Dominique Méda • Patricia Vendramin

Reinventing Work in Europe

Value, Generations and Labour

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Introduction

In his seminal work on *The Division of Labour in Society*, published in 1893, Émile Durkheim considered the social role of the division of labour, answering in the affirmative the question he had posed himself: "Thus we are led to ask whether the division of labour might not play the same role in more extensive groupings—whether, in contemporary societies where it has developed in the way that we know, it might not fulfil the function of integrating the body social and of ensuring its unity." Labour did indeed fulfil such a role in modern societies, and it was only in certain rare cases that the division of labour took on pathological forms, contributing to the isolation of the individual or to the loosening of the social bond. In fact, "The division of labour, when normal, supposes that the worker, far from remaining bent over his task, does not lose sight of those cooperating with him, but acts upon them and is acted upon by them. He is not therefore a machine who repeats movements the sense of which he does not understand, but he knows they are tending in a certain direction, towards a goal that he

can conceive of more or less distinctly … He knows that his activity has a meaning."[1]

Seventy years later, in 1963, in the foreword to the third edition of his *Où va le travail humain?*, Georges Friedmann[2] wrote: "I regret that books in the shops—books of this kind, at least—no longer come with a promotional wrapper; I would have suggested to the publisher that the title 'Where is Human Labour Going?' be followed by the answer, 'It's going to hell!'." A pithy summation, indeed, of the critical reflection on work he had embarked on in this book and would further develop in *The Anatomy of Work*, a whole chapter of which is devoted to demonstrating the outdatedness of Durkheim's conception of labour: "Had he lived, in order to maintain the purity of his theory of organic solidarity, he would have been obliged to consider 'abnormal' most of the forms taken by labour in modern society, both in industry and in administration, and even more recently in commerce."[3]

The 1970s saw considerable critical discussion of work and concern over its loss of meaning. In France one might think of the La Confédération française démocratique du travail's (CFDT) *Les Dégâts du progrès*,[4] published in 1977, which notes a serious reduction in the meaningfulness of work, or André Gorz's *Farewell to the Working Class*,[5] published in 1980, which saw modern work as essentially heteronomous and argued, along with Friedmann—even if he was but rarely cited—that its place should be minimised as far as possible to make space for autonomous activities. These ideas echoed those that were developed a little earlier in Germany by Claus Offe and Jürgen Habermas, the second of whom would put forward, in 1985, the idea of "the end of work-based society".

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[1] Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. Steven Lukes (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), p. 50.

[2] Georges Friedmann, *Où va le travail humain?*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1963).

[3] Georges Friedmann, *The Anatomy of Work: Labor, Leisure and the Implications of Automation* [1956] (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1992), p. 75.

[4] CFDT, *Les Dégâts du progrès: les travailleurs face au changement technique* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).

[5] André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism* [1980] (London: Pluto Press, 1982)

Brought to France in the mid-1990s, notably in *Le Travail, une valeur en voie de disparition*[6] and by the translation of Jeremy Rifkin's *The End of Work*,[7] the idea provoked an intense debate that revealed that the time of the critique of work had passed. The great rise of unemployment in Europe had made both it and the critique of economic reason inaudible. Reacting to these two works understood to proclaim the end of work (though the first in fact argued the normative position that work should take up less time and be better distributed, while the second proposed the development of non-work activities and the expansion of the non-profit sector as a basis for social cohesion), a number of authors sought to show how subjectivity was powerfully engaged by work, making it a crucial site for the construction of identity, while others insisted that work remained a central value for individuals and pursued investigations intended to show that this was so.

The present volume is no occasion to return to this debate, already reconsidered in the preface to the recent new paperback edition of *Le Travail, une valeur en voie de disparition*. Its object rather is to retrace the major historical stages in the valorisation of work and to offer a survey of the research available to us today, in France and in Europe, that helps illuminate the meaning individuals attach to work today and generational differences in the relationship to work. It also offers an opportunity to examine why there is so much talk today of suffering and dissatisfaction at work and what might be the causes of the current malaise.

This book has its origins in a European research project conceived and coordinated by Patricia Vendramin, intended to test the often canvassed hypothesis that young people today relate differently to work than do their elders. They have been said to be materialistic, nomadic, lazy, individualistic: characteristics that might account in part for their difficulties in finding and keeping work. A team of researchers from six different European countries was thus assembled, their task to find out whether young people did think differently about work. Had something changed

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[6] Dominique Méda, *Le travail, une valeur en voie de disparition* (Paris: Alto-Aubier, 1995; repub. Champs-Flammarion, 2010).

[7] Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1995).

in younger generations' relationship to work as a function of age or generation? In pursuing the question, we obviously encountered national differences: it was clear, upon examination of the major European investigations of work, that the relationship to work was differently inflected in different countries. And if countries differed, if age, generation, socio-occupational class and gender all had an influence on the relationship to work, were there regularities to be observed, explanations that might be offered? Had there been, as Ronald Inglehart[8] had suggested, a radical change such that the generations born after 1968 were post-materialist, with a less instrumental relationship to work than their predecessors? What was the impact of rising levels of education on the relationship to work? These were the questions addressed by a team of sociologists, economists and psychologists drawn from six European countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Hungary. A note at the end of the book details the research methods employed.

Today, people's expectations of work are enormous, and radically different from what they were when Goldthorpe and his colleagues published *The Affluent Worker* in 1968.[9] Have the changes that have occurred in the world of work and in conditions of work and employment been conducive to these expectations being met? This is the question that has guided our thinking and writing.

The book begins (Chap. 2) with a look back at the history of work and the meanings attached to it in different times and places. This anthropological survey of work through history is followed by a presentation of the tools and analytical frameworks needed to understand and to measure the meaning of work in contemporary societies. This chapter also introduces the material that serves as the foundation for the rest of the book.

Taking as its basis a number of international surveys, Chap. 3 considers the significance of work for Europeans today and its place in relation to other spheres of meaning. It also examines the kinds of explanation researchers have offered for the changes observed. Examination of the

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[8] Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

[9] John H. Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer and Jennifer Platt, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

data brings out a distinctively French paradox, but one that reveals deep contradictions equally affecting workers in other countries of Europe. The French accord great importance to work but at the same time say that "a decrease in the importance of work" in their lives would be a good thing. Consideration of changes in the conditions of work and its forms of organisation allows one to understand this apparent paradox. It is in fact the contradiction between the enormous expectations people have of work—both instrumental and expressive—and incompatible changes in the world of work that is at the heart of the dissatisfaction of many workers, both in France and elsewhere in Europe. A comparison is made with Québec that confirms this understanding of developments.

On the basis of this observation, Chap. 4 turns to look at what employers actually offer and more specifically at the new forms of organisation of work. It analyses what it is in these that comes into conflict with employees' strong expectations: the vicissitudes of flexibility and the unpredictability of work, the individualisation of the employment relationship and its excessive psychological demands, the definition and recognition of skills. This chapter highlights the tensions between individual expectations and developments in the system of social production, calling into question the significance of the European commitment to "quality employment". It also suggests the importance of taking a closer look at how these changes and contradictions are experienced by different categories of worker and at how this shapes their relationship to work. It is to this that the two chapters that follow are devoted.

Chapter 5 analyses the relationship between age, socio-economic category and gender and the relationship to work. It adopts a generational perspective based on the sociological hypothesis that it is its embeddedness in a particular context—cultural, economic, historical or political—that shapes a generation and, more specifically, its attitudes towards work. Despite the existence of intragenerational differences, it can be seen that among the younger generation, and among women more generally, experience of a particular context (characterised by persistent unemployment, rising educational standards and the feminisation of employment) is associated with a changed conception of work characterised by a desire to grant equal importance to the different spheres of life, by a reduction in the difference between male and female models of engagement with

work, and by a view of social relationships as more private than collectively shared.

On the basis of these observations, Chap. 6 analyses the reciprocal perceptions of generations which attach partly shared and partly differing meanings to work, and the effect these have on daily work and intergenerational cohesion. Changes in attitudes to work are connected to a wider socio-cultural transformation affecting all European societies, but are also inscribed within a distinctive intergenerational equilibrium that assigns specific places in the labour market to different age cohorts, with different rights and responsibilities.

Work remains, as it has always been, a powerful factor of social integration. It affords places, rights and duties and distributes individuals along a scale of social prestige. Yet over the years the meaning of work has changed. It has become more highly diversified, and it is today invested with high expectations that conflict with organisational developments and the changing nature of the labour market, which are creating a new fragmentation at work. To reinvent work, then, is to take seriously the expectations of Europe's citizens, and more especially those of women and young people.

2

A History of the Value Accorded to Work

The notion of work as an activity through which human beings transform the world in which they live, remaking it in their image and finding in this process one of their most important ways of participating in social life, is a recent and eminently modern idea. Since Antiquity, work has gradually come to occupy a more and more central place in societies, to the extent that it is possible to speak of "work-based societies". Over recent centuries, new layers of meaning have accreted to the idea of work, expanding individuals' expectations of it. Work is at one and the same time represented in economic calculation as a "factor of production", to be utilised as efficiently as possible; seen as an opportunity for individual self-fulfilment; and treated as a basis for the distribution of income, rights and welfare. In those societies where the expressive dimension of work has come to be salient, the different, contradictory meanings attached to work all coexist, generating tensions. There are different approaches that can be taken to try and grasp people's relationships to work: one can look to the major European surveys, which enable comparison but also have their limits, or engage in in-depth, face-to-face questioning. Either way, understanding relationships to work is a complex matter.

2.1   The Value of Work: A Long Story

Has work always been valorised? Is it true that from earliest Antiquity human beings have worked and considered work to be one of the most important activities in their lives, as is suggested by Georges Friedmann and Pierre Naville in their *Traité de sociologie du Travail*, in which they write that "work deserves to be recognised as a characteristic of the human species. Man is a social animal … essentially engaged in work"?[1] Such a thesis may be taken in two different ways. It might be taken to mean that humans have always been aware of transforming nature, of adding value to it, and in doing so developing a complex of activities to be radically distinguished from others, or, alternatively, that humans have always sought to meet their needs by making use of nature, but without necessarily radically distinguishing these activities from the rest of life.

If we think of work as the human activity of transforming nature, we are acting as if a specific nineteenth-century understanding already existed in Antiquity, forgetting that it was only later that it became possible to conceive of a "nature" susceptible of transformation by human activity and with this of a humanity capable of remaking it in its own image. Concepts and categories themselves are subject to change, and it is therefore necessary to try and tease out the meanings attached to the word "work" at different times, by analysing the corresponding texts.

We insist, then, on the historicality of the concept of work, following Jean-Pierre Vernant,[2] Michel Freyssenet[3] and Dominique Méda,[4] for whom our modern concept of work is the product of several layers of meaning successively accumulated through the centuries, as evidenced by many analyses.[5]

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[1] Georges Friedmann and Pierre Naville, *Traité de sociologie du travail* (Paris: Armand Colin, vol. I, 1961; vol. II, 1962).

[2] Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks* [1965] (New York: Zone Books, 2006).

[3] Michel Freyssenet, "Historicité et centralité du travail", in Jean Bidet and Pierre-Jean Texier, eds, *La crise du travail* (Paris: PUF, 1995), pp. 227–244; in English, see Freyssenet, "The Emergence, Centrality and End of Work", *Current Sociology* 47:2 (April 1999), pp. 5–20, which cites and expands upon this.

[4] Méda, *Le travail, une valeur en voie de disparition.*

[5] The analyses below drawn in part on Méda, *Le Travail, une valeur en voie de disparition* and Dominique Méda, *Le Travail* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2015).

2.1.1 Pre-capitalist Societies

Several anthropological or ethnological studies of life in pre-capitalist societies have shown that it is not possible to accord the same meaning to the term "work" as it is employed (or not) in the different societies under study. In her pioneering article of 1992, Marie-Noëlle Chamoux underlines how important it is, if one wishes to determine whether the concept of work can be used in speaking of pre-economic societies (whether distant in time or place), to avoid proceeding as certain writers do, which is to interpret distant times or places by means of concepts developed much later or elsewhere, analysing tribal societies using ideas forged by eighteenth-century economic thought, which obviously leads one to understand work as a universal category.[6]

To escape this trap, Chamoux argues that we should heed what anthropology tells us about work, revealing work to be "an ethnocentric notion".[7] "The notion of work is not universal. Many societies seem to have had no need for it. This being so, it tends to appear to us under the negative figures of absence, fragmentation into several concepts, or non-coincidence with the sense we ourselves accord to it."[8]

Chamoux offers examples of the absence of the notion of work. It is not to be found among the Maenge of Oceania, on whom she cites the work of Michel Panoff: "There exists no notion of 'work' as such, no more than any special word to distinguish 'productive activities' from other human behaviours. … On the other hand, there does exist, very distinctly, a frequently invoked notion of pain or suffering that appears in the context of gardening, among others."[9] The same goes for the Achuar of Amazonia,

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[6] This article was first published as Marie-Noël Chamoux, "Sociétés avec et sans concept de travail: remarques anthropologiques", in *Actes du colloque interdisciplinaire "Travail : recherche et prospective"*, 1993, the proceedings of a colloquium organised by PIRTTEM-CNRS and held at the École Normale Supérieure, Lyon, 30 Nov.–2 Dec. 1992 (Lyon: PIRTTEM, 1993) and afterwards as Chamoux, "Sociétés avec et sans concept de travail", *Sociologie du travail* 36 (1994), p. 57–71. Here we shall use the version published in the proceedings of the colloquium, with the corresponding pagination.

[7] Ibid., p. 28.

[8] Ibid., p. 28.

[9] Michel Panoff, "Energie et vertu: le travail et ses représentations en Nouvelle-Bretagne", *L'Homme* 17:2/3 (1977), pp. 7–21, at p. 11, quoted in Chamoux, "Sociétés avec et sans concept de travail", p. 28.

studied by Philippe Descola: "Identical in this with other pre-capitalist societies, the Achuar have no term or notion corresponding to the idea of work in general, that is, to the idea of a coherent ensemble of technical operations whose goal is to produce the material means of life. Nor does the language have terms designating work processes in the wider sense."[10] And Chamoux adds that "Here one must vigorously reject any psychological evolutionism that would see in the absence of any general notion of work the symptom of any supposed 'mental confusion' suffered by 'primitives' incapable of abstraction and capable only of recognising sensations."[11]

To illustrate the fragmentation of the notion, Chamoux recalls that among the Ancient Greeks two words were needed, *ergon* and *ponos,* and that the Romans used no less than three: *opus, labor* and *opera (-ae)*. And finally, for non-coincidence, she points out that the sense of word can extend far beyond production.

Certain societies have a very broad conception of work, while others designate by this term only non-productive activities. One finds nowhere, combined in the same single concept, the ensemble of ideas and meanings to which our own concept of work refers (difficult effort, the transformation of nature, the creation of value, etc.). More generally, Chamoux relies on the work of Marshall Sahlins, who writes in "Tribal Economics" that work is there not alienated from man, separable from his social being and capable of being the object of an exchange. One works, one produces as a social being, a husband, a father, a brother, a member of a clan or village. Work is not separate from the rest of life: "'Worker' is not a status in itself, nor 'labor' a true category of tribal economics."[12]

More than this, it is Sahlins who showed us, in a sense, that primitive humanity did not live under a crushing weight of needs requiring satisfaction: needs were limited, life not a breathless race to satisfy unlimited need. Tribal people work less than us, and less regularly.

Can one then retain "work" as the term to describe the activities engaged in by these peoples? Chamoux concludes her article by posing

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[10] Philippe Descola, "Le jardin de Colibri. Procès de travail et catégorisations sexuelles chez les Achuar de l'Equateur", *L 'Homme* 23:1 (1983), pp. 61–89, at p. 63, quoted in Chamoux, "Sociétés avec et sans concept de travail", p. 28.

[11] Chamoux, "Sociétés avec et sans concept de travail", p. 29.

[12] Marshall David Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 80, quoted in Chamoux, "Sociétés avec et sans concept de travail", p. 38.

the question in all its amplitude: "There thus arises a series of doubts. Is the economic definition of work not an indigenous concept like any other, a way of cutting up the world employed within the culture, despite the persistent claims for its being a category of reason and as such universal? … The anthropological approach poses too a question that cannot be avoided, one perhaps more pregnant with practical and theoretical consequences than any other: can one say that work exists when it is neither thought not lived as such?"[13]

2.1.2   Ancient Greece

In this respect, Vernant's article "Some Psychological Aspects of Work in Ancient Greece"[14] represents a major theoretical contribution, both methodologically and substantively, in many respects laying the ground for the research programme launched by Maurice Godelier in 1980, under the title "Le travail et ses représentations" (Work and Its Representations), whose work would persuade a number of anthropologists and sociologists, in the 1990s, to recommend greater prudence in the use of the term, no longer seeing it as a universal category.

Like Chamoux, but in even severer terms, Vernant stresses the impermissibility of interpreting ancient civilisations through the categories of the present or of attributing to earlier civilisations concepts created or modified only later. "Just as it would not be right to apply the economic categories of modern capitalism to the ancient Greek world, we cannot ascribe the psychological functions of work today to the man of the ancient city. For us, professional tasks, no matter how different they may be in concrete terms, belong to a single type of behaviour: in all of them we see the same type of activity, set in a framework of rules and constraints, whose effects directly concern others and whose object is to produce something with value and utility for the group. This unification of the psychological function of work goes hand in hand with what Karl Marx calls abstract labour. So that the various working activities may

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[13] Chamoux, "Sociétés avec et sans concept de travail", pp. 37–38.
[14] Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Some Psychological Aspects of Work in Ancient Greece", in Vernant, *Myth and Thought*.

be integrated into a single psychological function, man must be able to conceive his own particular activity—whatever form each individual task may take—as work understood in a general sense. This is only possible in the context of a fully commercial economy in which every form of work aims to create products with a view to selling them."[15]

In Greece, then, one finds trades, activities and tasks, but one looks in vain for "work". On the contrary, activities fall under irreducibly different categories that make it impossible to think of work as a single function. The most important distinction is between activities that fall under the term *ponos*, toil, calling for effort and contact with matter and hence degrading, and those identified as *ergon*, act, work as accomplishment, the imposition of form on matter.

While Vernant does not say that work did not exist in ancient Greece, one has to understand in the strictest terms his observation that "in ancient Greece the idea is not [of] one great human function, work, encompassing all the trades, but rather a plurality of different functions, each constituting a particular type of action with its own particular product. Furthermore, whereas agricultural activities as a whole are [for us] an integral part of working behaviour, for the ancient Greeks they remained outside the sphere of the trades".[16] As Vernant insists, the concrete activities involved in the different trades carried on by artisans who have nothing in common with modern "producers", the creators of value, have therefore nothing to do with the abstract labour whose advent was noted by Marx and Weber, emerging in the sixteenth century and later systematically expounded by Adam Smith.

Oversimplifying to the extreme, it could be said that throughout the period of the Roman Empire and until the end of the Middle Ages, as Jacques Le Goff shows in *Pour un autre Moyen-Âge*,[17] the representation of what would later come to be called work changed very little. The classification of activities found in Cicero and the mediaeval classification of the arts both rest on the distinctions drawn by the ancient Greeks. At the risk of some considerable simplification, one might say that while

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[15] Ibid., p. 293.

[16] Ibid., p. 294.

[17] Jacques le Goff, *Pour un autre Moyen-Âge*, Paris, Gallimard, 1977.

philosophical and religious ideas remained as they were until the sixteenth century (the overdetermination of the natural by the supernatural; devaluation of the terrestrial and changing in the name of the eternal and unchanging; the contempt for profit, accumulation and trade; the undervaluing of human activities …), work could not be valorised, nor emerge as a homogeneous category unifying diverse employments under a single concept. On the contrary, the "invention of work", whereby the category finds its unity—bringing with it in French the possibility of using the definite article—would take place gradually through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as demonstrated by Lucien Fèbvre,[18] to find its first rigorous definition in Smith.

2.1.3 Weber's Argument: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Criticised as it may have been, it is impossible to ignore Weber's argument, which remains fundamental to any understanding of the development of the ethic of work. We may recall that he opened his discussion with the observation that "A glance at the occupational statistics of any country of mixed religious composition" revealed that "business leaders and owners of capital, as well as the higher grades of skilled labour, and even more the higher technically and commercially trained personnel of modern enterprises, are overwhelmingly Protestant".[19]

Weber understood the idea that one did one's moral *duty* in doing a job as characteristic of the *social ethic* of capitalist civilisation, and in a sense its *foundation*. What then were the background ideas that led to the belief that this sort of activity, to all appearances guided by profit alone, was a vocation—a calling—in relation to which the individual felt a *moral obligation?* The Reformation, and the work of Luther more particularly, represents a first, essential step, even if—as Weber says

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[18] Lucien Fèbvre, "Civilisation: Evolution of a Word and a Group of Ideas" [1930] in *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Fèbvre,* ed. Peter Burke, trans. K. Folca (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), pp. 219–57.

[19] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons [1930] (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 3.

time and time again—there is no question of attributing the invention of *capitalism* to him or his disciples: "The cultural consequences of the Reformation were to a great extent … unforeseen and even unwished-for results of the labours of the reformers … often far removed from or even in contradiction to all that they themselves thought to attain."[20] And Weber emphasises that he has "no intention whatever of maintaining such a foolish and doctrinaire thesis as that the spirit of capitalism (in the provisional sense of the term explained above) could only have arisen as the result of certain effects of the Reformation, or even that capitalism as an economic system is a creation of the Reformation".[21] But one has to attribute to the Reformation what was a radically new conception, the idea of "the fulfilment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume".[22] The activities of everyday life took on a religious significance, and no longer was it necessary to go beyond secular values in monastic asceticism in order to live a life pleasing to God; on the contrary, this could only be done by fulfilling the duties associated with one's allotted place in society.

The Calvinistic Puritans helped the idea to prosper, notably thanks to their doctrine of predestination: while God's decrees were inscrutable, the criteria of election forever unknowable, and works evidently offered no way of attaining salvation, it was nonetheless true that only the elect could increase the glory of God by works that were truly good. The Calvinist God "demanded of his believers not single good works, but a life of good works combined into a unified system".[23] The Calvinist's activity in society being carried out only for the glory of God, love of neighbour primarily found expression in the accomplishment of professional tasks: it "assumes a peculiarly objective and impersonal character, that of service in the interest of the rational organization of our social environment".[24] Ascetic behaviour was entirely governed by a single goal, to increase the glory of God, and thus became entirely rationalised: "This rationalization

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[20] Ibid., p. 48.
[21] Ibid., p. 49.
[22] Ibid., p. 40.
[23] Ibid., p. 71.
[24] Ibid., p. 64.

of conduct within this world, but for the sake of the world beyond, was the consequence of the concept of calling of ascetic Protestantism."[25]

Thus, according to Baxter, the protestant divine whose Christian Directory offers "the most complete compendium of Puritan ethics", the maxim "Work hard in your calling" is an effective prescription against "sexual temptations … against religious doubts and a sense of moral unworthiness".[26] But more importantly, work itself becomes the end of life as ordained by God, and "St. Paul's 'He who will not work shall not eat' holds unconditionally for everyone".[27] Disinclination to work is a sign of the absence of grace because "For everyone without exception God's Providence has prepared a calling, which he should profess and in which he should labour. And this calling is not, as it was for the Lutheran, a fate to which he must submit and which he must make the best of, but God's commandment to the individual to work for the divine glory."[28]

Given this, it is easier to understand how asceticism came to legitimate the acquisition of wealth. In fact, in accord with the Old Testament and by analogy with the ethical valuation of good works, asceticism saw the pursuit of riches for their own sake as the height of wickedness, even as it understood the wealth that resulted from doing one's duty in a calling as a sign of God's blessing. Which allows Weber to see as the seventeenth century's most important bequest to the next the "amazingly good, we may even say a pharisaically good, conscience in the acquisition of money, so long as it took place legally".[29]

As Lucien Fèbvre and Jules Michelet before him would emphasise,[30] while the sixteenth century saw the emergence of a powerful tendency towards the valorisation of work, one has to await the eighteenth century before work comes to be properly defined as we understand it, with the unification under this concept of activities hitherto falling under different categories.

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[25] Ibid., p. 100.

[26] Ibid., pp. 103, 105.

[27] Ibid., p. 105.

[28] Ibid., p. 106.

[29] Ibid., pp. 119–20.

[30] Lucien Fèbvre, "Civilisation: Evolution of a Word and a Group of Ideas"; Jules Michelet, *Histoire du XIXème siècle*, cited in Fèbvre, "Civilisation".

2.2   The Three Dimensions of Work

Not only has the concept of work, with all its present connotations, not existed from earliest Antiquity, it consists of several "layers of meaning" (as Ignace Meyerson put it in 1955[31]) accreted at different times and serving as a basis for individuals' interpretations and expectations. One may distinguish three major moments in the determination of the concept of work, three radically different and indeed contradictory meanings that continue to coexist.

2.2.1   Work as Factor of Production

It is in the eighteenth century that a unified notion of work first emerges, with the concept of "abstract labour". It becomes possible to think of work or labour in the abstract when activities hitherto governed by irreducibly heterogeneous logics come to be sufficiently homogeneous to be marshalled under a single term. As Vernant writes, "This is only possible in the context of a fully commercial economy in which every form of work aims to create products with a view to selling them. Under these conditions, a particular article is no longer made to satisfy the needs of a particular user. Every job, whether agricultural or industrial, produces a commodity intended not for any individual but for a market where things are bought and sold. Through the medium of the market, all the jobs done throughout the society are related to one another, brought into contact with one another, and thus made comparable."[32]

It is in Adam Smith, and notably in his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*,[33] that one can best see this process at work: for even though *The Wealth of Nations* is a hymn to work and more especially to its productive power, Smith never asks himself what labour actually is, as a concrete activity. The definition he gives of labour is purely instrumental: labour is that human or mechanical power that makes possible the creation

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[31] Ignace Meyerson, "Le travail, fonction psychologique", *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique* 52 (1955), pp. 3–17.

[32] Vernant, "Some Psychological Aspects of Work", p. 294.

[33] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* [1776] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.)

of value, labour is *what creates value*. On the one hand, work appears as a physical expenditure, associated with effort, fatigue, and hardship, and on the other it is that substance into which everything may be resolved and which enables universal exchange, because all the things we exchange contain labour, all things can be reduced to labour, to quantities of fatigue or physical expenditure. Smith doesn't say what labour, what work is, but it is now possible to say that it is one thing.

Work has a double function: it is not only the activity that produces the wealth of a nation but it is also what underlies the stability of the social order. In fact, it allows the precise measurement of each individual's contribution, and thus of their remuneration, thus permitting the establishment of an objective, non-arbitrary order, one not open to challenge at any moment. As individuals strain under the supreme injunction to maximise production, their remuneration is automatically calculated in terms of their measurable contribution to production. The social order cannot be challenged, its stability is guaranteed. Human intervention is not an adequate basis for the social bond: to found this on exchange solves the problem of the unsocial sociability of men, holding them together even though they may not wish it.

Work was thus at the centre of the social mechanics that emerged at that time: it is both human effort and the yardstick that measure the value of that effort. It is the central social relation, because it is the concrete means to abundance—now the goal of society—and because it is the universal measure of exchanges and social relations. It determines the price of everything and guarantees the impregnability of the social order; it imposes sociability on the individual. Admittedly, society is now self-regulating, but work has been made into the very basis of social life, obliging society to produce, exchange and work without end. But even though it is made the basis of the social order, work is not in any way valorised or glorified. For Smith and his contemporaries it remains synonymous with hardship, effort and sacrifice, as Karl Marx will later complain.[34] The eighteenth century thus witnesses the invention of work as *that which produces wealth*, or as economists would say today, *a factor of production.*

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[34] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in Karl Marx, *Early Writings,* trans. Rodney Livingston and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1975; repr. 1992), pp. 279–400.

2.2.2 Work as Essence of the Human

To this first layer, the nineteenth century would add another, radically new and of the first importance, in making work the very model of creative activity. This was a conceptual revolution, the origin of the modern, Promethean idea of work that we project back onto the past when we imagine that humans have always "worked" because they have always transformed their environment.

In the early nineteenth century, there was a real conceptual revolution in Germany, France and England. In all three countries work was identified with human creative freedom, what it was that allowed humankind to adapt and transform the world. In France, work became the means whereby humanity progressed towards well-being; with the notion of "industry", the French discourse of the glorification of labour was developed at the hands of such as Alexandre de Laborde[35] and Saint-Simon.[36] In Germany, German idealism—with Hegel most notably[37]—gave philosophical grounding to the idea that work was the essence of the human. Hegel in a way introduces history into God. The World Spirit produces itself, becoming for itself what it is in itself, becoming even more itself as it externalises itself, revealing its own potentialities in realising them. It produces itself in opposing itself to an externality that reveals itself to be nothing other than itself. It is Hegel who effects the first extraordinary extension of the concept of work in using the same word for Man's earliest confrontations with Nature, the invention of the tool (the prolongation of the human body), the ruse of reason and the movement of the World Spirit. The notion of work will henceforward be considerably broader and richer.

It is through work that humanity creates itself. Through work, man destroys the natural, remaking the world in his own image, spiritualising nature, abolishing the given. Nonetheless, Hegel does not reduce the entire history of humanity to work. Work, reading, writing, the invention of political institutions and the creation of works of art are different ways of valorising the world, and they are not all reducible to the category

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[35] Alexandre de Laborde, *De l'esprit d'association dans tous les intérêts de la communauté* (Paris: Gide fils, 1818), pp. 3–4, cited in Meyerson, "Le travail, fonction psychologique".

[36] Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, *La Physiologie sociale, Œuvres choisies* (Paris: PUF, 1965).

[37] Notably in Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind,* trans. A. V. Finlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

of work. It was Marx who would make this logical leap, who, in making Hegel's movement of history, reason and dialectic his own—in setting the latter on its feet, as he says—would call the whole process *labour,* work.

Marx invented this new conception of work, considerably enlarging its sense and extension: what interests him is the human capacity to negate and destroy the natural: infinite negativity. Marx takes up this vision, but applies it to the work he has before his eyes, to real work. It is in Marx that the assimilation of human activity to work is most complete: all human activity is work. Procreation is work. And work *is* (in the sense of "is identical with") human activity. In Marx, the concept of work expands to infinity, but to work is to produce. Marx adopts the model of craft production: to work is to externalise yourself in the transformation of matter and to present it to others when transformed; to work is to produce. Given this, there is now only one kind of activity, one legitimacy, one way of being human: to produce, to transform by remaking in one's own image, to destroy the naturally given.

In Germany and France, by the mid-nineteenth century, the shift had happened: the majority of thinkers no longer understood work as a mere means of gaining a living. Work was creative freedom and synonymous with self-realisation, which is why Lamartine and his "National Workshops" were so derided. Having skilled workers dig holes and fill them in again seemed a kind of sin against the nature of work itself.[38] By 1848, this had happened on both sides of the Rhine. Work was henceforth understood to be, in essence and in aspiration, a form of self-realisation and a means to the development of human capacities.

2.2.3 Work as System for the Distribution of Income, Rights and Welfare

A third layer of meaning came to be added to the concept of work in the late nineteenth century, making it even more contradictory in nature. This was a time, in fact, when socialist thought retained a vision of work

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[38] Fernand Tanghe, *Le droit au travail entre histoire et utopie: 1789–1848–1989: de la répression de la mendicité à l'allocation universelle* (Brussels: FUSL, 1989).

as creative and emancipatory while forgetting the qualifications insisted upon by Marx. For Marx, work was in itself pure expressive potential, creative freedom, but if this potential were to be actualised it had to be liberated. As a good Hegelian he thought it necessary first to free work—and hence to abolish wage-labour—if work were to be *for itself* what it was only *in itself*. In the late nineteenth century, though, in socialist thinking, and indeed in all currents of reformist thought (and notably that of Eduard Bernstein), the idea of work as a value was not abandoned but the conditions of actualisation of this value were forgotten.

Far from being abolished, the wage-relation became on the contrary the anchorage for a range of rights: the right to work and welfare, but also the right to consumption. While in socialist thought, and in Marxist thought more especially, the abolition of the wage-relation had been a *sine qua non* if work were to become creative freedom, now the wage-relation was central, having become, as Robert Castel has shown, the very heart of what was to be retained, of what it was that would be sought for in work.[39] Rather than abolishing the wage-relation, social democratic discourse and practice would make the wage the means by which social wealth was to be distributed and through which a social order both more just (based on work and its capacities) and more properly collective (the "associated producers") would be gradually brought into being. In this, the State was accorded a dual role, firstly of guaranteeing growth and secondly of promoting full employment—that is, offering to all the possibility of access to the wealth produced.

The contradiction with Marx's thinking is evidently complete, the social democratic discourse maintaining that work becomes the means to human flourishing primarily through rising wages and consumption. What is crucial to work here is its ability to provide an adequate income and hence an ever-increasing ability to consume. As Jürgen Habermas writes, "For the burdens that continue to be connected with the cushioned status of dependent wage labour, the citizen is compensated in his role as client of the welfare state bureaucracies with legal claims, and in his role as consumer of mass-produced goods, with buying power. The lever for the

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[39] Robert Castel, *From Manual Workers to Wage Laborers: Transformation of the Social Question,* trans. and ed. Richard Boyd (New Brunswick, NJ; London: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

pacification of class antagonisms thus continues to be the neutralization of the conflict potential inherent in the status of the wage labourer."[40]

In other words, the social democracy which, understood precisely in this sense, continues to inspire us today is based on a profound contradiction in that it thinks of work as the essential modality of human flourishing, both individual and collective, while not considering what it would be for work to be an end in itself (for work remains heteronomous, done for the sake of something else) or a collective production and self-realisation, with work being the expression of a true co-operation. It thus grossly confuses two notions of work that socialist thought had been careful to distinguish: the real, alienated labour that is the subject of the political struggle to reduce working hours, and the free labour that will one day become the first need of life. Social democratic thinking rests on a fragile foundation in that it continues to focus utopian energies on the world of work without putting the wage relation in to question. It is obliged to make the latter as tolerable as possible by improving concrete conditions of work and guaranteeing wage-earners access to ever greater compensations. In doing this it necessitates a form of global regulation of the social system that will allow the production of increasing wealth, thus requiring the intervention of a State capable of ensuring that the great machine that is society continues to turn.

Only in this way is it possible to compensate for the wage-relation and encourage workers to ignore the fact that work itself remains unfree. The welfare state makes it its objective to maintain a positive rate of growth and to distribute such compensation. So labour no longer needs to be liberated, the social state having succeeded in replacing the socialist utopia of liberated labour with the simpler goal of providing the workers, in exchange for their efforts, with an ever-increasing quantum of well-being and a guarantee of full employment. The twentieth century was the century of the wage-earning society, the century of employment, employment being work considered as social structure, as an articulated ensemble of places each associated with advantages, the whole with a

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[40] Jürgen Habermas, "The New Obscurity: The Crisis of the Welfare State and the Exhaustion of Utopian Energies", in *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 55.

scheme of income distribution. Employment is waged work in which the wage is no longer merely remuneration for work done but also the means by which employees accede to training, to social welfare and to social goods more generally.

The twentieth century inherited a concept of work, a category that is composed of (or makes reference to) a number of mutually contradictory dimensions perhaps rather incompatible with each other: *incompossible*, as Leibniz would have said.

2.3   From an Ethic of Duty to an Ethic of Self-fulfilment

Here we use the term ethic in the sense proposed by Irving H. Siegel—"We define work ethic for an individual (or for a more or less homogeneous group of individuals) as a value or belief (or a set of values or beliefs) concerning the place of work in one's life that either (a) serves as a conscious guide to conduct or (b) is simply implied in manifested attitudes and behaviour"[41]—and later reformulated by Christian Lalive d'Epinay as pertaining to "ethos" as the "system of values, beliefs, norms and models that constitutes the frame of reference for individual behaviour and social action within a given group. This system is a socio-historical product".[42]

The three dimensions of work described above have grounded individuals' understandings of work and with these the meanings they accord to the concrete experiences and expectations they have of it. But work has long been identified with difficulty, with disagreeable effort, as evidenced by the etymology of French *travail* (work) and English "travail" (painful exertion), which have their shared origin in the Latin *tripalium,* an instrument of torture, and how economics today still treats it as a "disutility".

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[41] Irving H. Siegel, "Work Ethic and Productivity" in Jack Barbash, Robert J. Lampman, Sar A. Levitan and Gus Tyler, *The Work Ethic: A Critical Analysis* (Madison, WI: Industrial Relations Research Association, 1983), p. 27.

[42] Christian Lalive d'Epinay, "Significations et valeurs du travail, de la société industrielle à nos jours", in Michel de Coster and François Pichault, eds, *Traité de sociologie du travail* (Brussels: De Boeck, 1994), pp. 55–82, here p. 68.

The sense of work as fulfilment or accomplishment was for a long time restricted to the artistic domain, or at least to those work activities most resembling it, that is to craft; but in agriculture, industry or services, work was for a long time an external obligation, at best an instrumental good, a means to other ends: social cohesion, production, the earning of income. In the twentieth century one can still distinguish these same three moments, testimony to the slowness of change and the continuing ascendancy of an ethic of work as duty and as a means to an end.

2.3.1   Work as Constitutive of the Social Bond

Even if his entire theory was a weapon of war directed at the thinking of the economists (and more especially against the idea of society as an aggregation of self-contained individuals assembled in order to exchange), the role played by work in Durkheim's description of society[43] is very much the one we have seen it play in Adam Smith: the main function of work is to underwrite social cohesion, ensuring solidarity and effecting social integration. The division of labour is accompanied by ever stronger social integration, for it makes us ever more intimately dependent upon each other, upon society as a whole.

This dependence is manifest not only in production itself, where we need to work with others and alongside others if our own specialised skills are to bear fruit, but in the larger social exchange, each needing, in order to survive, the combined and co-ordinated efforts of everyone else. In this respect, Durkheim's theoretical discussions echo Smith's admirable account, a century earlier, of how, in a thriving country, thousands of people were involved in meeting the everyday needs of the least workman: "If we examine … all these things, and consider what a variety of labour is employed about each of them, we shall be sensible that without the assistance and cooperation of many thousands, the very meanest person in a civilized country could not be provided, even according to,

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[43] Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society,* trans. Steven Lukes (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

what we very falsely imagine, the easy and simple manner in which he is commonly accommodated".[44]

Individuals are thus held together and connected with each other both in production and in generalised exchange: no-one could live without the contribution of the other members of society.

In Durkheim, work generally and the division of labour more particularly derive their importance from the fact that they undergird the very existence of society: what is fundamental to work, beyond its products, is the social cohesion it engenders. Far from isolating individuals or turning humans into automata—things that occur only with certain of its pathological forms—the chief function of the division of labour is to elaborate and strengthen the ties and the sentiments that bring them together: "The division of labour, when normal, supposes that the worker, far from remaining bent over his task, does not lose sight of those co-operating with him, but acts upon them and is acted upon by them. He is not therefore a machine who repeats movements the sense of which he does not understand, but he knows they are tending in a certain direction, towards a goal that he can conceive of more or less distinctly … He knows that his activity has a meaning."[45] The division of labour has a moral character. Work is a duty in that everyone ought to contribute to the production of goods and to the ordinary functioning of society. Work produces not just goods and services but also solidarity. That is what it is for.

2.3.2 Taylor: Work as Factor of Production at the Cost of Work as Human

We would agree with Lalive d'Epinay in asserting that in the early twentieth century "the subordination of the individual to society, the sacrifice of self for the sake of the group, found their justification in the fact that society accorded the individual a certain security, and above all in the idea that, transformed into a gigantic factory, society was in the process of producing a prosperity that tomorrow would bring. Progress was on the

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[44] Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, p. 22.
[45] Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, p. 50.

march, happiness and well-being awaited, a happier future lay ahead".[46] Frederick Taylor, no less, testifies to the importance attached to the social rather than individual dimensions of work, and more specifically to the ascendancy in the early twentieth century of the concept of work as factor of production.[47]

In his *Principles of Scientific Management,* Taylor maintains that the ultimate goal of society, as of individuals and corporations, is maximum prosperity, the result of maximum productivity, which in turn depends on "each man and each machine … turning out the largest possible output". The achievement of this maximum prosperity thus requires a complete revolution in the way work is organised, because while under old-style management "success depends almost entirely upon getting the 'initiative' of the workmen",[48] under scientific management "the managers assume, for instance, the burden of gathering together all of the traditional knowledge which in the past has been possessed by the workmen and then of classifying, tabulating, and reducing this knowledge to rules, laws, and formulae which are immensely helpful to the workmen in doing their daily work".[49] Their first task is to "develop a science for each element of a man's work, which replaces the old rule-of-thumb method",[50] following which, just as a young surgeon uses the methods he has been taught, so must the worker employ the methods determined by time and motion study.

Not only are the workers dispossessed of their knowledge, initiative and margin of manoeuvre, but they are exclusively considered as instruments in the service of a higher purpose, the ultimate goal of the system, which is—just as it was in Smith—the achievement of the greatest possible production, making the greatest number of products available to all at the lowest possible price, as Taylor makes unambiguously clear in his conclusion to this work of edification. There he observes that while workers or shareholders might seem to have justice on their side in complaining that

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[46] Lalive d'Epinay, "Significations et valeurs du travail", p. 71.

[47] Frederick Taylor*, Principles of Scientific Management* [1911] (New York, London: Harper & Brothers, 1913).

[48] Ibid., pp. 35–6.

[49] Ibid., p. 36.

[50] Ibid.

the doubling of production brings no corresponding doubling of wages or dividends, a more considered analysis shows this to be wrong-headed. "At the first glance we see only two parties to the transaction, the workmen and their employers. We overlook the third great party, the whole people, the consumers, who buy the product of the first two and who ultimately pay both the wages of the workmen and the profits of the employers. The rights of the people are therefore greater than those of either employer or employee".[51] A fall in the sales price of the product is thus the ultimate goal to which all else is subordinated.

Increasing the productivity of work, as Smith had sought to show, was the key to a process that would eventually make abundance available to the very lowest classes of the population. The worker's own well-being is thus entirely subordinated to this prime objective, but Taylor simply rejects the claim that this system of production threatens to turn the worker into an automaton. For "the training of the surgeon has been almost identical in type with the teaching and training which is given to the workman under scientific management. … The surgeon, all through his early years, is under the closest supervision of more experienced men, who show him in the minutest way how each element of his work is best done."[52] No more than the surgeon's, then, is the worker's personality denied; it is indeed affirmed in being endowed with a stock of knowledge to which the worker may add in turn.

We may note that in all this, from Smith to Taylor, the possibilities opened up by technical progress, "the productive power of labour" and growth lead in the first place to a focus on the product of labour and not on the activity of work itself. In a way, it doesn't matter whether work brings the worker pleasure and self-realisation: what matters is that as much as possible is produced so that the worker's other aspect—the consumer—finds satisfaction. The satisfaction of the individual as consumer prevails over the satisfaction of the individual as worker, and the instrumental aspect of work, as means to general prosperity, over any expressive potential.

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[51] Ibid., p. 136.
[52] Ibid., p. 126.

2.3.3 The Great Transition: From Toil to Self-realisation

The shift from the conception of work as instrumental, and hence inevitably a burden, to another more focused on the activity itself and its consequences for the individual, was effected in two stages: in theory, in the nineteenth century (as we have seen in the thinking of Hegel and Marx) and in fact, in the second half of the twentieth century in the developed countries, when, as Lalive d'Epinay explains, the concrete conditions emerged—notably as a result of the historic increase in rates of growth—that would allow humanity in a sense to escape the realm of necessity and to see work as something other than a tedious and wearing but necessary means of ensuring food on the table: an activity that could not only transform the world, remaking it in the image of man, not just make the world more liveable, but could also be an important means of self-expression and self-realisation.[53] This was clearly a major revolution, and it's no surprise that it should have been more than a century between first theorisation and concrete realisation.

Lalive d'Epinay identifies two fundamental elements in the historical process that leads to the disappearance of the ethos of duty: on the one hand, the development of the social state and the idea that its role is to guarantee its citizens' well-being, and on the other, more importantly, the explosion in growth rates that suddenly made realisable and achievable what had hitherto seemed utopian: the transformation of work from duty to pleasure, of a mode of self-sacrifice into a means of self-realisation and self-expression. "Suddenly, in the years after the war, there happened what industrial society had always promised but which no-one any longer really expected, not, at any rate, on this scale: the arrival of plenty, the happier tomorrow! … The moment that industrial society produced the abundance in whose name it had demanded and justified so many sacrifices by labour, the ethos of work withered away, its values turned upside down. Work stopped being seen as a duty, a social obligation.…

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[53] Lalive d'Epinay, "Significations et valeurs du travail".

For a new world, a new culture: the true vocation of man was not work but happiness, the flourishing of the individual."[54]

Lalive d'Épinay sees in this shift a Copernican revolution: whereas individuals had earlier fulfilled themselves in fulfilling the obligations imposed on them by society, society now serves individuals and their self-fulfilment. Oddly, it is here that he locates the instrumentalisation of work: now one works to gain access to all that consumption offers, work bringing the income needed to buy anything. Lalive d'Epinay thus finds himself in agreement with Habermas, for whom work—because it still remains alienated—is chiefly valued for its purchasing power, for the income, rights and access to welfare it confers.[55] But the explosion of growth rates and the development of an ethic of self-fulfilment would seem also to have prompted expectations of work that are no longer merely instrumental (the expectation of an income, an employment, a role) but symbolic and having to do with both the content of work and the individual's relationship to it, as Marx so powerfully propounded it in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*:

"Let us suppose that we had produced as human beings. In that event each of us would have doubly affirmed himself and his neighbour in his production. (1) In my production I would have objectified the specific character of my individuality and for that reason I would both have enjoyed the expression of my own individual life during my activity and also, in contemplating the object, I would experience an individual pleasure, I would experience my personality as an objective sensuously perceptible power beyond all shadow of doubt. … (3) I would have acted for you as the mediator between you and the species, thus I would be acknowledged by you as the complement of your own being, as an essential part of yourself. I would thus know myself to be confirmed both in your thoughts and your love. (4) In the individual expression of my own life I would have brought about the immediate expression of your life, and so in my individual activity I would have directly confirmed and realized my authentic nature, my

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[54] Lalive D'Epinay, "Significations et valeurs du travail", p. 82–83; the first two sentences here are that author's account of the arguments of Daniel Yankelovitch, *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Random House, 1981), to which he refers the reader.

[55] Habermas, "The New Obscurity", p. 55.

human communal nature. Our production would be as many mirrors from which our natures would shine forth."[56]

The expressive dimension of work is here brought out in all its amplitude: in my work, I simultaneously express my singularity, my individuality and my belonging to the human race as a whole. The product of my work is a work both individual and collective. The activity of work brings pleasure and enjoyment because it enables me to remake the world in my own image and to experience my capacity to do so, and in this to show myself and others *who* I really am. In this Marxian schema we have a complete change of mental universe. As Marx explains in his critique of Smith, work can no longer be assimilated to toil or effort, being in its unconstrained or unalienated state no more nor less than human activity, and as such the creative and positive activity of remaking the world in our image, functioning as fully human.

While the ethic of self-fulfilment is not reducible to this, it does indeed centre on the individual's feelings and on work's ability to develop and to experience one's own capacities, to transform the real in accordance with the worker's intentions. It introduces the notion of creativity and the idea that what counts in the activity undertaken is not exclusively or even primarily an objective extrinsic to it (whether income or employment), but something intrinsic to it, whether the ends it serves, the pride or satisfaction it affords, the relationships it brings about, the experiences it occasions.

