneous qualification structure in this field.

Regarding the organisation of film projects, there are roughly three project phases which require different skills (see here and in the following Apitzsch 2010; Marrs/Boes 2003). In the project development phase, the author usually develops the project idea in close cooperation with the producer and the core staff of the production firm. The production firm employs a producer, who hires the director, who then recommends the other heads of department, who recruit their own staff in turn. Departments are strictly demarcated with regard to different functions such as cameras, lighting, and costume, and are internally hierarchically differentiated, usually consisting of interns (at the lowest hierarchical level), second assistants, assistants, and the head. The control exerted by production companies is limited to defining the broad parameters of production, for example, by setting deadlines for project phases and defining the budget. Beyond that, they delegate the whole control of the work process to the heads of department. Work organisation is based on informal communication within and between the departments, or what has been called “mutual adjustment” (Mintzberg 1979: 3-5; Thompson 2003). Control is exercised personally and informally by direct supervisors and colleagues (Marrs/Boes 2003; Marrs 2007: 107), resulting in a highly interactive work process (Apitzsch 2010: 102-106).<sup>5</sup>

Because of the lack of standardisation of qualifications (Baumann 2002a), but also for organisational reasons, recruitment relies solely on informal networks as a way of controlling and communicating evaluations of professional and extra-functional qualifications. As is explained in more detail in Apitzsch (2012), the pronounced particularism of the recruitment process is mainly due to institutional and organisational factors. In a nutshell, the argument goes as follows. The lack of universalistic criteria for evaluating work and qualification, and the time spent together in close interaction, both at work and afterwards, in places distant from home and non-work related contacts increase the importance of extra-functional (Dahrendorf 1956; Offe 1970), diffuse and particularistic criteria. In addition, working with people on a friendship-like basis, sharing a sense of humour, and “being on the same wavelength” not only ease the coordination of work, which is mainly based on informal interaction and personal control, they also compensate for stressful working conditions such as extremely long working hours and time pressure (here and in the following, see Apitzsch 2012). Finally, these characteristics are evaluated mainly in the course of collaboration, and they can be communicated only personally.

As a result, media workers, to whom production firms delegate recruitment decisions for the strongly hierarchically differentiated departments, rely almost exclusively

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<sup>5</sup> Both the product market and the organisation of training affect the organization of work. The short-term nature of production in projects (one-off business), the uniqueness of the product, and the discontinuous character of demand foreclose standardised bureaucratic forms of coordination and control. Given the low degree of formal regulation of skills, professional control – that is, coordination based on internalised professional norms provided by standardised training – is not a viable alternative (see for a more detailed analysis Apitzsch 2010: 98, 115-118).

on recommendations and direct contacts to fill assistant positions within their departments. These contacts involve former assistants, colleagues, and service providers. While formal applications could be used early in their careers, they only lead to entry positions such as unpaid internships. Later, recruitment was based solely on personal contacts – be it repeated direct recruitment or recommendations by former supervisors. Eventually, directors finish up working with only a few directors of photography and other heads of department on a regular basis, who themselves tend to recruit from a small pool of camera assistants (see also Wirth 2010: 86-89, 100-105; Blair 2001). Colleagues and assistants are chosen on the basis of personal knowledge formed through prior cooperation, or on the basis of recommendations by personally acquainted (with both the applicant and the recruiter) colleagues.

In a study of the German film and television industry, Marrs and others (Marrs/Boes 2002, 2003; Boes et al. 2005, 2006; Marrs 2007) relate the mode of recruitment to control relations at the workplace. They argue that the insecurity of employment in projects, which requires information and referrals by current supervisors, reinforces the power concentration in the hands of supervisors in teams. As their team members depend on them for access to work, they are likely to accept hierarchical commands at work. In addition, especially in times of crisis solidarity would erode. While these diagnoses are confirmed by the present study in large parts, in particular the central role of vertical relations within departments, the following will show hitherto underestimated solidarity between media workers, and differences between employers and production firms' interests and professional identities of media workers.

#### **4. Data and method**

This study into the television and film industry builds both on primary empirical data and secondary literature. The former comprises semi-structured interviews with 33 project workers in different departments and hierarchical positions, such as camera crew members, video camera operators, costume and set designers, and administrative, editing and management staff. In addition, it includes interviews with 13 experts, such as union representatives, production firms, and representatives of professional associations, on the general labour market situation, interest representation, and organisation and employment practices. The focus of the interviews on the experiences of project workers derives from the facts that they are more closely involved in controlling work processes and in recruiting personnel, but they are also the group most immediately affected by aspects of uncertainty.

The sample of project workers was obtained by directly contacting media workers from one of the German media clusters who are listed, together with short CVs, by professional associations, and by the most popular German platform for freelancers in the film and television industry.<sup>6</sup> The interviewees were selected so as to reflect the

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<sup>6</sup> Listings by professional associations were useful in providing a first access to the field. In order to avoid a selection bias resulting from differences in openness of professional associations, the interviewees were selected from one of the most popular online platforms, and on the basis of specific criteria to secure a sufficient variation within the sample along the above-mentioned criteria. While interviews with experts and with project workers

heterogeneity of qualification profiles – ranging from training on the job and participation in short courses at private further training institutions through to media-related vocational training and graduation from film schools (the latter group represents one third of the sample). Moreover, the sample included workers with different levels of experience, as older workers (with 10 to 20 years of work experience) would be more familiar with vertical and horizontal mobility, with economic boom phases and downturns, and with labour market characteristics in film and television in general.

The interviews with project workers aimed to elicit not only biographical experiences and planning perspectives according to the method of the narrative biographical interview (Schütze 1983; Holtgrewe 2002; Kelle/Kluge 2001: 19), but also their connection to the structural characteristics of the labour market and the organisation of work. After receiving a narrative account, elicited by an open introductory question on their first contact with the industry, additional questions were then asked to examine the role of networks in major career transitions and recruitment processes, and to elicit individual risk-coping strategies and perceptions of working conditions. The interviews took from one to two and a half hours. On the basis of the transcribed and encoded interviews, career trajectories and structural characteristics were reconstructed and interpreted, first at the level of single cases and then as inter-case comparison.

## **5. Individual network use: access to projects and negotiations over terms of employment**

Especially against the background of the limited access of the atypically employed to unemployment benefits and other forms of social insurance, the income of the fixed-term employed or self-employed project worker depends mainly on continual access to projects. This brings to the fore the question of how this access is realised. Because of the low degree of professionalization in this field – unprotected occupational titles, non-standardised training routes, and heterogeneous entry paths<sup>7</sup> – one might expect that individual adaptations to changes in market demand, training investments and the establishment and instrumentalisation of weak ties should be the predominant reactions to insecure and interrupted employment.

However, this does not seem to be the case. Rather, given the informal recruitment patterns (see section 3), from the viewpoint of the individual crew member, building strong vertical relations with supervisors is the essential prerequisite for access to employment and income, and it structures the career. This is true for all posi-

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confirmed that this platform is of limited use for actual recruitment decisions, it is in fact a very widely used device for making contact information and information about work experience easily accessible to potential employers to whom media workers are recommended via third parties. This widespread use makes selection biases resulting from the use of this platform for searching for interview partners unlikely.

<sup>7</sup> The degree of professionalization is particularly low compared to the high degree of standardization of skills, training and the formalization of professional control in traditional professions (Freidson 2001; Stinchcombe 1959), but also in occupations for which training is conducted in the framework the dual vocational education and training scheme in Germany (Baumann/Voelzkow 2004; Baumann 2002a).

tions in film crews. The directors of photography interviewed, for instance, reported regularly receiving requests from a few directors, and themselves working repeatedly with a limited number of assistants. This makes vertical relations extraordinarily important for employment, even if the degree of closure varies, as a camera crew member recapitulates:

“Usually it is like this: there are directors who are in fact married to their directors of photography, which means they work with each other exclusively. And then there are also many who have three or four directors of photography with whom they work repeatedly.”