2.4   Analytical Categories for Understanding Relationships to Work

Laid down in different periods, as one might say, the different layers or dimensions we have identified in the concept of work today manage a difficult coexistence, grounding individuals' perceptions and their experiences of everyday life—work as factor of production, work as essence of the human, work as a system for the distribution of income, rights and welfare. Might they nonetheless serve as the central categories for

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[56] Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 277–8.

structuring an understanding of recent changes in the relationship to work? We have already seen that this can be supplemented by considerations of the general ethos in which the relationship to work is inscribed, notably distinguishing between an ethos of duty and an ethos of self-fulfilment. Several other types of categorisation could be, indeed have been mobilised, to provide a finer-grained understanding of individuals' relationships to work.

2.4.1   Instrumental versus Non-instrumental

The idea of a multiplicity of relationships to work was developed notably by John H. Goldthorpe and his colleagues David Lockwood, Franck Bechhofer and Jennifer Platt in *The Affluent Worker*, published in 1968 and translated into French as *L'ouvrier de l'abondance* in 1972.[57] These authors distinguished between three ideal-typical orientations to work: the *instrumental* orientation, chiefly exhibited by those who treated work as means to an extrinsic end, primarily acquiring an income; a *solidaristic* orientation in which work was on the contrary treated as an end in itself, accompanied most often by strong identification with the group and high levels of satisfaction; finally a so-called *bureaucratic* orientation for which work is defined as service to an organisation in exchange for a career. The first type of orientation was adopted in particular by manual workers, and the goal of the research carried out by Goldthorpe and his colleagues was precisely to demonstrate that there had not been an embourgeoisement of the working class as its characteristic orientation to work remained instrumental, |being uncontaminated, as it were, by the ideal-typical orientations of other classes.

In fact, the analytical framework developed by Goldthorpe et al. was not limited to the opposition between two antithetical conceptions of work, as means or end. It also took several other elements into consideration, notably the contamination of the non-work sphere by values, behaviours and relations deriving from the world of work, the degree of satisfaction with work, greater or lesser group identification, and so on,

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[57] Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer and Platt, *The Affluent Worker*.

elements later aggregated to characterise class differences. The authors thus successively demonstrated that manual workers preferred to stay in a job offering few intrinsic satisfactions if it secured a higher level of extrinsic satisfaction (in terms of income or job security); that manual workers had weak attachments to their fellow workers; that they were relatively uninvolved in trade union activities … and that they were therefore very different to white-collar workers or managers in their behaviours and way of life.

But the means/end, instrumental/non-instrumental opposition was nonetheless determinant. The entire study is indeed characterised by an almost obsessive concern to reduce the whole spectrum of workers' motivations with regard to work to the means-end polarity, sometimes to the point of exaggeration.[58] In many places, in fact, the causal link established between a fact (workers moved from a more interesting to a less interesting but better-paying job) and its explanation (because their orientation to work was predominantly instrumental) seems weak, not only because the sample size is small but even more because of the constant back-and-forth between isolated "facts" about which not all is known (the whole complex of reasons prompting a change of employment), references to workers' own words ("It's the money you work for, isn't it?") and appeals to more general theories (the three types of orientation). What is problematic is to argue from workers' obvious concern for their pay to an exclusively instrumental relationship to work, all those factors that might show that work did indeed procure satisfactions being studiously ignored.

It should be noted that Goldthorpe and his colleagues did not adopt a single, specific term to designate the contrary of the instrumental orientation (work as a means to an extrinsic end). More specifically, they do not oppose to the instrumental an expressive or symbolic dimension, as other authors do. In their seminal 1955 article, "The Function and Meaning of Work and the Job", Nancy Morse and Robert Weiss, for example, had employed the notions of interest and accomplishment to capture the non-instrumental, or as they put it, non-economic functions

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[58] Dominique Méda, "Comment mesurer la valeur accordée au travail?", *Sociologie* 1:1 (2010), pp. 121–140, available online at http://www.cairn.info/revue-sociologie-2010-1-page-121.htm.

of work.[59] So it was that they were among the first to come to the conclusion that "to the typical man in a middle-class occupation … working means having a purpose, gaining a sense of accomplishment, expressing himself".[60] And in 1978 Rogene Buchholz considered five beliefs about work evidenced in the literature, one being the "humanistic belief system" for which "work is a fundamental way in which people fulfil themselves as human beings. What happens to human beings in the workplace is thus more important than the output of the work process. Work must be redesigned to be more meaningful and fulfilling for individuals and to allow them to discover their full potential as human beings".[61] Buchholz attributed these theoretical developments chiefly to Erich Fromm and Abraham Maslow.

2.4.2 Post-materialism: Beyond the Instrumental?

It was on Maslow and his *Motivation and Personality*[62] that Ronald Inglehart too relied when in *The Silent Revolution* he argued that Western societies, having succeeded in meeting the basic physical needs of their populations, now attached more importance to immaterial needs such as those for esteem, intellectual satisfaction and self-actualisation.[63] After the Second World War, growth had allowed increasing numbers of Europeans to develop so-called post-materialist expectations as their material needs came to be satisfied.

Borrowing certain concepts from Daniel Bell, Inglehart in fact identified three stages of social evolution: in agrarian society, humans have to struggle with nature; in industrial society, the "game against nature" is mediated by technology and the organisation of work; while in post-industrial society, the struggle for survival is over. More specifically,

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[59] Nancy C. Morse and Robert S. Weiss, "The Function and Meaning of Work and the Job", *American Sociological Review* 20:2 (April 1955), pp. 191–198.

[60] Ibid., p. 198.

[61] Rogene A. Buchholz, "An Empirical Study of Contemporary Beliefs about Work in American Society", *Journal of Applied Psychology* 63 (1978), p. 219–227, p. 220.

[62] Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954).

[63] Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

Ronald Inglehart and Wayne Baker have in later works proposed to classify countries along two dimensions: the first scale, which marks the shift from pre-industrial to industrial society, opposes traditional and religious to secular and rational values; the second opposes concern for survival to concern for self-expression and quality of life.[64] Movement along this corresponds to the shift towards post-industrial society.

As regards work, if one follows Inglehart then economic development tends to modify the meaning attributed to it, allowing the identification of three phases. In the first, traditional, phase, work has its place within a system of religious belief and respect for authority and is governed by an "ethos of duty", being an obligation to society. In the second phase, marked by individualist and rational values, work has an instrumental value, being sought for the income and security it brings. The richest countries, however, are characterised by the ascendancy of "post-materialist" values, economic security no longer being of prime concern and subjective well-being and quality of life becoming the most important values. From this point of view, work would chiefly be a means of self-fulfilment.

This thesis has faced two kinds of critique, at least, that make it difficult to accept without qualification. On the one hand, while the proponents of post-materialism suppose the persistence of values acquired in adolescence, certain economists have claimed that the economic difficulties of recent decades have brought about a return to materialist values, so that individuals, and more particularly the young who haven't found it easy to get jobs, are today favouring secure and well-paid employment and may thus be considered more "materialist" than their predecessors. This has been argued notably by Easterlin and Crimmins.[65]

Furthermore, the effect of rising national incomes on individuals' expectations of work remains uncertain, the capitalist system constantly

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[64] Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values?", *American Sociological Review* 65:1 (April 2000), p. 19–51. See Lucie Davoine and Dominique Méda, "Importance and meaning of work in Europe: a French singularity" (Centre d'Etudes de l'Emploi working paper no. 96–2, February 2008).

[65] Richard Easterlin, and Eileen M. Crimmins, "Private Materialism, Personal Self-Fulfilment, Family Life, and Public Interest", *Public Opinion Quarterly* 5:5 (1991), p. 499–533.

creating and maintaining new consumption needs.[66] One might want high pay and job security to ensure security and survival or to permit conspicuous consumption. In any event, is the intrinsic interest of work not an issue, even in societies where questions of survival have not been entirely solved? And finally, it must be noted that the development of post-materialist values may have contrary effects on the importance attached to work. Needs for security having been met, work need not take up so much time, leaving individuals the opportunity to find satisfaction in other spheres (e.g. leisure, politics, family). Yet in seeking self-fulfilment in work, those who privilege post-materialist values might be led to accord greater value to it, it no longer being merely a means to an extrinsic end. In other words, in already industrialised societies, economic growth can have a double effect, work becoming less important, or remaining important but for different reasons.

2.4.3 The Many Functions of Work: Unpacking Importance

We have, then, several criteria or interpretative frameworks available to us for analysing individuals' relationships to work. We have seen that the ethos of *duty* and the ethos of *self-fulfilment* can be counterposed to one another, point by point, the first emphasising the dimension of duty associated with work, the second seeing it rather as a means of self-fulfilment, of self-expression and self-realisation. This distinction does not entirely cover the question of the ends or functions of work encountered in the discussion of instrumentality. Turning to a concept no doubt more precise than the simple notion of instrumentality (for work can serve several different ends, as we have seen: the establishment of the social bond, the acquisition of income, the securing of recognition, etc.), Morse and Weiss thus distinguished between the *economic* functions of work (work as a factor of production or as a means of gaining an income) and the

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[66] Max Haller, "Theory and Method in the Comparative Study of Values: Critique and Alternative to Inglehart", *European Sociological Review* 18:2 (2002), p. 139–158.

non-economic. The non-economic functions may be divided into sub-categories, distinguishing between symbolic, expressive and relational types of function.[67]

Chantal Nicole-Drancourt and Laurence Roulleau-Berger similarly seek to distinguish, alongside the instrumental, the social and symbolic dimensions of work, the social concerning the importance of human relationships at work, the symbolic possibilities of personal development, the opportunity for self-expression and self-fulfilment it offers, the intrinsic interest, the sense of achievement and the degree of autonomy it affords, the social contribution it represents.[68] Other authors combine social and symbolic in a single dimension termed the "expressive".[69]

Following in the footsteps of Morse and Weiss and maintaining a certain reserve with regard to the theory of post-materialism, even if, like other researchers, they recognise its interest and its relatively good fit to the situation, Daniel Mercure and Mircea Vultur adopted as the structuring principle of their research the distinction between *economic* and *experiential* goals.[70] "In the first case, the chief goal of work is of a material and economic order, not primarily associated with the lived experience of work, whatever that might be. Work is rather a means of achieving goals extrinsic to work: earning the money I need to live and consume … In the second case, the chief goal of work is of a non-material, experiential order, essentially non-instrumental."[71] Mercure and Vultur specify that what primarily experiential goals have in common is not being based on experience but being in essence experience, "experiences gained in work that do not for all that derive from its intrinsic character, as is often intended by the category of the 'expressive': they are linked to self-expression or self-fulfilment through work, and likewise to recognition".[72]

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[67] Morse and Weiss, "The Function and Meaning of Work and the Job".

[68] Chantal Nicole-Drancourt and Laurence Roulleau-Berger, *Les jeunes et le travail. 1950–2000* (Paris: PUF, 2001).

[69] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action,* trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984); Rainer Zoll, *Nouvel individualisme et solidarité quotidienne* (Paris: Kimé, 1992).

[70] Daniel Mercure and Mircea Vultur, *La signification du travail* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval), 2010, p. 15.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

In this category the authors distinguish between two sub-groups, the first encompassing goals in the way of personal development ("work is an experience that offers me personal fulfilment") the other goals more markedly collective in character, the experience of work being valorised for offering a way of doing something socially useful or the opportunity to form valued relations with others.

There is, however, more to be said about the individuals' relationship to work than the reasons for which they do it. Another issue frequently pursued in this kind of study is the centrality or importance accorded to it. The questions of how important work is to a given individual or group or whether it is as central as it was are considered in the majority of surveys concerned with the subject, and are revived each time unemployment rises markedly or authors put the centrality of work into question. Among international studies one might note in particular that carried out by the Meaning of Work International Research Team, which catalogued nine meanings of work and placed at the centre of its researches, alongside the ends it served, the importance attached to it.[73]

In France, the survey by the Cevipov in 1993 centred on the question whether people agreed that work was the most important thing (and this at a time when unemployment was reaching hitherto unprecedented levels).[74] A survey by Christian Baudelot and Michel Gollac in 1997 had recourse to the same idea, asking respondents what, for them, was most important for happiness.[75] But what does important mean?[76] Important by comparison with what? And the same questions can be addressed to the notion of centrality. What does it mean? Taking the question of the importance attached to work as one of the keystones of their investigation, alongside that of its goals, Mercure and Vultur develop the idea of absolute and relative centrality, the first to the importance attached to work, however work is conceived, and the second to its place in relation to other aspects of life. Such an approach seems more useful.

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[73] Meaning of Work International Research Team, *The Meaning of Work* (London: Academic Press, 1987).

[74] Guillaume la Chaise, ed., *Crise de l'emploi et fractures politiques* (Paris: Presses de Science-Po, 1996).

[75] Christian Baudelot and Michel Gollac, *Travailler pour être heureux?* (Paris: Fayard, 2003).

[76] Dominique Méda, *Qu'est-ce que la richesse?* (Paris: Aubier, 1998).

2.5   Methodological Considerations

Most studies that have looked at people's relationship to work in the second half of the twentieth century and later have taken these people themselves as their chief source of information, questioning them, in different ways, about their perceptions. Like those of any investigation based on individuals' subjective judgements, their results raise many questions. Can one be confident that respondents tell the "the truth"? What status is one to accord to their assertions? How might one take into account the possibility of their being alienated, in some sense unaware of themselves? How can one be certain—especially in the context of international comparative studies—that they are all referring to the same concepts, the same meanings, the same scales of magnitude? Investigators face many problems of this kind.

2.5.1   Honest Answers: The Limits of Subjective Responses

All this suggests how difficult it is to judge what is meant by something being important. When people are asked—in the course of a face-to-face interview, or over the telephone, or as part of a written questionnaire—whether work is important to them, or whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree "with the commonly held idea that work is the most important thing in life", how do they go about answering? What are the different thoughts they might have? Respondents will obviously take into account their own situation: if unemployed or very precariously employed, they might say that work is very important because they are acutely aware that they need it to survive and its absence is very real or a very real possibility. A manager or farmer, though, who spends the best part of his waking hours working might not even begin to conceive of the possibility of a life without work. And what of someone so harried and harassed at work that that is all they think of? The notion of importance doesn't tell us whether work is important because its absence is terrible or because its demands are fulfilling, or whether it feels good or feels bad. More than that, though, this kind of question doesn't make it clear

whether one is asking people to say what they think about their current work, about work in general or about work as it ideally could be. And finally, it gives no clue as to whether people are simply giving the answers they feel are expected, given the prevailing norms, in an attempt to save face, or even to convince themselves. "The difficulties involved in assessing the degree of workers' satisfaction with their jobs are by now fairly well recognised among industrial sociologists", say Goldthorpe et al., in introducing the results of their investigation. "The evidence of a number of studies reveals that the large majority of workers, if asked how they like their jobs, tend to give generally favourable answers; or, if asked to rate the level of their satisfaction on some sort of scale, tend to make choices which fall in the positive range. Results of this kind have in fact been several times achieved in cases where other evidence has indicated fairly clearly that the workers in question experienced quite severe deprivations in performing their jobs. Part of the explanation of this is probably that as Blauner has suggested, a worker will find it difficult to admit he dislikes his job without thereby threatening his self-respect. For, in our kind of society, a man's work tends to be a more important determinant of his self-image than most of his other social activities. Thus, there is considerable psychological pressure upon the individual to say that he finds his job acceptable: to say otherwise may well be tantamount to admitting that he does not find *himself* acceptable."[77]

It is on account of this distrust of subjective perceptions and self-report that Goldthorpe and his colleagues chose to focus on practice, and preferred to rely on objective "facts" to get at the truth of the relationship to work. Thus the fact of keeping a job rather than finding another was taken as evidence: "Furthermore, under such conditions, the very fact that men remain in particular jobs may generally be taken to imply *some* degree of satisfaction with them, relative to other jobs which are in the market."[78] They therefore "deliberately avoided any direct questions on job satisfaction of the type which ha[d] become conventional".[79] It was only afterwards that one could take self-report into consideration:

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[77] Goldthorpe et al., *The Affluent Worker*, p. 11.

[78] Ibid., p. 12.

[79] Ibid.

"In more detail, however, the setters' high level of satisfaction can best be understood in terms of the reasons they themselves gave for preferring their present jobs."[80] The subject, then, has to be approached in a round-about way ("obliquely", as Goldthorpe puts it), never head-on, and subjective perceptions are elicited not to determine whether work is important or not, or satisfying or not, but to discover why one job is preferred to another. It's only in these justifications that the reality of what work represents emerges, either positively ("You really feel you're somebody") or negatively ("I'm not tied to the machine all day"). The truth about the individual's relationship to work can only be discovered through such an indirect approach.

Despite these repeated warnings by sociologists, recent years have seen a great increase in surveys greatly reliant on subjective perceptions and self-report, notably in response to pressure from the economists who found the *European Values Study* or the *World Values Survey* to offer an unprecedented opportunity for comparisons across time and across vast geographical spaces and so took them and their methods as a standard, in part because data of this kind allows correlations to be made between individual perceptions (satisfaction, happiness) and objective situations, institutional arrangements or public policies. As Claudia Senik points out in "Que nous apprennent les données subjectives?": "Economists' distrust of subjective data seems to be gradually disappearing. … Since the pioneering work of the Leyden School, 'subjective' data have been drawn on not only to analyse the bases of individual well-being but also to cast light on public policy or macroeconomic choices. This recent wave of articles makes explicit or implicit reference to a methodology of 'ordinary experience' involving the identification of the impact on subjective well-being of exogenous variables varying across time or space, these variations being supposed to affect individuals in more or less aleatory fashion."[81]

Yet do these "advances" in economists' use of subjective data really escape the limitations discussed earlier? Can one really trust people's own

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[80] Ibid., p. 13.

[81] Claudia Senik, "Que nous apprennent les données subjectives? Une application au lien entre revenu et bien-être" (DELTA Working Papers No. 2002–20, École Normale Supérieure, Paris), p. 10.

statements as a basis for understanding what work means to them? If they do indeed "cheat"—consciously or unconsciously—in reporting what their job is like or what they think of it, then there are limits to the confidence we can have in the job-satisfaction figures that are regularly produced. If, as Georges Friedmann emphasised, citing Erich Fromm, such figures "are only derived from the conscious expression of dissatisfaction and would certainly be much lower if the unconscious depths were taken into account";[82] if "in our competitive and conformist societies, where people apparently happy and contented are often considered 'well-adapted' and 'successful', while anyone expressing dislike of his job is regarded as a 'failure', many of those who feel dissatisfied hesitate to admit it even to themselves, much less to others, owing to the pressure of public opinion";[83] and if, finally, there are some who not only do not admit their dissatisfaction, but say and believe that they are happy and satisfied with their jobs, even though they are not—then how are we to know what their jobs mean to individuals? How can we know whether their expectations have been met, or disappointed? By what round-about ways can researchers ensure that what they identify is not some individual or collective illusion but a well-formed judgement untouched by alienation or autosuggestion? Let us be clear, then: all this seems extremely difficult, and we shall therefore be very modest in our claims when we later come to present survey results, by whatever method obtained.

2.5.2 The Difficulties of Large-scale Quantitative Surveys

The limits of these studies are many.[84] In addition to those just discussed, there are others connected with comparability: the comparability of the ways respondents understand the question, of the individual experience to which each one refers in order to understand the question and to formulate a response, the comparability of scales (of satisfaction, for instance) and intensities—all problems multiplied when questionnaires are translated into several languages and administered in several different countries.

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[82] Friedmann, *The Anatomy of Work*, p. 111.

[83] Ibid.

[84] On these limits see Davoine and Méda, "Place et sens du travail en Europe".

Biases can creep in at different stages, from the construction of the questionnaire to the collection of data.[85] There are a variety of problems of linguistic and conceptual equivalence, ranging from gross errors of translation to slight disparities in the connotations of words,[86] and variations in acquiescence bias by country.[87]

As Pierre Bréchon writes, "In a national opinion survey, certain indicators are formulated in relation to the social, economic and political context of the country and current public preoccupations. The information collected is therefore relatively precise, in terms of a public opinion shaped and structured by the key themes of public debate. In international surveys, indicators are much more decontextualised. … The problem of the decontextualisation of indicators is amplified by the difficulty of deciding how questions are to be formulated … At the international level, the social scientists responsible for the development of questionnaires have been trained in very different research traditions while also being marked by the cultural traditions of their home countries and the national studies they have themselves conducted. Some try to promote at the international level questions that have worked well in their own countries."[88]

Furthermore, some researchers and statisticians have argued that the samples used in a number of these surveys have been too small and above all too unrepresentative to provide an adequate knowledge base for each country and do not therefore afford a good basis for comparison. Such criticisms have notably been addressed to the EVS, half of whose French sample is currently selected half at random and half by the quota method,[89] and to the ISSP, whose questionnaire is distributed by post and suffers a very low rate of return, making it vulnerable to manifold

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[85] Anthony Heath, Stephen Fisher and Shawna Smith, "The Globalization of Public Opinion Research", *Annual Review of Political Science* 8:6 (2005), pp. 297–333.

[86] Rosemary Crompton and Clare Lyonette, "Some Issues in Cross-National Comparative Research Methods: A Comparison of Attitudes to Promotion, and Women's Employment, in Britain and Portugal", *Work, Employment and Society* 20:2 (June 2006), pp. 403–414.

[87] Timothy P. Johnson, Patrick Kulesa, Young Ik Cho and Sharon Shavitt, "The Relation Between Culture and Response Styles", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 36:2 (March 2005), pp. 264–277.

[88] Pierre Bréchon, "Les grandes enquêtes internationales (Eurobaromètres, Valeurs, ISSP): apports et limites", *L'année sociologique* 52 (2002), pp. 105–130, p. 120.

[89] *European Values Study*.

biases.[90] Project specifications for international surveys are however being increasingly tightly drawn and despite their many limitations, one finds oneself "in a situation in which the debate is constrained by empirical data that while it might be fragile is at least consistent".[91]

Ever more vigilant, the teams responsible for the construction of questionnaires make use of recognised procedures to prevent errors of translation and interpretation, recourse to back translation, for example, now being general.[92] At a more fundamental level, the question of linguistic bias deserves further discussion: surveys only transcribe differences in modes of expression and communication, they do not create them. In data-gathering itself, differences in sampling or in the population generally surveyed can also pose problems for the comparability of results. Here too, project specifications for international surveys are increasingly detailed.

Questions about the possibility of common measures are not limited to international value surveys. Doubts about the understanding of questions and problems of multiple meanings also arise at the national level, when a survey covers different social classes, for example.[93] More generally, how can one be sure that a word, the word "work", for example, has the same definition and denotes the same experiences for different respondents? One is reminded of J.K. Galbraith's exasperation at the same word being used for such different experiences: "Here is the paradox. The word 'work' embraces equally those for whom it is exhausting, boring, disagreeable, and those for whom it is a clear pleasure with no sense of the obligatory. There may be a satisfying feeling of personal importance or the acknowledged superiority of having others under one's command. 'Work' describes both what is compelled and what is the source of the prestige and pay that others seek ardently and enjoy. Already fraud is

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[90] International Social Survey Programme. "In the case of the ISSP, the funding provided by the research bodies is insufficient to pay for a study of optimal quality. For financial reasons, we have had to opt for a postal questionnaire, which is not ideal, and the issue of reminders was not possible for the earliest surveys in the series (Bréchon, "Les grandes enquêtes internationales", p. 114).

[91] Bréchon, "Les grandes enquêtes internationales", p. 130.

[92] Janet A. Harkness, ed., *Cross-Cultural Survey Equivalence*, special issue of *ZUMA Nachrichten* 3 (1998).

[93] Roger Jowell, "How Comparative is Comparative Research?", *The American Behavioural Scientist* 42:2 (October 1998), pp. 168–177.

evident in having the same word for both circumstances. But this is not all. Those who most enjoy work—and this should be emphasized—are all but universally the best paid. This is accepted."[94]

If such international surveys remain problematic, there has recently been progress on all fronts, from questionnaire construction to data collection: the *European Social Survey* (ESS), the most recently established international survey, thus meets strict and demanding criteria, thanks to a highly detailed specification that calls for random sampling, face-to-face interviewing and costly fieldwork monitoring processes. In addition, the scale of the survey and the possibility of cross-national comparison allow more confidence in the conclusions. Yet vigilance is always called for with regard to comparative results: nothing must be taken for granted, even if it is in the end worthwhile to venture interpretative hypotheses.[95]

Despite these numerous limitations (inherent in reliance on subjective data and in the act of comparison and amplified by the cross-national character of the exercise; or arising from the suitability of the questions to the goal pursued, the selection of the sample or the conditions of administration of the questionnaire), international comparison casts valuable light on the situation in each individual country and may draw attention to the collective character of phenomena that might otherwise be taken to be national peculiarities. What is more, large-scale surveys carried out in one or more countries can serve as a basis for attempts at verification or more refined analysis through in-depth interviews.

2.5.3 A Wealth of Material: Surveys and In-depth Interviews

Despite these cautionary remarks, this book sets out to present the fruits of reflection on the results of several such surveys, which when set into relation to each other offer many novel insights into the way Europeans relate to work today. In this, we have taken into consideration only

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[94] John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Economics of Innocent Fraud: Truth for Our Time* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin; London, Allen Lane), p. 18.

[95] Jowell, "How Comparative is Comparative Research?"

investigations carried out by qualified researchers and drawn upon by the social scientific community since the mid-1990s.

We look at both a corpus of articles on the relation to work deriving from specific investigations (e.g., the "Travail et Modes de vie"[96] and the "Histoire de vie sur la construction des identités"[97] studies) and a body of original materials representing the results of French and European surveys and in-depth interviews carried out with individuals and groups in 2007 and 2008 as part of a European research project on different generations' relation to work (SPReW: "Social Pattern of Relation to Work").[98]

In France, the conception and execution of these investigations coincided with rising unemployment, and they were intended to show how this might affect the importance attached to work, or indeed reveal its continuing, essential role in structuring individual and social life, as described in the work of Renaud Sainsaulieu,[99] Claude Dubar[100] and Dominique Schnapper.[101] Several surveys covering at least the countries of Europe will be drawn on, notably the *European Values Study (EVS)*, the *International Social Survey Program* (ISSP) and the *European Social Survey (ESS)*. We will also have recourse to the succeeding surveys of working conditions in Europe organised by Eurofound and Eurobarometer. These surveys all include questions about work and have been carried out over a number of years in an ever-growing number of countries, allowing comparisons to be made across time and space. Finally, we will also draw on the results of the national surveys we have managed to identify and the semi-directed interviews carried out as part of the SPReW European

[96] See Christian Baudelot and Michel Gollac, "Faut-il travailler pour être heureux?", *Insee Première* 560 (December 1997) and the same authors' *Travailler pour être heureux*.

[97] See *Histoires de vie*, special issue of *Economies et statistique* 393–394 (2006) and in particular Hélène Garner, Dominique Méda and Claudia Senik, "La place du travail dans les identités", pp. 21–39; also Guillemette de Larquier, Hélène Garner, Dominique Méda and Delphine Rémillon, "Carrières et rapport au travail: une distinction de genre?*"* in France Guerin-Pace, Olivia Samuel et Isabelle Ville, eds, *En quête d'appartenance* (Paris: Éditions de l'INED, 2009).

[98] See the methodological note at the end of the present volume.

[99] Renaud Sainsaulieu, *L'identité au travail* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1977).

[100] Claude Dubar, *La socialisation, construction des identités sociales et professionnelles* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991) and the same author's "Formes identitaires et socialisation professionnelle", *Revue française de sociologie* 33:4 (1992), p. 505–529.

[101] Dominique Schnapper, *L'épreuve du chômage* [1981] (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

research project[102] (163 narrative interviews and 18 group interviews across 6 countries), some of which, notably in France, made considerable use of questions from the three international surveys in the face-to-face interviews. Reference will also be made to the results of the survey carried out in Québec by Daniel Mercure and Mircea Vultur.[103]

The different international surveys are described below. In referring to them later, we shall often use the acronyms or short forms indicated here.

– *The European Values Study—EVS*

The *European Values Study* was established in 1981 by a group of researchers led by Jan Kerhofs of the University of Louvain and Ruud de Moor of the University of Tilburg.[104] Nine European countries took part in the first wave of surveys, other countries of Europe later participating under the aegis of the World Values Survey. The second wave of the EVS in 1990 covered 33 European countries and also saw the participation of 12 non-European countries. A third wave of surveys was carried out between 1999 and 2002; the fourth and most recent in 2008 included 47 European countries or regions. Some 1000 people are questioned in each country. The EVS questionnaire, much of which remains constant from one wave to the next, addresses the importance attached to work, family and religion, among other topics, but also investigates religious practice, political opinions etc. The importance of work is considered under its different aspects: pay, security, fulfilment and so forth.

– *The International Social Survey Programme—ISSP*

The first wave of the ISSP took place in 1985, a collaborative venture by researchers in four countries—Germany, Great Britain, the USA and Australia—where there already existed a tradition of social attitudes surveys, but the 1990s saw a great increase in the number of countries participating, which now stands at around 50. The sample is at least a thousand strong in each country. Compared to the EVS, the ISSP is concerned more with attitudes and behaviours. The survey takes place every

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[102] See the methodological note at the end of the present volume.

[103] Mercure and Vultur, "La signification du travail".

[104] Bréchon, "Les grandes enquêtes internationales".

year, with a different theme each time. Each annual module is fielded as a supplement to a national survey, the interview lasting 15 minutes (not including demographics). Surveys on attitudes to work have been carried out in 1989, 1997 and 2005, and these three waves undoubtedly represent one of the most comprehensive databases on people's relationship to work.

– *The European Social Survey—ESS*

This is the most recently established of the surveys considered here, the first wave taking place in late 2002–2003 and the fifth in 2010–2011. At first covering 22 countries, it now includes more than 30. The interview lasts an hour, half the questionnaire (the core) being constant, the other half consisting of two "rotating modules" covering topics selected from proposals by participating research teams. The 2004 wave included modules on "Health & Care Seeking" and "Family, Work and Wellbeing", and it is in the second of these that one finds questions relating to work.

– *The European Working Conditions Survey—EWCS*

The EWCS is carried out every five years by the Dublin-based European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), the number of participating countries growing with the enlargement of the European Union. The first questionnaire contained some 20 questions, the most recent around a hundred. The survey is not concerned so much with personal preferences regarding work as with working conditions in the broadest sense: working hours, the organisation of work, income, physical and psychosocial risks, stress, availability of conciliation, the nature of tasks, experience of discrimination. It does however include a number of questions on satisfaction with conditions of work, income and promotion possibilities. The most recent wave took place in 2015.

– *The European Community Household Panel—ECHP*

The ECHP was a panel survey coordinated by Eurostat, carried out in eight waves from 1994 to 2001 and covering countries then in the

European Union. The object of the ECHP was to obtain comparable statistics on the household income and living conditions, and it included items on employment, among other matters. There was a question on satisfaction with work or main activity and six questions on satisfaction with different aspects of work (pay, security, kind of work, working hours, working time, conditions of work, distance between home and workplace). It provides a wealth of social, demographic and economic data on each individual, with 140 variables at the household level and 320 at the level of the individual. The panel is of a good size, including almost 10,000 persons. Halted in 2001, the ECHP has come to be replaced by the more recent European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) rotating panel survey.

– *Eurobarometer*

Conducted every six months since 1974, without interruption, the Eurobarometer survey has from the very beginning involved academics like Ronald Inglehart, who relied in part on its data in developing his theory. Eurobarometer is conducted on behalf of the European Commission and serves primarily to meet the needs of its directorates. The questionnaire contains many questions on feelings of European identity and attitudes to European integration, but also from time to time features items on poverty, unemployment, precarity, life-long learning, work satisfaction or labour mobility, for example. In the analysis that follows, we draw more particularly on the results of the Eurobarometer special survey on "European Social Reality" conducted in 2006.

3

The High Expectations of Work

We looked in the last chapter at the long history of work and at the categories, tools and resources relevant to grasping people's relationship to it. In this chapter, we present the most important results of our consideration of the data sources available. We first analyse the place of work in the life of Europeans, examining the reasons for national differences and for the apparent distinctive situation obtaining in France in particular. That importance is attached to work tells us nothing of the hierarchy of values or of the relative importance accorded to different activities or areas of life, and it is to these matters that the remainder of the chapter is then devoted. Is work central, or does it find itself in competition with other areas of life—other objects of emotional investment or means of self-realisation—that might make the relationship to work perhaps more intense but less exclusive? The intensity of individuals' expectations of work calls for some exploration of their nature, and we shall thus spend some time on the opposition between instrumental and expressive dimensions. While everything seems to indicate an unprecedented growth in expressive expectations of work, those features thought to reflect a more materialist attitude—such as the

importance attached to pay or to security of employment—have not for all that disappeared. The countries of Europe display different types of trade-off between the two types of relationship, with one or other taking priority. The non-instrumental dimension, evidenced not only all over Europe but also in Québec, where a detailed survey was carried out on the subject of our present concern, is not one thing, but comprises several elements relating to the content of work or to relationships with others at the workplace, which vary in importance by country. We end the chapter with a consideration of what we call, following Lucie Davoine and Dominique Méda, "the French paradox", that is to say, the ambivalent relationship to work characterised by both emotional attachment and rejection. While France may appear distinctive in this respect, it exemplifies tendencies at work in several other European countries, combining still important instrumental expectations with the ever stronger expectations of self-expression and rewarding relationships that characterise the young and above all the more highly educated.

3.1   The Great Importance Attached to Work in Europe

Whatever the survey, and whatever the year it was carried out, two key facts clearly emerge from the European data analysed here: work is considered to be important or very important by the majority of European workers, and the French are invariably among those more likely to consider work important. Here we look at the different theoretical explanations that can be offered and analyse the different aspects of the importance accorded to work.[1]

3.1.1   Work: Important to Varying Degrees

Work holds an important place in the life of Europe's citizens: only a minority of those surveyed—less than 20 % in nearly all countries—declared in

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[1] Some of the analysis that follows was developed in Lucie Davoine and Dominique Méda, "Importance and Meaning of Work in Europe: a French Singularity" (Working Paper No. 96-2, Centre d'Études de l'Emploi, 2008).
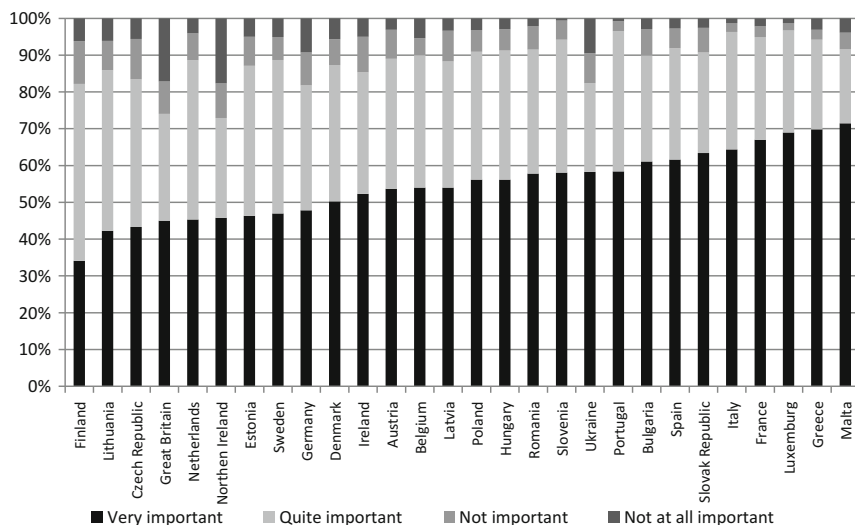
Source: EVS 2008.

Fig. 3.1 "How important is work in your life?" Answers by country, 2008

2008 (as in 1990 and 1999) that work was "not very important" or "not at all important" in their lives (Fig. 3.1).

Yet a certain heterogeneity is fairly immediately evident. It is possible, in fact, to identify a group of countries (Northen Ireland, Great Britain, Finland, Germany) where a higher percentage of the population than elsewhere considers work to be "not important" or "not at all important" (more than 25 % in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain, 17 % in Finland and Germany) and where it is less often said that "work is very important" (between 40 and 50 %); and another group consisting of Southern European countries (Greece, Spain, Italy), two Western European countries (France and Luxemburg) and a number of more recent member states (Malta, Cyprus, etc.), where the percentage declaring that work is "not important " or "not at all important" is less than 10 % and where between 60 and 70 % of respondents say that "work is very important".

The situation was comparable in 1999: only 40 % of Danish, British and Northern Irish respondents at the time declared that work was "very important", while the proportion neared 50 % not only in Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Finland or Luxemburg, but also in the Czech
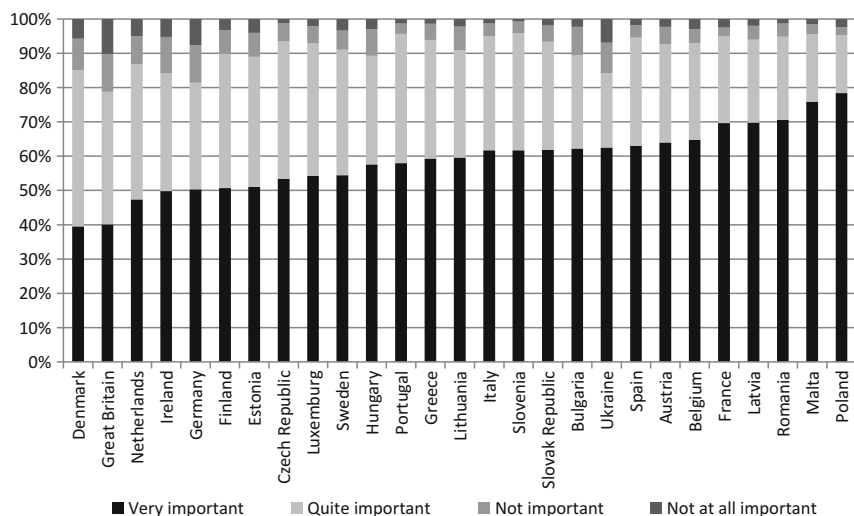
Source: EVS 1999.

Fig. 3.2 "How important is work in your life?" Answers by country, 1999

Republic and in Estonia, and was much higher in France and some new member States (Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania). France already occupied a distinctive position, standing out from the Mediterranean and the other Western European countries by virtue of the particularly high proportion of respondents for whom work was "very important", which reached almost 70 %. In this France found itself in the company of some of the poorest countries in Europe (notably Romania), and separated from Denmark and Great Britain by some 30 percentage points (Fig. 3.2).

How are these differences to be explained? They might simply be the result of a composition effect. The age structure of the population, the proportion of the population economically active and variations in qualification and type of occupation are all sources of difference. Full-time housewives and university graduates, for example, are less likely to say that work is very important, while employers, the unemployed and the self-employed attach more importance to work—and these classes are very variably represented among the populations of European countries. Levels of education, for instance, are higher in the Nordic countries, and women are less frequently in employment in the countries of Southern
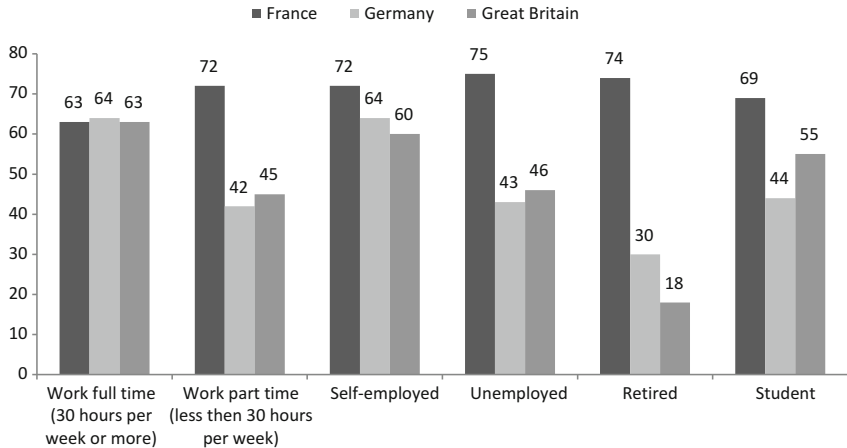
Source: EVS 2008

Fig. 3.3   Percentage saying work is "very important", by employment status, in France, Germany and Great Britain

Europe.[2] Even taking account of such effects of composition, however, differences between countries remain significant.

More importance is attached to work in France across all categories of respondent, whatever the employment status. While in Germany and Great Britain it is above all those in employment, and even more than those employed full-time, who tend to say it is important, France is distinctive in that there the unemployed and the retired are of the same opinion (Fig. 3.3).

This distinctiveness is further underlined by the relative unimportance accorded to leisure, in comparison, say, to Great Britain or Sweden (see above).

3.1.2   Cultural Explanations?

How is one to interpret those differences between countries that do not result from differences in population composition? Taking a clearly culturalist approach, Philippe d'Iribarne has emphasised the singularity of

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[2] Lucie Davoine and Christine Erhel, "La qualité de l'emploi en Europe: une approche comparative et dynamique" (Working Paper No. 86, Centre d'Études de l'Emploi, 2007).

French culture,[3] or—as he put it in the title of his book, *l'Étrangeté française*—the strangeness of France.[4] For him, French society is still structured by a social hierarchy of "ranks", access to which is governed by academic attainment. At the top of this hierarchy, an élite of graduates from the *grandes écoles* has taken the place of the old nobility, and an opposition between "noble" and "base" still structures the relationship to work in France, characterised by a "logic of honour". This is said to differ from both the Dutch logic of consensus and the US market logic of "fair" exchange between equals described in his book, based on case studies in the three countries. In a dispute with the Aix-en-Provence School (of Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre),[5] d'Iribarne extended his analysis to German society, relying on the work of Norbert Elias to claim that Germany represented a "juxtaposition of communities"[6] that coexist without one being more noble than another, the profession representing one such community. The French logic of honour and the German sense of community would thus explain numerous differences currently observed:

> That certain essential features of contemporary realities were already present in the pre-industrial past suggests that, in Germany as much as in France, these features are not the simple result of a particular mode of organisation of the "employment relation" prevailing in the world of industry; they have their roots in an age-old past.[7] … It should not be forgotten that some of their coherence derives from those principles, rooted in history, that presided over their birth.[8]

From this point of view, then, it is the French "logic of honour" that would explain French people's relationship to work today.

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[3] Philippe d'Iribarne, *La Logique de l'honneur. Gestion des entreprises et traditions nationales* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1989).

[4] Philippe d'Iribarne, *L'Étrangeté française* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2006).

[5] Philippe d'Iribarne, "Culture et effet sociétal", *Revue française de sociologie* 32:4 (1991), pp. 599–614.

[6] d'Iribarne, "Culture et effet sociétal", p. 609.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., p. 613.

Is this culturalist hypothesis borne out by the results of the surveys under consideration here? The fact that differences between countries are relatively stable through time suggests that their causes are largely cultural and institutional. In fact, whatever year one looks at, work is considered to be less important in Great Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands than it is in France, for example. The report on the Eurobarometer special survey on European Social Reality[9] confirms that the French attach more importance to work than do most of their neighbours, 92 % of them saying that work was important, compared to 84 % for EU-25 as a whole.

There appears to be a split, in fact, between Protestant and Catholic countries: contrary to Max Weber's earlier observations,[10] work now seems to be less important in Protestant countries (Denmark, Great Britain, Netherlands, Germany, Finland) and more important in Catholic countries (France, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Austria), with Ireland an exception. But a distinction has to be drawn between the effect of individual religious belief on the relationship to work and the effect of belonging to a country or group of that religion. At the individual level, religion certainly does have an impact on the relationship to work: compared to respondents who describe themselves as atheists, those who are Christian or Muslim attach more importance to work, and Protestants in particular are among those who think it most important. Yet at the more general level, countries of Protestant tradition are not those in which work is held in the highest importance, in this confirming Weber's own analysis:

> But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer. … In the field of its highest development, in the United States, the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which often actually give it the character of sport.[11]

Other phenomena seem to intervene, as we shall see later, notably wealth and secularisation. "Protestant" countries are in fact both the richest and those where religious belief is less significant.

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[9] European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 273: European Social Reality*, Brussels, 2007.
[10] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*.
[11] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 124.

3.1.3 Explanations in Terms of GDP or Rate of Unemployment

An indicator that other factors have to be invoked to explain the differences across Europe, notably the level of national economic development, as measured by GDP, is the fact that there are strong variations in opinions about work between different waves of the same survey in the same country. Work was thus considered to be less important in 1999 than in 1990 in the Scandinavian countries, in the UK and in Ireland, the intervening decade having seen a considerable improvement in their economic situation. The importance of work is not then unconnected to the changing state of the economy, as was suggested by Inglehart.[12] In-depth consideration of European surveys shows that while a negative correlation between per capita income and the importance attached to work (the higher the income per capita, the less importance attached to work) is indeed to be found in many countries of Europe (though not in France), there is another relationship that obtains in all of them, that is, that between the rate of unemployment and the importance of work. The higher the unemployment rate, the greater the importance attached to work: in countries suffering mass unemployment people are more likely to say that work is "very important". In countries where unemployment is high, the prospect of losing or not finding a job is more of a worry, and work becomes more of a priority. Furthermore, the ECHP and EVS surveys show a correlation, at the national level, between the sense of insecurity of employment and the importance attached to work.

More importance is therefore attached to work when it is in short supply, and more importance attached to the balance of different activities when one has a secure job and a reliable income. Such conclusions accord very well with the results of the "Travail et modes de vie" survey carried out in 1997 among a representative sample of the French population.[13]

In answer to the question "What for you is the thing most important for happiness?", 46 % said health, 31 % family, 27 % work, 25 % friends

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[12] Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[13] Christian Baudelot and Michel Gollac, "Faut-il travailler pour être heureux?", *INSEE Première* 560 (December 1997), and the same authors' *Travailler pour être heureux?* (Paris: Fayard, 2002).

and 20 % money. A little more than a quarter of respondents, then, mentioned work (or its equivalent: a job, etc.), but it was those whose conditions of work were worst, whose pay was lowest and who were at the highest risk of unemployment who tended most to identify work as the most important thing for happiness. The word "work" or one of its synonyms appeared in the responses of 43 % of unskilled workers, as against 27 % of company directors, managers and professionals. Among men, social status as measured by socio-economic category (unskilled worker or not) was highly determinant, as was employment status, the unemployed (43 %) and temporary employees (45 %) far more often citing work as a condition for happiness than those in secure employment (31 %). For those who do not have any, the authors explain, work is the minimum good, the first step on the way: to be happy one must first of all have a job. Then, as one acquires more and more goods of all kinds (income, family, children, "rewarding" work), the more numerous are the sources of happiness. And this is why unskilled workers, clerical workers and the unemployed more frequently associate happiness with work than do managers.[14] These results are concordant with those of Paul Lazarsfeld and his team in 1931, when they studied the effects of unemployment in the little Austrian town of Marienthal,[15] with Dominique Schnapper's study of the experience of unemployment,[16] and with Andrew Clark's work on the ISSP data:[17] in societies structured by and organised around work, unemployment represents a serious loss not only of social bearings and the conditions of social integration, but also of self-esteem. Given this, having a job is indeed the *sine qua non* of happiness, one of the most important conditions for participation in social life. Taken together, these results throw some light on the distinctive situation in France: the rate of unemployment in France (which has been high for more than 30

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[14] Baudelot and Gollac, *Travailler pour être heureux?*

[15] Marie Jahoda, Paul Lazarsfeld and Hans Zeisel, *Marienthal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community* [1933], trans. J. Reginall and T. Elsaesser (Chicago and New York: Aldine, Atherton, 1971).

[16] Dominique Schnapper, *L'Épreuve du chômage*, new and revised ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

[17] Alan E. Clark, "What makes a good job? Evidence from OECD countries", in Stephen Bazen, Claudio Lucifora and Wiemer Salverda, eds, *Job Quality and Employer Behaviour* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 11–30.

years) and the consequent insecurity of the French, given the threat of unemployment and the failure of "career security" policy,[18] may explain the importance the French attach to work, even if their responses are not entirely explained by the unemployment rate and the insecurity of employment. The "Travail et modes de vie" survey furthermore confirms that this explanation is valid for only part of the French population.

3.2   Another Look at "Work Centrality"

Does the fact that work is believed to be important mean that it is "the most important" of values, activities or areas of life? We look again here at the necessary distinctions between absolute and relative importance that the available surveys do not always allow one to make but which offer a more fine-grained view of individuals' relationship to work.

3.2.1 The Relative Importance Accorded to Work in France

The 1990s saw considerable discussion in France on the question of the centrality of work, prompted notably by the publication of two books, Méda's *Le Travail, une valeur en voie de disparition*[19] and Rifkin's *The End of Work*.[20] A number of authors saw in these authors' critique of work as it exists a challenge to the thesis of the "centrality of work", though no clear definition of this was given. The fact that work is considered important, or even very important, does not in itself mean that it is considered "central".[21] This would require the comparison of different kinds of activities, values or areas of life, with individuals being asked to rank them—which is not the case with the EVS. In that survey, people are indeed questioned about each of the major areas of life (work, family, leisure, friends, etc.), but only one after

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[18] Well illustrated by the fact that 60 % of the French believe they would not find it easy to find another job should they lose their present one, according to the EWCS.

[19] Méda, *Le Travail, une valeur en voie de disparition*.

[20] Rifkin, *The End of Work*.

[21] For a very brief overview of this debate see Méda, *Qu'est-ce que la richesse?* and also the preface to the 2010 edition of the same author's *Le Travail, une valeur en voie de disparition*.

another, without any comparative ranking being elicited. Consequently, while the scores obtained for "family" are even higher than those for work, no meaningful conclusion can be drawn from this. Likewise, while the most important French survey dealing with the question (the "Travail et modes de vie" survey carried out by Institut national de la statistique et des études économicques (INSEE) in 1997, among a representative sample of the French population)[22] did elicit a form of comparison in asking the open question, "What for you is most important for being happy?", to receive the answer "health", followed some distance behind by "family" and "work", there was no attempt to determine a rigorous ranking. This was done, however, in the survey "Histoire de vie/Construction des identités", carried out by INSEE in 2003,[23] by means of two questions that produced very interesting and relatively novel results regarding the place of work in life.

Of course, work is important, and even, as we have seen, "very important", particularly in France. But when one asks people "what defines them best" or "what says most about them", they tend to put work second, far behind family. If one considers only people's first choice from a list of ten items, 76 % chose "your family" as compared to 7 % for "your occupation, your employment situation, your studies".[24] Family thus appears as "the backbone of identity"[25] for all age groups, social classes and employment statuses, quite unlike work. Furthermore, the survey also comes up with another and more familiar result: other things being equal, one is more likely to put work first, believing oneself best defined by one's occupation or employment situation, if one belongs to the best-paid 10 % or to the category of "senior managers and professionals", or is without young children. There would thus seem to be two elements crucial to what one might call a strongly work-based identity: membership of the higher socio-economic categories and lack of family responsibilities.[26]

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[22] Baudelot and Gollac, *Travailler pour être heureux?*

[23] See *Histoires de vie*, special issue of *Économie et statistique* 393–394 (2006), devoted to the results of the survey, and more particularly Hélène Garner, Dominique Méda and Claudia Senik, "La place du travail dans les identités" at pp. 21–40.

[24] Respondents could give up to three answers in order of importance.

[25] Frédérique Houseaux, "La famille: pilier des identités", *Insee Première* 937 (December 2003).

[26] Garner, Méda and Senik, "La place du travail dans les identités".

The same survey reveals that when people are asked to say how important different activities are, relative to each other, and hence whether work is more or less important than "other things", notably "family life, social life and personal life", 66 % of the employed said that "work is fairly important but less important than other things", and 25 % that it was "very important but only as much as other things", while 3.6 % of all economically active respondents said that work was "more important than anything else" and 5.4 % that it was "not very important". Having children (especially in the case of women), being in an "intermediate profession" or "routine occupation" increases the likelihood of attaching less importance to work than to other areas of life. Here again one notes a double effect at work in the relativisation of the importance of work in comparison to other activities or in the competition faced by work: on the one hand, socio-economic category, and on the other the existence of family or family responsibilities as another focus of interest.

Looking in greater detail at those who say that work is important or very important, one notes that occupation is a much better predictor of the relative importance of work than either qualifications or income. Whatever their income, self-employed tradespeople and shopkeepers attach great importance to work while the better-off are not necessarily among those who take it to be of the greatest importance. After adjustments by logistic regression and multivariate breakdown three "occupational" criteria remain associated with considering work to be important:

– engagement in an occupation allowing for self-expression (occupations in the media, arts and performance are by far the most likely to say that work is more important or very important), confirming the theories of Pierre-Michel Menger[27] on the relationship between creative work and the importance attached to work;
– working long hours, having a job that takes up most of ones time (non-standard hours are always positively correlated with the importance attached to work. This is true of administrative and commercial managers in business, shopkeepers, self-employed tradespeople and farmers);
– self-employment and hence ownership of ones own means of production.

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[27] Pierre-Michel Menger, *Portrait de l'artiste en travailleur* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2003).

This survey thus brings out two crucial results. On the one hand, work can be thought to be very important without its being central or enjoying priority. Family, in fact, is generally the first priority, a fact that has many implications, one being that the place accorded to work must be compatible with the demands on time and energy of all those activities associated with "the family". In hoping to limit or reduce the place of work in their lives, the French are expressing not a disengagement from work but rather the desire that work should allow them to attend to other concerns that make demands on their time, among them family. On the other hand, the relative importance accorded to work and to other activities depends on socio-economic category and level of education—or rather, as we have seen, on the nature of the occupation—but also on family situation, and one sees a clear polarisation between those for whom work is very important and represents the essential basis of identity (managers, professionals, the self-employed, artisans and people without children) and those for whom work has only a relative importance, being rather a means of earning a living (clerical or unskilled workers, the low-paid, women with dependent children).

3.2.2   The Results of European Surveys

These French results find confirmation in the European surveys examined here. The countries of Europe rank the family high among the "areas of life" that are important: the family is more frequently and more uniformly cited across the different countries than is work (partly explained by a structural effect, the population surveyed including students, pensioners, homemakers, etc.). Work, however, is more often mentioned than friends, religion or politics (except in certain countries such as Denmark, where leisure is more frequently held to be important than work). Among the French surveyed for EVS 2008, family was said to be very important by 89 % of respondents (as against 67 % for work (Fig. 3.4)).

In the ISSP survey, respondents are asked whether they would like to devote more, less or the same amount of time to a number of activities (work, leisure, family, etc.). Family is cited most often, with more than 60 % wishing to devote more time to it (while only 20 % would wish to
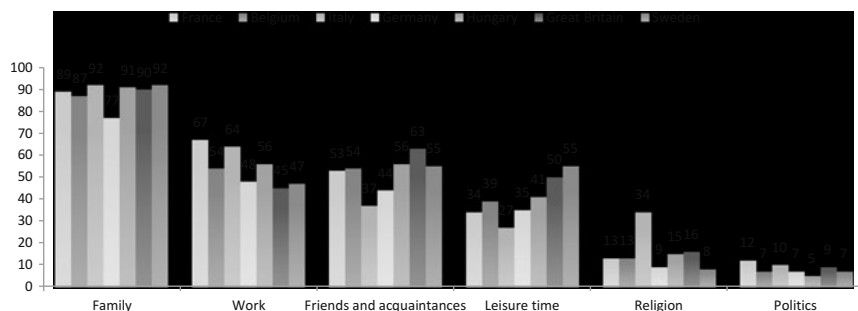
Source: EVS 2008

Fig. 3.4 Percentage identifying different areas of life as "very important", by country

devote more time to work). This desire is particularly marked in France, with 75 % of the French wishing they could devote more time to family, as compared to 72 % in the UK, 69 % in Sweden, 66 % in Denmark and East Germany, 65 % in Ireland and 59 % in Portugal. In general terms, in at least 11 countries of EU-15 more than 50 % of the population would like to spend more time with the family.

At the individual level, the desire to work less and reduce the place of work in life partly depends on gender and family situation: the existence of children at home strongly increases the likelihood of wanting to work less, as does being a woman. Issues of balancing work with the demands of other areas of life thus appear crucial to understanding preferences in terms of working hours and the place of work in life as a whole.

At the macro level, Haya Stier and Noah Lewin-Epstein showed that in countries where women's participation in the labour market is high, the majority of the population would prefer to spend less time at work.[28] The family living standard in these cases is high enough for workers to prefer to give up work in favour of free time, whether devoted to family, friends or leisure activities. Furthermore, in countries where incomes are high, inequalities low and social expenditure substantial, most workers would prefer to work fewer hours, economic security allowing them to

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[28] Haya Stier and Noah Lewin-Epstein, "Time to Work: A Comparative Analysis of Preferences for Working Hours", *Work and Occupations* 30:3 (2003), pp. 302–326.

conceive of exchanging work for free time. We may note, finally, that the effect of level of education is more marked when inequalities are high: workers lower down the socio-economic scale more often would prefer to do more work when the gap between their own living standards and those of the better-off is greater.

In France, Germany and Great Britain, a quarter of all workers say that their job prevents them from giving as much time to their family as they would like, a result that underlines the fact that workers in Europe are not entirely happy with the current allocation of time between work and family life. Quite apart from the "quantitative" balance (in terms of time), work and work-related anxieties can diminish the quality of life outside of work. For grasping the complex interactions between the worlds of work and family, the ESS provides some very revealing data: a quarter of Europeans are "often" or "always" worried about work-related problems outside work. Such problems seem to be particularly acute in France, for 44 % of workers say that they are "often" or "always" worried about work-related problems outside work. The French are also more likely to say that they are too tired on coming back from work to enjoy doing what they like to do at home. Conversely, family responsibilities do not seem to prevent Europeans in general, from concentrating at work. Problems of work-life balance and integration seem then to have been solved in favour of work and to the disadvantage of family life.

These observations are confirmed by the wave 2010 of the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), which reveals a marked sense of imbalance between work and private life in France (Fig. 3.5).

3.2.3   The European Results Echoed in Québec

Mercure and Vultur begin the presentation of the results of their survey on the relationship to work in Québec by raising the question of work centrality and asserting their intention to distinguish between absolute and relative centrality.[29] Absolute centrality denotes the place of work in general in the life of the individual, and is measured by means of responses to

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[29] Mercure and Vultur, *La Signification du travail.*
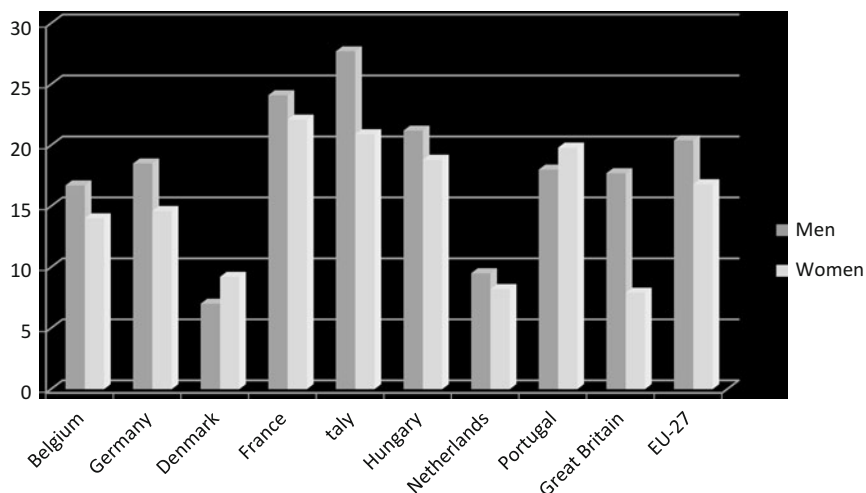
Source: EWCS 2010.

Fig. 3.5 "In general, [how] do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?" Percentage answering "well" or "very well" in 2010

the following question: "For you, is work: 1) the most important thing in your life as a whole? 2) One of the most important things? 3) Something more or less important? 4) One of the less important things?" Relative centrality is the place of work in the life of the individual compared to other areas of life, and it is measured by the responses to the questions: "Of the following areas of life, which in your opinion is the most important to you now?", the areas proposed being work and career, relationships and family life, leisure and friendship, and social, political, religious or community involvement. The structure of the two questions makes them very similar to the two questions of the French "Histoire de vie/Construction des identités" survey that we presented above, making a comparison of the results all the more interesting.

The results in Québec are in all respects similar to those in France. Three-quarters of respondents, in fact, said that work was one of the most important things in their life as a whole, comparable to the almost 70 % in France who said that work was important, while the 7.4 % in

Québec who said that work was the most important thing in their lives closely matches the 7 % in the French "Histoire de vie" survey who put work first in answering that it was work that defined them best, which best expressed "who they are". As in France, having children reduced the importance attached to work, and more again for women than for men in France, and, just as in the French "Travail et modes de vie" survey, it is the unemployed who were most likely to say that work was one of the most important things in life. Two differences are however to be noted: in contrast to the "Travail et modes de vie" survey, part-time or casual workers in Québec were less likely than the French to mention work as one of the most important things in their life; among those who say that work is the most important thing in their life as a whole in Québec one finds manual workers, non-graduates and those earning less than 20,000 Canadian dollars per annum.

The results for relative centrality are even closer to the French: as in France—and as in most European countries, as we have seen—work ranks second after relationships and family life. Just as two-thirds of French respondents said that work was important, but less important than personal, social or family life, and 76 % said that it was family that best defined who they were, so 77 % in Québec said that relationships and family life were the most important areas of life, with only 12.5 % saying as much about work. The respondents, say Mercure and Vultur, "thus deny work the most important place in their lives".[30] As in France, the centrality of work increases with higher socio-economic status. "Company directors, managers and professionals attach more importance to work relative to other areas of life than do manual or office workers."[31] This was also true of university graduates as opposed to non-graduates, of those earning more than 40,000 Canadian dollars a year as opposed to those earning less than that, heads of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as opposed to part-time workers, the old as opposed to the young, and men as opposed to women.

In general, say the authors, using almost the same words as we did in describing the results of the French survey, "everything happens as if

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[30] Mercure and Vultur, *La Signification du travail*, p. 64.

[31] Mercure and Vultur, *La Signification du travail*, p. 65.

there were a line of demarcation separating two groups: on the one hand, those for whom work has an important place in their life, who enjoy a working life that favours self-realisation and personal development, and on the other those for whom the nature of their employment or the disappointment of their expectations of work prompts greater investment in family, friends or leisure activities".[32] It seems to us, however, that rather than presenting this situation as simply the result of a withdrawal from work, it is crucial to see these results as also reflecting the positive attraction of family life, or more specifically people's interest in other activities just as meaningful and time-consuming as work.

We shall return to this, but it is now necessary, quite apart from the question of absolute and relative importance, to look at the aspects of work that are most important to people.

3.3   What Aspects of Work Are Held to Be Most Important in Europe?

If work is considered to be "important" or "very important" by a very large majority of Europeans, what components or aspects of work do they particularly appreciate? And might these explain the importance attached to work? Have they changed, are they the same in the different countries of Europe, do they vary with career trajectory or other circumstances?

3.3.1 The Return of an Ethic of Duty

We saw earlier that if an ethic of duty was deeply influential in Western societies in past centuries, some authors have argued that the twentieth century saw its decline, work no longer being viewed as a duty to be fulfilled but as an activity engaged in for gain that brings with it social integration and the possibility of a certain self-realisation. What trends can be observed in the survey data before us, and what is the current situation in Europe? Certain questions in the EVS are useful in this respect: the

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[32] Ibid.
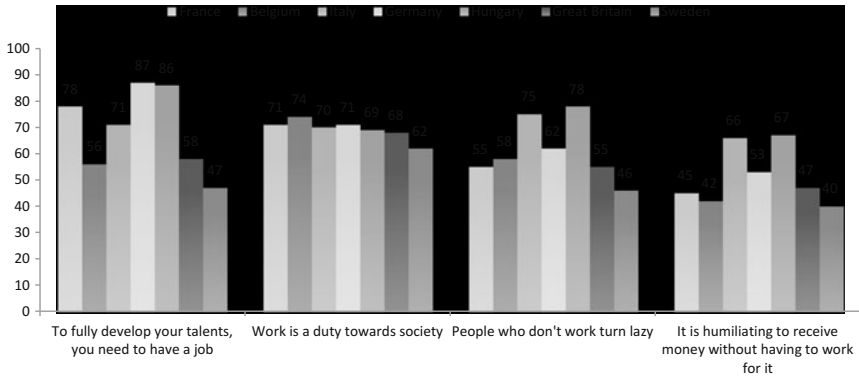
Source: EVS 2008

Fig. 3.6   Percentage who "agree" or "strongly agree" with different statements about work

idea of work as a duty to be fulfilled is still widely prevalent, being shared by more than half of all Europeans (64 % in 2008 (Fig. 3.6)).

Here again, there is an evident lack of uniformity across the countries of Europe but the pattern is not what we have seen: in 2008, if one limits oneself to EU-15, it was in Portugal and Denmark that people were most likely to see work as a duty to society: 84 % of Portuguese and 79 % of Danes either agreed or strongly agreed that work is a duty towards society. This was already the case in the previous wave of the survey in 1999. In 2008 the French also scored high, as did Belgians, Germans and British: 74 % of Belgians, 71 % of French and Germans and 68 % of the British believed work to be a duty. The countries of the ex-Communist East, notably Poland, Romania, Montenegro and Russia, were among those least likely to agree. The idea that work is a duty towards society had become considerably more common in France over the previous decade: only 56 % of the French thought so in the late 1990s, as against 71 % in 2008–2010 (an increase of 15 percentage points in ten years). What's more, the same was true of most other European countries, most notably the UK, where the percentage of the population who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement was less than 50 % in the 1999 survey.

If the idea that "It is humiliating to receive money without having to work for it" gets less support in Europe than that of work as a duty to society (58 % as against 64 % strongly agree or agree), by the late 2000s

in any case the level of agreement affords further support to the idea of work as an ethical duty. A relatively high proportion of French (20 % in 2008), Germans (22 %) and Italians (31 %) strongly agreed that it was humiliating to receive money without having to work for it. The proportion was lower in the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Great Britain (there varying between 9 and 15 %).

3.3.2   The Persistence of the Instrumental Dimension

Of all aspects of a job said to be important, pay was the most frequently cited across Europe as a whole, both in 1999 and in 2008, more than 84 % of respondents answering "Good pay" in EVS 2008. Opinions vary however by country. While 89 % of Portuguese, and around 74 % of both Germans and British thought good pay was important, this was true of only 55 % of Danes, 58 % of French, 60 % of Belgians and 61 % of Swedes. When the survey asks about degree of importance (as do the ISSP and the ESS) most Europeans say work is "important" rather than "very important".[33] According to the ESS, it is security of employment that is most important: this was the aspect of a job that was most often said to be important in 2004, 90 % of respondents describing it as "important" or "very important", ahead of high income, ease of combining work and family responsibilities, or good prospects of promotion. In 2010, still according to the ESS, while 34 % of respondents said a high income was "very important", 50 % said that a "secure job" was important.[34]

The difference between countries is in part explained by economic context: in 2008 "Good pay" was thus mentioned as very important by the Bulgarians (98 %), Greeks (94 %), Hungarians (85 %), Spaniards (78 %) and Italians (76 %). More generally, it is the less wealthy European nations that most often mention the income that work brings. Income per capita

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[33] Lucie Davoine, "La Qualité de l'emploi: une perspective européenne" (doctoral thesis, Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, presented and defended 29 November 2007).

[34] Among the courtiers of Europe, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Greece, Hungary and Sweden put security of employment above a high income, France and the UK being exceptions.

thus seems to influence the importance attached to pay, this being considered less important in wealthier societies. Institutional context also plays a role: high unemployment benefits reassure those in work, who worry less about security of employment, given that they are guaranteed a certain continuity of income. Generous social protection and a certain degree of redistribution of wealth also tend to reduce the importance of pay and promotion. So in countries where social spending is high (Denmark, France, Sweden), workers are less likely to say that pay is important. Differences in preferences across Europe thus in part reflect differences in economic and institutional contexts. A certain disregard for pay, which might be taken for a cultural characteristic, may in reality be explained by levels of national income and social protection.

The same goes for job security, generally considered part of the "instrumental" aspect of employment. While 70 % of the inhabitants of the 47 countries surveyed mentioned this as one of the important aspects of work, there is great variation: in Belgium (32 %), Denmark (44 %), France (28 %). Of the 47 countries investigated, France is the country where job security is thought least important, it being mentioned only by 28 %.

These results accord with those of the ISSP 2005, which includes two questions relevant to the instrumental importance of work. The Swedes (less than 20 %) and the Danes (25 %) are the least likely to strongly agree or agree with the idea that work is "just a way of earning a living". The French come immediately afterwards, a job being "just a way of earning a living" for only 32 % of them. What is more, across the whole of Europe around 57 % gave a positive answer to the classic question that Morse and Weiss first asked in 1955:[35] would they continue to work if they didn't need the money?

The importance attached to different aspects of work thus varies considerably from country to country. The Scandinavian countries attach less importance to so-called extrinsic or instrumental aspects (income,

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[35] Nancy C. Morse and Robert S. Weiss, "The Function and Meaning of Work and the Job", *American Sociological Review* 20:2 (April 1955), pp. 191–198.

security, promotion) and more to the intrinsic. For most of their inhabitants with the exception of Finland, work is not "just a way of earning a living—no more". The extrinsic aspects are much more highly valued in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Ireland, according to the ESS and ISSP.

We may note here, in addition, a factor that came out clearly in the interviews: while traditional classifications tend to establish a strong opposition between extrinsic and intrinsic aspects and to treat pay and job security as extrinsic, many interviewees treated pay, and more especially developments in pay and promotion, as closely related to the intrinsic as to the extrinsic dimension of work. Pay and promotion are felt, in fact, to express recognition (or non-recognition) of personal merit and thus have a crucial symbolic function.

3.3.3 Growing Expectations of Self-realisation

Certain researchers have attempted to test the idea of a decline in the importance of "extrinsic" aspects and a rise in the importance of values based on personal fulfilment through work,[36] using the results of the EVS[37] or the World Values Survey (WVS).[38] In this, the theoretical framework developed by Maslow that we earlier saw deployed by Inglehart[39] has served as the principal instrument of analysis. They distinguish extrinsic, materialist or instrumentalist attitudes to work (which attach more importance to pay, prestige or job security) from

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[36] The analyses that follow were particularly developed by Lucie Davoine in her thesis "La Qualité de l'emploi", and in Lucie Davoine and Dominique Méda, "Place et sens du travail en Europe: une singularité française?" (Working Paper No. 96, Centre d'Etudes de l'Emploi, February 2008).

[37] Hans de Witte, Loek Halman and John Gelissen, "European Work Orientations at the End of the Twentieth Century", in Wil Arts and Loek Halman, eds, *European Values at the Turn of the Millennium* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), Vol. 7, pp. 255ff.; Peter Ester, Michael Braun and Henk Vinken, "Eroding Work Values?", in Peter Ester, Michael Braun and Peter Mohler, eds, *Globalization, Value Change and Generations: A Cross-National and Intergenerational Perspective* (Leiden and Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), pp. 89–113; Hélène Riffault and Jean-François Tchernia, "Sens du travail et valeurs économiques", in Pierre Bréchon, ed., *Les Valeurs des Français* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2003), pp. 108–129.

[38] Xu Huang and Evert van der Vliert, "Where Intrinsic Job Satisfaction Fails to Work: National Moderators of Intrinsic Motivation", *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 24 (2003), pp. 159–179.

[39] Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Value", *American Sociological Review* 65:1 (Feb., 2000), pp. 19–51.

intrinsic or post-materialist attitudes (more concerned with personal fulfilment through work etc.).

According to the results of the WVS, which covered now some 60 countries across the world, the intrinsic aspects of work are more important in countries that are more individualist, more economically developed and enjoy a higher level of social protection.[40] At the European level, the results in a number of cases lend little support to Inglehart's theory that personal fulfilment is more highly valued in wealthier countries. Ester et al. have shown for their part that extrinsic aspects have gained in importance in Great Britain and Italy over the last two decades, while losing importance in the Scandinavian countries.[41] In general however, the late twentieth century saw the intrinsic aspects grow in importance in most European countries, and more especially in France, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands. The French stand out among the Europeans for the importance they attach to the intrinsic interest of work: according to the ISSP, nearly 62 % of the population said this aspect was "very important" in 1997, and 66 % in 2005. The proportion is lower in most other countries of Europe (Fig. 3.7).

In EVS 2008 the French are also much more likely than the Swedes or the British to believe that self-development comes through work; 44 % "strongly agree" with the idea that "to fully develop your talents, you need to have a job", the highest score in EU-15, while less than 20 % are of this opinion in Great Britain, Sweden and Finland. Similarly, in France more than 25 % of the population "strongly agrees" with the idea that "people who don't work turn lazy". Less than 17 % think the same in Great Britain and Sweden, a gap that persists when one takes account of those who simply "agree". For the French, work appears to be very important, that is, necessary for leading a normal life, for developing one's talents and for finding fulfilment. The result confirms the idea that work occupies a very distinctive place in France, while Scandinavian and English-speaking countries do not have the same expectations of work.

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[40] Huang and van der Vliert, "Where Intrinsic Job Satisfaction Fails to Work".

[41] Ester, Braun and Vinken, "Eroding Work Values?"
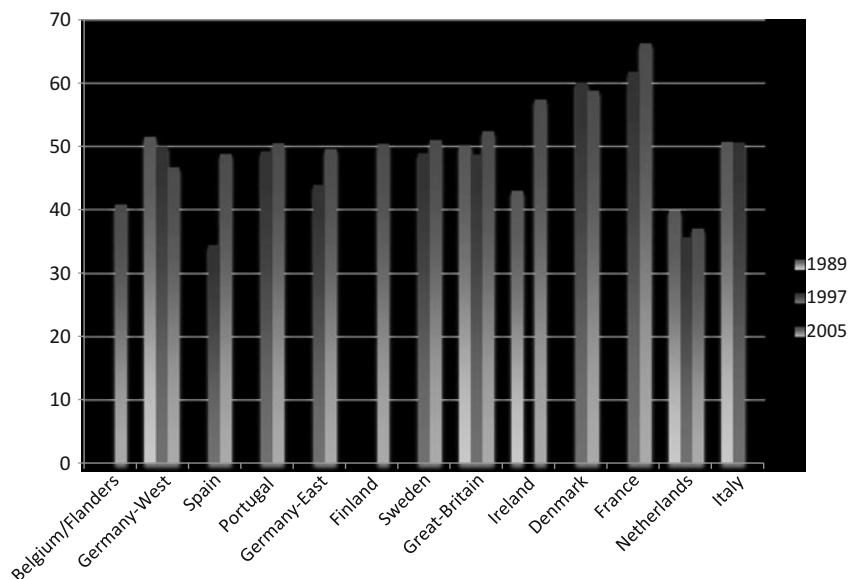
Fig. 3.7 Percentage saying it is "very important" to have an interesting job, ISSP 1989, 1997 and 2005

What explanations might there be for this?[42] First of all, once again, the composition of the population plays a role. The intrinsic interest of work is of greater importance to the young; at the same time, independently of age, those in the lower socio-economic categories are less likely to see work as a means to self-realisation than those in the higher. It is also of greater importance to those with higher incomes and those who are more highly qualified. The more highly qualified also attach more importance to autonomy, to the possibility of being useful to society and to the possibility of helping others, and they are less concerned with pay and job security. These results are entirely compatible with the idea that a degree affords a certain protection against having a bad job and tends to turn one's ambitions towards the intrinsic aspects of work. Preferences also vary from one occupation to another. Intellectual occupations favour importance being attached to intrinsic interest, autonomy and the possibility of helping others and being useful to society. Unskilled workers attach less importance to these aspects.

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[42] The analysis that follows was developed by Lucie Davoine in Davoine and Méda, "Place et sens du travail en Europe".

Such individual differences could explain the differences between countries discussed above. For example, the importance attached to the intrinsic interest of work in Denmark might be explained by the structure of the population, which has the highest proportion of graduates in Europe. But though these composition effects undoubtedly exist, they do not explain everything. Living in one country rather than another has a significant effect on preferences, the results show, and these "country effects" are significant in most cases. Whether looking at the "country effects" or simply the percentage of respondents who say that a particular aspect of work is important, the differences between countries are there. This is particularly so for the intrinsic interest of work. Here the result is close to that found by Duncan Gallie.[43]

The importance of intrinsic aspects is much less correlated with national income than is the importance of pay. This helps explain the lack of support found for Inglehart's theory. The literature had not until then revealed a significant effect of national income on the importance attached to intrinsic or extrinsic aspects; it must be said that it relied on a composite index that opposed intrinsic to extrinsic aspects.[44] As we have seen, the level of national income does not have as clear an effect on the importance attached to intrinsic aspects, and its impact on preferences regarding pay was more difficult to grasp using a composite index. Inglehart's theory is confirmed only in part: our results indicate that the desire for self-fulfilment at work is relatively well-developed in Europe and is not correlated with national income. They support the critiques of Maslow that emerged in industrial psychology in the 1960s, insisting that a need for meaning and self-realisation existed even before the need for security was met in full.

Similarly, the structure of the population plays a role in explaining the level of agreement with the idea that "to fully develop your talents, you need to have a job". Older people, men, employers, freelancers, trade unionists and the low-paid are more likely to agree with this. Even taking composition effects into account, however, France remains distinctive.

[43] Duncan Gallie, "Welfare Regimes, Employment Systems and Job Preference Orientations", *European Sociological Review* 23:3 (2007), pp. 279–293.

[44] Witte, Halman and Gelissen, "European Work Orientations at the End of the Twentieth Century".

The country's position does not correspond to national income, and we may note as well that habitual classifications in terms of welfare states, for example, are not well reflected in the data.[45] As many Danes as Spaniards are likely to say that you need a job to develop your talents. Likewise, the Spaniards are no more likely than the British or Danes to find it humiliating to receive money without having to work for it.

It must then be recognised that the French attach a distinctive importance to the intrinsic interest of work that is not explained by the characteristics of the employed population, or by effects of context or by linguistic bias. The importance of intrinsic aspects has to be situated in the wider context of work's place in life. Work is more often an object of emotional investment in France, as is also shown by Ipsos and Sofres surveys.[46] One sees, for example that 42 % of the French say that they "often find self-fulfilment in work", as compared to the European average of 30 %.[47] Compared to the European average, the French are more concerned with ideas of self-fulfilment and pride in work. Here we find again the idea of d'Iribarne, who suggested that the French value system distinguished between "base" and "noble", the latter escaping the logic of the market to be governed by an internal logic of professional honour.[48]

Surveys by TNS Sofres have suggested that the British, on the other hand, have a "mercantile", "utilitarian" or even "mercenary" approach to work, to cite the terms used in their report.[49] The information we now have available allows us to somewhat qualify this description. While it is true that the British are a little more likely to say that work is "just a way of earning a living", the results of the ESS and ISSP indicate that they rarely say that pay is "very important", in this resembling the Scandinavians. Detailed consideration reveals that, making allowance for population structure, Great Britain stands out for the relatively low importance attached to pay. These results cannot be understood without

[45] Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

[46] Antoine Solom, "Salariés et entreprises: vers une relation 'transactionnelle'?", *IPSOS Ideas*, March 2006; TNS Sofres, Observatoire international des salariés, "Etude de référence sur les problématiques du travail dans les principaux pays occidentaux et en Chine", 2007.

[47] Antoine Solom, "Salariés et entreprises".

[48] d'Iribarne, *La Logique de l'honneur* and *L'Étrangeté française*.

[49] TNS Sofres, "Étude de référence sur les problématiques du travail".

taking into account the place accorded to work in life as a whole: together with the Danes, the British are those for whom work has least importance compared to other areas of life. Put another way, what we are seeing is a certain detachment from the world of work, a phenomenon that has to be understood as expressing not a "mercantile" or "utilitarian" attitude but rather a more distanced, more pragmatic and less emotionally engaged relationship to work. The Ipsos survey offers support for this idea: when Europeans were asked "What idea does work suggest to you?", almost 40 % of the English chose "routine", while the French tended to opt for "accomplishment" or "pride".[50]

When all is said and done, a unidimensional analysis of the relationship to work characterised by the opposition of "intrinsic" to "extrinsic" aspects cannot claim to be exhaustive, neglecting as it does the place accorded to work in life as a whole and the system of values within which the relationship to work is inscribed. The national peculiarities that we have identified might be interpreted as cultural effects, even after having discounted religion. They might also be the result of institutional particularities that evolve only slowly through time and which we can capture only through the indicators we have adopted, the only ones available for a large number of countries and over a long period. It may be, for example, that the policies for improving the quality of life at work developed in Scandinavia in the 1970s led to workers there taking a greater interest in their work.[51] But this type of explanation is not available for France, where a Taylorist approach to management generally prevails and where, more recently, "just-in-time" production has enjoyed a certain success.[52]

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[50] Question reported in French as "Qu'est-ce qu'évoque le travail pour vous?" in Solom, "Salariés et entreprises".

[51] Gallie, "Welfare Regimes".

[52] Edward Lorenz and Antoine Valeyre, "Organisational Innovation, Human Resource Management and Labour Market Structure: A Comparison of the EU-15", *The Journal of Industrial Relations* 47:4 (December 2005), pp. 424–442.

3.3.4 Some Preliminary Findings

The first part of this chapter has sought to test the explanatory hypotheses that might be prompted by the observation of differences by country across Europe, notably as regards the importance of work and the meanings attached to it (a means of gaining a living, a duty towards society or a means of self-fulfilment?). The analysis has allowed us to tease out the effects of population structure and of economic and institutional context, and to identify the national peculiarities that remain. It has shown that variation in preferences across Europe arises in part from structural differences (in levels of education, for example), from the socio-economic situation and socio-economic policy (economic growth, social protection) and not just from distinctive national cultures. It thus lends support to the hypothesis that preferences are shaped by economic and cultural context. In accord with Inglehart's intuitions, it has been possible to show that material concerns—here pay—are less significant in wealthier societies. On the other hand, post-materialist concerns, to use his vocabulary—here, the intrinsic interest of work—seem to have become equally important in less wealthy societies, once one allows for levels of education, which play an important role. Beyond the economic development that Inglehart focused on, the institutional context represents a second important dimension for the analysis of values and preferences.[53] The system of social protection can be a reassurance to workers, who thus worry less about security of employment.

On this value map, France, as we have seen, occupies a distinctive position. It is one of the countries that attaches most importance to work. The three hypotheses proposed to explain this (the ethic of duty, the instrumental dimension and the post-materialist dimension) all have their place, even if the last seems more decisive than the two others. The French remain concerned about their purchasing power and security of employment, and such material preoccupations are connected to the anxieties prompted by unemployment. The very high level of unemployment across more than three decades is one major explanation of France's

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[53] Max Haller, "Theory and Method in the Comparative Study of Values: Critique and Alternative to Inglehart", *European Sociological Review* 18:2 (2002), pp. 139–158.

position. The importance the French attach to the intrinsic interest of work and the intensity of their belief in work as a means to self-fulfilment would seem to mark them out among the countries of Europe, even if these features are only more marked expressions of tendencies at work in all of them (and indeed in the West as a whole).

3.4 Prevalence and Diversity of Expressive Expectations of Work

Interviews carried out in six European countries between 2007 and 2008[54] and the results of the present analysis of the major national and international surveys show, in fact, that in all the countries of Europe (with the exception of the ex-Communist states), people's expectations of the intrinsic, social and expressive dimensions of work are very great, even if these concerns are not exclusive of others. This observation is entirely concordant with the results of Mercure and Vultur's work in Québec.[55] We need, however, to more precisely identify the expressive aspects of work that are held to be important.

3.4.1 The Importance of Atmosphere

As we have seen, the major surveys relevant to the relationship to work in Europe reveal the prevalence of expressive expectations of work: symbolic, subjective, reflexive or social. In this cluster of non-instrumental or non-economic dimensions of work, the research has brought out three key elements (or three components of the non-instrumental dimensions). The first has to do with the individual, work being seen as an activity that allows individuals to evaluate and to surpass themselves, to judge and to improve their own abilities. Work then appears as one of those fields where individual potentiality can be given free rein and individuality can find expression. The second has to do with social relationships and the

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[54] See SPReW research presented in Sect 2.5.3 of Chap. 2 ("A Wealth of Material: Surveys and In-depth Interviews") and the "Methodological Note" at the end of this book.

[55] Mercure and Vultur, *La Signification du travail*.

atmosphere at work, work being understood as an activity that allows one to meet other people, to partake in a shared project, to form groups, to do things with other people. The third has to do with the possibility of thinking of work in terms of a career, characterised by progression and accumulation through time.

The European studies under consideration reveal the existence of these three dimensions, in so far as they look at different facets or dimensions identified as important in a job. The EVS presents respondents with 15 items listed on a card and asks: "Please look at them and tell me which ones you personally think are important in a job?" In 2008, the item that gained most mentions after those referring to instrumental dimensions was "Pleasant people to work with" (mentioned by more than 75 % of all those questioned in the 47 countries) and "A job that is interesting" (mentioned by 69 % of interviewees). In most countries, a pleasant atmosphere at work headed the list (the Netherlands, 95 %; Portugal, 88 %; Sweden, 84 %; Denmark, 78 %; Belgium, 68 %).

There is a group of countries (the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, France, Sweden) where, according to the EVS, non-instrumental dimensions predominate, that is, where people are more likely to say that the atmosphere at work is important than they are to say good pay. This group is followed very closely by Portugal and Great Britain, where instrumental and non-instrumental dimensions run each other close, while the Mediterranean countries, Germany and Hungary prioritise pay (Table 3.1).

While the phrasing in English was rather narrower ("pleasant people to work with") the good atmosphere felt to be the most important non-economic or non-instrumental dimension of work designates something that has less to do with individuals and individual performance than with the work group as a whole, and more generally with the overall

Table 3.1 Aspects of a job that are important

	BE	DK	FR	DE	HU	IT	NL	PT	ES	SE	UK
Good pay	60	55	58	74	85	76	77	89	78	62	75
Pleasant people to work with	68	78	62	64	59	57	95	88	60	84	71

Source: EVS 2008

experience of work for the employer concerned, with a given group and organisation of work. As we have seen, these results find confirmation in those of the ISSP, which asked respondents from 33 countries to describe the importance of different aspects of work in terms of a five-value scale (very important, important, neither important nor unimportant, not important, not at all important). In 2005, while job security came out on top (considered very important by 58 % of respondents), "an interesting job" followed next (considered very important by 49 %).

Atmosphere and interest both come up extensively in the interviews, from which it appears that the idea of interesting work has to be understood not only in terms of content but in relation to individual talents. An interesting job is one that allows people to carry on learning and to make full use of their talents, confronting them with problems to solve by bringing to bear their technical, intellectual and organisational skills, that is, challenges that enable them to make use of their talents and display these in action. Interesting work doesn't settle down into a routine, it keeps you on your toes, it isn't monotonous, and it supports self-development. It is creative work that gives individuals the chance to show off their skills, demonstrate their abilities, show themselves what they can do. The interest of work has evidently much to do with the strong demand for meaning equally evident in the interviews. But the interest of work does not only depend on congruence between the talents of the individual and the nature of the task at hand; it also depends on the concrete conditions in which work is done, and notably on the work group, those with whom one works on a daily basis. It is this more social dimension of work that is addressed by the idea of the atmosphere at work.

3.4.2   A Demand for Meaning and Relatedness

The importance of the relational aspect of work is one of the more significant commonalities to emerge in the interviews done in the six European countries involved in our own research. Our investigations reveal that what psychologists call "relational motivation" covers two distinct meanings: on the one hand, it appears as one of the components of the

expressive relation to work, and on the other as the expression of the individual's need to belong to a group. This second meaning is connected with the idea of social identity, to the sense of belonging to an occupational group, to a trade or profession, or, as was often said, to the small team that one works with every day. What seems essential in all the countries where interviews were carried out is the importance attached to the personal relationships developed at work, to the everyday interactions that connect the individual to those others encountered on a daily basis. What working people seem to value above all, more than any belonging to a more distant "society", is this little network of people with whom habits are formed and who are one of the fundamental constituents of the "place of work" and the decisive factor in the atmosphere at work.

For those whose life trajectories have been discontinuous and those for whom social and interpersonal relationships are an important part of life, the relationship to work is deeply bound up with their relational motivation. Work thus takes on particularly great importance where family relationships are absent or unsatisfactory. Among the countries investigated, Portugal stands out for the importance attached to the relational aspect in the evaluation of work: to the communication, contact and social connection considered to be essential to personal equilibrium. Relational aspects are also held to be very important in Italy and Belgium: a number of case studies carried out in those countries show that the quality of the social relationships formed at work are a decisive element in the evaluation of work as a whole, as witnessed by the importance attached to the atmosphere at work by survey respondents.

In addition to offering people an opportunity to display their skills, develop their talents, and express their individuality, to challenge themselves and measure themselves up against others, and also to form interesting relationships beyond family and neighbourhood, work is also asked to meet two other expectations. The idea that work allows people to feel useful is long familiar and still highly prevalent in Europe. In 1997, and also in 2008, to a lesser degree, the Spanish, the Irish and the Portuguese continued to attach great importance to the social value of their work, being much more likely than other Europeans to say that it was very important to have a job that allowed one help other people (between 37 and 40 %) and that was useful to society (between 40 and 45 %).

As well as the desire for a job that is meaningful and allows for the expression of one's individuality, talent and skills, or a job that allows the development of good relationships with others, there is another strictly non-instrumental aspect of work that emerges as important: the interest in the idea of a career, of making progress and seeing one's efforts rewarded. This was particularly noticeable among the Portuguese:

> While the notion of work refers to the content of work considered synchronically, that of career refers to the same idea but projected into the future[56] and includes the dimensions of active choice and of selection among several possible paths, as well as of progress and transformation through time.[57]

The interviews done in Portugal showed the notion of career to be central to the organisation of the different kinds of relationship to work. Certain interviewees showed a strong tendency to plan their careers, to select sectors and jobs with career-development in mind, anticipating a certain progression and investing time and energy in gaining further knowledge and skills. This type of behaviour was noted particularly among the highly qualified young people. And in certain cases, the concern with career-development took priority over the content of work, the income and prestige attached to a future post becoming the ultimate object of work. In France too a good number of interviews testified to the importance attached to choice as an aspect of career-development and the way it determines a very individualistic relationship to work and career.

3.4.3 Economic and Experiential Goals in Québec

These early results find confirmation in Mercure and Vultur's survey in Québec.[58] Based on the opposition of economic to experiential goals, it

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[56] Wendy Patton and Mary McMahon, *Career Development and Systems Theory: Connecting Theory and Practice* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2006), cited by original authors (see note below).

[57] Ana Margarida Passos, Paula Castro, Sandra Carvalho and Célia Soares, "Self, Work and Career in a Changing Environment", in Patricia Vendramin, ed., *Generations at Work and Social Cohesion in Europe* (Brussels: PIE-Peter Lang, 2010), p. 232.

[58] Mercure and Vultur, *La Signification du travail*.

testifies to the great salience of the experiential dimension, whose importance has not however eclipsed the economic—far from it, indeed, given that 42 % of respondents chose "money" as the main meaning of work (in response to the question of which item from a list best represented what work meant for them personally at that time). This was the highest score of all. After this came self-fulfilment (31 %), followed by other meanings based on the actual experience of work but more evidently social in nature—relationships with other people (10 %) and doing something useful for society (9 %), then recognition and prestige at work and elsewhere. Mercure and Vultur conclude from this that being useful to society, the altruistic goal par excellence, is becoming increasingly obsolete, as is the ethos of duty, in this confirming much earlier research (see Chap. 2). They write: "The two most important goals of work have in common the rejection of the idea of work as a 'duty to society'."[59]

The distribution of responses is highly dependent on socio-economic category, family situation and position in the life cycle: just as we have seen in Europe, Québécois higher up the occupational, educational and financial scales tend to associate work more with self-fulfilment than with economic goals; managers and professionals, university graduates and leaders of SMEs tend to put self-fulfilment first among the goals of work. On the other hand, those in the lower socio-economic categories, those earning less than 40,000 Canadian dollars a year, as well as temporary or contract workers, tend to say that money is most important, as do those with family responsibilities (couples with children).

One also finds the same results regarding the ideal job: experiential goals are placed highest, the Québécois opting first for a good atmosphere at work (72 %), then good relationships with colleagues (71 %), an interesting job (67 %) and a job that offers self-fulfilment ahead of material conditions. In particular, security of employment is not very important for nearly half the active population of Québec. The authors see in this a sign of the emergence of new expectations in terms of the content of work and of social relationships at work, just as we have seen in Europe. Again, as in Europe, material conditions are more highly valued by the

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[59] Mercure and Vultur, *La Signification du travail*, p. 69.

less educated, while the content of work is more important to company directors, senior managers, professionals and university graduates.

3.5   The French Paradox: Testimony to Wider Processes

We shall spend some time on the case of France in particular, as it seems to us to illustrate developments in Europe in general. France is in fact the country where the intrinsic interest of work is ranked highest as a desideratum, but also—and this is the paradox that interests us—the country where individuals are more likely to wish that work had a less important place in life as a whole. Consideration of this paradox allows us to identify the elements that hinder the attainment of the "ideal job" of people's dreams and highlight the differences between real and ideal work.

3.5.1   The French Most Likely to Want "a Decrease in the Importance of Work in Their Lives"

While the French are the most likely of all the populations of EU-15 to say that work is important or very important, they are also the most likely to say that they wish work were a less important part of life. While nearly half the British, the Belgians and the Swedes said that they thought "a decrease in the importance of work in their lives" would be a good thing, the figure in France was 65 %. Geert Hofstede had already remarked on France's distinctiveness in this respect.[60] Great Britain too is distinctive: the British are in fact less likely to say that work is very important to them, but they too wish, the great majority of them, that work were a less important part of their lives. These two contrasting cases highlight the complexity of the phenomena under consideration.

In the two last decades of the twentieth century a number of countries saw a growth in the number of people who wished work were a

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[60] Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (London: Sage, 2001).

less important part of life, notably Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden and Great Britain. In 1981 and 1999, according to the EVS, the French were the most likely to want to see work become less important, while they had been less likely to say so in 1990. This can be explained by the dates of the surveys: in 1981 and 1999, the governmental majorities had made a reduction in the working week a policy objective and the idea had been taken up in public debate. What is more, in 1990 the rate of non-response to this question was very high, which may cast some doubt on the quality of the result.

How can one explain these results, and the French paradox more particularly—the fact that the French consider work to be very important but at the same time would prefer it to have a less important place in their lives? Several explanations might be offered. First of all, as has just been pointed out, it is possible that this is not so much a paradox as an effect of overamplification as a result of the debates of the time. In 1999, the debate on the reduction of the working week was at its height in France. The surveys then reveal a strong desire on the part of the majority of the French to see a reduction in hours. Yet more recent surveys—ISSP 2005, for example, which focused precisely on work—also show that a good proportion of the French continue, despite the passage of time and the change in political fashion regarding the working week, to want to work fewer hours (32 %), even if a somewhat smaller proportion would prefer to work longer hours (21 %). For EWCS 2010, these figures were 27 % and 17 % respectively. When the issue of the trade-off between work (and hence income) and free time is raised more explicitly, the percentage of people wishing to "work longer hours and earn more money" was higher in 2005 (compared to 1997), without however forming a majority of the population: 37 % of the French opted for this in 2005, as opposed to 20 % in 1997 (ISSP 2005).