In order to establish and strengthen such ties, going out and hanging out together after work despite a 10 to 15-hour working day is inevitable. However, besides such irregular activities outside of work, the flexibility and intensity of project work does not allow for regular activities and meetings, even between projects. Therefore, vertical relations with supervisors who make recommendations or recruitment decisions can be stabilised first and foremost at work – during close interactions within the hierarchically-differentiated departments. Accordingly, not working together regularly threatens the very basis of employment and income prospects. The dominance of stable vertical relations as a means of reducing uncertainty of employment, income and career prospects orientates individual strategies, in that project workers avoid interruptions to their regular cooperation with a supervisor. The respondents tended to refrain from altering their field of specialisation and work team, and from long-term commitments to formal training.

This also affects careers, in that a step up requires the strong vertical relations which usually exist within one team. As a consequence, career progress ideally builds on strong ties to supervisors who are themselves advancing, as is illustrated in the career of a camera crew member:

“As a clapper loader, I got to know a camera assistant who preferred to work with me, and also a director of photography. This remained stable for years. And then he became a director of photography, and I a camera assistant.”

Still, despite this regular cooperation employment remains highly uncertain, as is illustrated by a camera operator:

“You never know, I don’t know whether they are already tired of you and say: ‘Well, let’s phase this [co-operation] out’.”

This uncertainty derives in part from the importance of particularistic recruitment criteria which are less calculable. Despite making employment prospects a little more predictable, even for the most successful interviewees, uncertainty remained a crucial part of their work experience (for a more detailed analysis of this aspect, see Apitzsch 2010, 153-163), especially because of the lack of transparency of particularistic and diffuse recruitment processes. Accordingly, all interviewees considered exiting the industry, or trying to invest in training to be able to enter a more stable labour market segment.

The imperative of being available at short notice to collaborate with a supervisor on a project for weeks usually far from the place of residence, hampered the establishment of ties not related to work, such as with partners and family. Such non-work-related relationships are considered as important source of emotional and material

support in volatile labour markets (Henninger/Gottschall 2005; Betzelt/Gottschall 2004), being an important way to become less dependent on volatile market demands.<sup>8</sup>

Project workers not only depend strongly on their supervisors for access to employment and income, but also to determine conditions of work and employment. Interestingly, these networks, and more specifically the recruitment decisions and support of supervisors, are used as a resource in individual negotiations over their terms of work and employment. Although the production firm is formally the employer of the crew members and sets the wages, the firm will usually not endanger the motivation of the head of department and the functioning of the team, as the “functioning and harmony of the team” becomes an important ‘zone of uncertainty’ (Crozier/Friedberg 1979; for the importance of quick and well-functioning work teams in the German television and film industry, see also Windeler/Wirth 2004: 310) for the firm and thus a power resource for team members.

Indeed the preference for working only with assistants with whom they have had positive experience with regard to professional and extra-functional aspects in former projects (see section 3) leads heads of departments to sometimes intervene in wage negotiations if production firms offer wages which are too far below a given standard, as is described by an interviewee in a leading position:

“They [the assistants, author] negotiate for themselves, but only, if there is an extreme gulf [between normal wages and offers in a concrete project][...], my assistants, I will support them: ‘I do not care, but pay them a decent wage, because I want to do a decent movie’. So I will say something, from my position, so to say, I try to intervene. But in principle they negotiate for themselves.”

Crew members reported negotiating more confidently when they were supported by their supervisor. As a camera assistant puts it:

“When a DoP suggests to the production firm that I should be employed for an assistant position, then I am lucky enough to be employed, given I am not extremely expensive. When he states that I am his first choice, and if you do not employ her I will not work for you either – of course then I am lucky.”