The French situation thus seems paradoxical: the French are those who attach the most importance to work and see it as a means of self-fulfilment, but they are at the same time those who wish to devote least time to it, and some of them do not see work as central to their identity. There are four possible explanations of this paradox, in our opinion. The first two are concerned with dysfunctions in the world of work itself,

whereby individuals with very high expectations of work see them disappointed by their work's inability to meet them.

The first type of explanation is represented by Thomas Philippon,[61] who has argued that there is no "crisis of work" in France, but rather a strong dissatisfaction with work. Workplace relations are said to be so bad that employees give up their hopes of work and to that extent disinvest from it. The desire for a shorter working week would thus be the result of an inability to change work for the better and an expression of the difficulties of working life.

The second is not very different: if employees want to reduce hours of work, this can be explained by the fact that work is in reality not only not a means to self-expression and self-fulfilment but also, for some of the population, an activity productive of malaise and stress, by reason of the intensification of labour, the effect on health of new forms of work organisation, the deterioration of conditions of employment, anxiety about keeping one's job and so forth. And as the material gratifications (income, security) are very far from being a compensation adequate to the distress, a general sense of dissatisfaction develops.

The next two explanations evoke the existence of other spheres of self-expression and self-fulfilment, or other sources of identity, the paradox being explained less (or not so much) by dissatisfaction with work as by the degree it takes life over, the impact on other important spheres of the demands it makes on time, and the difficulty of co-ordinating the demands of different spheres of life. These aspects have already been considered in Sect. 3.2 of this chapter ('Another Look at "Work Centrality"'), and we will therefore attend here only to the first two explanations, in terms of poor workplace relations and bad conditions of work and employment.

3.5.2 Unsatisfactory Workplace Relations and Conditions of Work

Relationships with management and colleagues are described as good in most EU-15 countries, though the figures vary widely from one country

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[61] Thomas Philippon, *Le Capitalisme d'héritiers. La crise française du travail* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2007).

to another. It is in France that one finds the worst relationships with management across the three waves of the ISSP, a result that accords with Philippon's observations:[62] in 2005 50 % of French employees say that their relationship with management is "good", while the figure exceeds 60 % in all other EU-15 countries, reaching more than 80 % in Germany, Ireland and Portugal. Philippon finds the origin of this relative discord in the concentration of decision-making power at the very highest levels of the hierarchy, with little effort made to consult those chiefly affected. The EWCS of 2010 confirms this in reporting that only 51 % of the French say they are consulted before new targets for their work are set, that is to say, somewhat fewer than in the Netherlands (65 %), Ireland (64 %) or Denmark (62 %). Similarly, less than 50 % of the French felt they were able to work autonomously in 1995, evidence that management did not have confidence in them.[63] This accords with the surveys on the organisation of work that reveal that Taylorist management is more prevalent in France and Southern Europe as compared to the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries in particular, where there is greater stress on autonomy and teamwork.[64]

The importance that the French attach to work seems to be the obverse of a certain stress and exhausting commitment. According to EWCS 2010, France has a high proportion of workers who say they experience stress at work: 27 %, a figure much higher than in the Netherlands (10 %), Denmark (12 %) or Finland (15 %). French employees are also among the most likely to say they have suffered overall fatigue: 54 %, while the European average is 35 % ; only the Estonians (60 %) are more likely than the French to report having been fatigued .

What is more, France has not escaped the increase in the intensity of work witnessed by most European countries.[65] According to EWCS

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[62] Philippon, *Le Capitalisme d'héritiers.*

[63] In 2010, a degree of autonomy had become more prevalent in France, being reported by 63 % of French employees, still a little lower than Germany (64 %) and the European average (65 % for EU-27) and markedly lower than Belgium (71 %), the Netherlands (76 %), Sweden (78 %), Finland (86 %) and Denmark (89 %).

[64] Lorenz and Valeyre, "Organisational Innovation".

[65] Francis Green, *Demanding Work: The Paradox of Job Quality in the Affluent Economy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

2010, 59 % of French workers said they worked at very high speed and 62 % that they worked to tight deadlines at least a quarter of the time. The intensification of labour is in great part responsible for the unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the work of many European workers.[66] The EWCS also shows that the proportion of workers dissatisfied with their working conditions rose from 19 % to 21 % between 1995 and 2010. One can see that it might well lead to frustration, if work is believed to be important but its organisation makes it difficult, tiring and too intense.

In addition, if the members of France's younger generation are today highly invested in work, they have also invested heavily in education and training before even joining the employment market, hoping that this would bring them—among other things—an interesting job. Yet this hope seems to have been disappointed. In France, according to EWCS 2010, 31 % of employees believed they had the skills to cope with more demanding duties. This sense of being overqualified is less prevalent in Finland, Denmark, Germany, Italy and Belgium.

Faced with unsatisfactory working conditions that cannot be improved, thanks to the tense relationship with management, the French may thus have been forced to adopt an attitude of withdrawal, to accord work less importance in their lives, even while work remains intrinsically very important to them. One notes too that the French case becomes less singular when skill and conditions of work and employment are taken into consideration: those whose work is stressful and tiring do not want to work longer, preferring in fact to work less. Conditions of work, as measured here, thus certainly explain part of the French paradox.

3.5.3 Conditions of Employment and Dissatisfaction with Work

If French employees complain of stress and poor workplace relations, they are also unhappy about pay, according to the ISSP 2005: only 13 % believe they have a high income, a figure that puts France at the bottom of the table, alongside Portugal. The French are much less satisfied with

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[66] Ibid.

their standard of living than the inhabitants of other countries at the same level of development, their levels of satisfaction being close to those of the Poles and the Portuguese at 76 %, as compared to more than 90 % in the Benelux countries, Scandinavia, the UK and Ireland.[67] This situation is all the more discouraging for the French given that they have little confidence in their prospects of promotion, France being the country where people are the least likely to expect to be promoted.

In the matter of security of employment, one sees a cleavage between the Scandinavian countries on the one hand and the countries of Western and Mediterranean Europe on the other, among them France. In this second group, workers are less satisfied with their security of employment, worrying about the possibility of losing their job. And around 60 % believe it would be difficult to find another job at a similar rate of pay should they lose it. On this set of questions, France finds itself towards the middle, but more worried than Denmark or the Netherlands. The special Eurobarometer survey on "European Social Reality" confirmed the existence of this cleavage and revealed that the French were among the most worried in this respect in 2007. Asked "How confident would you say you are in your ability to keep your job over the coming months?", the French were among the most likely to say they were not very confident, alongside the Poles, Lithuanians, Hungarians and Slovakians, and the most likely to say, alongside the Hungarians, "not at all confident". Similarly, when asked the question "If you were to be laid off, how would you rate … the likelihood that you find new job requiring the same skills and experience in the next six months?", the French were among the most pessimistic, in this being very far from the Scandinavian countries on the one hand and the more liberal economies of the UK and Ireland on the other, and well above the average.

The French dissatisfaction with income and security of employment results in part from people's fear for their jobs and the level of unemployment. The more acute the former, the more threatening the latter.[68] Marcel Erlinghagen has shown that the long-term unemployment rate

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[67] European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer* 273, "European Social Reality", p. 9.
[68] Baudelot and Gollac, *Travailler pour être heureux?*; Davoine, "La Qualité de l'emploi"; Davoine and Méda, "Importance and Meaning of Work in Europe: A French Singularity".

has a marked effect on the sense of job insecurity, while other macrosocial variables have little.[69]

If, as reported by most surveys (EVS, ECHP, ISSP, Eurobarometer, ESS), most Europeans say they are on the whole satisfied with their jobs, there are great differences between countries: while almost 56 % of Danes say they are "very satisfied" or "completely satisfied", less than 30 % of the French said the same in 2005, according to the ISSP. In terms of this composite indicator, the situation in France would appear to be deteriorating: according to the ISSP, the French were less satisfied with their jobs in 2005 than they had been in 1997. While there are differences between one survey, they do nothing to dispel the contrast between the people of the Scandinavian countries, who are very satisfied, and those of the Western European and Mediterranean countries, who are less so. France finds itself among the countries of the South, according to the EVS, the ECHP and the special Eurobarometer on "European Social Realities". The French are much more dissatisfied than the people of other countries, according to the ISSP. And according to ESS 2010, the French are less satisfied than the people of the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Germany or Belgium.

Research shows that interesting work and good working relationships are the main factors making for job satisfaction: Andrew Clark, for example, has shown on the basis of the ISSP 1997 data that good relations at work are the most important, with the highest and most significant coefficient of variation, followed by job content and prospects of promotion, then pay, job security, and the match between actual and desired hours of work.[70] Using the same data set, Alfonso and Andrés Sousa-Poza showed that an interesting job and good relations with management were the two most important factors in job satisfaction, emphasising that good relations with management had a more significant effect than good relationships with colleagues.[71] Given this, poor workplace relations, worsening

[69] Marcel Erlinghagen, "Self-Perceived Job Insecurity and Social Context" (Discussion Paper 688, DIW Berlin April 2007), pp. 22–23.

[70] Andrew E. Clark, "What Makes a Good Job? Evidence from OECD Countries", in Bazen, Lucifora and Salverda, eds, *Job Quality and Employment Behaviour*.

[71] Alfonso Sousa-Poza and Andrés Sousa-Poza, "Well-Being at Work: A Cross-National Analysis of the Levels and Determinants of Job Satisfaction?", *Journal of Socio-Economics* 29:6 (November

conditions of work and the absence of prospects of promotion might well explain the persistent disappointment of a large part of the French workforce.

France, however, is not an isolated case. While the figures we have presented show that the situation in France is worse than elsewhere, it is nonetheless true that a number of other European countries display the same tendencies: the intensification of work, increasing pressures on the workforce, the growth in flexible working, the threat of unemployment and exclusion that weighs on certain categories of employees. These very real developments in most European countries give some measure of the difficulty in satisfying Europeans' high expectations of work. We shall return to these changes in the employment market in the next chapter.

In the course of this chapter we have seen that while Europeans in general attach great importance to work, the position varies considerably across countries, the French notably being the most likely to find work "very important". In the search for explanations for these divergences, we identified the rate of unemployment as an important factor, and, in the French case, a particularly marked concern for the content of work.

But we have also shown that in France, as in Europe as a whole, and as in Québec, the results of the most recent surveys agree in suggesting that while it still matters greatly, work has been overtaken in overall importance by the couple and the family. Whether in terms of the goals of work or the place of work in the construction of identity, we have seen a strong differentiation between two parts of the active population, one made up of managers, professionals, the self-employed and those without family responsibilities taking work to be the most important part of life, synonymous with self-fulfilment, and the other, made up of manual and clerical workers, the low-paid, and those with children, for whom work is a means to primarily economic ends, outranked in intrinsic importance by family.

We have also shown that if the intrinsic or non-economic dimensions of work have been particularly salient in Europe since the late twentieth century—that is, the possibility of self-expression and self-fulfilment and the opportunity for social relationships—the economic or instrumental dimensions persist, though their prevalence is strongly differentiated by

2000), pp. 517–538.

age, family situation and especially socio-economic category. And as we have seen, a survey carried out in Québec in the early 2000s came up with the same results.

Finally, we put forward a number of explanations throwing some light on the French paradox—the fact that while the French are, in Europe, the most likely to say that work is important, they are also those most likely to wish it were a less important part of their lives. These chiefly concerned the contradiction that exists between the desire for more meaningful, more autonomous work better integrated with the rest of life, and the reality of French conditions of work and employment. Far from being an exception, however, we shall see that France is in fact a signal example of a more general tension, found throughout Europe, between the enormous, radically new expectations invested in work and recent and ongoing changes in the way it is organised.

4

Expectations Frustrated by Changes in Work

The relationship to work and the meaning attached to work are shaped by individuals' experience of the labour market and of employment: the way in which they have found or failed to find employment, their sense of job security, their position at work, the style of management, ways of working and modes of evaluation, the type and degree of knowledge and skill required, the scope for negotiation and so on. The nature of the experience is intimately related not only to individual characteristics, notably gender and socio-economic status, but also to age in that this can entail considerable differences in the encounter with the realities of work and employment. The meanings individuals attach to work and to their participation in it are intrinsically linked to their own experience of a world of work that has undergone profound transformations over the last three decades. Very few of the key features that characterised the Fordist firm of the post-War period remain in place. Ways of organising production, conceptions of the individual at work, the power relationship between workers and employers: all have changed radically.

In Europe, the three decades of the post-War boom saw the consolidation of an organisation of work based on the standardisation of products

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and production methods and the rationalisation of work processes (in terms of maximum production at minimum cost) as mass production became the norm in economies reconstructing and recovering after the War. This was the age of great industries inspired by Taylorism and Fordism, of assembly line work and large-scale bureaucracies. There was no particular thought given to workers as individuals, in that they were essentially understood as integral elements of larger groups essentially motivated by the instrumental dimension of work, by the desire to meet their everyday needs in relative security. Human resource management was limited to personnel administration in the narrow sense, that is, to the statutory and contractual aspects of employment. In the world of work, the relationship of forces was clear: powerful worker organisations rooted in solid, homogeneous groups of working men negotiated with clearly identifiable local bosses who held decision-making power, the whole within a state-supervised framework. The welfare state was created.

The 1990s, however, saw a decisive shift. Changes that had begun to emerge in the previous decade now imposed themselves on most branches of the economy, and on the public sector as well.[1] Organisation theorists, sociologists, managers and administrators no longer talked of Taylorism and Fordism, or even of post-Taylorism or neo-Fordism, but of new forms of work organisation (NFWO), a term that suggests the advent of a new period. In his *Sociology, Work and Organisation*, Tony Watson offers a comprehensive and up-to-date sociological study of these transformations,[2] also treated by Mike Noon and others in *The Realities of Work*.[3]

The generations coexisting at work today have thus had very different experiences of work. In what follows, we shall highlight a number of profound changes that have occurred in the world of work and which have directly affected individuals' relationship to work and the meaning they attach to it.

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[1] On the new public management, see John Cultiaux, *Les Perdants de la modernisation* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2012) and "*New public management* et professions dans l'État: au-delà des oppositions, quelles recompositions?", *Sociologie du travail* 53:3 (July–September 2011).

[2] Tony J. Watson, *Sociology, Work and Organisation*, 6th ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2012).

[3] Mike Noon, Paul Blyton and Kevin Morell, *The Realities of Work: Experiencing Work and Employment in Contemporary Society*, 4th ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 2013.

4.1   New Forms of Work Organisation

Flexibility has succeeded standardisation as the key to the organisation of production. Large corporations are today divided into smaller-scale units in very diverse relationships of interdependence, and outsourcing has become a norm. This organisational decentralisation can extend across borders: businesses in sectors such as automotive, textiles, food and even IT may locate their activities in different countries across the world.[4] The advent of the new information and communications technologies (ICTs) brought with it idea of the network firm, and with that a new way of thinking about work.[5] The goal is now to control costs (especially wage costs) and to promote flexibility of every kind (of workforce, teams, hours, etc.), while defining employee goals in terms of quality and customer satisfaction. Flexibility has done much to individualise workers' statuses and career paths and to promote insecurity and exclusion.[6] Over the last 30 years or so, the industrial model with its Fordist corporation and its unwieldy bureaucracy has given way to new modes of organisation thought more capable of meeting the challenges of a globalised economy in constant mutation. These new modes of organisation have led to a diversification of forms of employment. Flexibility, networking, technology, lean production, customer orientation, quality, diversification and personalisation are central to these modes of organisation. Motivated in the first instance by a concern for competitivity and profit maximisation, these transformations have led to profound changes in ways of working and the criteria by which quality work is defined and recognised. The opportunity existed to develop quality work that would be profitable as well as flexible in a way that suited both employers and workers (e.g. in terms of reconciling the demands of work and family). Yet the majority of firms chose to expose their employees to insecurity, instability, stress and overwork, thus frustrating their growing expressive expectations. Today, change still comes thick and fast, but the approaches adopted generally

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[4] Suzanne Berger, *Made in monde* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2006).

[5] Patricia Vendramin and Gérard Valenduc, *Technologies et flexibilité. Les défis du travail à l'ère numérique* (Paris: Editions Liaisons: 2002).

[6] Patricia Vendramin, *Le Travail au singulier. Le lien social à l'épreuve de l'individualisation* (Louvain-la-Neuve, Academia-Bruylant, 2004).

lead to ever greater pressures on work, increasing dualisation of the labour market and growing individualisation. The advent of the digital economy seems only to have strengthened these tendencies.

4.1.1 Flexibility and Fragmentation of the Labour Market

The quest for flexibility of both work and employment[7] has been central to these organisational changes, impacting every aspect of work[8]: when and where it is done, the type of contractual relation, the nature of skill. It is also central to the fragmentation of the labour market. *Temporal flexibility* refers to every kind of adaptation or variation of working hours and working time, usually introduced by employers to meet market and customer requirements, but sometimes at the request of employees, with a view to better reconciling the demands of work and family life. *Locational flexibility* covers the different forms of teleworking, distant access to labour markets and consumer markets, relocation, and more generally all those forms of geographical organisation of work that exploit the way ICTs make it possible for certain kinds of work to be done more or less anywhere. *Employment flexibility* has two aspects: *numerical flexibility* being the adjustment of worker numbers and types of employment to the fluctuations of demand, mainly through temporary contracts and other forms of non-standard employment, *wage flexibility* the use of a system of remuneration that reflects worker or company performance. *Contractual flexibility* relates to the growth of outsourcing and the replacement of employment contracts by contracts for services through recourse to temp agencies, self-employed sub-contractors, and more recently the allocation of micro-tasks via online platforms. It also covers non-standard forms of

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[7] Jean-Claude Barbier and Henri Nadel, *La Flexibilité du travail et de l'emploi* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000); Bruno Maggi, "Critique de la notion de flexibilité", *Revue française de gestion* 162 (March 2006), pp. 35–49; Daniel Mercure, "Nouvelles dynamiques d'entreprise et transformation des formes d'emploi. Du fordisme à l'impartition flexible", in Jean Bernier, Rodrigue Blouin and Gilles Ladlamme, eds, *L'Incessante Évolution des formes d'emploi and la stagnation des lois du travail* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001), pp. 5–20.

[8] Patricia Vendramin and Gérard Valenduc, *L'Avenir du travail dans la société de l'information. Enjeux individuels and collectifs* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).

employer–employee relationship, such as work for a group of employers or work on secondment to a third party. *Functional flexibility* covers job rotation, multi-skilling, occupational mobility and worker adaptation to an expanded range of functions, generally in order to respond to customer requirements or changes in products and services.

The data on work and employment reflect this quest for universal flexibility, more especially the statistics on employment contracts and working hours. According to the European Labour Force Survey (ELFS) temporary contracts accounted for 14 % of total employment in Europe in 2014;[9] the figure in 2000 was 12 %. In a little more than 62 % of cases, temporary contracts had been accepted for want of more permanent employment. Non-standard employment also plays a massive role as young people enter the labour market. According to EWCS 2010, only 60 % of European employees under the age of 30 had permanent contracts, the rest (40 %) being either on fixed-term or temporary contracts. According to the same source, in Europe in 2010, 13 % of high-skilled white-collar workers and 25 % of low-skilled blue-collar workers were on fixed-term or temporary contracts; in France, the gap was wider, with 6 % and 22 % respectively on non-standard contracts. Furthermore, in all countries surveyed, temporary work is more often the lot of low-skilled workers, accounting for one in four (all age groups taken together).

The survey carried out in six countries of Europe shows that a period of temporary contracts or changes of employer is seen as a more or less "normal" phase in the career paths of young people, but within limits (in terms of length of period or number of changes) that cannot be exceeded except at the cost of a lasting precarity of employment.[10] A survey of employees under 30 in French-speaking Belgium comes to the same conclusion regarding young people's career paths, three changes of employer or contract at the start of the career seeming to represent a critical threshold separating those who find stable employment from those who will

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[9] Eurostat, *European Labour Force Survey* 2014.

[10] Patricia Vendramin, ed., "Changing Social Patterns of Relation to Work. Qualitative Approach through Biographies and Group Interviews", report of the SPReW project (CIT5–028048 – European Commission, DG Research, 2008), downloadable at http://www.ftu-namur.org/fichiers/SPReW-D11-Finalreport-web.pdf

remain on the margins.[11] The SPReW research also shows that the failure to switch temporary workers onto permanent contracts raises the question of recognition, which can in certain cases lead to tension between different age groups.[12] Such a situation also causes problems regarding the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and skills and can lead to disengagement on the part of those supposed to train new arrivals.

ELFS 2014 also shows that part-time contracts accounted for 20 % of total employment (9 % of total male employment and 32 % of total female employment); in 2000, the figure was 16 %. For 30 % of the employees concerned, they worked part-time because they could not find full-time employment (40 % for men, 26 % for women). This compares with 18 % in 2003. The majority of part-time employees do so because they have care responsibilities (for children or other dependents), which raises the question of so-called voluntary part-time work. The SPReW research showed that young European women, who increasingly have degrees, have very high expectations of work in terms of career and personal development; it is not at all clear that partial withdrawal from the labour market is an option that could meet those expectations or their expectations of work involvement.

With NFWO, regular, standard working hours are increasingly giving way to flexible hours and unsocial hours (late at night, early in the morning, weekends) in sectors where this is an absolute necessity, as for example in hospitals or continuous process industries. In 2014, 23 % of employees normally worked Saturdays, 13 % Sundays, 15 % evenings, 6.5 % nights. In 2010, according to the EWCS data, nearly four in ten people (38 %) across Europe did not work fixed hours, the figures varying by country. Here too, the research shows that the destandardisation of working hours is likely to come into conflict with strong expectations of compromise between the demands of work and the desire to enjoy family life and personal life more generally. Young couples in which both are employed have a different relationship to availability for work.

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[11] Patricia Vendramin, *Les Jeunes, le Travail and l'Emploi. Enquête auprès des employés de moins de 30 ans en Belgium francophone* (Namur: FTU/Jeunes CSC, 2007), available at www.ftu-namur.org/fichiers/Jeunes-travail-emploi.pdf.

[12] Vendramin, "Changing Social Patterns of Relation to Work".

Furthermore, it would seem that young fathers, especially the more highly qualified, are no longer happy to sacrifice private life to work.

With the NFWO, change also became permanent, with all the demands for adaptation and mobility that it implies. Technological change and restructurings and reorganisations of the work process are today part of the everyday normality of work, rather than the exception. Nearly one worker in three had seen a significant restructuring or reorganisation at work over the previous three years: more precisely, 31 % for EU-27 and 33 % for EU-15, including 35 % in France, 31 % in Belgium, 31 % in Germany, 28 % in Hungary, 30 % in Portugal and 23.5 % in Italy. In the UK the figure was 40 %, in Denmark 48 %. Between 2007 and 2010, 36 % of workers (employed and self-employed) in France saw new processes or technologies introduced at work, 43 % in Belgium, 44 % in Germany, 35 % in Hungary, 40 % in Portugal and 33 % in Italy. In the UK the figure was 49 %, in Denmark 53 %. The average for EU-27 was 40 % and for EU-15 42 %. Permanent change, when not properly supported, is a factor in alienating older employees, who may contemplate early retirement.[13] Relying on several studies carried out in Europe, the European Trade Union Institute reports that workers facing reorganisation share a number of common problems: fear of falling into precarity, feelings of powerlessness, lack of recognition and respect for their work, and fear of deskilling.[14]

Not all workers are affected the same way by the increasing flexibilisation of work;[15] new inequalities in terms of employment status and the scope for finding fulfilment are being superimposed on the old. For some years now, studies have been reporting a dualisation of the labour market, with a core workforce on the one hand and a peripheral workforce on the other.[16] The concept of dualisation is perhaps a little overemphatic, but it has the merit of highlighting marked disparities in the experience of many

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[13] Patricia Vendramin, Gérard Valenduc, Serge Volkoff, Anne-Françoise Molinié, Évelyne Léonard and Michel Ajzen, *Sustainable Work and the Ageing Workforce* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012).

[14] *Restructurings: Workers Health at Crisis Point*, special issue, *HesaMag* 4 (Autumn–Winter 2011).

[15] Matthieu de Nanteuil-Miribel and Assâad El Akremi, eds, *La Société flexible* (Paris: Érès, 2005); Barbier and Nadel, *La Flexibilité du travail et de l'emploi*; Arne L. Kalleberg, "Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition", *American Sociological Review* 74:1 (2009), pp. 1–22.

[16] Michael J. Piore and Peter B. Doeringer, *Internal Labor Market and Manpower Analysis* (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1971); John Atkinson and David John Storey, *Employment, the Small Firm and the Labour Market* (London: Routledge, 1994).

aspects of work. The distinction drawn by Atkinson and Storey in 1994 remains relevant.[17] They distinguished between a central core drawn from a primary labour market, who essentially offer functional flexibility, and a first periphery drawn from a secondary labour market, meeting needs for numerical flexibility (part-time work, short-term contracts, government-subsidised placements), while a more distant periphery is formed by self-employed workers, sub-contractors, workers on secondment, agency temporaries and the outsourced workforce. The worker's situation varies across these different labour-market segments. The probability of optimism or pessimism regarding the effects of work flexibility depends in good part on position in this dualist schema. However this general picture shows differences between types of qualification: an IT engineer working as a self-employed sub-contractor, thus occupying a peripheral position, nonetheless has a better position in the labour market than an older worker in standard employment in a business in difficulty.

All these transformations have led to a fragmentation of models of employment and an increasing differentiation among the workforce in terms of the distribution of risk and insecurity, which tend to fall on peripheral workers, women, the low-skilled—or those whose skills have become obsolete—older workers, younger workers, foreign workers and those in difficult personal circumstances. Many authors argue that we have arrived at a watershed, and that advances secured by decades of struggle, such as the reduction of the working week and the decline of the hierarchical, disciplinary model of the employment relation, are now being reversed.[18] Serge Paugam has analysed the effects of this kind of differentiation on occupational integration, understood in terms not of employment status alone but also of the relationship to work.[19] The dualisation approach tends to limit itself to employment status and to the objective, instrumental aspects of employment, whereas Paugam includes the subjective aspects linked to the possibilities of finding self-fulfilment. He thus distinguishes between four types of integration: the *assured* inte-

[17] Atkinson and Storey, *Employment, the Small Firm and the Labour Market*.

[18] Patrick Cingolani, ed., U*n travail sans limites? Subordination, tensions, résistances* (Paris: ERES, 2012); Anne-Marie Guillemard, ed., *Où va la protection sociale* (Paris: PUF, 2008).

[19] Serge Paugam, *Le salarié de la précarité*, 2nd ed. (Paris: PUF, 2007).

gration associated with a positive relationship to both employment and work; the *arduous* integration characterised by a positive relationship to employment and a negative relationship to work; the *insecure* integration that comes with a negative relationship to employment and a positive relationship to work; and finally, the *disqualifying* integration marked by a negative relationship to both employment and work. Paugam then looks at the link between degree of integration and collective action, and considers collective disengagement in situations of poor integration, which tends to reduce the capacity to negotiate regarding increasingly poor working conditions, which conflict with workers' high expectations in terms of both security and self-fulfilment. In the SPReW study, older workers saw the young as introducing an individualism that undermined the sense of solidarity and belonging that had characterised the earlier workforce, one indicator being the decline in rates of unionisation, more especially among the young.[20] This reading has its roots in two contrasting experiences of employment: most older workers have spent their careers in large businesses based on "communitarian" principles, while younger workers entered employment on temporary contracts in flexible organisations.

4.1.2   The Uncertainties of Work

In 2015, insecurity of employment was an issue for the 16 % of European employees who said they feared losing their job in the next six months, the incidence varying with skill: 22.5 % in the case of low-skilled blue-collar workers, 18.5 % for high skilled; 16 % for low-skilled white-collar workers, 11 % for high skilled. Between 2005 and 2015, the European average rose from 14 % to 16 %. Behind these averages, however, lie considerable differences of situation. While the figures remained fairly stable for all occupational groups in countries such as Germany, other countries saw an explosion in feelings of insecurity, the average rising in Spain, for example, from 15 % in 2005 to 26 % in 2014. In Europe, this sense of insecurity of employment is highest among low-skilled blue-

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[20] Jelle Visser, "Union Membership Statistics in 24 Countries", *Monthly Labor Review* 129:1 (January 2006), pp. 38–49; Bernhard Ebbinghaus and Jelle Visser, *Trade Unions in Western Europe Since 1945* (London: Macmillan Reference, 2000).

collar workers in the Czech republic, 52 % of whom feared for their jobs over the next six months.

With destandardisation of work contracts and low pay, the first decade of the new century saw the emergence of the working poor as an issue.[21] Robert Castel sees, more broadly, the establishment of a new status alongside that of employment, the condition of precarity as something neither exceptional nor temporary.[22] Low-waged employment, sometimes not paying enough to escape poverty, has become increasingly common in Europe, a tendency that may be associated with deunionisation and governments' adoption of new labour-market policies. On the supply side, these policies have encouraged the expansion of low-skilled jobs;[23] on the demand side, the past decade has seen the expansion of programmes to return people to the labour market and the imposition of ever more restrictive conditions on access to social assistance, which has pushed beneficiaries into low-paid employment.[24] A substantial programme of comparative research on this subject was carried out in the 2000s, funded by the Russel Sage Foundation, its goal being to understand how institutional contexts influence employer strategies regarding low-skilled and/or low-paid workers. One conclusion of the study was that good economic strategies do not in themselves lead to good human resources strategies, which emerge only under institutional constraint. The situation in Germany today affords a good example, where good economic performance is accompanied by a growth in working poverty.[25] The study also shows that different aspects of job and work quality, such as security, good wages, access to training, good working conditions and so on, don't

[21] Robert Castel, "Au-delà du salariat ou en deçà de l'emploi? L'institutionnalisation du précariat", in Serge Paugam, ed., *Repenser la solidarité* (Paris: PUF, 2007), pp. 415–433; Patrick Cingolani, *La Précarité* (Paris, PUF, 2005); Sophie Béroud and Paul Bouffartigue, eds, *Quand le travail se précarise, quelles résistances collectives?* (Paris: La Dispute, 2009).

[22] Castel, "Au-delà du salariat?"

[23] Henning Lohmann, "Welfare States, Labour Market Institutions and the Working Poor: A Comparative Analysis of 20 European Countries" (DIW Discussion Paper 776, Berlin, 2008); Hans-Jürgen Andreß and Henning Lohmann, *The Working Poor in Europe: Employment, Poverty and Globalization* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2008).

[24] Low pay is here defined as an hourly rate less than two-thirds of the median. See Joel F. Handler, *Social Citizenship and Workfare in the United States and Western Europe: The Paradox of Inclusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[25] On the failings of the German model see Steffen Lehndorff, ed., *A Triumph of Failed Ideas: European Models of Capitalism in the Crisis* (Brussels: ETUI, 2011).

necessarily come together. The French researchers who participated in the study show, for example, that several sectors in France are seeing the development of a "bad equilibrium" of high pay, high work intensity and poor working conditions.[26] Researchers on occupational transition have also looked at poverty in employment, seeking to understand first of all how changes in income contribute to entering or leaving poverty, and then the mechanisms of the intergenerational transmission of poverty.[27]

In 2014, 10 % of workers in the EU were poor.[28] Poor workers are people who have a job but who live beneath the poverty threshold, defined by the EU as 60 % of the median income for the country concerned. Differences between countries range from 4 % in the Czech Republic and Finland to 19.5 % for Greece. In between stand France at 8 %, Belgium 5 %, Germany 10 %, Italy 11 %, Hungary 6 %, Portugal 11 %, the UK 9 %, the Netherlands 5 % and Sweden 8 %. Working poverty is higher among the less qualified, being 16 % for those who have completed no more than lower secondary education and 3.5 % for those who have a tertiary education. Working poverty is also higher among the 18–24s, at 11 % (as compared to 9 % for the 25–54s and 8.5 % for the 55–64s), and those employed on temporary contracts at 16 % (as compared to 6 % for permanent).

There are jobs that do not pay enough to live above the poverty line, and there are jobs people are afraid they will lose sooner or later—and there are also the jobs that people cannot find. In Europe, one worker in ten is unemployed. The rate of unemployment has risen from 9.4 % in 2000 (EU-27) to 10.3 % in 2014 (EU-28), its course varying enormously between countries (Table 4.1), but hitting the low skilled most of all (Tables 4.2 and 4.3).

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[26] For France, see Eve Caroli and Jérôme Gautié, eds, *Low Wage Work in France* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008).

[27] Dominique Anxo and Christine Erhel, "Irréversibilité du temps, réversibilité des choix? Les fondements des 'marchés transitionnels' en termes de trajectoires de vie", *Revue française de socio-économie* 1 (2008); Catherine Pollak and Bernard Gazier, "L'apport des analyses longitudinales dans la connaissance des phénomènes de pauvreté et d'exclusion sociale: un *survey* de la littérature étrangère", *Les Travaux de l'Observatoire national de la pauvreté and de l'exclusion sociale 2007–2008* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2008), pp. 447–490; Günther Schmid and Bernard Gazier, eds, *The Dynamics of Full Employment: Social Integration by Transitional Labour Markets* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2002).

[28] Eurostat, Statistics on Income and Living Conditions.

Table 4.1 Unemployment rate for men and women, age 15–64 (%)

	Men 2014	Women 2014	Total 2014	Difference as compared to 2000 in % points
EU-28	10.3	10.5	10.3	+0.9*
EU-15	10.6	10.7	10.7	+2.2
Germany	5.4	4.7	5.1	−2.9
Belgium	9.1	8.0	8.6	+2.0
Denmark	6.6	6.9	6.8	+2.3
Spain	23.7	25.5	24.6	+10.7
France	10.6	10.1	10.3	=
Hungary	7.6	8.0	7.8	+1.2
Italy	12.1	13.9	12.9	+1.8
Netherlands	7.2	7.8	7.5	+4.8
Portugal	14.2	14.8	14.5	+10.1
UK	6.5	6.0	5.6	−0.7
Sweden	8.5	7.8	8.1	+2.6

*EU-27 data for 2000.
Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

Table 4.2 Unemployment rate, age 15–64, by educational attainment, 2014

	Isced 0–2		Isced 3–4		Isced 5–8	
	2014	Difference as compared to 2000, in % points	2014	Difference as compared to 2000, in % points	2014	Difference as compared to 2000, in % points
EU-28	19.0	+6.8*	9.5	−0.1*	6.2	+1.3*
EU-15	19.3	+7.7	9.5	+1.6	6.4	+1.5
Germany	12	−0.7	4.7	−2.8	2.5	−1.8
Belgium	16.4	+6.0	8.8	+2.0	4.7	+2.0
Denmark	10.6	+4.3	6.1	+1.7	4.8	+2.2
Spain	34.0	+19.3	24.2	+10.4	14.8	+3.9
France	17.3	+1.9	10.7	+1.6	6.3	+0.7
Hungary	18.6	+7.0	7.4	+0.9	3.2	+1.8
Italy	17.0	+4.8	12	+1.3	8.0	+1.8
Netherlands	12.3	+7.8	7.5	+5.5	4.0	+2.3
Portugal	16.2	+11.9	15.3	+10.5	10.1	+7.3
UK	11.8	+2.7	7.0	+2.0	3.2	+0.7
Sweden	20.0	+11.6	7.1	+1.4	4.4	+1.4

*EU-27 data for 2000.
Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

Table 4.3 Unemployment rate, age 25–29, by sex, 2014 (Q2)

|	Male	Female	Difference, F compared to M
Germany	6.9	5.3	−1.6
Belgium	13.6	10.1	−3.5
Denmark	9.1	10.0	+0.9
Spain	30.6	30.0	−0.6
France	14.9	14.0	−0.9
Hungary	8.7	10.4	+1.7
Italy	21.9	25.5	+3.6
Netherlands	7.4	6.9	−0.5
Portugal	16.9	19.7	+2.8
UK	7.0	6.8	+0.2
Sweden	9.9	8.2	−1.7

Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

If one takes the data for the six countries under study and the three generations we are concerned with, the unemployment data show that in every country but one the rate of unemployment is higher among the young (Fig. 4.1), and this more especially in France, Italy and Belgium—the exception being Germany, where it was higher among older workers until 2008, the relative incidence then coming to roughly even out. Intercountry comparison also shows how the youth unemployment rate varies with the economic situation, figures for all countries except Germany showing the effect of the economic downturn in 2008, which has had a massive effect on youth unemployment rates.

In 2014, the unemployment rates of young people of 25 to 29 were more or less similar for both sexes in Spain, France, the Netherlands and the UK; they were higher for men in Belgium, Germany and Sweden, and higher for women in Portugal, Hungary and Italy—reaching 25.5 % for Italian women in this age group, even though they are on average better educated than men of the same age (see Sect. 4.3 of this chapter, on "The Transformation of Skill").

In a survey of employees under 30 carried out in French-speaking Belgium in 2007, young people reported the high expectations they had of work, in all respects: instrumental, social and expressive.[29] Overall, all these dimensions scored high for importance, indicating how great

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[29]Vendramin, *Les Jeunes, le Travail and l'Emploi.*
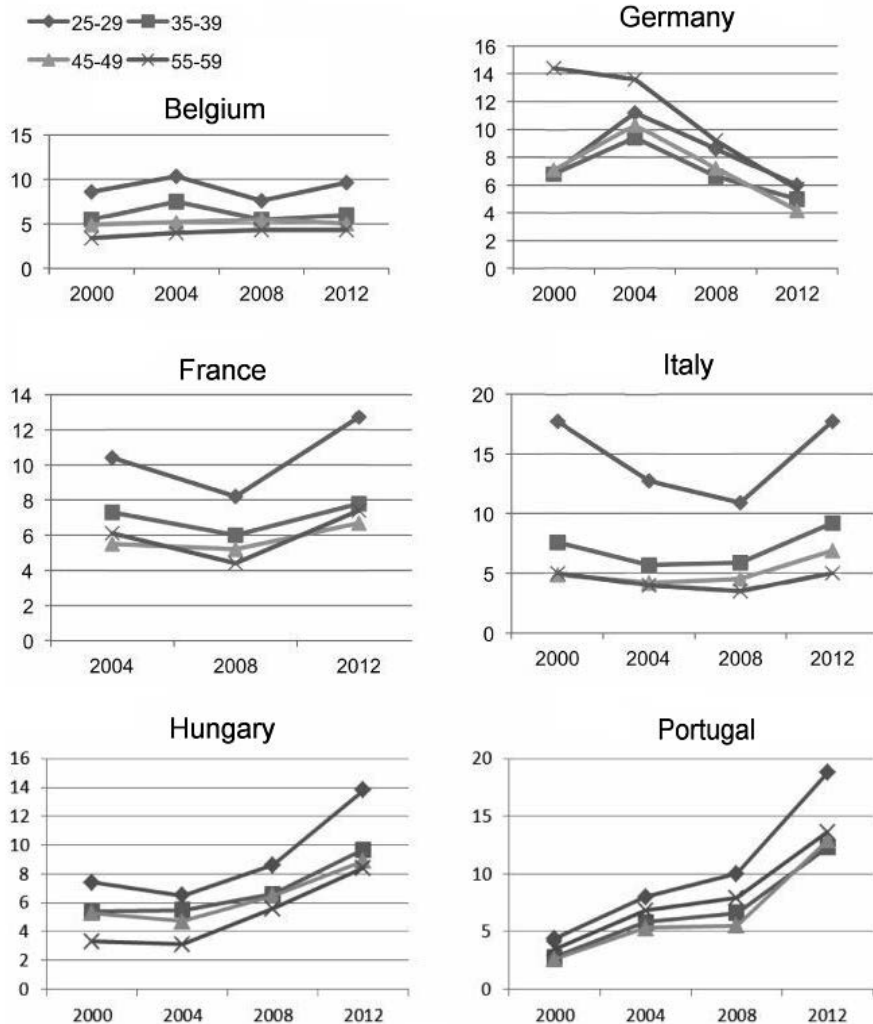
Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey.

Fig. 4.1   Change in unemployment rate by age, 2000–2014 (Q2)

were the expectations—and disappointment might be expected to be correspondingly severe. Interestingly, the study also shows that the experience of unemployment makes no change to expectations of work, all three dimensions retaining the same importance. The disappointment of young people who do not find a job and a place in the world of work then gives rise to all the greater a sense of frustration.

The inequalities and insecurities engendered by flexibility and the difficulty or even inability to do anything about them led in the 2000s to the emergence of "flexicurity"—a policy approach supposedly combining flexibility with security. In 2007, the European Commission published a communication entitled "Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity" in which it is described as "an integrated strategy to enhance, at the same time, flexibility and security in the labour market".[30] The concept thus appeared as a veritable panacea, capable of miraculously reconciling all the contradictions and of serving as a goal for all member states, even while respecting the national particularities and traditions of each (thanks to the idea of different "flexicurity pathways" adapted to the specificities of national labour markets).[31] Representing a skilful dressing-up in the clothes of the "Nordic model" of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) customary prescriptions for the reduction of employment protection,[32] flexicurity has really amounted to no more than a policy slogan,[33] one that has presided over a surfeit of flexibility rather than any increase in security.[34]

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[30] European Commission, "Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity: More and Better Jobs through Flexibility and Security", COM 359 final, 27 June 2007.

[31] Jean-Claude Barbier, "Au-delà de la 'flex-sécurité', une cohérence sociétale solidaire au Danemark", in Paugam, ed., *Repenser la solidarité*, pp. 473–490; Amparo Serrano Pascual, "Batailles d'idées dans l'espace européen: la lutte contre le chômage and le combat pour le nommer", *Revue de l'Ires* 60 (2009), pp. 47–64.

[32] Dominique Méda, "Flexicurité: quel équilibre entre flexibilité et sécurité?", *Droit social*, June 2009, pp. 763–775.

[33] Antoine Bevort, Michel Lallement and Chantal Nicole-Drancourt, eds, *Flexicurité: la protection de l'emploi en débat*, special issue of *Problèmes politiques et sociaux* 931 (December 2006); Amparo Serrano Pascual, ed., *La flexicurité. Mutation symbolique de la notion de sécurité*, special issue of *Les Politiques sociales* 72:3/4 (2012).

[34] Maarten Keune and Maria Jepsen, "Not Balanced and Hardly New: The European Commission's Quest for Flexicurity" (ETUI Working Paper 2007.01); Jean-Michel Bonvin and Pascale Vielle, "Une flexicurité au service des citoyens européens", *Revue de l'Ires* 63 (2009); Dominique Méda, "La flexicurité peut-elle encore constituer une ambition pour l'Europe?", *Formation emploi*, March–

In the end, workers' immense expectations of work—and more especially those of workers in the so-called peripheral segments of the labour market—come up against the growing downward pressure on economic security that comes with flexibility and NFWO, and a deterioration in job quality that leaves little scope for self-fulfilment, especially looking forward.

4.2   Individualisation of the Employment Relation and the Demand on Subjectivity

If NFWO have helped bring about a deterioration and segmentation of the experience of work, they have also brought a new focus on the individual, who has now emerged from the anonymity of the group, even if at the risk of losing the strength that had brought. The individual is now recognised as such, and even coached. Human resource management is no longer a merely administrative task but a key business function, concerned with the strategic management of human capital, and with that a matter for boards of directors. Managements have realised that, for employees, work is no longer merely a way of meeting their needs but has acquired a considerable social and expressive dimension: expectations of personal development, recognition and meaning have gained in importance.

Since 1990, modern management has put forward a supposedly emancipatory vision of work[35]—more intelligent, more fulfilling, more autonomous, more collaborative, more creative, more responsible—a vision that often turns out to be a trap. Autonomy and responsibility are often accompanied by the intensification of work and self-exploitation. Working time is increasingly dispersed and irregular and ever more dif-

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May 2011, pp. 97–109; Dominique Méda, "La flexicurité à la française: un échec avéré", pp. 86–97, in Serrano Pascual, ed., *La flexicurité*.

[35] Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London; New York: Verso, 2005); see too the literature of the entrepreneurial self, such as Bob Aubrey, "L'entreprise individuelle, vers un new modèle de travail", *Futuribles* 207 (March 1996); William Bridges, *Jobshift: How To Prosper In A Workplace Without Jobs* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1994) etc.

ficult to measure. Workload increases. Control has lost its hierarchical aspect, but has not disappeared for all that. If employees are called to take control of themselves, they are also controlled by goals, by measures of customer satisfaction and all the indicators that come with information technology. And lastly, NFWO have not decreased the arduousness of work, but have increased it, thanks to the increased physical and psychological burdens that come with intensification, urgency, continuous change and insecurity of employment.[36] The increase in the number of suicides at work, a phenomenon not confined to France, is the most dramatic and intolerable symptom of this.

4.2.1   Unfulfilled Promises of Self-fulfilment

In their comparative analysis of management writing from the 1960s and 1990s, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello track changes in thinking about the management of the human factor at work.[37] They identify a number of key ideas in the managerial innovations of the 1990s, which they sum up as follows: "Lean firms working as networks with a multitude of participants, organizing work in the form of teams or projects, intent on customer satisfaction, and a general mobilization of workers thanks to their leaders' vision."[38]

In this literature one finds a critique of hierarchy, the form of coordination typical of bureaucracy, based on relationships of domination and subordination, and said to be no longer appropriate to today's network firms. A rise in levels of education, dissatisfaction among middle managers and a general rejection of relationships of command all contributed to the decline of hierarchy at work. The goal now is a non-hierarchical organisation, flexible, innovative and highly proficient. And now it is not just middle managers alone who are freed from subordination, but the

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[36] Philippe Askenazy, *Les Désordres du travail, Enquête sur le nouveau productivisme* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2004); Michel Lallement, Michel Gollac, Marc Loriol, Pascal Marichalar, Catherine Marry et al., "Maux du travail: dégradation, recomposition ou illusion?", *Sociologie du Travail* 53:1 (2011), pp. 3–36.
[37] Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.
[38] Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 115.

workforce as a whole. Work groups are self-organising, guided by leaders whose vision wins the assent of all, without recourse to compulsion, by conferring meaning on their work and enabling self-fulfilment through creative thinking and the exercise of their abilities.

In earlier research on the ICT sector, we studied the impact of NFWO at the "cutting edge" of management practice on a workforce on the whole fairly young, well qualified and highly invested in the idea of work as a means to self-expression and self-fulfilment.[39] These young people were characterised by a relative detachment from the firm, a conception of work as a source of pleasure and opportunity for personal development, an understanding of power that projected it out of the workplace, and a sociability organised around the project in hand. This pattern of sociability focused on relationships with the small group encountered on an everyday basis was also observed in the SPReW research.

If power did not much make itself visible in the ICT workplaces studied, this was not only because there were few hierarchical levels—all at a considerable distance, in any event, from the true centres of decision-making—but more especially because their mode of operation was based on autonomy and self-responsibility. Control and supervision were located with the customer and the market. Local management was highly approachable and open to discussion, everyone was on first-name terms and social relationships often extended outside of work. The approachability of management formed part of a wider strategic orientation invested in the quality of social relationships. The new forms of organisation put the accent on conviviality, on authentic human relationships (as opposed to bureaucratic formality). Communication was important, as part of the sharing of information. Good cooperation was essential to the successful execution of projects; there were institutionalised out-of-work activities that overflowed into private life, while work relationships and friendships were conflated.

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[39] "Widening Women's Work in Information and Communications Technology" (WWW-ICT), EU research project covering seven countries carried out for the "Information Society Technologies" programme under the Fifth European Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (2003–2004), and MéTIC (Métiers des TIC), a research project carried out in French-speaking Belgium for the European Social Fund and the Wallonian Minister for Employment and Training (2002–2004).

In NFWO, autonomy—with self-fulfilment as its corollary—is also a response to the critique of large-scale bureaucratic organisation, prescriptive and tightly controlled. With this new autonomy come assessments and individual goals, individualised pay and new forms of direct participation. Autonomy is essential to the flexible firm, compelled to innovation and creativity. The firm expects employees to put all they have into what they do and in return undertakes to develop their knowledge and skills. At the same time, technology is taking over everything routine and deadening about work, thus expanding the scope for the exercise of intelligence, and with it for self-fulfilment.

In our study of the ITC sector—a real laboratory for NFWO—and in line with the lessons of the SPReW research, the interviews showed that individuals were in search of satisfaction and personal development.[40] Work was no longer seen as simply a way of meeting one's needs and/or an investment expected to pay off in the future. Work might be an obligation, but it was one that offered the possibility of self-expression and personal development. You have to be able to take pleasure in work, to learn new things, meet new people, continue to make progress. Creativity is an important part of work. It's no longer a question of the traditional idea of a career based on progress on a pay-scale or on accumulating responsibilities, but a vaguer and yet more insistent desire to exist as a person, as a distinctive individual in a work environment that no longer calls for a workforce but engages directly with individuals, with their own characters and skills. There is little that is left to the future. Everything is played out in the present. Each at their own level, people want to be recognised now, as a person, for their own importance and for their contribution to shared goals. For the German sociologist Stefan Voswinkel,[41] the development of post-Taylorism and the intense mobilisation of subjectivity at work since the 1980s have contributed to the replacement of an ethic of duty by a subjectivised ethic of occupational self-fulfilment. The individual is on display, and recognition now implies admiration rather than appraisal. An expectation of admiration is a corollary of the choice of work as a locus of

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[40] Vendramin, *Le Travail au singulier*; WWW-ICT; MéTIC.

[41] Stefan Voswinkel, "L'admiration sans appréciation. Les paradoxes de la double reconnaissance du travail subjectivisé", *Travailler* 18 (2007), pp. 59–87.

self-expression, as one of the places where the individuals can give of their best, an arena for showing off what they can do.

Yet what looks at first glance like spontaneous inclination is also the expression of a social norm that imposes and maintains certain ways of being at work. This quest for pleasure and self-expression in work not only suits firms who no longer offer long-term prospects, but it also brings with it the risk of overinvestment in work and hidden self-exploitation. There is a thin line between an investment proportional to one's own interests and an overinvestment imposed as a quasi-norm. The question of "Where is it going to stop?" frequently arose in the interviews, one respondent putting it like this: "I have the sense that I'm on a train that I can't get off, otherwise I'd never be able to get on again."[42]

NFWO are described as highly advantageous, with characteristics that make for the possibility of personal development in a world of creativity, conviviality and high pay. There are indeed a few firms here and there that match the description, but in most the reality is very different and this idealised portrait calls for serious qualification. Another received idea about recent developments at work is the belief that group work and autonomy are guarantees of job quality and the possibility of self-fulfilment. It is certainly true, in principle, that a certain freedom to organise one's own work, a sense of responsibility and initiative, and collaboration on a common project are preferable to working to a prescribed system, under supervision and without scope for individual or group creativity. Yet it has been reported that group work and autonomy can also be sources of stress, interworker competition and self-exploitation. Effective autonomy has its counterpart today in autonomy "limited", "supervised"[43] or "organised".[44]

Numerous studies, the Eurofound surveys among them,[45] have shown that group pressure can be stronger than that exerted by traditional man-

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[42] Patricia Vendramin, "Nouvelles formes de coopération au travail", *Humanisme et entreprise* 273 (October 2005), pp. 89–107.

[43] Béatrice Appay, *La Dictature du succès. Le paradoxe de l'autonomie contrôlée and de la précarisation* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005).

[44] Gilbert de Terssac, "Autonomie", in Antoine Bevort, Annette Jobert, Michel Lallement and Arnaud Mias, eds, *Dictionnaire du travail* (Paris: PUF, 2012), pp. 47–53.

[45] Eurofound, *Ten Years of Working Conditions in the European Union*, EF/00/128/EN (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2001).

agement hierarchies, and that work groups' margin of manoeuvre can be relatively limited. A survey carried out by Eurofound in 1996 already revealed how little decision-making power was granted to groups,[46] a finding confirmed by EWCS 2010.[47] An index of work-group autonomy developed by the same foundation indicates that 22 % of workers (employees and self-employed) enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, 36 % a certain degree of autonomy and 42 % a low degree of autonomy.[48]

Research on NFWO characteristic of the ICT sector shows that there is little solitary work there, as most development work on software and internet services is, for various reasons, organised on a team and project basis. The real site of encounter and organiser of sociability is the project, the task, the mission to be accomplished. While cooperation is an obligation, to be a member of a good team is a significant and valued experience. Workers appreciate the conviviality that comes with cooperation, which is also the occasion of a reciprocity favourable to personal development. But participation in a project team also requires a high degree of subjective mobilisation and brings exposure to competing interests.[49]

Employees increasingly often find themselves in paradoxical situations, where they enjoy greater autonomy but at the same time have less control over work and life.[50] Many managements offer them greater control over the execution of work but then retighten the noose in setting the goals to be achieved, leading to loss of control over time and workload and the individualisation of blame in the case of failure.[51] Autonomous employees are also called upon to be actors in their own change. Who would dare turn up at the annual evaluation interview without having formulated a professional development plan? There's no question but that one would

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[46] Eurofound, *Useful But Unused: Group Work in Europe. Findings From the EPOC Survey*, EF/98/59/EN (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1996).

[47] Eurofound, EWCS 2010.

[48] The index is based on the scope allowed to groups in the distribution of tasks and in the selection of the group leader.

[49] Vendramin, *Le Travail au singulier*; Jérôme Cihuelo, "Le quotidien du projet", in Guy Minguet and Christian Thuderoz, *Travail, entreprise et société* (Paris: PUF, 2005), pp. 143–160.

[50] Vincent de Gaulejac, *La Société malade de la gestion* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2005); Nicole Aubert and Vincent de Gaulejac, *Le Coût de l'excellence* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1991); Danièle Linhart, ed., *Pourquoi travaillons-nous?* (Paris: Érès, 2008); Marie-Anne Dujarier, *L'Idéal au travail* (Paris: PUF, 2006).

[51] Vincent de Gaulejac, *Les Raisons de la colère* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2011).

be taken for a passive individual, a drag on change. While autonomy does make a positive impact on the experience of work, the effect is counter-balanced by an excessive load and pace of work.[52]

Overinvestment in work is increasingly common. It is associated with the desire for positive evaluations and career advancement, and also the fear of being seen as the weak link in the chain, ineffective or disengaged. Autonomous work is judged not on time put in but on results, and more specifically on success in attaining the goals set under the new system of management by objectives. This raises the problem of measuring workload and more generally of the definition and role of "working time".[53] Working time is increasingly dispersed and irregular, and ever more difficult to measure. It includes not only time at the place of work, but also hours on call, more frequent travel, work done at home or at a client's, more flexible hours. For middle managers and others holding special responsibilities, there may be a plethora of seminars, company retreats, conferences and meetings far from home. However, the problem of workload and the measurement of working time extend beyond management and may affect employees at all levels. Increasingly dense, working time thus comes to invades non-working time. New communications technologies have enabled the establishment of direct and uninterrupted links between the employee and the firm. According to the Eurofound survey of 2010, 16 % of Europeans worked at least once a week in their free time to meet the demands of work, with great variation by occupational category. Across Europe as a whole, 31 % of high-skilled white-collar workers did so: 34 % in France, 38 % in Germany, 33 % in Belgium, 29 % in Hungary, 24 % in Portugal.[54] The growth of informal teleworking—work done in part away from the workplace without formal agreement between employer and employee—often brings an increase in hours worked, the hours of such work not replacing but supplementing the hours formally worked.[55]

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[52] Peter Boxall and Keith Macky, "High-Involvement Work Processes, Work Intensification and Employee Well-Being", *Work Employment & Society* 28:6 (December 2014) pp. 963–984.

[53] For France, see Bruno Mettling, *Transformation numérique et vie au travail*, report submitted to the Minister of Labour, Paris, September 2015.

[54] Eurofound, EWCS 2010.

[55] Laurent Taskin and Patricia Vendramin, *Le Télétravail, une vague silencieuse* (Louvain-la-Neuve: PUL, 2004).

As well as their time, employees are supposed to put all of themselves into their work, not just their technical skills but their creativity, their feelings, their capacity for friendship and so on. Yet there are no guarantees that their personal integrity will be respected or that they will obtain a fair return on their investment, as French employees report in a survey devoted to the issue of recognition, which looked in some detail at this question.[56] Pierre Veltz sees contemporary management as "the art of prescribing subjectivity", bringing with it a risk of overexposure.[57] "When it is no longer possible to define tasks objectively, performance is no longer measured in terms of them. The focus is directly on the individual. Hence the excessive over-investment in work of certain employees, of middle-managers in particular."[58]

As for supervision and control, though it may take longer hierarchical form, it has by no means disappeared. Self-supervision comes with monitoring by objectives or by customer satisfaction index, and with the batteries of quantitative and qualitative indices afforded by computerisation.[59] Monitoring and assessment put employees into competition, as teams or as individuals, in which the worst performers are eliminated. "If new forms of work organisation allow some to achieve excellence and so find themselves valued, they almost as inevitably lead to the disqualification of those employees least capable of meeting the challenge."[60]

In an increasingly competitive environment, all employees become extremely attentive to the recognition of their work and skills by colleagues and management—it is their status in the firm and in the world of work more generally that is at stake.[61] The SPReW study shows that this expectation of recognition is fundamental, and shared by all age groups, but is a particular issue for the young, who feel unrecognised,

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[56] Maëlezig Bigi, Olivier Cousin, Laetitia Sibaud, Dominique Méda and Michel Wieviorka, *Travailler au XXIème siècle. Des salariés en quête de reconnaissance* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2015).

[57] Pierre Veltz, "La nouvelle révolution industrielle", *Revue du Mauss* 18 (2001), pp. 67–71.

[58] Linhart, ed., *Pourquoi travaillons-nous?*

[59] Patricia Vendramin, "Les TIC, complices de l'intensification du travail", in Philippe Askenazy, Damien Cartron, Frédéric de Coninck and Michel Gollac, eds, *Organisation et intensité du travail* (Paris: Octares, 2006), pp. 129–136.

[60] Paugam, *Le salarié de la précarité*, p. 26.

[61] Bigi, Cousin, Sibaud, Méda and Wieviorka, *Travailler au XXIème siècle*.

despite being better qualified on average, and the old, who feel that their experience is devalued.

4.2.2 Growing Psychosocial Risks

If technological change has brought the elimination of many of work's physical demands and the NFWO have, despite everything, enabled new ways of working bearing the promise of self-fulfilment, they have both also been the occasion for new hardships. Stress, burn-out, health problems and suicide are all manifestations of a growing malaise in the world of work.

Concern over psychosocial problems is not new, going back to the first studies of stress and burn-out. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, however, these phenomena were approached from a psychologising, individual point of view, and the strategies adopted aimed to provide workers with the mental tools to deal with stress-generating situations. Nurses were thus trained to maintain a distance from the sufferings of their patients, managers trained or coached to avoid overinvestment in their work. The organisational and social dimensions of the problem received very little attention, and explanatory factors and hence strategies of prevention were essentially individual in register. In the late 1970s, the work of Robert Karasek marked a turning-point, introducing the organisation of work as a factor in understanding the health effects of occupational stress.[62] His well-known typology of work situations characterises these in terms of the margin of autonomy ("job decision latitude") granted to the worker on the one hand, and the difficulty of the tasks and the scale of the workload on the other; the most stressful situations were those combining little control and high demand. Later, with Töres Theorell, Karasek introduced the positive role of social support (from colleagues and/or management) in moderating the effects of stress on health.[63] The positive contribution of work-group support and social relationships

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[62] Robert A. Karasek, "Job Demands, Job Decision Latitude, and Mental Strain: Implications for Job Redesign", *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24:2 (1979), pp. 285–308.

[63] Robert A. Karasek and Töres Theorell, *Healthy Work: Stress, Productivity, and the Reconstruction of Working Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

more generally to the capacity to deal with difficult situations was recognised. Following this, other studies highlighting inequalities in the incidence of stress as between occupations and positions in the hierarchy demonstrated the usefulness of an organisational approach to the harmful effects of stress. Going beyond medicalising and individualising approaches made it possible to consider the effects of group dynamics and organisational factors, among them the intensification of work, the introduction of interemployee competition, emotional demands, lack of recognition, absence of social support, loss of meaning, continuous evaluation, the demands on subjectivity, tensions with private life and conflict of values.[64]

The Eurofound surveys on working conditions in Europe provide a number of indicators that enable consideration of the link between certain symptoms (among them sleeping problems, overall fatigue, anxiety and stress) and occupational or organisational characteristics. According to EWCS 2010, a little more than 35 % of European employees suffered from overall fatigue in the 12 months preceding the survey, 18 % from insomnia or sleeping problems, and 8.5 % depression or anxiety. More women than men experienced overall fatigue (39 % as against 32 %), and insomnia or sleeping problems (21 % as against 16 %). A considerable proportion of European employees also reports having experienced stress at work: nearly 10 % saying "always", 17 % "most of the time", 40.5 % "sometimes", a little more than 18 % "rarely", and 15 % "never". More than one employee in four thus report being regularly subject to stress at work. Exposure to stress varies with occupation. If it is common in management (36 %), it is also frequent among professionals and teachers,[65] (30 %), plant and machine operators and assemblers (30 %), and associate professionals and technicians[66] (29 %).

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[64] Marie Buscatto, Marc Loriol and Jean-Marc Weller, eds, *Au-delà du stress au travail* (Paris: Érès, 2008); Marc Loriol, "Pourquoi tout ce stress?", *Sociologie du travail* 53:1 (2011), pp. 3–36.

[65] This includes professionals in science and engineering; health; teaching; business and administration; information and communications technology; legal, social and cultural.

[66] This includes associate professionals in accounting, finance, property and business services, arts and leisure; sports coaches, officials and instructors; social workers, customs inspectors, tax officers and police officers; administrative and specialised secretaries; technicians in industry, science, transport; supervisors and controllers; media and ICT technicians; medical and paramedical assistants and technicians, nurses and midwives, health workers and inspectors.

Differences between countries are also considerable: France has the highest figures for the three symptoms (depression or anxiety, overall fatigue, insomnia and sleeping problems). Belgium, Germany and Italy stand fairly close, while Hungary and Portugal are notable for high levels of overall fatigue, though lower than in France. In terms of regular exposure to stress at work, of all six countries the figure is lowest in Germany (12 %) and highest in Hungary (40.5 %). In the four other countries of the SPReW study (Belgium, France, Italy and Portugal) the percentage varies between 26 and 28 %. The UK and Sweden find themselves in the same range with 25 % and 26 %, while Denmark lines up with Germany at 12 %.

The EWCS 2010 survey also makes it very clear that not having enough time to get the job done is one of the most important stress factors: 57 % of European employees who say that they "never" or "rarely" have enough time also report regularly experiencing stress at work, while only 20 % of those who have enough time do so. Regular experience of stress is also more common when employees faced substantial restructuring or reorganisation of work in the previous three years, and this is also true of those who saw new processes or technologies introduced, and of those who felt insecure in their jobs, those saying they might lose their jobs in the next six months more frequently saying they experienced stress at work.

While work is not the only variable that goes to explaining individual situations, there is a great deal of empirical evidence from research in different disciplines to show that there is a strong correlation between situation at work and various expressions of physical or psychological distress; and there is too Francis Green's paradox of work that ought in principle to afford greater satisfaction yet fails to do so.[67]

The conflict between NFWO and individuals' expectations of work also lies behind the emergence of a new concept, that of suffering at work, popularised by Christophe Dejours in the 1980s.[68] Suffering in this sense is not the same as stress, being more generic; it designates a feel-

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[67] Francis Green, *Demanding Work: The Paradox of Job Quality in the Affluent Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[68] Christophe Dejours, *Travail, usure mentale* (Paris: Bayard, 1980).

ing about work, an affective state.[69] Suffering is the inability to do the job and continuing failure when all available resources have been mobilised. This incapacity may be connected to personal limitations or to a work environment that prevents doing a good job and taking pleasure from it. For Yves Clot, suffering at work is the outcome of "blocked psychic activity", work unsuccessful and unrecognised, which intrudes upon the mind out of working hours.[70] The ultimate expression of suffering is suicide. Since the mid-1990s, the question of the link between work and suicide has sporadically been taken up by the French media, reacting to spates of such unhappy events in a particular company (Renault, France Telecom) or sector (the police). To raise the question of the link is also to raise the question of responsibility.[71]

In her analyses of the relationships between flexibility, precarity and workers' health, Anne Thébaud-Mony has drawn attention to the public costs of NFWO:

> In the name of productivity, firms have been authorised to manage human resources in such a way as to make men and women work to the limits of their physical and psychological capacity, to employ only workers in the best of health, and to take no responsibility for the consequences of these systems of management, either in terms of the human and financial costs of unemployment or for the medical care and economic support of the occupationally handicapped, excluded from the jobs market.[72]

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[69] Pascale Molinier, "Les approches cliniques du travail, un débat en souffrance", *Sociologie du travail* 53:1 (January–March 2011), pp. 3–36, and "Nouvelles approches des maux du travail", *La Vie des idées*, September 2009; Michel Gollac, "Quelques raisons de se plaindre", *Sociologie du travail* 53:1 (January–March 2011), pp. 3–36.

[70] Yves Clot, *Travail et pouvoir d'agir* (Paris: PUF, 2008). See also the interviews with Yves Clot and Christophe Dejours in *Sciences humaines* 242 (November 2012).

[71] Thomas Périlleux and John Cultiaux, *Destins politiques de la souffrance* (Paris: Érès, 2009); Blandine Barlet and Pascal Marichalar, "Suicide", in Bevort, Jobert, Lallement and Mias, eds, *Dictionnaire du travail*, pp. 744–750.

[72] Annie Thébaud-Mony, "L'impact de la précarité et de la flexibilité sur la santé des travailleurs", *Bulletin d'information du Bureau technique syndical européen pour la santé and la sécurité*, 15–16 February 2001, special issue on "Le travail sans limites? Réorganiser le travail et repenser la santé des travailleurs", p. 22. See also Annie Thébaud-Mony, Philippe Davezies, Laurent Vogel and Serge Volkoff, eds, *Les risques du travail. Pour ne pas perdre sa vie à la gagner* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015).

4.3   The Transformation of Skill

It isn't only the way that work is organised that has changed, or the way the individual employee is considered within that mode of organisation; there has been a profound change too in the nature of the work that is done and of the skills that it calls for.[73] Over the last 20 years, the idea of skill has become increasingly personalised, with the growing importance of the notion of social skills. This development represents a challenge to the importance of experience gained through work and to its status in relation to the knowledge acquired through education—a theme frequently evoked in the interviews carried out in the six countries studied for the SPReW project.

4.3.1   Skills in Question

Occupational skill was once a matter of the capacity to carry out operations, whether manual or intellectual. The terms used to describe workers often made explicit reference to their tasks, and one spoke of electricians, accountants, fitters, typists and so on. One spoke of occupations, rather than positions. Skill was also closely connected to a classification of posts essentially intended as a basis for the pay hierarchy.[74] A new tendency emerged when the introduction of IT came to make itself felt in changes to the work environment of most white-collar and blue-collar workers, with the notion of skill gradually detaching itself from operational tasks and becoming more abstract. It became connected to the handling of abstract information (codes, signals, procedures), to the capacity to understand and manage complex situations, and to the ability to communicate. The notion of occupation was gradually abandoned in favour of that of position, which in turn slowly gave way to that of role. Rather than instancing a merely terminological slippage, this reflects profound

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[73] Jean-Daniel Reynaud, "Le management par les compétences: un essai d'analyse", *Sociologie du travail* 43:1 (January–March 2001), pp. 7–31; Vendramin and Valenduc, *L'Avenir du travail*.

[74] Mateo Alaluf, *Le Temps du labeur* (Brussels: Presses de l'ULB, 1986); Michèle Tallard, "Conventions collectives and qualifications", in Dominique Méda and Francis Vennat, eds, *Le Travail non qualifié* (Paris, La Découverte, 2004), pp. 41–54.

changes in ways of defining and evaluating the knowledge and the aptitudes required for a job.[75]

The tendency became widespread because technical advances made it possible to automate the majority of materially oriented, purely operational tasks: fabrication, assembly, control, data input, calculation and verification.[76] ICTs are now beginning to take over the immaterial activities that are central to human intervention in the process of production: reacting, interpreting, evaluating, communicating, planning, deciding and creating. Today, occupational skill is increasingly reduced to its "immaterial" aspect: the capacity for abstraction, responsiveness to events, the ability to make diagnoses, to deal with uncertainty, to use ICTs as a medium of communication. It was in the mid-1980s that the notion of competence first made its appearance in the workplace,[77] initially as a "principle of human resource management" that effected a shift from the evaluation and management of the workforce in terms of "physical" aptitudes, the ability to carry out operational tasks (dexterity, speed of execution, etc.) to an evaluation based on "demand on the intelligence". In an administrative job, for instance, organisational ability, self-motivation and interpersonal skills became more important than input speed or keystrokes per second. The change also reflected a desire to escape an approach to occupational status that saw each group as a homogeneous set. The idea was that in a changing economy a rigid approach to occupational status left too little room for flexibility, adaptability and the use of intelligence and initiative. This change in human resource management found concrete expression in new recruitment practices, new demands for intrafirm mobility, a new insistence on employee self-responsibility, and a challenge to traditional systems of classification and remuneration.[78] It thus did away with the seniority principle in career advancement, making the

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[75] Patricia Vendramin and Gérard Valenduc, "Les impacts de l'informatique sur les métiers et les compétences", in Jacky Akoka and Isabelle Comyn-Wattiau, eds, *Encyclopédie de l'informatique and des systèmes d'information* (Paris: Vuibert, 2006), pp. 1612–1616; Philippe Zarifian, *Objectif compétence: pour une nouvelle logique* (Paris: Liaisons, 1999), and *Compétences et stratégies d'entreprises* (Paris: Liaisons, 2005).

[76] Vendramin and Valenduc, "Les impacts de l'informatique".

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.; Yann Moulier-Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, trans. Ed Emery (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012).

recognition of competences all the more crucial. The SPReW research shows that in the six countries investigated, these issues can give rise to intergenerational tensions when one age group (the old) feels unrecognised or stigmatised and goes on to blame this on another age group (the young) whose formal knowledge, acquired in the course of education, is better recognised and valued.

These transformations were accompanied by a considerable increase in the educational capital of the young. In Europe, the proportion of the young gaining a degree rose significantly, and the percentage of those who do not has fallen with every succeeding generation (Tables 4.4 and 4.5).

Young women, for their part, enjoy an advantage over their male counterparts in terms of education. In most countries of Europe, they are significantly more likely than young men to have a degree (Table 4.6). However, the data on unemployment and non-standard employment show that they continue to suffer unfavourable treatment in most countries. Their situation is contrary to the wishes expressed by the young graduate women interviewed in the six countries studied, who have high

Table 4.4 Change in educational attainment of 25–34-year-olds, 2000 to 2014 (in %)

	Isced 0–2		Isced 3–4		Isced 5–8	
	2014	Difference as compared to 2000, in % points	2014	Difference as compared to 2000, in % points	2014	Difference as compared to 2000, in % points
EU-28	16.9	−8.8*	45.9	−5.5	37.2	+14.3*
EU-15	18.6	−10.8	43.7	−1.6	37.7	+12.4
Germany	12.7	−2.7	58.9	−3.2	28.4	+6.0
Belgium	17.7	−7.0	38.0	−1.4	44.2	+8.2
Denmark	17.6	+2.8	39.6	−16.7	42.7	+13.8
Spain	34.4	−10.1	24.1	+2.5	41.5	+7.6
France	13.8	−9.8	41.9	−3.1	44.3	+12.9
Hungary	13	−5.9	54.9	−11.7	32.1	+17.5
Italy	26.2	−14.5	49.7	−1.0	24.2	+13.6
Netherlands	14.8	−10.0	40.9	−7.6	44.3	+17.4
Portugal	35.3	−32.8	33.2	−14.3	31.4	+18.4
UK	14.9	−16.3	37.3	−1.9	45.8	+14.3
Sweden	12.7	−0.1	41.2	−12.9	46.0	+12.9

*EU-27 data for 2000
Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

Table 4.5 Percentage of labour force with higher education (Isced 5–8), 2014 (in %)

	45–64 yrs	25–34 yrs	Difference of young over old in % points
EU-28	23.4	37.2	+13.8*
EU-15	25.2	37.7	+12.5
Germany	25.9	28.4	+2.5
Belgium	30.7	44.2	+13.5
Denmark	30.9	42.7	+11.8
Spain	26.3	41.5	+15.2
France	23.9	44.3	+20.4
Hungary	18.5	32.1	+17.6
Italy	12.6	24.2	+11.6
Netherlands	28.6	44.3	+15.7
Portugal	14.9	31.4	+16.5
UK	35.1	45.8	+10.7
Sweden	31.1	46.0	+14.9

*EU-27 data for 2000
Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

Table 4.6 Percentage of labour force with higher education (Isced 5–8), age 25–34, 2014

	Women	Men	Difference in favour of women over men
EU-28	42.0	32.5	+9.5
EU-15	41.8	33.6	+8.2
Belgium	51.4	37.1	+14.1
Germany	28.9	28.0	+0.9
France	48.4	40.0	+8.4
Italy	29.8	18.6	+11.2
Hungary	38.3	26.1	+12.2
Portugal	39.0	23.5	+15.5
Denmark	50.6	35.2	+15.4
Spain	47.5	35.4	+12.1
UK	48.8	42.9	+5.9
Netherlands	48.7	39.9	+8.8
Sweden	53.6	38.8	−14.8

Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

expectations of work and who are attached to a vision of life that would allow them both a personal and family life on the one hand and a fully engaged working life on the other.

Generally speaking, we find ourselves in a historical situation in which the younger generation is significantly more highly qualified than its elders. Yet this educational advantage has not found recognition on

the labour market, and has not led to advancement as it did for earlier generations.

Together with the transformation in the understanding of skill, the growth in the number of graduates and the rise in average levels of education have contributed to the emergence of a new way of defining, evaluating and recognising "occupational abilities"—the competence approach—and the displacement of skill by competence brings a new focus on the individual as such.[79] Yet this distinction between skill and competence deserves some consideration.[80] Skill (as trade or craft) is normally defined in terms of the job. That is, a worker is considered skilled if he or she holds a skilled job, no matter their education or their personal capacities. The attribution of skill in this sense is the process by which the employer recognises and remunerates the abilities of the worker recruited. It is an element of what is called the "contractual relation" or the "employment relation", but also more than this. The recognition of a job as skilled depends on technology, collective labour relations, task organisation and human resource management. A job is the more highly skilled the greater or more extensive the abilities it calls for.

Competence, on the other hand, is not defined in terms of the job; it is a notion that applies only to persons. Competences are related to workers' education, training and experience, and also their personal aptitudes. Despite their apparently highly individual character, however, training, experience and aptitude also have a collective aspect, as they are developed through teamwork, in cooperation and communication with others. The SPReW research shows that young recruits' professionalism can be greatly encouraged by good relationships with experienced elders, who in turn gain recognition for their experience. These exchanges enable the acquisition of knowledge and information beyond what individual

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[79] Catherine Paradeise and Yves Lichtenberger, "Compétences, compétences, compétences", *Sociologie du travail* 43:1 (2001), pp. 33–48; Michel Lallement, *Le Travail, une sociologie contemporaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007); José Rose, "Travail sans qualité ou travail réputé non qualifié?", in Méda and Vennat, eds, *Le Travail non qualifié*, pp. 227–241; José Rose, *Qu'est-ce que le travail non qualifié?* (Paris: La Dispute, 2012).

[80] Yves Lichtenberger, "L'emploi des jeunes", in Pierre Boisard, Daniel Cohen, Mireille Elbaum, Jean-Louis Laville, Dominique Méda et al., *Le Travail, quel avenir?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

learning or trial and error might bring. Yet such exchanges are possible only within an organisational framework that allows and promotes them, preferably through formal arrangements (tutoring, mentoring, allocation of time).[81] Competences always involve a mixture of formal knowledge, which can be more or less objectively described, and implicit or tacit knowledge deriving from the complex interaction between the individual's knowledge, experience and aptitudes.

If competence is displacing skill, it is because some of the foundations of the notion of skill as trade or craft have been undermined by the development of new technologies and new organisational models. With the growth of distance and mobile working, the very idea of a position as work station has been put into question. And where the work station does still exist—in the form of an office computer, for example—it is defined not by its material but its immaterial characteristics: software, networks and so on. Given rapidly changing work stations, work stations whose requirements in terms of skill content are shifting or ill-defined, employers are looking for the competences that to a certain extent assure an ability to adapt to them.

Concepts such as social competence, or social or interpersonal skills, are now mobilised in recruitment practices and feature in the policy literature on training and employment. Social skills were not ignored before, but were a desideratum only for middle and senior management. Today, they are expected of all workers, at all levels.[82] But these expectations in terms of soft skills are bringing with them new forms of polarisation at work, notably between men and women. If the rise of soft skills has promoted the recognition of skills traditionally regarded as feminine, it seems not to have done anything to raise their value.[83]

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[81] Béatrice Delay, Dominique Méda and Marie-Christine Bureau, "How Do Socio-Organisational Systems Support Competition or Synergies Between Age Groups?", in Patricia Vendramin, ed., *Generations at Work and Social Cohesion in Europe* (Brussels: PIE-Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 129–159.

[82] Jim Hillage, Jo Regan, Jenny Dickson and Kirsten McLoughlin, "Employers Skill Survey 2002", UK Department for Education and Skills, Research Report 372.

[83] Irena Grugulis and Steven Vincent, "Whose Skill Is It Anyway? 'Soft' Skills and Polarization", *Work Employment & Society* 23:4 (December 2009), pp. 597–615.

4.3.2 Competence and Employability

The advent of competence was accompanied by that of the idea of employability,[84] which insidiously displaced that of secure employment. Where once the possession of the right skills ensured security of employment, today it is the competence portfolio that underwrites employability, although the slippage has helped undermine the frameworks for the recognition and valorisation of employee knowledge. The SPReW study shows in fact that while the experience of the old is valorised in theory it is eclipsed in practice by the young's supposed competence in innovation and creativity.[85]

Employability is a portmanteau concept that arrived in France from the USA at a time of high unemployment and became embedded in labour management practice in both private and public sectors.[86] For the worker, maintaining employability involves a commitment to constant learning, adapting and updating competencies to the ever-changing needs of the job and of the labour market more generally. A firm is then taken to offer a certain form of security when, though unable to rule out redundancy or promise a career, it does not destroy but rather develops the employability of its staff. However, there are few if any formal methods for evaluating employability or determining that it has improved rather than deteriorated.

Learning and "learning to learn" are the supposed keys to employability, allowing the worker to ride the swirls and eddies of growing competition and ever faster innovation. Employers thus need no longer guarantee their workers a job but only ensure that they remain employable by offering them opportunities for training or retraining, outplacement services or support in becoming self-employed. According to EWCS 2010, 37 % of

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[84] Bernard Gazier, ed., *Employability: Concepts and Policies*, a report prepared for DG V of the European Commission by the Institute for Applied Socio-Economics, Berlin, 1999.

[85] Ana Margarida Passos, Paula Castro, Sandra Carvalho and Celia Soares, "Self, Work and Career in a Changing Environment: A Portuguese Perspective", in Vendramin, ed., *Generations at Work*.

[86] Bernard Gazier, "L'employabilité", in José Allouche, ed., *Encyclopédie des ressources humaines* (Paris: Vuibert, 2003), pp. 418–427; Thomas Périlleux, "Se rendre désirable. L'employabilité dans l'État social actif et l'idéologie managériale", in Pascale Vielle, Philippe Pochet and Isabelle Cassiers, eds, *L'état social actif: Vers un changement de paradigme* (Brussels: Presses Inter-universitaires Européenes/Peter Lang, 2005).

European employees said they had undergone training paid for or provided by their employer in the previous 12 months. The figures for Belgium and Germany are a little higher than the average, while France has the lowest percentage among the six countries under particular consideration here, with only 26 % of employees reporting such training. Hungary and Italy do a little better than France with roughly 29 %, while the figure for Portugal is 33 %. There are large differences by occupation, but not much difference by age. In the UK, 49 % of employees received training paid for or provided by their employer, 50 % in Sweden, 45 % in Denmark.

It is not rare to see employability defined by its contrary, non-employability or unemployability, meaning unemployment. According to this conception, workers with a job are unemployed because they are no longer employable, because they are inadequately trained, or their skills are obsolete, or they are insufficiently flexible. From the employers' point of view, employability is associated with flexibility. They want a well-trained employee who can be deployed in different roles within the organisation. For employees, it represents a kind of security in insecurity: the possibility that they might be offered other jobs or retrained for other roles. Research shows, however, that employability skills do not always correlate with finding employment.[87]

Educators and trades unions remain sceptical. One criticism of the approach is that employability is impossible to define objectively, depending always on context. It is said to be no more than an expression of the relation between a person's qualifications in a given situation, at a given moment, and the state of the labour market at the same time.[88] More and more training is in itself no guarantee of a job. Employability, for employees, is not a verifiable concept, given that many closures, redundancies or relocations are financially rather than economically motivated. Such restructurings consign workers to unemployability, though a moment before they were competent and employable, a phenomenon that Linhart calls "programmed exclusion".[89]

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[87] Nick Wilton, "Do Employability Skills Really Matter in the UK Graduate Labour Market? The Case of Business and Management Graduates", *Work Employment & Society* 25:1 (March 2011), pp. 85–100.

[88] Lichtenberger, "L'emploi des jeunes".

[89] Danièle Linhart, *Perte d'emploi, perte de soi* (Paris: Érès, 2003).

This change in approach to occupational abilities shifts the emphasis onto the individual rather than the group and promotes the mobilisation of personal skills. This switch of perspective has contributed to the recognition of "the human factor at work", central to people's expectations of personal engagement and personal recognition at work. Yet this mobilisation of the subjective can also increase their vulnerability, as when the competencies and knowledges acquired are suddenly declared to be obsolete, or discontinuity in the path to occupational integration does not allow the accumulation of experience that makes for professionalism, or when competence is disregarded simply on account of youth, a disillusioning experience reported by a number of young people interviewed in the course of the SPReW research.[90] The move from skills to competence also increases the relative importance of tacit knowledges picked up on the job, acquired in employment and in working with others. Formal and informal arrangements for the transmission of knowledge are necessary for the development of competencies, but if they are to be effective they require organisational support and a context that truly recognises the value of experience; these issues too were frequently raised in the SPReW interviews.

4.4   The Rise of Virtual Working

The transformation of work has also been driven by a technological revolution said to be underpinning a new, digital economy.[91] The latter has become the subject of public debate, given the devastating effects on employment that some researchers say it will have. This began with a study by economist Benedikt Frey and engineer Michael Osborne which assesses the likelihood of different occupations being automated, their

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[90] Delay, Méda and Bureau, "How Do Socio-Organisational Systems Support Competition?"

[91] Ursula Holtgrewe, "New 'New Technologies': The Future and the Present of Work in Information and Communication Technology", *New Technology, Work and Employment* 29:1 (2014), pp. 9–24; Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, *Race Against the Machine: How the Digital Revolution is Accelerating Innovation, Driving Productivity, and Irreversibly Transforming Employment and the Economy* (Lexington, MA: Digital Frontier Press, 2011); Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, *The Second Machine Age* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

conclusions for the USA being that nearly one job in two (47 %) is under threat in the medium term, not all of them involving unskilled and repetitive work.[92] Following this paper, extrapolations have been made for Europe, leading many countries to very similar conclusions.[93] Yet these alarmist predictions regarding employment are not unanimously accepted; it has been suggested, for example, that they are the result of bedazzlement by the forecasts of engineers.[94] The experience of the past also teaches that the relationship between technology and employment is complex and frequently misunderstood, as a result of the neglect of a number of decisive parameters.[95] Failure to take account of the diversity of organisational changes in firms and the complexity of the process of innovation diffusion is, in fact, one of the weaknesses of Frey and Osborne's study.[96] Nonetheless, if the forecasts for employment are disputed, as are those regarding the effects of automation on the polarisation of the labour market,[97] there is much greater agreement on the consequences for work.[98]

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[92] Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael A. Osborne, "The Future of Employment: How Susceptible are Jobs to Computerisation?", Oxford Martin School Working Paper, September 2013, downloadable at http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The_Future_of_Employment.pdf

[93] At the time of writing (Spring 2016) one could find on the BBC's website an interactive module allowing one to calculate the chances of one's job being replaced by a robot in the next 15–20 years: http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-34066941

[94] Lilly Irani, "Justice for Data Janitors", Public Books, 15 January 2015, downloadable at http://www.publicbooks.org/nonfiction/justice-for-data-janitors

[95] Robert Brainard and Kym Fullgrabe, "Technology and Employment", *Science, Technology and Industry Review* 1 (Fall 1986); Universität Siegen, Corvinus University of Budapest, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Twente, World Research Centre (Ireland), *Study on the Social Impact of ICT*, report to European Commission (SMART 2007/0068), 2010; Jean-Louis Missika, Olivier Pastré, Dominique Meyer, Jean-Louis Truel, Robert Zarader et al., *Informatisation et emploi, menace ou mutation?* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1981); Luc Soete, ed., *Technology, Productivity and Job Creation—Analytical Report* (Paris: OECD, 1996); Ian Stewart, Debapratim De and Alex Cole, "Technology and People: The Great Job-Creating Machine", report published by Deloitte LLP, 2015, downloadable at http://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/finance/deloitte-uk-technology-and-people.pdf; Georg Graetz and Guy Michaels, "Robots at Work" (CEP Discussion Paper No 1335, London School of Economics, March 2015).

[96] Frey and Osborne, *The Future of Employment*.

[97] David H. Autor and David Dorn, "The Growth of Low Skill Service Jobs and the Polarisation of the US Labor Market", *American Economic Review* 103:5 (2013), pp. 1553–1597.

[98] Ursula Huws, "Working Online, Living Offline: Labour in the Internet age", *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation* 7:1 (2013), pp. 1–11; World Economic Forum, *The Future of Jobs: Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution*, 2016; UK Commission

In discussing the particularities of work in a digital economy, various authors employ the concept of virtual working,[99] a generic term for every kind of work done using the internet, computers or other information technology, whether at home, in public spaces or anywhere but the traditional workplace. New forms of employment are associated with the expansion of these more or less new forms of work, new contractual forms emerging in response to the role of technology and of non-conventional places of work.

On the basis of a "mapping exercise" covering 27 countries, Eurofound researchers identified nine new types of employment[100]: employee sharing and job sharing; interim management; voucher-based work; casual work; ICT based, mobile work; portfolio work and crowd employment; collaborative self-employment. These new forms of employment are plotted against two axes, one corresponding to the type of work relationship (between the worker and the employer or client), the other to the work pattern (the way in which work is conducted).

Some of these forms of employment emerged around the turn of the millennium, while others existed already but have since become more common. There are three types of employment situation that seem to be particularly associated in the development of the digital economy: digital nomadism, crowd working and a certain kind of casual work. The discussion that follows looks at terms of employment and conditions of work that obtain under each of these increasingly prevalent forms of employment,[101] relying in great part on the findings of the Eurofound case studies.[102]

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for Employment and Skills, "The Future of Work: Jobs and Skills in 2030", Evidence Report, February 2014.

[99] See in particular the publications of the Dynamics of Virtual Work network, "an international interdisciplinary research network on the transformation of work in the Internet Age": http://dynamicsofvirtualwork.com

[100] Eurofound, *New Forms of Employment* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015).

[101] This section is based on Gérard Valenduc and Patricia Vendramin, "Work in the Digital Economy: Sorting the Old from the New" (European Trade Union Institute Working Paper 2016.04).

[102] Eurofound, *New Forms of Employment*.

4.4.1 Digital Nomadism

Making regular use of computer, internet and e-mail for their work, digital nomads—who may be employed or self-employed—do not for the most part work either at an employer's premises or at their own homes. Their work calls for the use of ICTs, for access to shared information networks, but not the use of a fixed workplace, and their work activity is carried out away from employer or customer premises. Informal arrangements are frequent and employment status is often idiosyncratic in relation to the norms of statutory provision, collective agreement or customary free-lancing. According to the EWCS data, while 7 % of EU workers put in more than a quarter of working hours elsewhere that at their main place of work in 2005, this figure had risen to 24 % by 2010.[103]

Nomadic virtual working has certain preconditions, one being the very suitability of the job and its tasks, for not all kinds of work activity can be carried out online at a distance. Digital nomadism also calls for a distinctive work culture based on trust and the existence of such technical support as is required for effective working. It was in the late 2000s that digital nomadism first developed significantly. It is not distinctive of any particular sector, size of firm or organisational structure. It is however more frequently found in the ICT, engineering (automobile, aviation, construction) and health sectors and in decentralised industrial production. Employer interest is often related to questions of work organisation and job attractiveness. They want to implement flexible and innovative forms of work organisation, attract skilled staff and burnish the brand image; but they also want to reduce costs and increase productivity. Workers' motivations are different: they are looking for flexibility and work-life balance.

This type of working is very much associated with young men—highly skilled knowledge and management workers employed full-time on permanent contracts. This form of work is in fact a variety of teleworking without a fixed "elsewhere".

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[103] Agnès Parent-Thirion, Greet Vermeylen, Gijs van Houten, Maija Lyly-Yrjänäinen, Isabella Biletta et al., *Fifth European Working Conditions Survey: Overview Report* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012).

The impact on working conditions is mixed, positive in certain respects but negative in others. On the good side, it offers considerable flexibility and autonomy, an increase in personal efficacy, access to ICT skills and improvements in processes of communication and collaboration. The disadvantages are more or less those associated with teleworking in general: results-based remuneration, sophisticated systems of monitoring and control, information overload, social isolation, an emphasis on self-organisation, the blurring of boundaries between work and private life, the potential for conflict arising from failures of coordination, the danger of 24-hour availability and the off-loading of employer responsibilities.

Effects on the labour market are also mixed. Potential transformations in the organisation of work might have positive consequences for the organisation as a whole, but also have its disadvantages. Digital nomads often report high levels of work satisfaction, notably in relation to the high degree of autonomy they enjoy. This form of work might also contribute to the development of more inclusive labour markets, in allowing a wider range of people to work, such as those who cannot put in regular hours at a fixed place of employment for reasons of health, mobility or availability. But it might likewise lead to the exclusion from the labour market of certain groups who would find more traditional forms of employment no longer available to them.

One of the chief topics of debate regarding this form of work is the health and social security situation of digital nomads.

4.4.2 Crowd Working

"Crowdsourcing" or "crowd working" refers to work organised through online platforms that offer organisations or individuals access to an undefined and unknown pool of other organisations and individuals for the purpose of solving specific problems or obtaining specific products or services, in exchange for payment.[104] Such platforms are in a way marketplaces for "micro-jobs". Examples are PeoplePerHour, Clikworker and

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[104] Anne Green, Maria de Hoyos, Sally-Anne Barnes, Beate Baldauf and Heike Behle, *CrowdEmploy Crowdsourcing Case Studies: An Empirical Investigation into the Impact of Crowdsourcing on Employability* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013).

Amazon Mechanical Turk, which offer one-off jobs in such fields as web development and design, software development, data duplication, translation, audio-transcription, the location of items in photos or videos, the extraction of details from data, or the chance to enter design competitions (for a logo, for example) and so on.

In recent years, many tools have been created to organise relationships between firms and workers, relationships that are ambiguous in status, somewhere between employment and self-employment. New developments in the digital economy have given a boost to an older tendency to outsourcing with the replacement of employees with self-employed workers. This involves a growing range of activities: art and design, IT, writing, transport, tourism and all kinds of work related to Web, but also more "material" tasks, such as childcare, dog-walking.

Workers are varied in expertise, some highly skilled (IT specialists, creatives, etc.), others much less so. They are most often young, students, unemployed or carers looking to earn spare cash. Not so many are looking to find their principal employment in this way.

Crowdsourcing puts workers in competition with each other (including the qualified with the unqualified), in some cases quite explicitly, as in a logo-design competition. In such a case, only the winning entrant receives payment. The competition is less evident, but just as fierce, in sectors such as hotelery or transport, and the auction-type systems used on certain platforms exert a downward pressure on rates of pay.

The impact of crowdsourcing on working conditions is considerable, and on the whole negative rather than positive.[105] On the positive side, there is the great flexibility and autonomy, the increase in personal efficacy, the development of ICT skills and an improved work-life balance. On the other hand, it has brought a deterioration in fundamental aspects of work and employment status: in terms of earnings, rates are low, even very low, payment often uncertain, and there is no access to benefits. In terms of employment status, there is an absence of social insurance, asymmetry of information and no trustworthy system for the resolution

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[105] EU-OSHA, *"A Review of the Future of Work: Online Labour Exchanges or 'Crowdsourcing': Implications for Occupational Safety and Health"* (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work discussion paper, 2015).

of conflicts. The worker may also suffer from the tedium of simple, repetitive tasks, social isolation, the burden of self-organisation, the blurring of the boundary between work and private life and with it the possibility of harm to the latter.

At the level of the labour market, the champions of this form of working emphasise—in addition to income and mobility it promises—the wider availability of work opportunities it offers, notably to creatives and to those excluded from customary forms of employment, and also the creation of jobs supporting the platforms themselves. At present, however, the balance of consequences for the labour market tends towards the negative. Among the risks, one might point to the development of a market for tasks rather than for jobs and to the deterioration in work quality, but also, more importantly, to the evasion of employment standards.

While crowdsourcing platforms have to meet the requirements of civil and commercial law and consumer and data protection legislation, there exist no specific legislative frameworks governing crowd working. The worker is treated as self-employed and conditions (e.g. remuneration, conditions of work, intellectual property) are otherwise laid down by the platform's terms and conditions of use. Given this situation, certain authors have spoken of a "cybertariat" (a cyber-proletariat[106]) or "undifferentiated multitude"[107] in connection with this form of work and employment.

One way of looking at the recent exponential growth of online platforms in service delivery is to see it as a formalisation of the informal economy, with the transparency of an open market replacing the old word-of-mouth methods of finding work, and the replacement of unrecorded cash-in-hand payments by trackable online payments, opening up at least the possibility for taxes to be collected and fairness to prevail.[108]

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[106] Ursula Huws, *The Making of a Cybertariat: Virtual Work in a Real World* (New York: Monthly Review Press; London: Merlin Press, 2003).

[107] Nicolas Colin and Henri Verdier, *L'âge de la multitude – Entreprendre et gouverner après la révolution numérique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012).

[108] Ursula Huws, "Logged In: The New Economy Makes it Harder than Ever to Untangle Capitalism from Our Daily Lives", at www.jacobinmag.com/2016/01/huws-sharing-economy-crowdsource-precarity-uber-workers

It is difficult to estimate the scale of crowd working. One possibility might be to estimate the number of platforms and the number of workers per platform, but the exercise is hazardous in both cases, on the one hand because of the great and rapidly growing number of platforms, and on the other because a person's registration on a platform does signify that they are active. Furthermore, a single individual can be registered on several platforms. Given the very wide range of fields covered, it is equally impossible to estimate the volume of work done.[109]

4.4.3   Work-on-demand via Online Platforms

Work-on-demand involves a continuous employment relation but discontinuous work. The employer offers a contract of employment but does not undertake to provide regular work—a typical example might be the "zero-hours" contract. This type of contract is based on the principle of work-on-demand, that is, when required. The Eurofound report puts it in the same category as intermittent casual work, that is, work limited to an individual project or specific task (in the arts, for example) or a seasonally occurring job. Seasonal or intermittent work is not new, and is not in principle linked to the digital economy. On the other hand, the advent of online platforms has provided a new form of intermediation between the demand for work and the pool of workers seeking jobs to do.