This experience – which is widely shared within the sample – points to the importance of control relations to network-supported negotiations over the terms of work and employment: In film and television productions, the role of employers and of supervisors can usually be divided. Production firms, which are the temporary employers of project members and with whom work and employment conditions are negotiated (mostly individually) for each project, grant directors, directors of photography, and other heads of department autonomy with regard to recruitment decisions. Yet, as the

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<sup>8</sup> From this sample of 33 media workers it is difficult to estimate the overall importance of this strategy. Yet, my results point to both the usefulness of additional informal material support, and to some tensions in establishing such relations: While some respondents indeed were supported by partners with more stable employment and income, many reported difficulties in establishing intimate or friendship relations with persons who do not know the requirements of the industry themselves, especially the necessity of being available for several weeks of intense work in another region at short notice, and therefore lack understanding for the often unexpected, long absence.

reference to luck in the quotation above indicates, recruitment decisions and informal support rest on criteria which are less transparent and enforceable (see above, section 3).

Acknowledging the possibility of this division between the function of employer and the function of supervising and recruiting is of major importance to an understanding of power relations in flexible labour markets. It opens the possibility for individual negotiations and collective interest representation of tying in with the negotiation power of whole teams, what has been termed “gang skill” by Finlay (1982: 52).

## **6. Collective action and personal networks: informal standards, recruitment and mobilisation of members?**

Considering the intensity of project involvement with regard to working hours, the required short-term availability for projects, and the resulting restrictions on individual risk-coping strategies and non-work-related commitments and activities, project workers demonstrate commitment, life-style adjustments and flexibility which deviate markedly from “limited and negotiated involvement” (Streeck 1996: 165). As has been shown elsewhere (Apitzsch 2010), this and the employment uncertainty are hardly endured throughout the entire career, and can hardly be reconciled with non-work-related commitments, such as friends, hobbies, and family. Therefore it can be assumed that at least for project workers in their later career stages, there is some need for the regulation of work and employment conditions beyond the informal support provided in work teams. What role do networks play, then, in power relations and collective action in flexible labour markets?

### **6.1 Peer exchange and local standards**

As film and television production is concentrated in clusters (Baumann/Voelzkow 2004; Windeler/Wirth 2004: 297), and informal exchange at work and industry-related events is considered to be of great importance for labour market processes, it seems plausible that workers also exchange information about their terms of employment and work. Indeed, interviewees reported that they informally talk to colleagues about their wages, even with those who they do not know personally. Collective agreements function as a reference point here, but the results also confirm the importance of informal standards specific to a certain region and genre (Windeler/Wirth 2004). Exchange with colleagues therefore helps orientation when working in a different city or in a different genre than usual. Interviewees also generously share information on overtime rates, on getting hotel costs reimbursed etc., and even on negotiation strategies with a particular firm. A camera assistant explains this with the aim of helping to maintain a given standard and thus being in a better position in the next negotiation:

“It [to keep others informed, author] is always in the interest of colleagues, as they do not want others to accidentally work for less, as this negatively affects the local wage standard”

Thus, media workers not only exchange information in order to get a short term advantage in a particular negotiation situation, but also to maintain the standard for the long term.

The exchange on wage standards described above takes place only randomly and individually, and does only rarely involve regular meetings outside projects in status-homogeneous groups. Professional associations, the union, and also media workers themselves face difficulties in facilitating exchange on working and employment conditions outside work through regular meetings. Interviewees described difficulties in setting up meetings because peers of the same status are involved in a project during the interviewees' own leisure time, or have spare time while they are working on a project or do not find time for activities beside work. Also the regular, more formal meetings set up by colleagues, professional associations or the union suffered from irregular attendance. Accordingly, a camera crew member recalled several initiatives to facilitate networking among assistants which ended in boom phases of the industry:

“At times, when there was little work, they met. It was for exchange: who does what, to get to know each other. [...] This went well for a while, but when summer started, or already in spring, and people started to work, it broke off”.

Intense and irregular involvement in projects with the long working hours and geographical mobility makes it difficult to meet and exchange regularly outside work. At work, however, exchange is concentrated to vertical relations, i.e. supervisors and colleagues in different positions and employment contracts, as teams are strongly hierarchically differentiated and do not include, for instance, several assistants with the same status. Mailing lists and other online communication platforms which do not require face-to-face meetings and which were set up by professional associations and the union could provide a partial solution to this problem. However, while they may help spread information, the exchange is likely to be less intense and less helpful for bottom-up processes of developing shared understandings of appropriate standards.