The use of online platforms to organise work-on-demand makes it possible to geolocate both the demand for work, that is, the places where services are required, and its supply, that is, the geographical and temporal availability of workers registered with the platform. The combination of web platform, geolocation and mobile internet enables the real-time coordination of requirements and availabilities, considerably increasing the efficacy of the work-on-demand regime. Platforms have also been developed by firms for their own use, optimising the deployment of a casual workforce to meet the demands of just-in-case or just-in-time production.

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[109] EU-OSHA, "A Review of the Future of Work".

As regards work contracts, a number of different situations are to be found. The best known is the zero-hours contract, common in the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands, characterised by a fixed contractual relation without any guaranteed volume of work. In Ireland, however, employees under such a contract who work less than 25 % of their contractual hours of availability are entitled to compensation. In other countries, a minimum number of hours is laid down by law (generally between a quarter and a third of a normal working week), any work beyond this not being guaranteed. In yet other cases, the legislative framework provides for the setting of a minimum number of hours and a maximum not to be exceeded, as in the min/max contracts in the Netherlands, amounting to a form of flexible-volume part-time employment.[110]

While intermittent work is generally a matter of seasonal employment (in bars, hotels restaurants, retail, leisure and entertainment), work-on-demand occurs in sectors characterised by continuous but variable demand, such a domiciliary care, childcare, retail or out-of-school activities for children, such as the organisation of events. Workers of all skill levels may be involved, though the workforce as a whole tends to be young and mostly female.

In terms of working conditions, these jobs are characterised by very flexible working, great variability of pay and long hours on call. They offer little security, little opportunity for wage progression and little job satisfaction. They break the link between employment and regular hours, and subject everyday life to the unpredictability of employer demand. It is worth noting, perhaps, that some employers take advantage of this form of working to organise a kind of probationary period before engagement on a standard contract.

4.4.4   The Challenges of Virtual Working

It is undeniable that virtual working brings new opportunities: work opportunities for those excluded from employment, such as people with disabilities or problems of mobility, or people in developing economies. It also offers

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[110] Eurofound, *New Forms of Employment*.

consumers access to services at an affordable price and as and when they need it. It offers new flexibility in organising the relationship between life and work. It supports innovation, creativity and the creation of new services and new cultural products. But the price seems too high, and is certainly unequally shared. The development of these new forms of work raises questions of many different kinds. Its potential impact on the employment market and on the location of activities and of value creation is the subject of public and academic debate.[111] Working conditions offer some grounds for hope, but also occasion for fear, more particularly in regard to pay and collective regulation. New problems are emerging in the field of occupational health and safety, such as techno-stress, techno-dependence, the blurring of the work/life boundary, information overload, burn-out, long-term exposure to electromagnetic fields, postural problems[112] and also cyberbullying.[113]

The European Agency for Health and Safety at Work has compiled a long list of the risks to health and safety posed by crowdsourcing. The authors distinguish between the physical risks associated with online work (use of VDUs, ergonomics, stress, etc.) and those connected with the less visible offline work arranged via online platforms (e.g. taxi-driving, with its risk of aggressive customers). They also identify a long list of psychosocial risks that little can be done to prevent among isolated workers.

The nature of the work can also pose a major problem for worker wellbeing. Social platforms are based on the participation and production of their users, who supply the platforms with user-generated content, but behind the scenes an army of unknown, badly paid workers checks images, video, text and other media. They are continuously confronted with coarseness, violence, vulgarity, sadism, pornography and paedophilia, an experience not without effects on psychological health.[114] What

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[111] Christian Fuchs and Eran Fisher, eds, *Reconsidering Value and Labour in the Digital Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Sabine Pfeiffer, "Web, Value and Labour", *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation* 7:1 (2013), pp. 12–30.

[112] Jan Popma, "The Janus Face of the 'New Ways of Work': Rise, Risks and Regulation of Nomadic Work" (ETUI Working Paper 2013.07).

[113] Premilla D'Cruz and Ernesto Noronha, "The Interface Between Technology and Customer Cyberbullying: Evidence from India", *Information and Organization* 24 (2014), pp. 176–193.

[114] Irani, "Justice for Data Janitors"; Sarah Roberts, "Essential Practice, Hidden Labour: Understanding Commercial Content Moderation in a Globalized Context", paper given at the "Dynamics of Virtual Work" conference, Parnü, 16–18 September, 2015.

of the well-being of these hidden workers, said by some authors to be engaged in a new form of work, digital labour.[115]

A key element in this kind of work is the degree of choice and autonomy enjoyed by the self-employed who find work through digital platforms. Self-employed professionals value autonomy, independence and control over their own work, but the question is whether the platforms actually ensure the conditions necessary for them (adequate pay, control of hours of work, etc.). Virtual working also raises questions about not only prevailing models of communication and human resource management but also workers' professional identities,[116] collective consciousness and capacity for organisation. Some studies have criticised the dumbing-down to which this kind of work is said to lead.[117]

None of these problems are new. What is relatively new is the rapid development of a platform economy in which organisers are acting in a kind of legal no-man's-land and generating precarious forms of employment. For example, when the Fotolia platform acquires rights in photographs for one euro and then sells the pictures for a thousand times as much, it takes on no responsibility for the photographer, makes no investment in the equipment required nor does it underwrite costs. Worthy of an earlier age, the working conditions of Amazon employees have been widely criticised.[118] Amazon is a web platform but it needs a local, physical implantation to distribute its products. Its construction of warehouses in Europe, in areas of high unemployment, has received government support despite serious misgivings about working conditions.

The new forms of work in the digital economy are characterised by a blurring of boundaries at several levels, each of which raises questions in terms of the regulation of employment[119]:

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[115] Dominique Cardon and Antonio Casilli, *Qu'est-ce que le Digital Labor?* (Bry-sur-Marne: INA, 2015).

[116] Vili Lehdonvirta and Paul Mezier, "Identity and Self-Organization in Unstructured Work" (Dynamics of Virtual Work Working Paper No. 1, 2013).

[117] Simon Head, *Mindless: Why Smarter Machines are Making Dumber Humans* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

[118] Jean-Baptiste Malet, *En Amazonie. Infiltré dans le « meilleur des mondes »* (Paris: Fayard, 2013).

[119] Pamela Meil, "ICT and Work: Future Opportunities, Fresh Insecurities", paper given at the conference "Changing Working Conditions in Europe: Moving Towards Better Work, First

- The problem of overlap between *work and personal life* is not new but has taken on a new significance with the advent of virtual working. How is personal life to be protected? How are working hours to be controlled?
- Current changes are posing the question of the distinction between *employment and self-employment* with particular acuity, notably in journalism and in creative occupations. Does one need to re-examine the definitions, or formulate some intermediate status between the two? And how should we deal with shift between one and the other, without compromising social protection?
- It isn't always easy, either, to maintain the distinction between *producer and consumer*. Doing the data-entry on one's own bank-transfers, offering opinions on hotels and restaurants, publishing photos and videos, writing and distributing news: are these acts of consumption or production? The emergence of the "prosumer", simultaneously producer and consumer of digital information, raises two questions in terms of regulation: how is the value creator to be identified, and who is entitled to appropriate that value?[120]
- The new, collaborative modes of production (co-creation, peer production, the collaborative economy in general) entail a possible confusion between *employee and volunteer*. Voluntary activity, or unpaid employment?
- Finally, certain currently expanding forms of work, such as crowd working and micro-jobs, are seriously blurring the boundary between *client and employer*. What kind of legal framework should govern these types of contractual relationship? What should be done about the unfair competition between the services offered on such platforms as Uber or AirBnB and regulated providers?

What is more, the changes brought about by the digital economy are not gender-neutral. On the one hand, there are many women in the intermediate occupations, which seem the most likely to be impacted by

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Findings from the Eurofound 6th European Working Conditions Survey", Luxembourg, 24 November 2015.

[120] Fuchs and Fischer, eds, *Reconsidering Value and Labour*.

the radical changes the digital economy is expected to bring, in terms of both employment and work, and on the other, women are still under-represented in the IT sector and they have little or no involvement in the development of the programmes and the apps that are going to reshape their own work. More fundamentally, virtual working, flexibility and autonomy seem to mean different things to men and women, reproducing in fact the traditional power relationships and gender segregation of private life. "Thanks to virtual technology, women can continue to multi-task—they opt in and opt out of work/family tasks, and by doing so they can 'do it all', without challenging conventional gender roles, without threatening their marriages or the belief that they are good mothers."[121]

And finally, in a period of ecological transition, the digital technologies are also a source of concern regarding the exponential growth of their harmful side-effects: the consumption of electricity and of rare earth minerals and the production of electronic wastes.[122]

In the face of these transformations of work and the growth of virtual working, it is useful to recall what work means today. The growing role of digital technologies does not change the meaning of work. Our societies are founded on work. A decent wage, a secure job, meaningful work and a sense of contributing to society: these are still very much what people expect from work, and the question is to what extent the new forms of work and employment in the digital economy can meet these expectations.

4.5   Conclusions: Job Quality and the Meaning of Work

The transformation of work over the last 30 years has led to fundamental changes to working conditions and the structure of the labour market. The development of new forms of organisation has seen the introduc-

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[121] Gudbjorg Linda Rafnsdóttir, "Time, Space and Gender", paper given at the Dynamics of Virtual Work network's workshop on "Gender Perspectives in the Analysis of Virtual Work", Barcelona, 10–12 November 2014.

[122] Fabrice Flipo, Michelle Dobré and Marion Michot, *La face cachée du numérique* (Paris: L'échappée, 2013).

tion of working arrangements that could help accommodate the changing expectations of work, notably the growth in expressive expectations. Yet only in a few circumstances have these new arrangements actually helped to satisfy the demand for self-fulfilment that has come with rising educational levels and the massive and definitive arrival of women on the labour market. The NFWO have consequently resulted in new fractures at work, in terms of both employment status and possibilities of self-fulfilment. A situation of permanent economic insecurity has developed, especially for certain groups, young people and the unskilled being particularly affected, and malaise at work has grown, a symptom of worker dissatisfaction and organisational dysfunction.

Faced with work that no longer guarantees long-term economic security and an experience of work that leads to dissatisfaction and a variety of physical and mental problems, job quality is more than ever an issue, but to what extent do contemporary approaches take account of the meaning or meanings nowadays attached to work? Is job quality simply a matter of security of income, of instrumental expectations, or should it also take more account of aspects that underwrite the possibility of finding self-fulfilment at work, and therefore include more subjective dimensions in the definition of job quality? Any definition of job quality rests on assumptions regarding the meaning of work.

There have been significant theoretical developments relative to the study of job quality over the last ten years, in particular in the fields of economics and industrial relations. Since the beginning of the millennium, it has also become an international issue in political economy, through the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Decent Work Agenda and the EU's Lisbon Strategy. From the late 1990s to 2003, the EU promoted a seemingly ambitious employment policy and social agenda, implemented through a variety of directives and the European Employment Strategy (EES). In 2001, "quality at work" was made one of the three main objectives of the EES. Yet these policy initiatives came to grief on the doxa promoted first by the OECD and then the European Commission, derailed by economic policies that put competition at the heart of the European project and of new developments in management thinking. After the Kok Reports of 2003 and 2004, flexicurity finally eclipsed any concern for quality work. Furthermore, facing economic

recession since 2008, the EU has given in to the temptation to abandon not only social Europe but also the goal of quality work, and that at a time when skill levels have become a central concern[123]: it's difficult to imagine, in fact, how Europe could still claim to be one of the most competitive regions of the world without serious, ongoing investment in skilled work and skilled workers. The Europe 2020 growth strategy (for the decade after 2010) did nothing to refocus on job quality, concentrating rather on the question of poverty, with the risk of reducing the question of job quality to the problem of poor workers[124] and so promoting a conception of work restricted to its instrumental aspects.

Europe faces a paradoxical situation, with on the one hand a growing interest in effective management oriented to high profits (laying emphasis on the development of competence, teamwork, motivation and innovation) and on the other the harmful effects of the NFWO and the new public management on employee motivation, health and well-being.

Although job quality will be crucial for the future of the European economies, it is difficult to define, involving as it does many aspects on which there is no consensus between the relevant actors, and because its very definition depends on a conception of work.

In the academic literature on the measurement of job quality, most authors take job quality to be a multidimensional concept. Both Green[125] and Brown et al.[126] concentrate on work content and working conditions (in the broad sense, including pay), while the quality indicators proposed by the ILO[127] and Laeken[128] relate more to general features of the labour

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[123] Dominique Méda, "La flexicurité peut-elle encore constituer une ambition pour l'Europe?"

[124] Silke Bothfeld and Janine Leschke, "'More and Better Jobs': Is Quality of Work Still an Issue – And Was It Ever?", *Transfer* 18:3, pp. 337–353.

[125] Green, *Demanding Work*.

[126] Andrew Brown, Andy Charlwood, Chris Forde and David Spencer, "Job Quality and the Economics of New Labour: A Critical Appraisal Using Subjective Survey Data", *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 31:6 (2007), pp. 941–971.

[127] Dharam Ghai, "Decent Work: Concept and Indicators", *International Labour Review* 142:2 (2003), pp. 121–158.

[128] Lucie Davoine, Christine Erhel and Mathilde Guergoat, "A Taxonomy of European Labour Markets Using Quality Indicators" (Centre d'Etudes de l'Emploi Research Report No. 45, May 2008).

market.[129] Empirical studies deal with two main issues: firstly, changes in job quality over time, and secondly the comparison of national job quality regimes. Some have sought to develop overall job quality indicators.[130] With regard to dynamics, these studies show a general improvement in job quality, subject to certain reservations in terms of work intensity and certain components of work satisfaction (stress). Comparative results reveal the uneven distribution of job quality across Europe and the relationships between job quality, economic performance and social protection regimes.[131] In addition to national differences, work by Eurofound also suggests significant variation between sectors.[132] Despite the evidence that job quality is important, changes in economic structure appear to have led to deterioration rather than improvement.[133]

Other authors such as Carlos Prieto and Amparo Serrano have highlighted the radically different implications of the slogans adopted by the European Commission on the one hand ("Quality Work") and the ILO on the other ("Decent Work").[134] They write:

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[129] See also Rafael Muñoz de Bustillo, Enrique Fernandez-Macias, José Ignacio Anton and Fernando Esteve, "Indicators of Job Quality in the European Union" (IP/A/EMPL/ST/2008-2009), a study commissioned by the Directorate-General for Internal Policies for the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, which offers a comparative assessment of 18 job quality indicators or systems of indicators developed between 2002 and 2009. See too the more recent review by David Holman and Charlotte McClelland, "Job Quality in Growing and Declining Economic Sectors of the EU", SSH-CT-2009-244597 (WALQING Working Paper 2011.3).

[130] Davoine et al., *A Taxonomy of European Labour Markets*; "Measuring the Quality of Employment in the EU", Chapter IV of European Commission, *Employment in Europe* 2008 (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2008); Janine Leschke and Andrew Watt, "Putting a Number on Job Quality? Constructing a European Job Quality Index" (ETUI-REHS Working Paper 2008.3).

[131] Duncan Gallie, *Employment Regimes and the Quality of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[132] Eurofound, *ERM Report 2008, More and Better Jobs: Patterns of Employment Expansion in Europe* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2008).

[133] Nathalie Greenan, Ekaterian Kalugina and Emmanuelle Walkowiak, "Trends in Quality of Work in the EU-15: Evidence from the European Working Conditions Survey (1995-2005)" (Centre d'Etudes de l'Emploi Working Paper 133, November 2010), pp. 41–49.

[134] Carlos Prieto and Amparo Serrano, "Qualité de l'emploi et travail décent: définitions contrastées et rapport", in Thomas Coutrot, David Flacher and Dominique Méda, eds, *Pour sortir de ce vieux monde. Les chemins de la transition* (Ivry-sur-Seine: Les Éditions Utopia, 2010).

Currently, within the European Union, one finds two opposed definitions of job quality: one from the European Commission, that has been welcomed by employers, and another put forward by certain critical currents that finds support among trades unions, and which finds expression in the notion of "decent work" promoted by the ILO since 1999. Notable for its vague, imprecise and shifting character, the first lacks all historical embeddedness and is intended to be introduced to every country of the EU and every workplace through the neo-liberal logic of "good practice". The second is distinguished by its precise content, which has its origins in the historic struggles of the workers' movement, and is intended to be introduced (and maintained) through the coercive logic of legally recognized employment rights.

Prieto and Serrano argue that, quite apart from its effective shipwreck in 2003, the European Commission's slogan was always intended to supplant "Decent Work", more costly to implement and much less in tune with the Commission's ideological orientation and economic policy.

In concluding, we may note that our findings accord in part with those of Mercure and Vultur in Québec: on the one hand, the expectation of self-expression through work has never been so great, and on the other, the firms that have for the most part supported or even created these expectations are incapable of meeting them: the NFWO, the tight constraints on the autonomy that is granted and the absence of worker participation in management are such that the development of individual expectations and the development of the system of social production have come into partial conflict. Mercure and Vultur observe that the flexibility that firms seek is not necessarily antithetical to the interests of certain sections of workers, notably the young and the more highly qualified. Its development then threatens to lead to a highly segmented workforce. Furthermore, it is not at all clear that Europe's workers are ready for such a transformation. This suggests that we need to take a closer look at the ways in which different classes of employee have experienced these changes.

In the next chapter, we shall look at the different dimensions of the meaning of work among different social groups, in doing so testing the hypothesis of the emergence of a new type of relationship to work and seeing whether the young are in fact different.

5

The Meaning of Work through the Prism of the Generations

The SPReW research we make use of here[1] was intended to determine to what extent different age groups were able to work together in mutual understanding, in the process putting to the test the hypothesis that young people have a more distanced relationship to work than their elders. This is an idea often advanced by members of the older generation confronted by young people's behaviours and attitudes with regard to work. In seeking to determine whether the young were indeed distinctive in this respect, we adopted, amongst others, a comparative generational approach. In this chapter, we explain first of all the significance of the generational approach and justify the choice of age groups for the purpose. We then propose a classification of types of engagement with work in terms of the instrumental/expressive dichotomy on the one hand and individual life course on the other, before going on to consider in what way young people may differ from their elders and the way they position themselves in relation to other generations. This leads us, in conclusion, to argue that we need a new model of the relationship to work.

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[1] See the Methodological Note at the end of this volume.

5.1   Why the Generational Perspective?

A generational perspective was adopted because it allows different experiences of the labour market to be related to the changing social context. For generational belonging is not a synonym for age—which is first of all a biological fact marked by distinctive features, while also identifying a position in the life course—but a matter of shared experience. A generation is formed by a shared context and a moment in history; it may be defined by shared experience of an event that leaves its mark, by "the spirit of the age" as Karl Mannheim put it,[2] or by some systematic difference and distinctive social image that distinguishes it from preceding and succeeding generations.[3] To characterise generations is to identify significant life experiences.[4] There is then no single definition of the concept of generation, each discipline favouring one aspect rather than another. Political science opts for the foundational event in relation to which a generation is said to forge its identity; anthropology looks to filiation and kinship; while management theory is especially concerned with cultural change and diversity. Sociology takes a multiform approach to the question, defining generations in terms of specific conjunctions of cultural, economic and historico-political factors.

Political generations are defined in terms of shared socio-historical experience, the generational nexus being constituted by participation in significant social events such as wars or cultural transformations, the unity of a generation being marked by similarity in patterns of thought.[5] Among the six countries investigated, Hungary exemplifies the situation of several different political generations confronted by the impact on work of radical political change in the novel experience of mass unemployment and the devaluation of knowledge and skills acquired under the old regime. Cultural generations define themselves by reference to

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[2] Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations" [1928], in Paul Kecskemeti, ed., *Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: 1952, repub. 1972), pp. 276–320.

[3] Claudine Attias-Donfut, *Sociologie des générations. L'empreinte du temps* (Paris: PUF, 1988).

[4] Carole L. Jurkiewicz and Roger G. Brown, "GenXers vs. Boomers vs. Matures: Generational Comparisons of Public Employee Motivation", *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 18:4 (1998), pp. 18–37.

[5] Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations".

specific experiences, by attitudes and styles. They are organised around changes in value systems; stereotypes regarding technology, the nature of the present age; individualisation; changes in education. Economic generations are formed by cohorts exposed to different economic risks and possibilities, with different experiences of unemployment, precarity, flexibility, organisational change at work and so on. Economic change has different effects on different generations.

For the sociologist, it is the tie to a particular context—cultural, economic and historical/political—that constitutes a generation and, more specifically, its orientation towards work. More familiar discriminant factors that cut across generations are also significant, most importantly social and financial resources, gender and ethnicity.

Generations at work are defined by reference to significant events that occur at various points in the history of capitalism and which bring about transformations in the social structure of work. In this way, three different generations of workers currently in employment were identified at the start of the SPReW research (in 2006)[6]: those born before the mid-1950s (the over-50s); those born between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s (the 30–50-year-olds); and those born since then (the under-30s).

In the second half of the twentieth century, more or less everywhere in Europe, the strict regulation of work and the extensive development of systems of social security created a secure and confident generation enjoying collective representation: these were the baby-boomers. Later, after two oil crises, all over Europe the financial systems of the welfare states went into crisis, together with the Keynesian policy framework. The early 1980s thus saw the birth of a new generation, more vulnerable to unemployment: Generation X.[7] At the same time, women's growing participation in the labour market emerged as a key variable in the generational transition, with the shift from "one economically active person / one career per household" model to "two economically active persons

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[6] The interviews were carried out between 2006 and 2008. Quantitative data have been updated for this study.

[7] Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991); David Cannon, *Generation X and the New Work Ethic* (London: Demos, 1994); Karen Wey Smola and Charlotte D. Sutton, "Generational Differences: Revisiting Generational Work Values for the New Millennium", *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 23 (2002), pp. 363–382.

/ two careers per household", bringing with it new priorities, new goals and new needs. More recently the mortgaging of the welfare state to the funding of pensions, the impact of globalisation on Western economies, and governments' marked preference for flexible labour markets have combined to produce a generation more precarious, with less social security, and more lacking collective representation. This has been called Generation Y, or the millennial generation.[8] Although it is the most highly qualified generation ever and enjoys the good fortune of being on the right side of the digital divide, some have called this the generation of the "baby-losers".[9]

Without denying the existence of great intragenerational differences, these three age groups (the under-30s, the 30–49s and the over-50s) were thus adopted for the purposes of the research on the basis of shared economic fates that contribute to shaping their relationships to work.

The concept of the relationship or orientation to work was developed in the 1970s and '80s by researchers interested in interpretative models and practical orientations in everyday life.[10] Interpretative models consist of socially acquired knowledge that results in part from individual and in part from collective experience, such as familial, occupational or group socialisation. Different interpretative models exist for different areas of life. Everyday orientations are the self-evident models of action that structure an individual's working and family life and leisure activity and which are generally determined by unconscious motivations. Orientations to work are social models that shape the individual's relationship to work. Orientation is here a sociological term denoting the norms individuals apply in the different spheres of everyday life (family, leisure, work, etc.). These everyday orientations are shaped by socio-economic and cultural contexts. Marked changes in these contexts will have their effect on orientations. As a fact of individual and social life, and also

[8] Madsen Pirie and Robert M. Worcester, *The Millennial Generation* (London: Adam Smith Institute, 1998).

[9] Jason Burke, Graham Keeley and Tom Kington, "After the Boomers, Meet the Children Dubbed 'Baby Losers'", *The Observer*, 11 May 2008, available at http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/may/11/spain.france.

[10] Rainer Zoll, *Alltagssolidarität und Individualismus: zum soziokulturellen Wandel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1993).

as experience, work has changed radically; as a result, the relationship or orientation to work has changed significantly. Debates on the centrality or non-centrality of work, the observed existence of differences in attitude between age groups at work, the hypothesisation of specifically female models, all testify to a certain perplexity in the face of these social changes. Here, the generational dimension is very important. Given that they have been socialised in different contexts, and that there have been differences in their specific experiences, one would expect different generations to have correspondingly different orientations to work. Yet it is not easy to identify such unconscious structures: this is what we sought to do through the interviews conducted in the six countries.

5.2   A Typology of Orientations to Work

From the analysis of the SPReW interviews emerge two structuring axes that offer a grasp on all the different stories, representing common denominators in the analyses carried out by the researchers in the six countries. The classifications proposed are organised around these two explanatory principles: the instrumental/expressive dichotomy and the individual trajectory. These axes structure the different ways of engaging with work and conferring meaning on it.

5.2.1   Two Structuring Axes: The Instrumental/ Expressive Dichotomy and the Life Course

As we have seen in Chap. 3, the opposition between instrumental and expressive aspects of work remains essential for distinguishing between orientations to work. It is this that modulates the individual's engagement with work. If the dichotomy remains valid as a means of understanding the meaning of work, it does however have its limits. A qualitative approach reveals on the one hand a differentiation within the category of the expressive, which may signify a certain altruism—in looking to the social utility of work—or contrariwise a certain concern for the self, in a search for meaning and/or ethical coherence, for challenge and so

on. Certain elements generally considered instrumental also have their expressive aspects, such as money for example. Pay plays a symbolic role as well, being seen as a possible measure of personal value, an objective sign of recognition and esteem, or a symbol of emancipation, as noted in particular by younger interviewees.

Analysis has also shown that other dimensions were associated with the instrumental/expressive dichotomy and capable of influencing it, one above all: the life course. This might be defined as a set of rules that organise the essential dimensions of life,[11] governing the roles linked to age and the transitions associated with key ages, a system Stefano Cavalli calls a "normative calendar".[12]

If individuals wish to conform to the norms prescribed by a cultural model, and if they have the resources to do so, they will follow a standard life course, that is, the prevailing, dominant life course.[13] Individuals who do not conform to this normative agenda follow an individualised life course, distancing themselves from the norms governing standard life courses. The distance might signify the lack of the resources necessary to conform, or, on the contrary, a deliberate choice, a decision to go one's own way. Such individuals thus negotiate their role, their position and their identity, sometimes the more precarious for institutions not providing adequate categories for the organisation of different phases of life, which can thus seem ill-defined, idiosyncratic in their interrelation and demanding more of individuals in the way of creativity or determination.[14]

In the interviews conducted in the six countries, the life course thus emerges as a structuring axis of the relationship to work. Researchers

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[11] On this concept see Jean-François Guillaume, ed., *Parcours de vie. Regards croisés sur la construction des biographies contemporaines* (Liège: Éditions de l'Université de Liège, 2005), and Martin Kohli, "The World We Forgot: A Historical Review of the Life Course", in Victor W. Marshall, ed., *Later Life: the Social Psychology of Aging* (London: Sage, 1986).

[12] Stefano Cavalli and Jean-Pierre Fragnière, eds, *L'Avenir. Attentes, projets, (dés)illusions, ouvertures. Hommages à Christian Lalive d'Épinay* (Lausanne: Éditions Réalités sociales, 2003).

[13] Kohli, "The World We Forgot"; Christian Lalive d'Épinay, "La construction des parcours de vie et de la vieillesse en Suisse au cours du xxᵉ siècle", in Geneviève Heller, ed., *Le Poids des ans. Une histoire de la vieillesse en Suisse romande* (Lausanne: Éditions d'en bas & Société d'histoire de la Suisse Romande, 1994).

[14] Vincent de Gaulejac, *L'Histoire en héritage. Roman familial et trajectoire sociale* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1999).

contrasted standard and individualised life courses (the Belgian and Hungarian teams) and institutional and discontinuous (the Germans), or linear and cyclic trajectories (the Portuguese). The second term of the dichotomy relates to idiosyncratic histories of training and employment or to less-standardised agendas in which the distinctiveness of certain individual choices or life events falls outside the general rule, sometimes resulting in sudden, radical and possibly painful changes in the course of life.

5.2.2   Four Types of Relationship to Work

On the basis of these two axes, the Belgian researchers[15] proposed a typology that offers a unifying overview of the analyses produced in the different countries. The notion of a typology is intrinsic to the sociological approach,[16] the "type" or "ideal type" being a tool for understanding social reality. "It has the significance of a purely ideal limiting concept with which the real situation or action is compared and surveyed for the explication of certain of its significant components."[17] For this reason, the ideal type is "a deliberately simplified image of reality, a guide for the investigations to come".[18]

This typology has all the strengths and weaknesses of the typological approach: the typified vision of reality has the advantage of bringing out salient features and major trends, but it also obscures certain nuances. Four typical modes of engagement with work will be described; they are constructed on the basis of the intersection of two criteria. Firstly, individuals' general attitude to work is identified as pragmatic or expressive. The notion of attitude, as employed here, should be understood broadly as including not only the representations mobilised by individuals when

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[15] John Cultiaux and Patricia Vendramin, "Report from Belgium", in Vendramin, ed., *Changing Social Patterns of Relation to Work*, pp. 39–88.

[16] Dominique Schnapper, *La Compréhension sociologique. Démarche de l'analyse typologique* (Paris: PUF, 1999).

[17] Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. and ed. E. Shils and H. Finch (New York: The Free Press 1949), p. 93.

[18] Jacques Coenen-Huther, "Le type idéal comme instrument de la recherche sociologique", *Revue française de sociologie* 44 (March 2003), pp. 531–547.

Table 5.1 A typology of modes of relationship to work

	Expressive engagement with work	
	Pragmatic Engagement with work	Expressive engagement with work
Standard life course Employment is more important than work	TYPE 1 Work is a necessity that has to be made the best of	TYPE 3 Work supports personal development Work is more important than employment
Individualised life course	TYPE 2 Work is a means of earning money	TYPE 4 Work is a cornerstone of identity

Source: Cultiaux and Vendramin, "Report from Belgium"

they describe their work but also the place they hope to occupy there and the values that motivate them.

We have used the word "pragmatic" rather than "instrumental" as it better communicates a certain realism or positive opportunism that does not see the relationship to work from a purely utilitarian perspective, as might be suggested by "instrumental". A pragmatic engagement is one grounded in the idea that it is necessary to work to satisfy personal and family needs, but is not for all that reducible to this instrumental dimension. In the case of expressive engagement, work plays a more crucial role in the construction of individual identity. Those who adopt this attitude have internalised another type of participation in the labour market that favours personal development, initiative, creativity, responsiveness and flexibility.

The interest of this typology lies in the way it relates these different attitudes to the form of the individual's life course, understood as standard or individualised. In pragmatic as in expressive engagement, two different attitudes are possible; these attitudes are influenced by the trajectories followed by individuals, who fall into two groups: those who in one way or another follow a more or less standard life course, and the rest (Table 5.1).

The typology is not an end in itself but a way of ordering reality so as to go beyond the mere observation that age groups differ in respect of engagement with work. All typologies are imperfect in their correspondence with reality, but they are useful in approaching complex subjects, helping to reveal meaning and identify the central ideas. This typology is used in particular in order to understand how interviewees of different ages, occupations and sex are distributed across different modes of engagement with work. Bringing out the commonalities in the ways that individuals engage with work is not only of sociological but also of practical interest, for these determine expectations of work, views of management, understandings of career and relationships to learning and knowledge.

a) *Work as a necessity to be made the best of*

In this first type, work is seen as a source of income and as the fulfilment of an obligation to contribute to social life. Such a view is

associated with a markedly standard life course, a linear career trajectory without upsets or interfering life events and characterised by a smooth transition between school and work. Most of these individuals have a stable and standard family background. Some expect to establish a family of the same kind. The nature of their employment matches their educational attainment. Those in this group have a clear, organised and confident view of their personal future, which involves working, starting a family, having children, and juggling the demands of work and private life.

This type is characterised by a pragmatic engagement with work. Work is not "life", but a necessity imposed by the need to meet one's material needs. Work is a means, not an end in itself. A young Hungarian blue-collar worker says: "It's not worse than lying about doing nothing." Family and work are separate; the boundaries between the two spheres are well-defined and private life clearly prioritised. A young Frenchwoman, a bookkeeper, says:

> For me, spending time with the children is better than spending time at work, when that's possible, of course.

In speaking of the instrumental dimension of work, pay is mentioned but priority is accorded to the stability associated with a reasonable income that meets one's needs and ensures personal security. These needs may change and there may also be "soft" bifurcations in the occupational life course, especially should security come under threat. These individuals take a fairly passive approach to their careers, and career advancement is a secondary consideration.

Having "a nice job" is another important factor. While work might be a necessity, individuals in this category try and make it a positive experience. There are two ways of doing this, often found together. First of all, a good job can mean work one finds interesting, without reference to needs for survival or identity. The symbolic attributes of the job or hierarchical positions are less important than the content of the work: variety, autonomy, coincidence with personal interests, usefulness and so on.

Secondly, a good job is always associated with good social relationships with colleagues and management. Concretely, this means being part of

a good team that offers support when it is needed and which produces a "good atmosphere" at work and even friendships that extend outside it. Work is often treated as something collective, people talking of it in terms of "we" rather than "I". Recognition by management is also necessary, but this is recognition as confirmation of a self-understanding rather than as requirement for promotion.

And finally, even if it is not a priority, those who fall under this type have symbolic expectations of work, relating to pride in achievement, to performance, to their popularity within the group and so on. A French woman clerical worker in the public sector puts it this way:

> For me, the most important thing is feeling alright. If I don't feel good, there's no point carrying on. If I don't like what I'm doing, I don't see why I should stay. I prefer work that I enjoy. … Good relationships with colleagues are very important. I like to get on with everybody. We have a laugh together. Time passes. At the end of the day you know you've done a good job and go home without any worries.

Type 1 covers the largest number of people; it includes all age groups, though the proportion of the middle age group (30–50) is less. There is no gender differential, and all skill levels are represented, though with a larger proportion of those with low skill levels.

b) *Work as means of making money*

Those falling under the second type are very diverse in terms of the criteria considered in the research (age, skill level, occupational life course, family situation). This diversity reflects individualised life courses and a more unequivocal, essentially pragmatic, attitude to work. A German mechanic in his 40s thus asked:

> Success? … at the end of the day, as far as I'm concerned it's a job where I earn my money, my keep, and that's all.

A young Frenchwoman marked by a failure that interrupted her plans for a standard life course declared:

> I live from day to day. We don't know what tomorrow will bring. Before, I used to say, 'When I've got my baccalaureate' or 'When I've had my driving lessons', 'I'll do it', 'We'll go on holiday.' But I was so disturbed after things went wrong that today I prefer to live from day to day … Health and the family are the most important things; the rest come afterwards.

Work is a means, not an end in itself, and what is important is to have enough money and security to meet personal and family needs. Life outside work is more important than work (family, other interests, hobbies, etc.). Boundaries between work and family are clear; work supports private life but it is kept clearly separate from it. A 39-year-old Italian man, a driver, says:

> Money is important, earning enough money is more important than doing a job that's more interesting but less well paid. It's more important than following your passion, especially if you're a husband and father.

Employees of this type reject overinvestment in work and the subordination of private life to the requirements of the job. However, unlike those of the first type, they do not make expressive demands on work, which is simply a means of earning money. A Hungarian manual worker reports:

> To be honest, I've never gone to work thinking 'Oh, how nice to spend the day here!' I've never been happy about it. I do it just because I have to.

This emphasis on the instrumental dimension dominates the relationship to work. Only money seems to give meaning to work; the content of work and social relationships are secondary. The social dimension of work is not an explicit concern: having a nice job or a good atmosphere at work is a "happy accident", not an expectation. People of this type are fairly critical of colleagues and management, their attitude towards them being marked by a "polite disinterest". Type 2 is a smaller group; it includes all age groups and skill levels, but it is preponderantly male.

c) *Work as support for personal development*

Those who fall under the third type are characterised by fairly standard life courses and stable family backgrounds: standard transition from

school to work, from family to independent life, no reverses, no disruptive life events, easy transitions from one job to another, no fear for the future, no great doubts about anything (life is predictable). This group chiefly consists of people in mid-course, both occupationally and in life as a whole. Here, even if the youngest have tried a number of things before finding a satisfactory job, they have started a family and gained significant experience in their field of work and have finally found the job that they wanted. Even if they are satisfied with their situation at work, they remain proactive in managing their careers and in the management of their lives more generally. They are open to change and to new experiences.

For this type of employee, involvement in their work is important; work is not an external necessity but a way of discovering one's own abilities and aptitudes. However, personal involvement with work is counterbalanced by the importance accorded to family life. People matching this profile don't think of work and life separately. Even if most of them clearly state that career is less important than personal and family life, career and life are developed in parallel. A Belgian customer services manager of 33 gives her point of view:

> When you arrive at the school in the morning, there are mothers who talk for hours and hours with the teacher. I don't have time for that! I drop my son off; I always stay with him a couple of minutes and then I have to go … When sometimes I pick him up again at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I ask myself, 'Who are all these people who're not working?' It can't be so, I don't understand.

A Portuguese school-teacher in her 40s also expresses satisfaction at having managed to achieve what she wanted on two fronts:

> I think I'm now in a phase where there is, in fact, a perfect match between what I am outside of work and what I am at work.

For these workers, their involvement with work reflects the tension between their desire to succeed on a number of different fronts simultaneously and their efforts to bring this about. One of the most important factors in the way they evaluate a job is that it should be reasonably compatible with having a family life. The practical aspects of a job (distance from

home, the demand for overtime, unsocial hours) are key factors in personal decisions about work. Similarly, a job is expected to provide reasonable stability and an income sufficient to meet the needs of oneself and one's family. Establishing a family requires that "sensible" choices be made to ensure the security and well-being of its members whatever might be one's idea of a "dream job". A 57-year-old Italian woman teacher declares:

> I have never sacrificed work for family. Family has been important, but work has been important too.

Yet to have a "good job" does not mean having the best-paid job. Pay is not central to the evaluation of a job. Furthermore, if stability is a necessary condition for the realisation of current family projects (because the children are still young), it isn't necessarily so in the longer term.

Self-development in fact is the most important criterion; members of this group think of challenges at work as opportunities to discover and exercise their own capacities. Bifurcations in career trajectories are explained by the desire to find a job that matches their interests and personality and which satisfies their desire for recognition. A Belgian woman manager explains:

> Learning and being useful to the business are essential for me. … I need to feel I'm in the right place, that I'm the right person in the right place. … It's connected to my need for recognition, to my confidence in myself.

A 54-year-old French woman teacher/researcher for her part remarks that

> When you think about it, you spend a lot of time at work, but even if you work to earn money you can't reduce work to that.

And a young Hungarian blue-collar worker says:

> My work is my hobby. I never arrive at work looking forward to the end of the day. I love what I do.

This type of employee appreciates autonomy, flexibility and personal goals, but they know that they must be effective and useful if they are to

feel legitimate in their position. They don't want to engage in meaningless activity. Work should be enjoyable and meaningful, it should be satisfying. A young German mechanic in the wood industry says:

> Everything here is special. It's interesting work, but not as easy as all that … For the moment, I really appreciate the work itself, and it's very good, I really like it.

And an Italian woman clerical worker of 27:

> For my parents a job is a job, but for me, there's a big difference between a good job and a bad job, and 'good' doesn't just mean a job with a big, well-established employer. 'Good' for me is more aesthetic.

As regards the social dimension of work, these employees adopt a "business-like" attitude. They appreciate moments of pleasure at work; these are important, but pleasure-time and work-time mustn't be confused. Nonetheless, social relationships at work are the vehicles of recognition and support. Finally, members of this group value autonomy, trust and collaboration with competent colleagues. They don't like constraint, or excessive control. And they also believe that a certain collective room for manoeuvre in the organisation of work is important for maintaining good social relationships.

Type 3 is the second-largest group; it includes a high proportion of the middle-aged, of women, and of people with high or intermediate qualifications.

d) *Work as the cornerstone of identity*

Those falling under the fourth type are characterised by individualised life courses, chaotic family histories, abnormal career trajectories with difficult bifurcations and transitions and other unhelpful life events (migration, divorce/remarriage of the parents, major switches of educational options, problems at work, etc.). Significantly, people fitting this profile offer little information about their own circle (parents, family, colleagues); they have an individualised vision of present and future. They are open to different scenarios and very confident in their own future. They are the authors of their own fate and do not follow the beaten path.

School education is not central to their careers; it can be important if it allows access to a higher social status, but ingenuity may make up for lack of formal qualifications. In order to achieve their goals, they lay down their own rules, taking their distance from standard social and group rules. For example, a young Belgian software developer reported without any compunction that he regularly worked off the books to earn more money and to gain useful experience.

Basic pay and bonus are crucial to their evaluation of jobs. On the other hand, stability is not that important. A 28-year-old Belgian man, assistant manager in a commercial SME, declared that

> If the company gives me a job that satisfies my ambitions, my aspirations … pay won't be the deciding factor. But it will come second. It will play a role in my decision, but my personal ambitions and my personal development come first.

More specifically, the young people interviewed consider themselves to be in a transitional phase of the life course. They are not against a certain stability of employment, but in this situation they have to be sure that the job is the best for them, the one that can best satisfy their expressive needs (in terms of autonomy, responsibility, social standing). A young Frenchwoman, an artistic director says:

> It's really exciting. You have plenty of creative scope … I need challenges to progress.

She is echoed by a woman administrative manager in Italy:

> I could never stay long in a job that didn't interest me.

And external constraints are never insurmountable says a 29-year-old marketing assistant:

> It's only a matter of organisation. When people ask me, 'How do you manage, with three children?', I say, 'But look, it's like a job, a second job'. It's just a question of organisation. If you're organised, it's fine.

These people's subjective involvement in work is significant, but, at the same time, they look at it from an individual point of view. The expressive aspect is not altruistic; it's not a matter of giving of your best because work is socially useful. This type of employee is more individualistic; for example, they say very little about their colleagues when talking about their occupational trajectory, their job(s) or their project(s). Social relationships are peripheral, even if they are counted among the positives. Their autonomy is an essential aspect of the job. They have a permanently critical attitude towards authority and to the managerial hierarchy, which they may consider an impediment to their own ambitions. They are impatient, constantly negotiating their pay and their role. Type 4 is small in size, though a little more numerous than Type 2. It includes all age groups, but a larger proportion of young people. There is no gender differential, and skill levels are relatively high.

5.2.3   Relationship to Work and Relationship to Employment

In the development of the typology, a heuristic limitation of the instrumental/expressive dichotomy became apparent, in that it indistinguishably conflates work and employment. For the instrumental aspect cannot be identified with the fact of employment, nor the expressive with the actual content of work. Analysis of interviewees' expectations of work led the researchers to introduce a distinction between work and employment, "work" generically considered covering, in fact, a variety of fields of meaning and reality. The relation to work refers to the content of work as well as to social relationships, work practices and relationships to knowledge. The relationship to employment refers to position in the job market, employment status, employment contract and career prospects.[19] Without at all being divided against themselves, interviewees could express quite different attitudes to these two aspects of the job. Someone could easily be very satisfied with the content of

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[19] Françoise Piotet, *Emploi et travail, Le grand écart* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007).

work while still being very unsatisfied with their employment situation. Those whose engagement with work tends towards the pragmatic (Types 1 and 2) accord more importance to their situation with regards to employment than to their work properly speaking, while those whose engagement tends towards the expressive (Types 3 and 4) accord more importance to their work than to their situation with regard to employment. This distinction was important in the SPReW research, for one of its objectives was to identify possible areas of friction arising from the clash of different conceptions of work, in particular between generations in employment. This distinction between work and employment turned out to be central to tensions between sub-groups at work (see the next chapter), such as, for example, when the youngest employees feel unrecognised or confined to a precarious status and see this as the price paid for the security of their older colleagues, even as they enjoy the content of their work.

5.2.4 Are the Different Types of Relationship to Work Determined by Age, Gender or Level of Education?

A hypothesis to be tested at the beginning of the analysis of the SPReW results was that of intragenerational homogeneity in patterns of relationship. The conclusion was plain: there was no exclusive or direct link between age and the individuals' mode of engagement with work. The generations, as defined, are distributed across the different types posited by the typology. Education, supposed to be a major influence in the increased incidence of the expressive relation to work, and gender, which has a strong influence on work's place in the individual's life, also proved to be discriminant. In this respect, this research accords with the most important international surveys that have looked at changes in attitudes to work (EVS, ESS, ISSP: see Chap. 3), and as well as with the work undertaken by Mercure and Vultur in Québec.[20] The young are however distinguished by a shared characteristic: the great importance they attach

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[20] Mercure and Vultur, *La Signification du travail*.

to all dimensions of work (instrumental, social and expressive); in other words, the over-30s have lower expectations and lower demands. The young less frequently believe that work is just a way of earning a living (Type 2) and that they would stop working if they didn't need the money. They are distinguished too by the importance they attach to the social aspect of work (being useful, helping others).

Comparison of the six countries in terms of age reveals both similarities and differences. Thus, in Germany, young people seem characterised by great ambition, being concerned with challenge, skills and quality of work. Many fear unemployment, but adaptation and change are strategies for reducing the risk of this. The interviews also teach us that expressive engagement can be replaced by a more pragmatic and routine relationship to work after the first years of employment (a point made by the German researchers), and that disinvestment (a reduction in the centrality of work) is the result of the gap between high expectations and the lived reality of work. It is sometimes seen that an earlier expressive relation to work is replaced by an instrumental or pragmatic relation when the latter can offer stability (a point made by the Portuguese and the Italians).

As for similarities, the most striking is the instability and insecurity of employment among the young in all the countries studied. In so far as trajectories are more diverse among the young, their effect on attitudes towards work is also more marked in the younger generation. Another feature is shared by young people in Italy and France in particular: their high expectations, but also the importance attached to the ethical and moral aspects of work. They want a job that is socially useful, that corresponds to their values.

Differences between genders are significant: men attach more importance to having a high income and the possibility of promotion, while women prioritise autonomy and the possibility of helping others.[21] Women are also overrepresented on the expressive side of the typology, while there are few if any women in Type 2, for which the engagement with work is essentially instrumental. According to the interviews, in Italy, France and Germany, gender is more influential than age in determining

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[21] Davoine, "La Qualité de l'emploi"; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza, "Well-being at Work".

the relationship to work. More precisely, in France and Germany, it is not so much gender as the presence of children that is determinant in differentiating the attitudes of men from those of women. In Portugal, young women at the start of their careers have a highly expressive attitude to work, though we do not know what will happen with motherhood. In Germany, women without children or with grown-up children display the same attitudes to work as do men. The same is true of Belgium, even if women's attitudes are more markedly expressive than men's.

Finally, in most countries, the level of education has an influence on the value attached to work. The expressive aspects of work are more important for those who have a high level of education. Two countries are exceptions in this respect: Hungary and Italy. In Hungary, the economic and social situation has a higher impact than does education, as was already seen in the 1989 wave of the ISSP.

5.3   Are the Young Different?

Despite strong intragenerational differences, notably associated with gender and education, there are shared features in young people's attitudes to work that distinguish them from other age cohorts, features arising from their specific experience of the job market and of the context in which they grew up, and thus from their generational location.

5.3.1 A Management Concern

It is no doubt in management that the question of young people's difference is most widely discussed, with a plethora of publications and events devoted to "Generation Y", whose behaviours are said to be problematic from a management point of view.[22] Generation Y features on the repertoire of management consultants and experts in human resources and

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[22] François Pichault and Matthieu Pleyers, "Pour en finir avec la génération Y … Enquête sur une représentation managériale", proceedings of the 21st Congress of the Association Francophone de Gestion des Ressources Humaines held at Rennes and St Malo, 17–19 November 2010, available at www.reims-ms.fr/agrh/docs/actes-agrh/pdf-des-actes/2010pichault-pleyers.pdf

on the front pages of the management press. Numerous articles describe these young people's behaviours at work and recommend practices and behaviours that will allow managers to effectively integrate into the business a generation said to be very different from the others.