These informal standards, while suggesting a starting point for establishing more enduring forms of interest representation in project-based industries (Windeler/Wirth 2004), remain a problematic and incomplete substitute for collective agreements and the standard model of co-determination. Interviews with labour market experts and project workers who experienced the decline in wages and employment standards after the media crisis which was set off in 2001 suggest that these informal local standards are neither stable nor enforceable in a situation where labour supply exceeds demand by far.<sup>9</sup>

The extent to which collective agreements are a reference point for informal standards varies with hierarchical positions and status in the field. Successful heads of department often prefer fixed pay for an a priori agreed-upon number of working days or weeks, which are frequently negotiated by their agencies. This relieves them from having to register in detail and negotiate the actual working time, as a head of department describes:

“I try to do this on a fixed rate. So you say: you know what you have to pay, and I know what I will get, and we have to agree on how much I have to work for this [...]. Of course this is against any collective regulation, of daily hours or anything. It is completely against

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<sup>9</sup> The vulnerability of informal standards is also acknowledged by Windeler and Wirth (2004: 314).

the idea of regulating this – what I understand as an idea, but I cannot adhere to it in practice.”

Heads of department, especially directors and directors of photography, however, also have more control over part of their working conditions not only by individual negotiations. As it is up to them to decide or negotiate with the production firm when a certain quality standard is met, and how often a certain scene has to be repeated during filming, they have relatively more control over the daily working time than assistants.

Furthermore, informal exchange is not a one-way-street favouring employees. The interviewed project workers and union representatives experienced that it is also used by production firms and administrative directors of production (who are usually hired for a project only and are thus as mobile as the crew). They use their ties to other firms to learn about the performances of workers, and also about workers’ negotiation strategies, or their attempts to stand up for their rights set by labour protection law which can be viewed as offensive, as contrasted with workers’ “tolerance” for harsh working conditions. This exchange might establish a barrier against raising standards and more rigorous individual negotiation strategies. Against such possible sanctions, a cooperation between several professional associations established an anonymous way for media workers to report violations of collective agreements or labour protection laws they experienced in a given project. On this basis, the professional associations’ umbrella organisation (“*Die Filmschaffenden*”) then will ask the respective production firm to abide by the existing regulations, and to change employment contracts respectively (see <http://www.die-filmschaffenden.de/seiten/tariftreue>, last accessed February 2013).

Thus, informal standards and informal communication can be a possible first step to the codification of terms of employment. However, their viability and effects cannot be evaluated without taking the supply-demand relation and its volatility into account. Not least do employer communication strategies and the possible employers’ attempts to set standards in negotiation processes matter.

## **6.2 Potentials for recruitment and mobilisation of members**

Which network structures, identities and interests characterise film and television, and how do they feed into possibilities of mobilising and recruiting members among media workers? In film projects, due to the intensity of interaction, separation from family and friends outside the project, and the autonomy of heads of department with regard to recruitment on the basis of extra-functional, particularistic and ascriptive criteria, vertical work relations tend to transform into dense, multi-faceted and diffuse friendship-like relationships. Exchange can take place both during work, since producers (as employers) keep rather distant from the workplace, and interaction within the department is very intense, and outside work, since project members often stay together for the duration of the production in a hotel. These friendship-like relations also help to cope with stressful working conditions and to motivate workers, which is acknowledged by a director of production:

“The team should be harmonic, it has to be a good match, only then it is fun, for everyone. A director of production has to motivate the staff.”

Yet the division of control between production firms (as employers or commissioners) and heads of department (supervisors and recruiters) suggests, and recruitment criteria demonstrate, that heads of department are in part independent from efficiency considerations and employ other criteria to evaluate and control (professional and extra-functional skills, see section 3). Also those in assistant positions aspire to reach leading positions with more artistic autonomy and view their subordinate routine jobs as transitory (Apitzsch 2010: 137-141 for a more detailed analysis of career orientations). Therefore, supervisors and team members share an interest in improving working conditions, and budget and time constraints impact negatively on working motivation, as illustrated by this quotation from an interview with a director of photography:

“Our job is very exhausting, because of these financial and economic constraints, it is also becoming more exhausting and tougher. But we, working in film [...], we are not producing toothbrushes or vacuum cleaners, but movies. And this is always related to idealism, and creativity, and appreciation of art. And it is us who they are taking more and more away from. Because everything becomes more economical. At some point, we do not understand anymore the meaning of all this, why we should do this job.”

Therefore, professional ideals and the orientation of project workers in the television and film industry towards artistic and creative autonomy can not only be used as a motivational resource by production firms, but potentially also contradict measures to cut costs by shortening budgets and production times.

Still, although the evaluation criteria of supervisors, and possibly their identities and interests, are not in concordance with those potentially brought forward by production firms, they may also not be equated with those of employees in dependent positions. Indeed, interviewees in leading positions, who are usually self-employed, showed less interest in a standardisation of working time and wages (see section 5.1), or in the service union lobbying for better access of media workers to unemployment benefits. This, together with the limited exchange among peers, makes it difficult to build up shared interests in employment regulation within work teams.

Union strategies started to address these heterogeneous interests: for instance, the service union's project *connexx.av* approaches media workers with different employment statuses (i.e. both freelancers and employees) with a “hybrid” (Betzelt/Gottschall 2004: 270-273) strategy of both providing professional services and aiming at the regulation and improvement of employment conditions. Another important step forward in acknowledging professional identities while trying to improve working conditions is the cooperation between the union and five professional associations (see the description of the Verdi Filmunion at <http://www.connexx-av.de>, last accessed February 2013; see also Windeler/Wirth 2004).

Also, the most influential professional associations, such as that of directors, directors of photography, and that of lighting technicians, and 11 other professional associations cooperate since the 1990ies. Although they are no bargaining party, their umbrella organisation (*Die Filmschaffenden*) increasingly tries to intervene in the regulation of working and employment conditions by publishing recommendations for collective agreements, and by offering media workers the possibility to anonymously complain about employment contracts and working conditions which violate existing collective agreements or labour law (see also section 6.1). Yet, the union and the um-

brella organisation of professional associations in film do not cooperate directly with each other, but rather seem to be in competition to each other. Also, some professional associations concentrate on market closure rather than employment regulation, and on the delineations between the professional groups that are involved in film and television productions, which possibly hampers cooperation with the service union (Wirth 2010: 167). Therefore, while some developments in the still highly fragmented landscape of interest representation in the media point to a possible adoption of more inclusive, cooperative strategies, the analysis of personal network use in this industry further emphasizes that it is of pivotal importance how interest organizations in such volatile environments deal not only with the heterogeneity of the workforce with regard to employment status, but also with the latent conflict between strategies of differentiation along occupational status and the focus on universalism (Streeck 1993, 2005).

Another difficulty for unions' attempts to mobilize media workers for visible campaigns arises from the fact that networks are the most important device for recruitment and information, and they are used by production firms and clients, too, to spread and receive information about individuals who stand up for their rights (see section 6.1).

## **7. Conclusion**

Starting from the growing interest of both labour market and industrial relations research in personal networks, this study has examined the interaction between individual networking strategies of workers in flexible labour markets and unions' possibilities to access these networks as part of their attempts to improve working conditions and gain foothold in this field. The German film and television industry constituted a highly interesting case for studying this because it deviates markedly from the German "occupational-professional model of skill and work organization" (Streeck 1996: 147) and collectively regulated employment. This makes actors highly dependent on alternative, more informal means of coping with flexibility demands.