Two remarks are called for here. Firstly, some of this literature habitually presents the cohabitation of young and old at work as presenting a risk of conflict that may in the longer term affect business performance. There is talk of a "generation gap",[23] a difference between generations that is "a source of organisational difficulties that hinder business decision-making and performance".[24] Yet the relationships between generations at work are multiple in register and cannot be reduced to the merely conflictual. Béatrice Delay, for instance, distinguishes several modes of relation between young and old at work (see Chap. 6).[25] Secondly, there seems to be little agreement between authors as to what are, in fact, the distinguishing features of Generation Y, a fact probably explained by the fact that much of this writing comes from non-academics.[26] François Pichault and Mathieu Pleyers have discussed the unreliable or even non-existent methodological basis of the available studies of Generation Y.[27]

We may note, then, that the managerial take on the younger generation is a partial view that focuses mainly on cultural and indeed mostly behavioural matters. The sociological approach to the relationship to work is more complex: it considers not only attitudes and expectations but also the meaning of work, its place in society and the interrelationships between work and other significant spheres of individual and collective life. This is the approach adopted by the SPReW research, and from this point of view young people have particularities that cannot be reduced to cultural attributes.

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[23] Daniel Olliver and Catherine Tanguy, *Génération Y, mode d'emploi. Intégrez les jeunes dans l'entreprise!* (Brussels: Éditions De Boeck, 2008).

[24] Cécile Dejoux and Heidi Wechtler, "Diversité générationnelle : implications, principes et outils de management", *Management & Avenir* 43 (March 2011), pp. 227–238.

[25] Béatrice Delay, "Le rapport entre jeunes et anciens dans les grandes entreprises. La responsabilité organisationnelle dans la construction de dynamiques intergénérationnelles coopératives" (Centre d'Etudes de l'Emploi Working Paper 103, September 2008).

[26] Jean Pralong, "L'image du travail selon la génération Y", *Revue internationale de psychosociologie* 16:39 (2010), pp. 109–134.

[27] Pichault and Pleyers, "Pour en finir avec la génération Y…".

5.3.2 The Complexities of Integration

Young people who are starting or seeking to start work are similar in a number of respects, the most important being their position in the life course: in transition to adulthood, looking to gain their independence, moving in together as a couple, planning a family and developing their own projects in several different fields. They also share a position on the labour market, characterised by both strengths and weaknesses: they are on average better educationally qualified than their elders, they are on the right side of the digital divide, and enjoy advantages in terms of mobility, flexibility and language skills, but they are also overrepresented among the precariously employed and the unemployed and less well covered by social security (see Chap. 4). In 2010, a country like Italy, for example, devoted 61 % of its social security budget to pensions, and very little to unemployment or to family or housing support.[28]

Examination of a series of surveys carried out in the six countries investigated[29] also reveals cross-national similarities between the different cohorts' experiences of the labour market, among them the complexity of the process of young people's integration. A lengthening of the period of integration is a common feature revealed in all surveys. They also demonstrate the increased complexity of the integration process, issuing in several types of partial integration or of "inability" to move on from informal or precarious employment relations to full-time employment with a formal, long-term contract. The surveys also converge in highlighting the social basis of insecurity and of processes of dualisation. The employment market is experienced as a source of "social fear" associated with a loss of confidence in public policy aimed at correcting inequalities in the employment market.

A survey on the life course of young adults, carried out in Belgium in 2004 among young people of 18 to 36, had already disproved the hypothesis that the young actually wanted increasingly individualised life courses. When they could, most chose standard life courses.[30]

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[28] Eurostat, European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics (ESSPROS).

[29] Patricia Vendramin, "Overview and Appraisal of Quantitative Surveys" Report 4 of the SPReW project, 2008, downloadable at http://www.ftu-namur.org/fichiers/sprew-D4-finalweb.pdf

[30] Mark Elchardus and Wendy Smits, "Le Cours de vie des jeunes adultes" (research report, Tempus Omnia Revelat Study Group, Free University of Brussels, 2005).

Furthermore, the self-chosen life course was more typical of upper social classes, the more standard life course more typical of the middle and lower classes.[31]

The typology presented here shows that the extreme types (2 and 4), characterised by individualised trajectories, are in a minority and are not confined to any one age group—although young people are a little better represented than their elders in Type 4, characterised by high expectations of self-expression and great subjective involvement with work. Type 2 (work as a means of earning money), characterised by essentially instrumental expectations, appears in the interviews as a fall-back position following disappointment at work, an interim condition while awaiting the "right" job, or as a necessity, "real" life being elsewhere, in more personal projects.

What is revealed by consideration of career trajectories and employment data is that the younger generation's main problem is not just finding a job but keeping it.[32] Young people become "habituated" to risk, which they cope with the help of their families. Alessandro Cavalli emphasises both the reality and the paradox of this complicity between the children who benefit from their parents' assistance—parents who are in competition with young people in the employment market or in defending their own pensions.[33]

Younger generations' relationship to work seems to be changing from a "roots" model to a "path" model: the idea of a job to be held on to, somewhere you put down roots, is becoming increasingly rare, replaced by the idea of a career path that is followed in stages. There is not one single meaning attached to this path, a polysemy that reflects the multiple views and expectations young people have regarding work, professional development, autonomy and security.[34]

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[31] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1986).

[32] Carla Facchini, ed., *Diventare adulti. Vincoli economici e strategie familiari* (Milan: Guerini, 2005).

[33] Alessandro Cavalli, "Generations and Value Orientation", *Social Compass* 51:2 (2004), pp. 155–168.

[34] Giorgio Gosetti, *Giovani, lavoro e significati* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005); Cécile Van de Velde, *Devenir adulte. Sociologie comparée de la jeunesse en Europe* (Paris: PUF, 2008).

5.3.3 The Impact of Education and Feminisation

It is undeniable that rising levels of education have an impact on the relationship to work. We may recall that in Europe a third of young people between the ages of 25 and 29 have a high level of education (Isced 5–6), 42 % indeed in France and Belgium. In Europe as a whole, 18 % of young people have a low level of education (Isced 0–2), with certain countries in particular standing out, such as Portugal with 39 %. What is more, the level of education is higher among young women than among young men (see Chap. 4).

Socialisation in the school context evidently has an impact on the way young people think of employment: a higher level of education promotes both a more detached, less "subjective" approach to work and greater self-confidence in relation to the labour market. Nor can attitudes towards work (especially among young graduates) be understood without reference to the disillusion caused by the decline in status that accompanies entry into the labour market and more generally the frustration and dissatisfaction engendered by a situation where the link between a degree, a job and social mobility has been broken, what Chauvel has called the breakdown of the social elevator.[35] Student employment also provides a distinctive experience of the world of work through which these young people develop a relationship to work before embarking on their careers proper; such jobs also contribute to the process of young people's socialisation.[36]

Analysis of the interviews, however, contradicts the hypothesis of the decreasing centrality of work; what one sees rather is a different way of constructing the relationship to work, the sense of social duty being increasingly absent. This finds corroboration in various other surveys, including the EVS. Mercure and Vultur note the same phenomenon

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[35] Louis Chauvel, "Les nouvelles générations devant la panne prolongée de l'ascenseur social", *Revue de l'OFCE* 96:1 (January 2006) pp. 35–50, downloadable at http://www.louischauvel.org/ofceralentissementgenerationnel5.pdf.

[36] Jacques Hamel, "Pour une vue longitudinale sur les jeunes et le travail", *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie* 115 (2/2003); Henri Eckert, "Les jeunes, les études, le travail, l'autonomie…", *in* Jacques Hamel, Catherine Pugeault-Cicchelli, Olivier Galland and Vincenzo Cicchelli, eds, *La jeunesse n'est plus ce qu'elle était* (Paris: PUF, 2010), pp. 237–243.

among young Québécois.[37] A survey of employees under 30 in French-speaking Belgium further shows that the experience of unemployment, which is common among young people, further reduces the number who believe that work is a social duty.[38]

Both international surveys (Chap. 3) and the interviews show that women have very strong expectations of self-expression. They have for the most part a high level of education and are well settled in employment. They have goals they want to achieve in both work and family life; young women graduates are no longer interested in the idea of earning a mere "supplementary income". If the family sphere is still of first importance, as is confirmed by many surveys, women today say they want a career and the opportunity for self-development at work. They also have expectations of the atmosphere and social relations at work. The typology's Type 3, the second more numerous, reflects women's characteristic kind of engagement with work.

5.3.4   Points of Convergence

Notwithstanding intragenerational diversity, and despite the absence of a generational self-consciousness, it would seem that the younger generation, together with women, are beginning to adumbrate a new conception of work. In general, the younger generation is more involved in the shift in the relationship to work, in the increasing salience of self-expression as a value. Those who have undertaken further study are more demanding and have higher expectations in terms of opportunities for personal development through work. The young tend to be enthusiastic about work and they have high expectations of their jobs (both instrumental and expressive), but at the same time they attach great importance to other things in life. The attitudes of the younger generation confirm the emergence of a more "polycentric" conception, that is of a conception of life and a value system structured around several centres (work, family, sexual relationships, leisure pursuits, social or

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[37] Mercure and Vultur, *La Signification du travail.*

[38] Patricia Vendramin, *Les Jeunes, le Travail et l'Emploi.*

political engagement, etc.), the balance between them being a matter for the individual. Young people are looking for a consistency between life and work in terms of meaning and value, which can sometimes lead them to prefer insecurity in a meaningful job than security in meaningless work. They are less afraid of instability than their elders, even if they aspire above all to security; they seem to see precarity as an inevitable but properly transitory phase.

This challenge to work's hegemonic status is explained by a number of factors, among them a higher level of education, a greater desire on the part of young men—as compared to those of the older generations—to limit the impact of work with the arrival of the first child, the refusal to reproduce a model of parenthood centred exclusively on work and disillusion associated with loss of status. Gender is pertinent to understanding generational changes, and with them changes in the culture of family and the growing importance as an issue of the reconciliation of work and family, for both men and women. As mothers, women bring to work a set of relatively new and very specific expectations.

5.4   Conclusion: A New Kind of Relationship to Work?

Drawing on major international surveys (ISSP, EVS and ESS), national surveys and qualitative interviews, the foregoing analysis of changes in the relationship to work has brought out the characteristics that distinguish the younger generation from their elders and women from men while drawing out the major features of a contemporary understanding of work, of which one may hypothesise that it will become increasingly prevalent among workers. The key features are a refusal of the hegemonic status hitherto accorded to work and the desire to pursue projects in different fields of life in parallel, in pursuit of a plural identity. Another feature is the convergence of male and female models of relationship to work and common approach to social relationships, considered a crucial element of a good job.

5.4.1   The Polycentric Life

Changes in the relationship to work are not best understood in terms of the centrality/non-centrality opposition, the concept of polycentricity proving more useful in illuminating the equilibria that individuals seek in their choices. Both the SPReW research and other studies reveal that work remains important but that it no longer functions as the one most important aspect in the construction of identity and the achievement of existential equilibrium: family, friends, leisure pursuits, social life, activism and so on are also important to the construction of identity. Work/life balance has become an important issue for both men and women, and work is being displaced from its hegemonic role by a more polycentric conception of life.

In this polycentric conception, work is a key component of life but does not dominate all others. The hegemony of work as a value has been replaced by the rejection of an unquestioning availability to the employer, corollary of a desire to preserve a personal life by means of autonomous and flexible management of time, that being seen as the privileged locus of personal development. The empirical studies carried out in the six countries have confirmed the prevalence of this polycentric perspective, which was very evident in the interviews conducted in France, Italy and Belgium, if a little less so in Portugal and Germany. In those countries where the tendency is very clear, it is more especially associated with the younger generation. It is not, however, the only pattern. For those workers for whom "work is the cornerstone of identity", there is a strong identification of work and life, leaving no space for plural interests, though this group is very much in the minority.

In this respect, Hungary is distinctive, perhaps because the process of adjustment to a new type of economy is still unfinished. For young people, only two possibilities seem open, neither compatible with a polycentric perspective. They can either become deeply involved with work, at the risk of being seen as careerist, young women in particular; or they can maintain a distance from work to focus more on family life. A single dichotomy between work and family is the norm; there is not an investment in multiple centres of interest beyond work and family such as friends, leisure pursuits or political or social engagement.

Polycentricity thus appears as a quest for coherence between different spheres of life, both in terms of organisation, allowing the reconciliation of work and family life, more than ever a concern in the engagement with work, and in terms of values.

This type of relationship to work is the one that Mercure and Vulture report as being prevalent in Québec:[39] of the six kinds of attitude to work they distinguish in terms of its finality (economic, experiential) and its centrality (high, moderate, low), the two most numerous "types" are the egotelic (moderate centrality, experiential finality, 37 %) and the professional (moderate centrality, economic finality, 22 %). Mercure and Vultur also highlight as a fundamental tendency the fact that "endowed with the capacity to reflect on their own lives, individuals attach growing importance to self-determination and to the ideal of balance between the different spheres of life".[40]

5.4.2 Gender Convergence

Gender remains a relevant variable for understanding changes in the relationship to work in parallel with changes in family culture and the increasing importance of reconciling work and family life for both men and women. Young people at work thus evidence a convergence of genders in respect of involvement with work, a phenomenon that might be described as a feminisation of the masculine model and a masculinisation of the feminine. Young men's orientation to work seems to be more governed by expressive values than before. They are more inclined than older generations to choose work in terms of their interests and enthusiasms. They also attach importance to having satisfying human relationships at work. Furthermore, they are also changing in their role as fathers. They are more present in the family and more involved in caring for their children. Even if the distribution of roles between men and women remains very unequal, such involvement with the family increases with the man's

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[39] Mercure and Vultur, *La Signification du travail*.
[40] Ibid., p. 222.

level of education, and is also higher in families where both partners are employed. For young women, work is no longer a means to emancipation—as it was for earlier generations—as this has already been achieved, even if gender discrimination and gender segregation in the employment market persist. Work is increasingly becoming an essential element in the construction of social identity, a means to personal satisfaction and gratification. Young women now enjoy a high level of education, often higher, on average, than that of young men. They are highly motivated to develop their careers. Yet if this is the dominant trend, we have also seen signs of a retraditionalisation of roles (father as provider and stay-at-home mother), more especially in countries where there is a very high degree of intragenerational competition among the younger generations (Hungary, Italy).

This convergence of genders in the relationship to work, especially among graduates, has already drawn the attention of human resources managers concerned to retain young graduates, who have encountered the new kinds of compromises that young, male managers come to between work and family commitments. Mercure and Vultur draw the same conclusion from their work in Québec: "Our analyses reveal that balance between work and private life, whether sought or achieved, is enormously important to workers. … In short, the reconciliation of work and private life seems to us now to be one of the great challenges that businesses have to meet."[41]

If women, particularly those of the younger generation, have very great expectations of work (wanting meaningful, interesting work that also allows the pursuit of other meaningful activities), and if working women with children succeed in speaking out and expressing the difficulties they face today in reconciling the different tasks that fall to them, it may be that the new relationship to work that they most prominently embody—one compatible with a two-earner, two-carer family model—might be established as the new norm for both men and women.

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[41] Ibid., pp. 248–249.

5.4.3 The Social Dimension and the Relationship to the Group

The interviews and the various surveys confirm the value that individuals attach to the social aspect of work, the importance of a good atmosphere at work and good relationships with colleagues and management. The work group, the people they encounter every day and the people they work with seem to be more important than any attachment to a professional group or other more abstract collectivity. This follows too from changes in individual career paths and in forms of organisation. Together with the growth in new forms of work, transformations in the relationship to work have led to new ways of constructing "we(s)" at work. This change in the relationship to the group is linked both to the complexity of the process of integration and a proactive attitude to mobility on the part of employees looking for a better match between job and expectations of work.

Our earlier study of relationships to the group in the IT sector,[42] a sector characterised by new forms of work, work in teams, and project-based organisation, and also by a highly qualified and relatively youthful workforce, reveals the emergence of this type of relationship to the group, marked by the absence of strong normative ties. Involvement in a group represents a compromise between the collective dimension of work and the personal dimension of the working individual. In their updated study of models of occupational identity, Renaud Sainsaulieu and his colleagues show the decline of fusional models of identity and the rise of models in which the mode of integration is less determined by rules than by interactions in the course of work.[43] Groups are invested with great personal expectations, and they are judged in terms of the satisfactions they afford and the learning they enable. More complex, more diffuse and less fusional solidarities are being formed between increasingly well-educated individuals whose expectations are high and career paths diverse. It is shared activity that creates the bond. This way of

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[42] Patricia Vendramin, *Le Travail au singulier*.

[43] Florence Osty, Renaud Sainsaulieu and Marc Uhalde, *Les Mondes sociaux de l'entreprise* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007).

coming together at work and forming groups tinged with nomadism suits those in certain kinds of jobs and also a certain phase in the career; it may not necessarily be preferred in the longer term. It does, however, raise questions for the work of trade unions whose approach to solidarity is based on a sense of belonging and of a commitment to a more abstract group.

At the end of this chapter, we may note that neither age, occupational category nor gender exerts a determining influence on the relationship to work, even if they may be seen as significant in individual cases. These variables do not determine a particular kind of relationship to work, even if certain tendencies may be observed, such as the rarity of women with essentially instrumental attitudes to work or the greater likelihood of the best-qualified having a more expressive attitude. The generational approach, however, reveals that experience of a particular context (characterised by continuing mass unemployment, high levels of education and the feminisation of the labour market) and a shared economic fate has seen the emergence among the younger generation, as well as among women, of a changed conception of work characterised the desire to accord equal importance to different spheres of meaning in life, by a convergence between masculine and feminine models of involvement with work, and by a more privatised rather than communal approach to social relationships at work. On the basis of these observations, we shall go on in the next chapter to analyse the different generation's perceptions of each other, each associated with different meanings attached to work, some shared, some not, and the effect of these mutual perceptions on everyday work and intergenerational cohesion.

6

The Coexistence of Generations at Work

There is nothing new about research and debate on young people's position in the labour market, either in the work of sociologists of labour[1] or in policy debate,[2] nor about concern for the future of European pensions systems.[3] Yet an intergenerational approach to labour-market participation

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[1] Hamel, Pugeault-Cicchelli, Galland and Cicchelli, eds, *La jeunesse n'est plus ce qu'elle était*; Rainer Zoll, "Mutation des orientations des jeunes par rapport au travail", in *Travail, activité, emploi. Une comparaison France-Allemagne* (Paris: La Documentation française, 1999), pp. 9–14; Chantal Nicole-Drancourt and Laurence Roulleau-Berger, *Les Jeunes et le Travail (1950–2000)* (Paris: PUF, 2001); Madeleine Gauthier and Laurence Roulleau-Berger, *Les Jeunes et l'emploi dans les villes d'Europe et d'Amérique du Nord* (Paris: Éditions de l'Aube, 2001); Florence Lefresne, *Les Jeunes et l'Emploi* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003); Stéphane Beaud, *80% au bac et après?* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003); Jean-François Tchernia, "Les jeunes Européens, leur rapport au travail", in Olivier Galland and Bernard Roudet, eds, *Les Jeunes Européens et leurs valeurs: Europe occidentale, Europe centrale et orientale* (Paris: Injep & La Découverte, 2005).

[2] Marina Monaco, "How do European Policy Practices Address the Intergenerational Challenge Regarding Work?", in Patricia Vendramin, ed., *Generations at Work and Social Cohesion in Europe* (Brussels: PIE-Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 255–279.

[3] Conseil d'Orientation des Retraites, *Retraites: renouveler le contrat social entre les générations. Orientations et débats. Premier rapport 2001* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2002); European Commission, *Adequate and Sustainable Pensions*, Joint Report by the Commission and the Council (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2003); Bruno Palier, *La Réforme des*

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has only recently emerged, either in sociology, policy discussion or human resources management. Until then, studies had looked at different age groups separately,[4] motivated on the one hand by a recurrent concern for young people's position in the labour market, and on the other by worries about demographic ageing and the future of pensions systems. It was the latter that would eventually prompt synoptic consideration of the different cohorts' place in the labour market. Over the last decade or so, articles,[5] colloquia and discussion meetings on age management in business have multiplied. The issue for human resources managers has been how to prolong the careers of workers over 50. At the national and European levels, on the other hand, the motivation to reflection has been the demographic challenge. Recent protest movements among young people in Europe and elsewhere have, furthermore, alerted public opinion to the younger generation's unhappiness at its place at work and on the labour market, which notably does not at all reflect the growing proportion of graduates, especially among young women.

This chapter elaborates on the topics addressed in the individual and group interviews carried out in the six countries investigated (Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal)[6] for the SPReW research

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retraites (Paris: PUF, 2003); Anne-Marie Guillemard, *L'Âge de l'emploi, Les sociétés à l'épreuve du vieillissement* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2003); Vincent Caradec, *Sociologie de la vieillesse et du vieillissement*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Armand Colin, 2008); David Natali, *Pensions in Europe, European Pensions: The Evolution of Pension Policy at National and Supranational Level* (Brussels: PIE-Peter Lang, 2008).

[4] For the definition of terms referring to age groups see Chap. 5.

[5] Nancy Pekala, "Conquering the Generational Divide", *Journal of Property Management*, 2001; Guy Paré, "La génération Internet: un nouveau profil d'employés", *Gestion* 27:2 (2002), pp. 47–53; Paul M. Arsenault, "Validating Generational Differences. A Legitimate Diversity and Leadership Issue", *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 25:1-2 (2004); Cécile Dejoux and Heidi Wechtler, "Diversité générationnelle: implications, principes et outils de management", *Management et Avenir* 43 (2011); Susan P. Eisner, "Managing Generation Y", *SAM Advanced Management Journal* 70 (2005), pp. 4–15; Ollivier and Tanguy, *Génération Y*; Bruce Tulgan, *Not Everyone Gets the Trophy. How to Manage Generation Y* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009); Pichault and Pleyers, "Pour en finir avec la génération Y…"; Tamara Erickson, "Gen Y in the Workforce", *Harvard Business Review* 87:2 (2009), pp. 43–49; Sylvia Anne Hewlett, Laura Sherbin and Karen Sumberg, "How Gen Y & Boomers Will Reshape Your Agenda", *Harvard Business Review* 87:7/8 (2009); Tania Saba, "Les différences intergénérationnelles au travail: faire la part des choses", *Gestion* 34:3 (2009), pp. 25–37.

[6] Patricia Vendramin, ed., *Changing Social Patterns of Relation to Work*.

on the coexistence of generations at work, focusing on the mutual perceptions of the age groups under study (the under-30s, the 30–49s and the 50-and-overs). The topics relate to awareness of age and the sense of belonging to a distinct group, the individual career trajectory and the tension between experience acquired at work and the formal knowledge instilled by education. Interviewees' testimony also highlights the key role of organisational choices.

More fundamentally, on the basis of employees' views of the relationship between generations at work, this chapter considers the similarities and dissimilarities and the closeness and distance between age groups, and identifies areas of conflict and cooperation. It is clear that other variables equally structure differences among the working population as a whole and within each generation, notably socio-economic category, gender and ethnic origin; these variables are discussed, but not considered in any depth here, as the analysis focuses on age and its ability to give rise to a sense of otherness accompanied by social distance or incomprehension.

6.1 Age: The Great Unsaid

Employees of all ages often see belonging to a specific age group as a predictor of particular attitudes to work and to the formal and informal rules associated with it. However, apart from the attribution of distinctive characteristics to different ages—these days an increasingly hazardous exercise—one notes a fundamental denial of the importance of age in intergenerational relations at work. For the interviewees, it is not the fact of being young and just starting work, or at the "peak" of one's career, or in the last years before retirement, that determines the nature of intergenerational relationships. Furthermore, if stereotypes associated with age certainly exist, they are not particularly strong and have little impact in day-to-day work; they tend rather to be mobilised at moments of tension, when one group feels itself in danger of marginalisation or exclusion on account of age rather than any more objective criterion. Finally, above and beyond social categories such as gender, age or occupation, it is the quality of interpersonal relations that determines the relationships between individual and groups. These points will be developed in what follows.

6.1.1 Perceptions of Attitudes and Behaviours

The first area in which employees display a differentiated perception of generational groups is that of attitudes and behaviours in the workplace. Any distinctive behaviours evoked are generally associated with the younger or older generations, the middle generation being more or less unmentioned in spontaneous discussions of age. Those who have the most to say about the subject are the older generation and their remarks are most often about young people at work. It is in its attitudes and behaviours that the younger generation is seen as distinctive, and motivation is the key word in older employees' discussions of the young. They suspect the young of lacking motivation, initiative and enthusiasm for work, complaining that their attitudes are predominantly instrumental. Reflections on the younger generation's motivations are organised around two axes, the first being the cultural changes associated with the democratisation of teaching, the relative generosity of social provision and changing values. For older workers, life has, to an extent, become too easy for the young, who don't have their parents' motivation, "who don't know why they have to work". "Young people feel more or less protected by the social security system." This was the point of view of a Belgian man in his 50s, a skilled worker:

> Life, the system is like that now … You can tell it's too easy, everything's handed to them on plate … A young man today, he's not even married and he wants a house; he wants a fitted kitchen, a car. They want everything, just like that. They have a different mind-set, even at work, they have a different mind-set.

In the same vein, one also finds references to changes in values. The younger generation is said to relate differently to leisure, this having an effect on its willingness to work. There are also differences in the relationship to the family. When both members of a couple work, their willingness to work is not the same. Older men were often the main breadwinner; for them it was important to seize on every opportunity to increase the household income, something no longer true of the

young, most of whose partners are working as well. A Belgian joiner put it like this:

> The young ones work their eight hours and then they like to go home. They like their friends. They visit their friends. They have a drink with them. Don't ask them to do more. Whereas for me, if there are two doors to be fitted, right, I go and fit the two doors. Then I go and see my friends. Young people aren't like that. That's not the way they live.

The second group of arguments about young people's motivation relates to the psychological contract between the business and its employees. According to older workers, the younger generation are obliged to live in the short term, to adjust to insecurity; it is they that have to make a career for themselves, and as a result they don't have the same loyalty to their employer, which the older workers interpret as a lack of motivation. They do recognise, however, that if younger workers feel less motivated by their work, this is also due to the fact that the firm offers them little in the way of opportunities or prospects. Faced with the permanent threat of unemployment, the young do not get involved in the job in the same way. A male Italian worker in his 50s explains:

> They have another mentality, yes, they have another mentality … They're asked to do another hour of overtime, and they say no. They want to go home. And they're not motivated. I understand that. They wait to be given a long-term contract, they wait and they wait and they don't get it. In the end they lose motivation.

Yet if there is tacit agreement on these points among employees of 50 and over, quite the opposite opinion can be found among the young, although it is less widespread. In this reading, it is the older workers who are said to be more *blasé* than the young, more uninterested in work, less engaged, uninvolved, while the young are said to be innovative and enthusiastic.

Arguments around the theme of motivation are all connected to the central notion of career trajectory. Young workers are different because their career trajectories are different from those of their elders (for this,

see the next section). One might well wonder, however, how new these mirrored discourses actually are. Thirty years earlier, as Nicolas Flamant has emphasised, views were very much the same.[7] The same kind of commonplaces circulated about young people starting employment, as witnessed, for example, by a study of young people's ideas about work carried out by the Centre d'Études de l'Emploi in 1972.[8]

> At a time when some are tempted to explain if not to justify the difficulties the young have in finding employment by their rejection of traditional values, this investigation of young people's notions of success and failure would seem to put a number of received ideas into question … When most employers known for the employment of young people echo each other in describing the new difficulties they have with them, claiming that they do not show the "enthusiasm for work, the ambition and the seriousness" that supposedly characterized earlier generations, and when they advance such subjective factors to explain their reluctance to continue recruiting them, what exactly is going on?

In the late 2000s, firms rediscovered the younger generation after two decades during which they had either been kept unemployed or served as an undemanding workforce governed by the fear of unemployment. This new generation reflected all the changes that had been happening outside the workplace, in terms of consumption, precarity, technological change and mobility. It now brought all of them into the workplace, with businesses having to face them properly for the first time in the persons of their younger employees. A process of relational learning had thus to be established between these workers and the firms that employed them.

More fundamentally, it is interesting to note that despite these criticisms of young people's lack of motivation to work, the subject of age is not spontaneously evoked in connection with the relationship between

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[7] Nicolas Flamant, "Conflit de génération ou conflit d'organisation? Un train peut en cacher un autre…", *Sociologie du travail* 47:2 (2005), pp. 223–244.

[8] Jean Rousselet, Gabrielle Balazs and Catherine Mathey, "Les jeunes et l'emploi. L'idée de travail, de réussite et d'échec chez des jeunes de milieux scolaires et sociaux différents", *Cahiers du Centre d'études de l'emploi* 7 (1975), pp. 11ff.

generations. In none of the six countries investigated did interviewees spontaneously raise the question. There is no implicit or underlying reference to a distinction, polarisation or conflict between age groups. Age is first of all something that is not talked about, it is not a subject of discussion. This absence of any discussion of age, despite the existence of lively and sometimes stigmatising social and political debate about both younger and older generations,[9] perhaps evidences a kind of workplace taboo on the subject, with people wishing to avoid an eternal debate such as sometimes arises in the case of gender. Yet the subjects that remain unmentioned and undiscussed in a society are often the most crucial. What is more, when directly asked about the importance of age at work, many interviewees stress that people differ in terms of their personal characteristics rather than in terms of age. This type of "internalising" explanation does not promote an awareness of social developments.[10] Social movements generally emerge in response to a perception that the salient features of a group's shared situation are determined by a set of circumstances outside them,[11] and internalising explanations are thus less compatible with a quest for change. The denial of the importance of age thus operates to reinforce the status quo, discouraging the engagement with social conditions that might bring about change. Somewhat paradoxically, despite this generalised denial of the importance of age, each country investigated sees stereotypes and negative characteristics attributed to all age groups. These negative characteristics can be mobilised in periods of conflict, or presented as insignificant in periods of harmony. They nonetheless remain present and available as a "resource" for periods of tension. The features in question display many commonalities from country to country.

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[9] Donatienne Desmette and Mathieu Gaillard, "When a 'Worker' Becomes an 'Older Worker': The Effects of Age-Related Social Identity on Attitudes Towards Retirement and Work", *Career Development International* 13:2 (2008), pp. 168–185; Matthieu Gaillard and Donatienne Desmette, "(In)validating Stereotypes About Older Workers Influences Their Intentions to Retire Early and to Learn and Develop", *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 32 (2010). pp. 86–98.

[10] Henri Tajfel, "Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations", *Annual Review of Psychology* 33, pp. 1–39.

[11] Bernd Simon and Bert Klandermans, "Politicized Collective Identity: A Social Psychological Analysis", *American Psychologist* 56 (2001), pp. 319–331.

6.1.2 Ambiguous Stereotypes

The negative characteristics and other qualities that older workers attribute to the younger are most often related to the lack of motivation already discussed. In certain cases, as we have seen, older workers explain this as the result of their younger colleagues' precarious status. Lack of initiative and lack of concentration on the job are also complained of, while others speak of the youngsters' competitive spirit. Some older workers go further, saying that the behaviour of the young has deteriorated over the last 20 years: frequent absenteeism, unsatisfactory behaviour, poor standards of work, disengagement, unreliability, impatience. A French sales assistant in his 50s complained: "They want everything now, though they don't know anything and haven't yet shown what they can do." The most common negative stereotypes attached to older workers relate to resistance to change, lack of drive and lack of personal ambition. In a country in transition such as Hungary, where the change in social values has been the most marked, intergenerational conflicts at work are strongly framed by the categories of family conflict. Group discussions conducted by the Hungarian team revealed that "the older generation imposes its ideas about the right way to live on the younger generation".[12] In this country in transition, generational stereotypes in the workplace reflect family stereotypes, and the new, market discourse of the public sphere has not yet penetrated the private realm and put down roots there.

Finally, it is the younger generation that is the object of the most stereotyping by other generations, whether negative or positive, while the middle generation suffers least. In many respects, the latter proves to be the invisible generation. Yet it is this generation that nurtures the most negative stereotypes regarding the young at work. This more critical view of the succeeding generation is nourished by a sense of job insecurity in the face of the rising generation, better qualified on the whole and more prepared to tolerate various kinds of flexibility that are unacceptable to the over-30s. As a result, the young appear as direct competitors to the

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[12] Katalin Füleki, Orsolya Polyacskó and Julia Vajda, "Chapter 5: Report from Hungary", in Vendramin, ed., *Changing Social Patterns of Relation to Work*, pp. 197–252.

middle generation, who still have many years of work ahead of them before they retire, and much less of a threat to the older workers.

The results of the 2010 survey of working conditions in Europe[13] confirm that there is little perception of age discrimination at work, but where it is felt to exist it is directed above all at the under-30s and the 50-and-overs. To the question "Over the past 12 months, have you been subjected at work to … age discrimination?", 5 % of European employees under 30 answered "Yes", while only 2 % of the 30–49-year-olds did the same, and 5 % of the 50-and-overs. The distribution is the same in all six countries investigated, with higher percentages among younger and older workers, though there are differences between countries. Germany had the highest proportion of respondents who said they had experienced age discrimination: 9 % among under-30s, 1 % among the 30–49-year-olds, and 9.5 % among the 50-and-overs. Then come Belgium (7 %, 3 % and 6 % respectively), France (6 %, 2 %, 6 %) and Hungary (4 %, 2.5 %, 5 %), while Italy and Portugal seem the least affected (Italy 3 %, 1 %, 3 %; Portugal, 4 %, 1 %, 2.5 %).

6.1.3 The Overriding Importance of Social Relationships

Finally, the quality of social relationships (the "atmosphere" at work) is a key variable in the relationships between individuals and between groups. A 54-year-old male consultant from Italy says:

> Work becomes important, becomes central only if you feel at ease with the people you work with, if you have good relationships.

A 27-year-old female technical employee says the same in her own way:

> When the people you work with look at you as if you were a stranger, don't see what you're capable of doing, don't offer to help or ask you to join them for a coffee, it's difficult to think positively and to feel OK.

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[13] Eurofound, EWCS 2010.

The quality of social relationships has little to do with generational identity and age does not seem to be seen as a possible barrier. A mix of generations is generally considered to be a good thing for an organisation, even if age does come up in private discussions. A 27-year-old French woman working as a human resources assistant explains:

> Obviously, we don't have the same problems. The older people are close to retirement, and so you often hear them talking among themselves about when they're leaving, about the pension reforms, what they're going to do afterwards. While for me, and for other young people in the same position, we're at a stage in our lives, both personally and professionally, when we're trying to get things together, with all that that involves: how do you get on in the business, what to do about childcare … , how to have the money to buy a house. All that kind of thing. Well, that can create a bit of a distance between us. We don't have the same problems.

The social relationship can take different forms; in more traditional industries, older workers develop a paternalist attitude towards new arrivals at work. A young Belgian metalworker explains:

> I was the youngster, the kid. They were in their late forties, fifties, I was the kid and they were really nice to me. That's why I say I wouldn't like to leave, because I've always been very well treated in the different sections I've been in, because, well, yes, I was 20, I was the kid. It was really nice.

Businesses sometimes make a policy of generational homogeneity and promote the social aspect of this as a form of compensation for insecurity and low pay. A 33-year-old human resources manager at a retail SME in Belgium says that she doesn't recruit employees over 30 as the young staff's commitment to the business was largely due to the atmosphere at work, based on youthfulness and shared interests.[14] And she goes on:

> I did an evaluation not long ago, when I asked questions about general matters and all I got out of it was: "We're not well-paid, it's not much of a wage but we're not going to go and look for anything else because it's very

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[14] Cultiaux and Vendramin, "Report from Belgium".

nice where we are, because there's a certain freedom, because it's a great team." That's the gist of what everybody was saying.

Talking of social relationships, there is one subject older workers often bring up, the supposed difference between the individualism of the young and the solidarity of the old. They have the impression that the world of work is becoming increasingly individualistic and that solidarity is in decline, for a variety of reasons that have to do with individuals but also with society as a whole. The young are said to be more marked by individualistic values and attitudes. Yet this type of observation remains extremely ambiguous, for while this is what they say, they also tell stories that show that social relationships at work have not weakened. Complaints about the fading of solidarity are often backed up by reference to rates of unionisation,[15] but they seem to be better explained by the contradiction between two different visions and two conflicting experiences of the workplace and the firm. Most older workers have spent their working lives in large firms based on more "collective" values, while younger workers have joined the workforce in organisations inspired by more "liberal" values. Recalling Duferco's purchase of part of bankrupt Belgian steelworks Forges de Clabecq in 1997, a worker in his 40s explains his sense of the awkward encounter of two different visions of work:

> We had a certain way of working, before. And then this lot arrived, young, with lots of drive; and they were more skilled. The others, the ones from the old days, they were resting on their laurels … There was a conflict of generations … The others, the ones who came after, are more individualist. They don't have the sense of camaraderie that we do. Because there are still a lot of people from the Forges there, and they still don't understand how, after ten years now, how the others don't have that spirit. It doesn't come just like that; if you don't know what it is you don't know how to get it. There are people who understand, even if they haven't been used to it. But there are people who don't understand, so the "others" are bad, even before you get to know them, they're bad, because they don't think like them.

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[15] Jelle Visser, "Union Membership Statistics in 24 Countries", *Monthly Labor Review* 129:1 (January 2006); Bernhard Ebbinghaus and Jelle Visser, *Trade Unions in Western Europe since 1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

This individualisation is not limited to the workplace but is a tendency of society as a whole. Opinion is however divided: certain authors are pessimistic, seeing in it a breakdown of social ties and a decline of solidarity brought about by new methods of management and evaluation adopted by employers,[16] while others are less so, seeing the prevailing individualisation as representing a change in the nature and form of social ties rather than their destruction.[17]

6.2   The Experience of Work and the Individual Trajectory

Generational belonging is inseparable from a specific experience of the labour market. If intergenerational differences can be very marked in terms of educational qualifications or gender, there are also strong differences in career trajectories—the transition from education to employment market, and the career path once in employment.

6.2.1 Differences of Trajectory

The changes in individual trajectories have been substantial, the life course and career path of older workers having been very different from those of young people today. Interviewees—the older ones especially—draw attention to differences at every stage: in the period of education and training, at the moment of entering work, of forming a family, in conditions of work. It is however the older workers who emphasise these differences between age groups. Their observations are ambivalent: on the one hand, young are said to have a more comfortable life, but on the other they see their employment status—rather than the content of work per se—as extremely problematic and unfair compared to how they themselves were treated when they started work more than 30 years earlier.

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[16] Danièle Linhart, *Travailler sans les autres* (Paris: Seuil, 2009); Christophe Dejours, *Travail. Usure mentale*, new and expanded edition (Paris: Bayard, 2005).

[17] Patricia Vendramin, *Le Travail au singulier. Le lien social à l'épreuve de l'individualisation*, (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant; Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004).

Older workers talk of upbringing, of the parents' role as models for their children. Their own parents had suffered poor working conditions. The parents of today's young people had enjoyed easier conditions of work and so it was quite understandable that they had passed on a distinctive way of thinking about work. A Belgian skilled worker in his 50s says:

> Our parents, you know, they worked hard, and we learnt from that experience, they passed that experience on. With young people today it's different. Myself, I look at how my father worked, how I work, it's much more laid back today. Much more laid back today, conditions of work have changed. The benefits have changed, there are more than before.

Older workers also point at the fact that young workers have no experience of work as they begin their first employment, having just left education when they are taken on. Furthermore, they have never had great demands made of them at home, where in earlier days they might have gained their first experience of carrying out tasks. Other key changes have been in the time spent at school, and the role of the school in the upbringing of children. Almost 42 % of European workers under 30 left full-time education at the age of 21 or later, while only 25 % of the 50-and-overs did the same.[18] For the EU-15 countries, the difference is even greater, the figures being 52 % of the young and 26 % for the old. The situation is similar in the six countries investigated here, though the differences vary: in Germany, 56 % of the under-30s and 32 % of the 50-and-overs left full-time education at the age of 21 or later, in Belgium 53 % and 40 %, in France 38 % and 22 %, in Hungary 36 % and 15 %, in Italy 38.5 % and 19 % and in Portugal 34 % and 8 %.

On the other hand, these observations need to be tempered by consideration of the increasing prevalence of student employment, which while not yet as common as it is in Québec and the rest of North America is nonetheless a growing reality in Europe. In France, 17 % of the young people who took part in the "Génération 2004" survey had had a regular job while a student, while 70 % had done "holiday jobs or casual work".[19] According to a survey of more than a thousand workers under 30 carried

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[18] Eurofound, EWCS 2010.

out in French-speaking Belgium in 2007,[20] one respondent in two had worked "regularly" as a student before taking up their present employment, 29 % had done so "sometimes" and 22 % had never had a job while studying. Student employment thus represents a form of occupational socialisation for a good number of young people. More common among young people who undertook lengthy studies, it further exacerbates the difference in skills portfolio between them and those who did not.

6.2.2 The Precarity of Young People's Employment

A topic frequently raised in discussions of the occupational integration of young people is the precarity of their employment, which older workers did not suffer from, and which they denounce. When they speak of their own integration into work, older workers highlight the fact that it was easy for them to make a career, whatever level of education or training they started with. Today, they note the fall in the value of a degree, the governmental promotion of non-standard employment as a solution to youth unemployment, the flexibilisation of work. They note that entry into work is increasingly individualised and chancy, and that individuals develop a career on their own, spending several years in multiple and sometimes widely varying jobs before finding a stable position.

Older workers maintain, however, that their own conditions of work were more difficult, but this concerns the job itself, not their employment. From this point of view, older workers recognise that "We weren't like young workers today", "It's not nice what young workers have to deal with today", "Employers are hard on young workers." A Belgian metalworker in his 50s says:

Before, companies took the time to train a new arrival, now he has to be up to it after only three days. If he doesn't have any experience of work, he's obviously going to lose the job … I can understand young people going

[19] Eckert, "Les jeunes, les etudes", pp. 237–243.

[20] Patricia Vendramin, *Les Jeunes, le Travail et l'Emploi. Enquête auprès des salariés de moins de 30 ans en Belgique francophone* (Namur: FTU/Jeunes CSC, 2007)

into new job feeling fearful. They don't know where they're going or how long they're going to be there.

Some older workers therefore think it natural that young workers are less loyal. In the words of a 63-year-old Belgian IT worker:

> They can't stick to the old model. Companies and management bear a heavy responsibility; they erect divisions between groups…

Furthermore, human resources management is seen as a vehicle of age stereotypes at work, and policy on secure and insecure employment as a clinical, even cynical tool for testing, sorting, motivating and retaining new arrivals. The same IT specialist sums up as follows:

> Now the bosses say: "We want to be able to recruit you and then get rid of you." I think it natural that people should react by saying to their company: "We (the workers) have the right to take you on and get rid of you as well". I think it's entirely natural, quite healthy, even.

Young workers, especially the less skilled, are said to be the chief victims of this situation. Yet while older workers mainly refer to "precarity" when they talk about the situation of the young, the young themselves tend to play it down to a certain degree. They often believe that their attempts at successive jobs are so many trials that legitimate the post they eventually gain, as if they had to undergo a probationary period before being recognised as capable of work. A young Belgian metalworker tells of his own experience:

> I had fourteen jobs before this one … I only ever had short-term contracts. I was young, and it was week here, a week there. It was OK. In fact, I worked a while in all the different sectors … A job is a job, it's all work experience.

Young people come to a negative view of this transitional period when they fear that they will find themselves stuck in it. For the more highly skilled, it also represents a "battle of the talents".[21]

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[21] Ed Michaels, Helen Handfield-Jones and Beth Axelrod, *The War for Talent* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001).

The survey of young workers in French-speaking Belgium looked at their profile in terms of the number of changes of employment in the course of their careers. It concluded that there was little difference in current status between those who had never changed employment and those who had changed only a few times (once, twice or three times). Up to a certain threshold, changing jobs is part of the normal career path for the young. Two or three changes of employment seem "normal", with more one tends to see more precarious trajectories and the social reproduction of occupational insecurity. In this survey, the 22 % of young people who changed employment more than three times were also more likely to have had parents who had experienced unemployment. These changes of job were more likely to be involuntary, and the young people with less experience of stability were more likely to have experienced unemployment. Of young people who had changed employment no more than three times, 53 % had experienced unemployment, as compared to 84 % of those who had changed employment more than three times. Beyond a certain threshold, multiple changes of employment in the early years of employment are an indicator of a fragile position on the labour market.

Career trajectories are significant, for several reasons. On the one hand, differences in these arise from a context, and on the other, trajectories are not themselves without effects. If the phase of transition and precarity is prolonged, it becomes difficult—by the age of 30 or even earlier—to achieve a standard career. Louis Chauvel described this situation as hysteresis of transitional socialisation: past history is a determinant of the individual trajectory, earlier experience has an impact on the later career, and the moment of entry onto the jobs market is crucial. According to Chauvel, there too is a process of generational scarring, whereby a generation's past difficulties leave a mark that does not spontaneously disappear.[22] In the context of a study of the different generations working on the French railways, Flamant also notes how the trajectories of young workers entering a firm have an impact on their relationship to work and their particular expectations of both business and management.[23] Trajectories differ by age group and also as between individuals

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[22] Chauvel, "Les nouvelles generations".

[23] Flamant, "Conflit de génération".

within them. In his study, Flamant distinguishes three sub-groups among young workers, each sharing a common trajectory: post-school entrants arriving directly from education; ex-apprentices who have completed in-house training; the post-precarious escaping a chaotic trajectory; and those embarking on a second career. Attitudes and expectations regarding work, the business and management are not the same across all four groups of young recruits.

6.3   Tensions Around Experience, Formal Knowledge and Innovation

While actually working, the chief divisions between the generations relate, on the one hand, to the real or supposed differences in aptitude for using ICTs, and on the other to the paradoxical character of experience in relation to formal knowledge on the one hand and the imperative of innovation on the other.

6.3.1   Aptitudes for ICT

In the six countries investigated, the interviewees tend to agree in seeing older workers as having limited skills in the field of ICT. Young workers see themselves as more competent in ICT, and are also so described by older workers, while older workers see themselves as less competent and reluctant to engage with new technologies. A young Belgian manager in his 30s offers his ambivalent view:

> I used to work with older people when I started … real stickers for procedure. What age is it for "older people"? Fifty … My mother is a teacher. Imagine her office, it's full of papers. I don't have a hundredth of all that, unbelievable, isn't it? Except it's not. These days, there's less paper everywhere, there's no need to make little drawings to understand each other, things like that. On the other hand, the older ones are perhaps better than us at concretising things at meetings. Perhaps because we stay too much behind our computers, we're just fifteen feet apart and we never even say "Hey, what d'you think of this?" Why? Because we don't see each other any

longer. I've noticed, I've got colleagues just opposite me, and it's very rare that we speak to each other. Everyone has an iPod in their ears, and we send each other e-mails. It's sad, it's sad.

The question of ICT is very often brought up by both younger and older workers, very rarely by the middle generation. Nonetheless, numerous national and European surveys have shown that the age-related digital divide largely disappears with time, especially at work.[24] The recent EWCS 2010 data show that for the six countries under investigation (except for Portugal), but also for the European workforce as a whole, that there is little difference between the under-30s and the 50-and-overs in the regular use of ICT at work.[25] For Europe as a whole, 33.5 % of under-30s are regular users of ICT at work, 38 % of 30–49-year-olds, and 33 % for the 50-and-overs, that is, only 1 percentage point less than the youngest. In France and Belgium, there are even more regular users of ICT among older workers than among the younger. In Germany, Hungary and Italy, young regular users outnumber the old by between 1 and 4 percentage points. Portugal is however distinctive in having more than twice as high a percentage of regular users among the under-30s as among the 50-and-overs (36 % as opposed to 17 %).

The same goes for regular use of the internet and e-mail in the course of work. For Europe as a whole, 24 % of under-30s regularly use the internet at work, 29 % of 30–49s, and 24 % of the 50-and-overs, very nearly the same percentage for younger as for older workers. Portugal again stands out among the six countries studied.