The study has confirmed the importance of personal relations for access to employment, to informal support, and to information on professional and wage standards. In addition, it has revealed the relevance of personal, and especially of vertical networks for individual negotiations over the terms of employment. While weak, horizontal ties between colleagues certainly help being informed about developments in the field and about standards in working conditions, vertical relations with supervisors are most important. They fulfil various central functions. First of all, recruitment by former supervisors is the most important means of access to projects. Second, they transmit, but also evaluate, knowledge and skills, and they orient career aspirations. Third, they are an important power resource in individual negotiations over the terms of employment. All these functions are even more important as in the film and television industry the share of temporary employment and self-employment with little access to social insurance schemes and to interest representation has increased, and there are no formal standards in training or qualifications. Media workers rely on vertical relations to make employment, income and career prospects at least partially more predictable, and to improve the negotiation position vis a vis the employer. Re-

search into individual strategies of coping with flexibility demands therefore needs to take the strength of ties into account to understand the functions and limits of networks, but also whether they include persons of similar status or in different hierarchical positions.

However, several aspects of this industry would make it plausible that industrial unions with their class-based approach would be an important complement to individual networking strategies, and encounter interests and identities, and personal relations, that are favourable for recruiting new members or mobilizing media workers for campaigns: informal local standards are highly vulnerable, income is insecure due to the short term employment and difficult access to unemployment benefits and social insurance schemes, project workers encounter problems in securing their livelihood and in balancing work- and non-work-related needs in the long run. Also, more bottom-up approaches to develop joint understanding of wages and to bridge fragmented exchange among peers are difficult to establish. Yet, influence of production firms (as employers) on exchange at the workplace and on recruitment decisions is limited.

What role do collective strategies, then, play in this labour market, and how do they interact with the individual use of personal networks? The empirical analysis of the structure of personal relations, interests and identities they proliferate and functions they fulfil has shed light on specific tensions between the individual and the collective use of networks in flexible labour markets. Both the necessity of stabilizing vertical relations and the characteristics of the organization of work – intensity of involvement with regard to working hours and geographical mobility, work contacts with supervisors and subordinates – hamper the stabilization of contacts between colleagues who work in the same position and under similar conditions: the highly interactive work process which involves supervisors and subordinates, but not peers, and the difficulties of maintaining contact to persons outside a project during production, support vertical networking. Also, the importance of vertical relations for access to employment, training, evaluations, career, and for attenuating stressful work situations orients networking strategies at work and outside the workplace. Exchange between peers on terms of employment therefore takes place somewhat occasionally. Under these conditions it is more likely that social groups form which are homogeneous with regard to professional ideals, but heterogeneous with regard to the need for employment regulation. As a result, professional concerns may be more salient than labour-capital conflicts. Interest representation is therefore more likely to be able to build on professional identities than on identities-as-employees. Changes at work therefore do not necessarily bring class-based interests to the fore, nor do they necessarily lead to a growing importance of non-work-related identities (Piore/Safford 2006).

Finally, while personal relations with supervisors seem to be extraordinarily important for individual strategies of coping with labour market risks, this resource can be considered to favour mostly those who are better established in the labour market and already have stable networks at their disposal. Support from supervisors is a crucial resource in individual negotiations between project workers and production firms, because well-functioning teams are a critical resource for the production process. However, as this support is per definition only available to a small group of subordi-

nates, and based on particularistic criteria, it is of limited use for collective action that aims at regulating employment conditions on a broader scale. Network-supported individual negotiations therefore might even aggravate a polarisation between those well established and those with less working experience and in more vulnerable positions in negotiations because of their looser ties to supervisors.

Taken together, networks do not per se enhance or prohibit collective action. Rather, taking into account the individual use of networks and the broader institutional and organisational context of their formation, my findings point to a large variety of functions that work-related networks fulfil, and to the potentials and limits of accessing employment-relevant networks in a highly flexible and networked industry for collective action. Such informal strategies tend to add to existing inequalities in the labour market by privileging those workers who are already well established, better integrated into informal networks and equipped with better employment prospects. Flexibility demands, such as those exerted in project industries, but also in other casual labour markets, and hierarchical forms of organisation bringing together workers who are highly heterogeneous in terms of employment and income then tend to enhance fragmentation and closure instead of collective action which draws on class conflicts. Therefore, beyond this specific case of the German film and television industry, the paper has pointed to the importance for industrial relations research to take into account the role of individual networking strategies, but also workplace relations and mobility patterns to evaluate the potentials of collective action and employment regulation.

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