Given the proportions of users of ICTs and the internet in each age group revealed in the results of the EWCS 2010 survey, one may hypothesise that the perception of differences in aptitude rests in part on stereotype or prejudice. This is a matter worth spending a little time over, because the relationship to ICT is seen as a clear distinguishing factor between generations, especially between youngest and oldest. A number of studies have looked at the use of ICT by different groups and at the

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[24] Eurostat Information Society Database.
[25] Eurofound, EWCS 2010.

skills mobilised by users.[26] The demarcation between young and old is not as clear as is implied by the stereotypes current in society generally and in the world of work more particularly. A typology proposed by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research in 2001,[27] since utilised and elaborated upon by other authors,[28] distinguishes three kinds of digital skills: the instrumental skills involved in the operation of hardware and software; the structural or informational skills required to exploit online content (finding, selecting, understanding, evaluating and processing information); and the strategic skills to make active use of the information, judging its significance to one's own situation and using it to inform decision-making at work or in private life. The same authors have shown that if the young do indeed have better instrumental skills, their elders had an even greater advantage over them in strategic skills. Furthermore, the successive surveys conducted by Eurostat show that the key factor in the digital divide today is no longer age but income and level of education.[29]

Older workers (the 50-and-overs) belong to the last generation to have spent a significant part of its working life without encountering ICT. They were not trained in the use of these technologies when they were young, nor did ICTs have any place in their home life. Their first experience of them then came at a time when interfaces were not very

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[26] Périne Brotcorne, Lotte Damhuis, Véronique Laurent, Gérard Valenduc and Patricia Vendramin, *Diversité et vulnérabilité dans les usages des TIC. La fracture numérique au second degré* (Gent: Academia Press, 2011); Neil Selwyn, Stephen Gorard and John Furlong, *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Information, Technologies and the Learning Society* (London: Routledge, 2005); Luc Mertens et al., *Digitaal over de drempel*, e-book (Leuven: Linc, 2007); Neil Selwyn and Keri Facer, *Beyond the Digital Divide: Rethinking Digital Inclusion for the 21st Century*, (London: FutureLab, 2007); Mark Warschauer, *Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

[27] Jan Steyaert and Jos De Haan, *Geleidelijk digital: een nuchtere kijk op de sociale gevolgen van ICT* (The Hague: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2001).

[28] Patricia Vendramin and Gérard Valenduc, *Internet et inégalités. Une radiographie de la fracture numérique* (Brussels: Labor, 2003), and "Fractures numériques, inégalités sociales et processus d'appropriation des innovations", *Terminal* 95-6 (2006), pp. 137–154; Jan A.G.M. Van Dijk, *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society* (London: Sage Publications, 2005).

[29] Eurostat Information Society Database.

user-friendly and the new technologies were suspected of being responsible for mass redundancies in certain industries or large organisations. They formed part of a context characterised by increased unemployment and lay-offs. For the younger generation, ICTs are an integral part of everyday life. They encounter them first in their leisure-time activities, and the technologies are already familiar tools when they later embark on their working lives. They are expert in the use of many different kinds.

> They play video games, visit forums, stay in touch with friends using instant messaging, mobile phones, and web sites such as Facebook; they turn to the internet (rather than the library) for their school work; they watch TV, take photos with digital cameras or mobile phones; they are often users of multiple virtual environments on the web.[30]

This overgeneralising vision of young people however obscures the significant differences between then in respect of their relationships to ICT and the skills they possess. A Belgian study of young people of 16 to 25 showed that far from being the homogeneous group suggested by talk of digital natives, the young were a highly diverse group and that some among them found themselves in a position of "digital marginalisation", explained in most cases by family structure, cultural milieu and level or type of education rather than economic circumstances.[31] This study also shows that there is a mismatch between young people's actual use of the internet and the expectations of them in terms of the use of ICT at work. In brief, all these studies tend to qualify the somewhat caricatural though widespread understanding of the difference in ICT skills between young and old.

For the over-50s, the ICTs represent one of the great changes to have happened at work over the last 20 years. They arrived alongside changes in modes of corporate organisation, with the emergence of business networks, the expansion of sub-contracting, the growth of services, the

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[30] Meyers, "Millennial workers".

[31] Périne Brotcorne, Luc Mertens and Gérard Valenduc, "Les jeunes offline et la fracture numérique. Les risques d'inégalités dans la génération des 'natifs numériques'", report published by the Belgian Federal Ministry for Social Integration, Brussels, October 2009.

automation of informal tasks, the codification of tasks and skills, multi-skilling and flexibility. In this sense, ICTs serve as an emblem for 20 years of transformation, even if their precise role in this remains debatable.[32] ICTs at work are the concrete, everyday expression of the shift from the industrial to the information society, from collective to neo-liberal principles of organisation. One corollary of this vision of the distribution of ICT skills is the belief that to be old is to be attached to bygone times, to be reluctant to change. We may hypothesise that differences of skill in the field of ICT reflect the opposition between two ages of capitalism and two historical contexts that differ in many respects.

6.3.2 Methods of Work and Knowledge Transfer

Besides ICT skills, methods of work too may vary between generations. In their everyday work, older workers are described as being more structured, more logical, more organised, more calm, less liable to go over the top. "They bring their good sense to daily work." All these characteristics are understood as the products of experience. Young workers are described (by young workers too) as being more excitable, impulsive and talkative. A Portuguese woman manager of 38 says:

> If I had to change today, I'd be glad if there weren't just the young people so I wouldn't have to be the only "oldie", but also to have the contact and the discussion, because while you certainly do learn from young people, you have to learn from older people as well.

Yet older workers are not thought of as less efficient: efficiency is associated with time and experience. In the words of one 24-year-old woman, a Belgian logistics assistant:

> The inefficiency of older workers is a myth … Young people are more wound up, they talk a lot, they get over-excited … but in the end the older ones do as much work … They may seem like old dinosaurs, they may be a bit slow, but you mustn't forget that they have thirty, even thirty-five

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[32] Gérard Valenduc, *La Technologie, un jeu de société* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 2005).

years of experience, and they know the system, they know there's no point getting worked up.

If the problems of knowledge and more especially its transfer are key drivers of age management policy at work, the theme is less central to the way generations speak about each other. Knowledge capital and knowledge transfer are omnipresent themes in interviewees' responses, but they are of secondary importance as compared to such matters as attitudes towards work and social relationships.

A more significant issue in relation to knowledge that emerges in interviews is the question of its recognition. A certain generational tension can arise from the confrontation between the experience that is to some extent acquired with age and the formal knowledge acquired in education, between those who have practical experience and a certain concrete experience in a particular field or in the operations of a particular company, but who lack any certification of their abilities, and those who come into the workplace possessed of formal knowledge and the educational certificates attesting to it. This appears to be an important factor in intergenerational tensions, for those with the experience are often the older workers, while those with the certificates and diplomas are the young.

The issue comes up in all six national studies, the Italian going into particular detail on this point.[33] Older workers have acquired a solid experience but they are now threatened by the young with their degrees, who go straight into management positions. The transfer of knowledge by those who have the experience then becomes a problematic issue, with a breakdown in the hierarchy of skills and knowledge as the young with their formal knowledge come to occupy positions of power. This is particularly noticeable in the service sector, both private and public, where the introduction of new technology has rendered the experience of older workers obsolete, although they still have the safest jobs. This observation is echoed in Germany, where in certain sectors knowledge derived from experience is said to have become less important following its integration

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[33] Adele Lebano, Anna M. Ponzellini and Sylvana Greco, "Report from Italy", in Vendramin, ed., *Changing Social Patterns of Relation to Work,* pp. 253–284.

into technical systems. The French contribution is also very clear about the existence of this kind of tension, noting that it is felt more strongly where the arrival of significant numbers of younger workers coincides with the introduction of organisational reforms. In these circumstances, older workers can feel that they have nothing to transmit to their younger successors and may be tempted to hold them responsible for their being sidelined. This very situation is found in Portugal, not only in the banking sector but also in public administration, which has undergone extensive reform. Yet this breakdown in the hierarchy of skills and knowledge—evident in the public sector in particular, but also in very hierarchical private sector organisations such as banks—is ambiguous, for seniority remains a key criterion in determining pay and promotion.

   In some cases, less numerous, the young see their ideas and suggestions discredited not on account of any intrinsic weakness but simply because of their own youth. Their age is seen, in this case, as indicating a lack of relevant skills and experience that denies them all credibility. According to EWCS 2010, the ability to apply one's own ideas at work increases with age, with 42 % of Europeans under 30 able to do so, but 52 % of the 30-and-overs. The situation does however vary with country: Belgium, France and Germany exemplify the general pattern, while in Hungary half of all workers are able to apply their own ideas at work, whatever their age, and in Italy and Portugal, it is the middle generation that is most able to do so.[34]

6.3.3   Innovation versus Experience

Strongly connected with the problems of knowledge just discussed, the polarisation between innovation and experience is another feature very present in discussions of intergenerational relations. It receives considerable attention in all six countries, interviewees agreeing that while older workers have the experience, it is the young who bring innovation and creativity. The problems concern the social value accorded to the two factors. Experience is thought of as both positive and negative, and in

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[34] Eurofound, EWCS 2010.

Table 6.1 Positive and negative meanings associated with generations by age group

		About Older People	About Younger People
G1 < 30	*Positive*	Experience 7	Experience 2
	Negative	Technological difficulties 8	Technological difficulties 0
G2 30–50	*Positive*	Help and experience 24	Energy 11
	Negative	Conformism Technological difficulties 12	No experience Conflicts 16
G3 > 50	*Positive*	Experience 3	Creativity/Innovation 8
	Negative	Stagnation 3	Creativity/Innovation 2

Source: Passos et al., "Self, Work and Career"[36]

theory, the same could be true of innovation, but in practice it is rarely seen as other than positive. This is because the values prevailing in the field of work are also the values of the culture in general, and innovation is clearly seen as a positive good in all contexts. A Portuguese woman in her 50s, a white-collar worker, says:

> Today people think that it's those who are new who will save the organisation and our society, and really, experience is almost seen as a handicap, as implying rigid methods of work.

This tension is illustrated in Table 6.1, derived from group interviews in Portugal.[35] It shows the frequency with which a number of positive or negative characteristics are attributed to older and younger workers, for each of the age groups considered.

Complaints and fears about experience and its devaluation in practice, as opposed to innovation, are found in most of the countries investigated. In Hungary, the researchers noted a decline in the value accorded to experience, though this was not so in all sectors. In Portugal, a number of interviews suggested that when experience is

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[35] Passos, Castro, Carvalho and Soares, "Self, Work and Career".

seen as without value or worse, this tends to make the persons concerned more inflexible. In organisations, being older is often seen as an indicator of attachment to past times and resistance to change. In the same way, the Hungarian researchers report that "Older people are blamed for sticking to old routines, and there are very few who argue on the contrary for the importance of their skills and experience."[37] The Belgian authors add that being older is sometimes equated with opposition to innovation, while the French note that for older workers, lack of acknowledgement of the value of experience leads to intergenerational tensions. They go on to say that career management under conditions of (internal) market logic can put younger and more experienced workers in direct competition with each other. The devaluation of the experience of older workers can then, be extension, lead them to adopt hostile attitudes towards young, as a 50-year-old Portuguese man, a transport clerk, explains:

> In future, the competition will be with the young, because they will challenge us for positions of power … and at the same time society is increasingly favouring the young, not experience, but the young who bring innovation.

The ICTs are often associated with this dichotomy between experience and innovation. This association between ICTs and innovation reinforces the polarisation between young and old. In theory, the two poles of innovation and experience are both positive and complementary, and it can easily be shown that both are indispensable at work. However, if one of the terms of the polarity becomes socially overvalued and more desirable than the other, the complementarity is lost sight of and competition takes its place. There is evidence, in most of the countries investigated here, of a fear that in future experience will become increasingly undervalued in relation to innovation, a paradoxical situation in view of all the discussion and effort devoted to the problem of knowledge transfer.

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Katalin Füleki, Orsolya Polyacskó and Julia Vajda, "Chapter 5: Report from Hungary".

6.4   The Role of Organisation

If management studies had focused in the last decade or so on the question of the coexistence of generations at work, it is because it had fairly rapidly become clear that organisational context was in the end the chief determinant of the quality of social relations at work, and thus of the capacity for cooperation and of collective performance. The lessons of empirical studies in the six countries are distilled in the overview by Béatrice Delay and her colleagues.[38] These authors highlight three types of configuration that represent the different relational registers that can be mobilised to describe the relationships established between the generations: (1) active cooperation; (2) distance; (3) tension.

6.4.1 The Working Environment Most Favourable to Intergenerational Cooperation

The most frequently encountered configuration is that of cooperative relations between young workers and their more experienced seniors. Such active cooperation is based on the benefits that each individual gains from it, benefits that derive for the most part from the exchange of knowledge, which develops the expertise of the young and affords recognition to their mentors. The occupational expertise of young recruits benefits greatly from their relationships with more experienced seniors, who enable the acquisition of useful knowledge and information that cannot be gained through individual learning or trial and error. The acquisition of new knowledge greatly depends on close socialisation, which takes place in the group through direct contact with more experienced colleagues. As Iasykoff remarks, "The unit to which they are assigned is the most important context of socialisation, where the new arrival assimilates values, usage and norms of behaviour",[39] and older

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[38] Delay, Méda and Bureau, "How Do Socio-Organisational Systems Support Competition…?"

[39] Vladimir Iazykoff, "Jeunes salariés dans les grandes entreprises: trajectoires sociales et représentations du travail", *Travaux et Recherches de l'Université de Marne la Vallée* 1 (March 2000), p. 5, downloadable at http://bernard.bianca.pivot.free.fr/Articles/JD/pj00239.pdf.

colleagues can thus play a major role in developing the professionalism of young recruits. A young Frenchwoman of 27, a research officer in an insurance company, explains:

> Me, I want to get on—that's normal—I'm at the start of my career and I don't want to be bored … That means learning quickly, progressing quickly … and to do that, there's a lot to be gained from more experienced colleagues, they can save you time … if you're lucky enough to get support from someone older and take maximum advantage of everything they say, you have a better chance of becoming good at your job, of getting yourself noticed, of rising through the ranks, of moving on.

Finally, many interviewees confirmed that older workers were not reluctant to share their knowledge, most often offering advice spontaneously. However, some new arrivals stated that they had had to prove themselves worthy of their elders' patience and indulgence by first showing a desire to learn, winning their confidence by demonstrating willingness to work and faithfully following instructions. This relationship of dependence on those who show how to do the job helps forge connections and can thereby lead to the possibility of the group's adoption of behaviours at variance with existing norms and working habits without their bearers risking marginalisation.

Training new arrivals is a satisfying task for more experienced workers. The transmission of knowledge gives older workers an opportunity to judge how far they have progressed themselves and to accord value to their own experience in sharing it with others.[40] It affords a symbolic social recognition that acts as a counterweight to the somewhat negative image of older workers, so long as this transmission is socially valued and not seen as a preliminary to being sidelined or even dismissed. Furthermore, for many older workers, the role gives them an increased sense of their own usefulness. Yet knowledge transmission is not necessarily a one-way process and is often enough an occasion for mutual enrichment. Contact with formal knowledge possessed by the young can lead

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[40] Jérôme Gautié and Anne-Marie Guillemard, eds, "Gestion des âges et rapports intergénérationnels dans les grandes entreprises. Études de cas", report on the ACI Travail programme, Ministère de Recherche, Paris, 2004.

some older workers to cast a critical eye over their own practices and look to refresh, if not completely update, their own knowledge. A 49-year-old Frenchman working as a technician says:

> It's true too that, because we have to train them, we have to look closely at what we do ourselves, and sometimes to ask ourselves if that is in fact how we ought to be doing it. What's more, you have younger people who have already worked elsewhere, if only on a placement. So they are able to show us methods with which we aren't familiar.

That being said, this "reverse socialisation" isn't always easy, especially in the industrial world with its strongly established guild consciousness, in that it may be seen as challenging the technical authority of the older workers, who derive their social status from it. Such threats to traditional order call for much prudence on the part of human resources when management does not properly play its role. These forms of co-learning based on the complementary nature of different age groups' knowledge and skills seem to be more in evidence in the service sector.[41] So, for example, a young marketing graduate can convey her technical knowledge to her seniors, while they in turn can communicate to her their knowledge of their customers, their habits and what they look for.

Cooperation between age groups is far from being a matter of mechanical organisation, being influenced by the hopes and desires of the parties involved and reliant upon the establishment of interpersonal relationships based on trust, as discussed by Norbert Alter in his *Donner et prendre*.[42] Given this, the organisational frameworks most encouraging of relations of cooperation are those that recognise the importance of mechanisms of transmission and put in place formal arrangements for the communication of knowledge, such as sponsorship or mentoring. Groups of mixed and balanced composition by age also encourage relations of cooperation, as does group stability.

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[41] Béatrice Delay and Guillaume Huyez-Levrat, "Le transfert d'expérience est-il possible dans les rapports intergénérationnels?", *Sociologies pratiques* 12 (2006), pp. 37–50.

[42] Norbert Alter, *Donner et prendre. La coopération en entreprise* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009).

6.4.2   Intergenerational Distance as Product of the Organisation of Work

The second configuration that emerges from the analysis sees a *distant relationship* established between age groups, exchanges between younger and older being limited in both quantity and quality. There are four main reasons behind the emergence of this type of interaction between generations. The first has to do with what one might call an age effect. Employees' different positions in their personal (and occupational) life cycle are reflected in different interests and preferences, and they tend to have a natural affinity with those who share them. For example, while workers in their 50s tend to discuss retirement, young parents may talk about childcare and about managing the relationship between work and family life more generally. A 26-year-old Belgian computer engineer explains:

> With guys my own age, the atmosphere's a little nicer. We have a bit more fun. We're a bit less inhibited, perhaps. If we travel on business, we'll go out more, have drink, a bit of fun. It's a slightly different relationship, it's slightly different.

And an Italian nurse, a young woman of 22, says:

> You can absolutely tell the age difference in their discussions. They talk about their problems with teenagers and grown-up children … well, we're in that age group, and so we feel some interest, but from the other side.

The second explanation has to do with prevailing managerial thinking. Relationships may be distant simply because the different age groups are not physically present in the same locations. Such separation by age can be the result of recruitment policy, the demographic composition of the personnel depending largely on the business's hiring decisions over previous years. Yet the age-uniformity in some workplaces cannot be completely explained as the mechanical result of failures of recruitment. There are organisations that have, and always have had, active recruitment policies, but in which management deliberately supplement their

modernisation policy with a segmented approach to age management, for instance grouping young workers together—on the basis of their supposed capacity for adaptation—in newly developing sectors and leaving the old—on account of their supposed resistance to change—in sectors in relative decline. There are also sometimes attempts to organise job specialisation by age, even if the policy is seldom made explicit, so as to avoid the working methods of older employees contaminating those of the young, who are expected to follow the new methods that management seeks to introduce. This mode of acculturation will however limit the possibility of using new recruits as agents of change.

The third reason for the loss of connection between generations has to do with increasing constraints on production, the intensification of work and just-in-time working. The role of the firm cannot then be limited to the physical organisation of working space, even less to ensuring a suitable mix of ages and seniorities. It must also contribute to the creation of conditions of everyday activity (especially as regards the pressure of time) favourable to the development of a dynamics of cooperation between generations. If proper arrangements are not made, exchange between generations becomes an informal process that does not establish itself automatically. An excessive turnover of staff, whether involuntary or not, also tends to discourage those employees responsible for the transmission of knowledge or the training of newcomers. A director of human resources, a Frenchwoman of 37, reflects on the mood of her colleagues:

> We just see young people passing through, and it's a bit demotivating when they only stay six months. Even people with lots of energy, they get tired in the end when the interns change all the time.

In fact, according to the EWCS 2010 survey, 40 % of employees under 30 are on short-term or temporary contracts.

6.4.3 When the Work Environment Promotes Hostility

A third configuration, less common than the two others, involves the *tensions* that can sometimes emerge between generations. Friction can take different forms, such as, for example, younger workers' disdain for

the older, or older workers' hostility towards new arrivals. This can be the case, for example, when experienced workers are reluctant to communicate their experience or acts as agents of socialisation or professionalisation in relation to newcomers. Contrary to any hypothesis of a conflict of values that might be suggested by an essentialist or culturalist understanding of intergenerational relations, these kinds of tensions tend rather to have their origin in problems with the working environment. Hostility may emerge, for example, in people who suffer a partial or total lack of recognition (or fear the loss of recognition in the immediate future). If due recognition is not offered, employees tend to see the other age group as the source of the threat, practitioners of a form of unfair competition against whom it is necessary to take defensive measures (e.g. the reporting of mistakes, the withholding of information, rumour-mongering).

Delay and her colleagues have analysed the causes of the lack of recognition that leads to the emergence of intergenerational tensions, looking at "the social causes responsible for the systematic violation of the conditions of recognition" which leads to the feeling of injustice, of the denial of human dignity and integrity, of what Axel Honneth sums up in the notion of "social disrespect".[43] For the young, this sense of disrespect can be provoked by the disappointment of graduate expectations, by broken promises of employment or promotion, or the sense of having been treated unjustly in terms of the efforts made and the symbolic and material rewards actually (or expected to be) received. The experience of the working environment is then dominated by a sense of injustice and unfairness. An Italian woman of 29, an administrator, gives expression to this sense of non-recognition:

> I worked for two years under an apprenticeship agreement, and then the company had automatically to put me onto a standard contract, but when I had the new contract to sign, after two years I expected to be offered more money, which they didn't give me. And that really shook me, because I saw it as not giving me any recognition for what I had done in the past, for the

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[43] Delay, Méda and Bureau, "How Do Socio-Organisational Systems Support Competition…?"; Axel Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: On the Legacy of Critical Theory Today", in *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), pp. 63–79.

way I had worked. During those two years I did a lot of things, I learnt a lot, but they didn't acknowledge that.

There may be a sense of lack of recognition when a young employee is treated as no more than an executant, without being granted any form of autonomy in the execution of tasks, but strictly following instructions given by superiors and sticking rigidly to the methods of work indicated. Such extremely close supervision seems particularly insupportable to young people who are well qualified or who already have a certain amount of work experience. In such circumstances they can feel an acute sense of frustration, provoked on the one hand by their inability to distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive context by showing off their skills, and on the other to capitalise on the theoretical and practical knowledge gained in the course of their academic or professional careers. Young employees can also feel insufficiently recognised when their suggestions are rejected not on account of any intrinsic weakness but simply because of their own youth, this being experienced as the imposition of a stigma that disqualifies them in their reactions with others.[44] Their age is seen as indicating a lack of relevant skills and experience that denies them all credibility. Finally, confinement to the status of learner is very hard to accept. Newcomers understand this as expressing a fear of losing power on the part of their immediate superiors. They then find themselves uncomfortably situated in relation to a rhetoric that ostensibly encourages initiative or the development of a critical attitude amongst new recruits, with a view to exploiting their dynamism, their capacity for creativity and innovation, and promoting the young generation as a vehicle of change. The young can find themselves caught amid different injunctions that are hard to reconcile. Faced with such ambiguity, they can be tempted to see the others, their older colleagues, as the source of their difficulties.

In the case of older workers, the lack of recognition that gives rise to intergenerational tensions is more connected with the devaluing of their experience at work. A Portuguese manager, a woman in her 50s, explains how she sees it:

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[44] Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

> A certain experience is important, and experience isn't something you get from reading, you get it through contact, through working with people who've been there longer. So I've nothing against young people who come into an organisation, but don't tell me the ones there already are no good for anything any longer. There are people of say 60 who are very valuable.

Such a loss of social and occupational status may result from a number of factors. It can result first of all from the relegation of older workers to sectors where they are suddenly expected to adapt to a results-oriented culture, or confined to areas where jobs are being lost or which are marginal to the strategic objectives of the company. Faced with a threatening environment that offers no hope in terms of career progression, growing old on the job seems to mean for some a long period when the routine character of the work represents a loss of status compared to the promotion expected to mark the last years of a career, as a form of a posteriori recognition of experience acquired and years spent with the firm. The injustice is particularly acutely felt when, for the workers, seniority connotes a personal commitment that is expected to be reciprocated.[45] The results of the Eurofound survey show how career prospects fall sharply with age: 41 % of European employees under 30 said they had good prospects for advancement, 32 % of employees between 30 and 49, and 21.5 % of those 50 and over. In all countries investigated, with the exception of France, this falling off in career begins in the 30s. It is in Portugal that the fall is sharpest, with 50 % of the under-30s saying they had good prospects for advancement, 38 % between 30 and 49, and 15 % of those 50 and over. In France, the youngest two groups share the same situation, with 35 % hopeful of advancement, with the figure only falling in the 50s, down to 22 %. Germany, the figure is 39 % for the youngest, 21.5 % for the oldest; in Belgium 49 % and 29 % respectively; in Italy 33.8 % and 19 %; and in Hungary 36 % and 12 %.[46] If it is logical that careers have largely been made by the time employees reach their 50s,

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[45] Delay and Huyez-Levrat, "Le transfert d'expérience est-il possible?"
[46] Eurofound, EWCS 2010.

with a concomitant reduction in prospects for change or advancement, employees in their 50s find themselves in a particularly uncomfortable position, with prospects of advancement blocked for four out of five and retirement age threatening to retreat further into the distance.

Older workers who have difficulty in adapting to successive changes can suffer a fall in occupational self-esteem and end up feeling that they have nothing to pass on to their successors. They can also be tempted to hold new arrivals responsible for their plight. Changes and reorganisations are frequent, as shown by the results of the EWCS 2010 survey. To the questions whether new processes or technologies were introduced or substantial restructuring or reorganisation carried out at their workplace in the last three years, directly affecting their working environment, 42 % of European employees answered yes to the first and 34 % yes to the second.

Career management systems and tensions around the struggle for posts can lead to friction, as testified by two Portuguese in their 40s:

– I think that relationships are more difficult between people of the same age than otherwise. What explains people not being on good terms even when they're of the same age is the fact that they are in competition for the same things; they're competing for the same posts.
– In a very competitive environment, you have to play professional survival games … it's for the sake of survival, in a quite concrete way, for there are few winners.

Frictions of this sort are more evident between adjacent age groups, between the young and those of the middle generation. The latter can feel themselves at a crossroads, increasingly aware that their position may be under threat from the young (better qualified and more flexible) and that the typical career trajectories of their elders are no longer available (with prolongation of working life and the end of early retirement schemes). In this climate of competition for jobs, retaining a monopoly over the possession of skills and qualifications can seem to some to offer a way of resisting the increasing insecurity of their social position and neutralising the real or perceived threat that new recruits may pose to their future. Alongside career management systems, some current forms of organisation of work may also contribute to the devaluation of the

experience of older workers, thus prompting them to adopt hostile attitudes to younger colleagues. We may note, in passing, that terminology is not neutral either. For some years now, the talk has been not of seniors or experienced workers but of older workers, ageing workers and an ageing active population.

Among the imperatives of the current organisation of work, the insistence on mobility has the effect of making seniority suspect.[47] While once it was considered a sign of professionalism, experience and maturity, it is today associated with stagnation, resistance to change, incapacity for personal development, obsolescence of skills. The generalisation of a radical conception of change (as opposed to the idea of gradual reform) has likewise resulted in a vast writing-down of the value of experienced workers while at the same time promoting a model of development in which history is no longer seen as a resource but as a cost, a brake on the process of modernisation. This approach necessarily implies a view of age as a form of disqualification.

Finally, the development of a culture of early retirement[48]—firmly established on mainland Europe, the results of two decades of business and government efforts to encourage the early retirement of older workers—have led on the one hand to a kind of "premature ageing" and on the other to negative stereotypes of older workers, assumed to be relatively unproductive and unmotivated. Such representations are gradually internalised as self-evident by young and old alike.[49] The cynicism that certain older workers can develop in relation to new recruits and also to the firm and its development probably reflects a loss of control over reality associated with the feeling that their careers are no longer on the right path in terms of the hopes they may have had, compared to other colleagues in the same cohort.[50]

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[47] Robert Castel, *L'Insécurité sociale: qu'est-ce qu'être protégé?* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).

[48] Guillemard, *L'Âge de l'emploi.*

[49] Desmette and Gaillard, "When a 'Worker' Becomes an 'Older Worker'"; Gaillard and Desmette, "(In)validating stereotypes".

[50] Delay and Huyez-Levrat, "Le transfert d'expérience est-il possible?"

Delay et al. insist on the organisation's own responsibility for the quality of intergenerational relations.[51] It is the firm, in fact, through its overall strategic orientation, its human resources policies—on age management more particularly—and the forms of supervision and methods of work that are adopted, which helps create the conditions that determine whether relationships between age groups will be beneficial or prejudicial.

6.5   Distance and Closeness Between Generations

In an increasing number of instances, the transformation of working environments over the last two decades has disrupted intergenerational solidarity and existing processes of intergenerational transmission. Since the late 1980s, the reciprocal loyalty and mutual recognition of a group conscious of sharing a common fate seem to have come under threat. Relations between the generations have also been disrupted by the coexistence of two modes of valorisation of work, the creation of distinctive areas of work for the young, the exclusion of older workers, mass unemployment and precarity, and also by certain discourses that cast doubt on the capacities and the value of older workers. This breakdown in intergenerational regulation and the increasing differences in attitudes and beliefs between age groups have led many researchers to propose the existence of an intergenerational conflict, said to impact on a number of areas:[52] on modes of management and attitudes to change,[53] the integration of age

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[51] Delay, Méda and Bureau, "How Do Socio-Organisational Systems Support Competition…?"

[52] Luc Ferry, "Interpréter Mai 1968", *Pouvoirs* 39 (1986), pp. 5–14; Louis Chauvel, *Le Destin des générations. Structure sociale et cohortes en France au* xxᵉ *siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1998).

[53] Jean-Claude Marquié, "Contraintes cognitives, contraintes de travail et expérience: les marges de manœuvre du travailleur vieillissant", in Jean-Claude Marquié, Dominique Paumès and Serge Volkoff, eds, *Le Travail au fil de l'âge* (Toulouse: Octarès Éditions, 1995), pp. 211–244; Chantale Lagacé, *Pratiques de gestion et représentations du vieillissement. Recherche exploratoire menée dans le secteur de la fabrication métallique industrielle*, research report presented to the Comité Sectoriel de la Main-d'Œuvre dans la Fabrication Métallique Industrielle, Montréal, INRS Urbanisation, 2003.

groups at work, perceptions of conflict or exclusion in the workplace.[54] From this point of view, the more experienced workers represent for the young an unattainable objective, or, on the contrary, a countermodel. For older workers, newcomers sometimes threaten their security in employment (particularly when restructuring is on the agenda), or, more fundamentally, threaten the values and representations of the world that undergird their sense of recognition. Adopting a somewhat determinist approach, certain authors analyse these situations as the outcome of a "struggle for power" between different generations that do not share the same trajectory or the same opportunities for integration into employment. Some qualify this analysis. For Chauvel, for example, the idea of intergenerational conflict is rooted in a particular period in recent history, when the young of the 1980s began to question their elders' model of society, while today the radical ideas of that time have little purchase.[55] To the contrary, with the increasing prevalence of precarious employment, the young seem to be chiefly concerned to find a place, uncomfortable as it might be, in today's society. The youth rebellions that occurred in certain European countries and elsewhere in 2011 and 2012 however would seem to vividly illustrate both the demand for a place and the rejection of a social model that has failed to keep its promises.[56]

Relations between young and old comprise both solidarity and tension, closeness and distance. The interviews carried out in the six countries investigated reveal young people to be fairly realistic about work but also engaged in fashioning a new relationship to work, defined in new terms, seeking to balance work with other commitments while valuing stability and work satisfaction, and also having regard to objective advantages in terms of quality of work, level of income, labour-market regulation and social protection. Older workers seem more nostalgic. They seem to have less control over their situation than one might suppose,

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[54] John Cultiaux, "Agir dans un monde flexible. Une expérience singulière", in Matthieu de Nanteuil-Miribel and Assaad El Akremi, *Une autre flexibilité. Travail, emploi organisation en débat* (Paris: Érès, 2005), pp. 137–154.

[55] Chauvel, *Le Destin des générations*.

[56] Espido Freire, *Mileuristas. Retrato de la generacion de los mil euros* (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 2006).

given their relative security of employment and the levels of pension they can still look forward to. The older generation are nostalgic for what has been lost—stability of employment, linear career trajectories and the ideology that went with them—even though they may not be losers themselves, to the extent that for the most part they enjoy long-term contracts of employment, better pay, regular advancement and advantages in terms of pensions. According to the national surveys, the last century saw older generations better protect their advantages, passing the cost onto the younger generation, notably in terms of jobs and social security. The more advantaged tend to project onto the younger generation a regret for the job for life that was theirs. In the interviews, the idea of a younger generation in difficulty, suffering precarity and lacking in prospects, is more often advanced by the old than by the young themselves. The results of the survey carried out by Mercure and Vultur in Québec also evidence this differential perception of the situation of the young.[57]

Exchanges between the generations take place in three different places: at the workplace, on the labour market and within the family; at each of these three sites, the relationship between generations has specific features.[58] In the workplace, the young are seen as the stronger, with more self-control and more security than the old. Those of the older generation experience a tension, with formal knowledge and qualifications more highly valorised than experience. They often entered employment without specialist degrees or significant professional qualifications and gained advancement through solid experience. They now see themselves threatened by young people who have degrees, technological skills and foreign languages. In some cases, young people go straight into supervisory or decision-making positions on joining the workforce, on the basis of their formal qualifications, or because they are better suited than the old to certain types of tasks, disrupting the traditional hierarchies, based on experience rather than the possession of specific skills. Despite the fact that they often win the battle of skill against experience and that they see themselves, as they are seen by others, as confident and reliable,

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[57] Mercure and Vultur, *La Signification du travail*.

[58] Adele Lebano, Maria Teresa Franco and Silvana Greco, "So Far, So Close: Generations and Work in Italy", in Vendramin, ed., *Generations at Work*, pp. 193–219.

the young run up against objective difficulties in the labour market, and their conditions of employment are less advantageous than those of their elders.

On the labour market, the distinction between core and peripheral workforce corresponds more or less to a segmentation between older and younger, though the security of the middle generation seems to be bought at the cost of those at both extremes of the age range. Most research and most public policy have thus focused on the young or on older workers. In their analysis of the Italian labour market, Adèle Lebano and her colleagues are very clear on this segmentation by age, equally found in other countries.[59] The Italian labour market is still characterised by strict rules on the hiring and firing of workers and the rarity of flexible forms of employment. Labour-market regulations underlie the high rates of unemployment among women and young people. The system of recruitment, high starting rates of pay and strict rules on the termination of employment strongly limit employment opportunities for new entrants. As few jobs are available to them, many young people live with their parents until they find stable employment. The Italian system of employment protection has often been described as rigid, characterised by high barriers to access unemployment benefits and to exit from the labour force. New regulations, notably regarding temporary contracts, have partly relaxed this rigidity, at least at the level of recruitment, and this has significantly accelerated the flexibilisation of the labour market over recent years. These government policies, and notably the promotion of non-standard forms of employment, have considerably changed the recruitment possibilities for businesses and these changes have gradually altered the structure of employment. At first, following the introduction of temporary contracts, the rate of unemployment fell significantly in Italy, especially among young people between 25 and 29, whose unemployment rate fell from 17.7 % in 2000 to 10 % in 2008, only to rise again to 17.7 % in 2012. In Italy, the division between insiders and outsiders tends to map onto that between young and old, the young mostly being in unstable employment and the traditional transitional period between education and work tending to turn into a "permanent condi-

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[59] Lebano, Franco and Greco, "So Far, So Close".

tion". Furthermore, the young are largely excluded from systems of social protection. This happens in part because they are working in the newest sectors of the economy, characterised by the most non-standard forms of employment, but also because they are most often non-standard workers—part-timers, temporary workers, agency workers or freelancers—and so excluded from the protections aimed at standard workers and their families. A relatively significant discontinuity between generations arises too from differences in the meanings attached to work and the role and importance it has in their lives (see Chap. 5). For young people, life is no longer organised around work, not at least to the same extent as in earlier generations. According to young workers, work isn't the only thing that is important, work is not the most significant constituent of identity, the only means to emancipation, the measure of personal value or the organising principle of gender relations within the family. Structural changes combine with subjective orientations and the changing meanings attached to work.

In Italy, the generations are nonetheless close, their relations in great part shaped by the interacting impacts of national social policy, mechanisms of redistribution and the distinctive role of the family in the culture. In terms of social security spending and security of employment, authors often evoke a bitter competition between generations, due to limited resources and the imbalance between spending on pensions and spending on unemployment, and also the precarity of young people's livelihoods.[60] In Italy, 61 % of social spending goes on pensions and only 3 % on unemployment. Yet generations seem very strongly connected when one looks at parents and their offspring. Parents stand behind their children in supporting them in their choice of work, helping them find employment and providing them with the stable foundation needed to deal with unstable employment or unemployment (financial support, help with the purchase of a home). In fact, the Italian system of social security is largely based on the family, and this Mediterranean model reinforces both the role of the family and

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[60] Carlo Buzzi, Alessandro Cavalli and Antonio de Lillo, eds, *Giovani verso il duemila: Quarto rapporto Iard sulla condizione giovanile in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996); Paul Johnson, Christoph Conrad and David Thomson, eds, *Workers versus Pensioners. Intergenerational Justice in an Aging World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

the system's neglect of the young.[61] This picture of the situation finds confirmation both in the interviews carried out and the results of the major Italian surveys.[62] Young people tend to remain with their parents not simply because of a distinctive culture of the family[63] but because the support of the family is an economic necessity given low pay and difficulty finding housing. In 2010, 52 % of young men between 25 and 34 lived with their parents, as did 36 % of young women the same age. The parental family is also enormously important for employment: according to a study by the IARD research institute, the family and the immediate friendship network are more important in the search of employment than are formal or institutional channels.[64]

In all the countries surveyed, in fact, the three generations appear to differ significantly in both their subjective attitudes and expectations and their objective conditions of work. Despite this, the survey revealed no evidence of a conflict of generations in everyday work. There are a number of explanations for this.[65] First of all, in some countries the young are not engaged in the same kind of work as their elders. In most large industrial firms, early retirement schemes mean that the very oldest generation is no longer present, while at the same time most of the young are to be found in more highly skilled jobs in the service sector, or in call-centres, fast-food outlets or other low-skilled employment. In certain sectors in particular there is no longer any face-to-face encounter of generations.

[61] Maurizio Ferrera, "The Uncertain Future of Italian Welfare State", *West European Politics* 20:1 (1997), pp. 231–249; Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Social Foundations of Post-Industrial Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[62] ISFOL, *PLUS - Participation, Labour, Unemployment Survey* (Rome: ISFOL, 2006); IARD, *Sesto rapporto sulla condizione giovanile in Italia* (Milan: IARD, 2006); Consorzio Interuniversitario AlmaLaurea, ed, *VIII Rapporto sulla condizione occupazionale dei laureati. I laureati di primo livello alla prova del lavoro* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006).

[63] Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[64] IARD, *Sesto rapporto*.

Nonetheless, our research suggests that the young are not really aware of being members of a generation, a fact that prevents them from forming a true generational unit in Mannheim's sense[66] and so becoming collective agents of social change. At the same time, other factors generative of other kinds of ties seem to be more significant determinants of work-group cultures: gender, skill, rank, employer prestige and so forth. Another interesting reason for—or perhaps consequence of—this unexpected absence of intergenerational conflict might be the fact that the young and their elders are represented by the same trades unions, the common interest in such a case transcending and masking intergenerational rivalries. It may be noted however that the young are less likely to join a trade union than are older workers.[67] In addition, especially in countries like Italy where the family retains an important role in social regulation and in the redistribution of income, there is what Cavalli calls the paradoxical complicity between the young and old, the young not challenging their parents' generation when the latter defends its security of employment and its pensions, being aware that the "privileges" accorded to the older generation also benefit them in terms of the resources and support their parents are enabled to offer them. The general picture of relations between generations is one of great solidarity between parents and children and fierce competition with the children of others.[68] In the private sphere, then, one has the odd combination of a supposed intergenerational tension at work and a marked intergenerational solidarity within the family, which continues to support its children for an extended period. In general, the older generation supports the younger generation financially, while the younger generation support their parents in the tasks of everyday life. The financial support parents offer their children is made possible by the public intergenerational contract that provides them with the resources

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[65] Anna M. Ponzellini, "Perspectives for Good Management of the Generations at Work and Pathways for Greater Social Cohesion", in Vendramin, ed., *Generations at Work*, pp. 293–319.

[66] Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations".

[67] According to Ebbinghaus and Visser, *Trade Unions in Western Europe since 1945* and Visser, "Union Membership Statistics" there has been a general decline in membership among those under 25 or 30, in part likely the result of the bias in trade union policy in favour of adults and older members.

they need for it, and the public contract is thus the precondition for the private contract between generations.

> Ambivalence is perhaps the term that best characterizes the relationships between generations.[69] The idea of ambivalence captures the fact that social relationships are mediated by attitudes, behaviours and practices marked by both solidarity and conflict: emotional support and emotional conflict, autonomy and dependence on the other, the need for closeness and the necessity of distance, to mention only a few … The experience of ambivalence is not intrinsically negative, but it represents a challenge in that individuals have to negotiate social situations traversed by tensions, calling for a greater reflective capacity than do other situations more homogeneous in their structures and expectations.[70]

In the labour market—if one takes into account all the variables affecting different generations' economic and social power, both privileges in terms of security of employment and benefits in terms of education—it is not so easy to say who comes off the best. In a certain sense, the obsolescence of skills and technologies and the risk of unemployment they pose to the older generation balance the insecure employment and status disappointment experienced by the young on starting to work. Yet it is likely, in the long term, that the younger generation of today will pay the greater price for the current imbalance of systems of social protection.

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[68] Tito Boeri and Vincenzo Galasso, *Contro i giovani* (Milan: Mondadori, 2007).

[69] Götz Richter, "Generational Perspective on Workplace Relationships: A German Perspective", in Vendramin, ed., *Generations at Work,* pp. 99–128; Eric D. Widmer and Kurt Lüscher, "Les relations intergénérationnelles au prisme de l'ambivalence et des configurations familiales", *Recherches familiales* 8 (2011), pp. 49-60.

[70] Widmer and Lüscher, "Les relations intergénérationnelles", p. 51.

7

Conclusion

Once devalued and disdained, work has become, over the last three centuries, the most important focus of utopian energies. In the Early Middle Ages synonymous with pain and suffering, work gradually acquired the meanings it has for us today; at first a means to a different end—creating wealth or earning an income—and hence the key to autonomy and emancipation, it was reimagined in the nineteenth century as an activity enabling humans to transform the world, remaking it in their own image, before then becoming the chief means of social integration in predominantly wage-earning Western societies.

As Lalive d'Épinay noted, the mid-twentieth-century explosion of growth rates in Europe suddenly made the dream of the nineteenth-century utopians a real possibility: a labour that was simultaneously created, work that not only produced the goods necessary to meet people's needs but also gave expression to both their individuality and their shared humanity, as Marx had foreseen in the *Paris Manuscripts*.[1] A work, then, that would simultaneously fulfil all its several functions; and a work that had been invested, as available productive resources expanded, with multiple—and contradictory—expectations. For things didn't turn out

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[1] Lalive d'Épinay, "Significations et valeurs du travail".

quite as nineteenth-century socialist thinkers had thought: when Marx spoke of work in future becoming "a first need of life" he meant not work as it existed in his day but unalienated work, work disalienated by the abolition of wage-labour. We know, on the contrary, that workers' well-being—their rights to work, welfare and consumption—came to be anchored in the wage-relation, and that they found security in the advent of the wage-earning society. Having a job became crucial, and the State was expected to ensure that jobs were available. At the same time, as Habermas put it: "For the burdens that continue to be connected with the cushioned status of dependent wage labour, the citizen is compensated in his role as client of the welfare state bureaucracies with legal claims, and in his role as consumer of mass-produced goods, with buying power."[2]

For the three dimensions of work are contradictory: if work is no more than a means to a different end—creating wealth or earning an income—as it is represented in the equations of the economists, it is the *product* of work that counts, and not the workers as individuals or the nature of the work that they do. Customary representations of the economy make it very clear, especially in the stylisation represented by the production functions, that labour, partly substitutable for capital, is significant only as a "factor" and that it is indeed the quantity or value of the product that counts. If, on the other hand, work is thought of as an activity in which people pit themselves against both nature and each other, transforming the world in which they find themselves and displaying to others who it is that they are—if work is this process of creation and self-creation, then the manner and circumstances in which it is carried out are just as, if not more, important than the ostensible product. And finally, the social compact that is constitutive of wage-earning society, whereby dependence of the sale of labour power is consented to in exchange for the recognition of rights, puts the balance between employer and employee requirements at the heart of the social dynamic while denying either side a monopoly over the theoretical or practical definition of work.

Until the late 1970s, the social contract was sustained by the West's high rates of growth, which made the flaws of Taylorism and Fordism

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[2] Habermas, "The New Obscurity", p. 55.

tolerable. The crisis of the 1980s, the replacement of Philadelphia Consensus by Washington Consensus and the spread of the neo-liberal doxa first through the English-speaking world and then through continental Europe were accompanied by new forms of work organisation, said to allow not only more flexible production more responsive to consumer demand but also greater employee involvement. The Toyotist principles of just-in-time or lean production, zero defects and total quality production were adopted alongside new principles of management. Firms went along with, if they did not indeed positively promote, people's new expectations of work: at a time when the continuous improvement in levels of education and training nourished the desire for more responsibility, initiative, autonomy and variety of work, firms adopted modes of organisation calling for more autonomy, risk-taking, multi-skilling, subjective involvement and personal engagement.

But what Daniel Mercure and Mircea Vultur call the "elective affinity" between the new personal values of self-expression and self-fulfilment (Inglehart's "post-materialist" values) and firms' new demands in terms of flexibility did not lead to harmony—far from it. For employers were unwilling or unable to go all the way: autonomy was hedged about with controls, while reporting requirements multiplied, just as did the indicators that allowed employee performance to be closely and continuously monitored; work intensified through the 1980s and 1990s and modes of organisation were transformed without any increase in employee participation in decision-making or management. More generally, certain general precepts developed by international institutions since the 1980s (in, for example, *The Welfare State in Crisis* of 1981 or the *Jobs Study* of 1994, two major reports by the OECD[3]) gained almost universal governmental acceptance, notably the idea that Western economies could adapt to globalisation only by increasing flexibility, and more particularly by controlling or reducing pay, limiting employment protection, reducing unemployment benefits, activating welfare and bringing about "structural reform of the labour market" more generally. Social and employment policies as a whole have thus been more or less subordinated to economic policy, reducing them to no more than adjustment variables of the lat-

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[3] OECD, *The Welfare State in Crisis* (Paris: OECD, 1981) and *Jobs Study* (Paris: OECD, 1994).

ter. Add in rising unemployment, which although unevenly distributed across EU member states has proved to be a regularly recurring phenomenon, and it is easy to see that the hopes invested in work in Europe—by young people in particular, but also by women, whose ever-increasing participation in the labour market has promoted the emergence of new expectations of work—are far from having been fulfilled.

In reality, while the discourse on the human value of work has been maintained—a rhetoric that allows one to say everything and nothing—and with it the idea that individuals should find meaning, self-expression and self-fulfilment in work, there has been a marked dualisation of the workforce and of the relationship to work: for directors, senior managers, intermediate occupations and skilled occupations more generally there is self-expression and self-fulfilment, while for manual and clerical workers and the low skilled there is tedium and lack of autonomy—but even high-skilled occupations are now coming to suffer the ills of post-Taylorist work.

It is true that different European states have reacted differently to the OECD prescriptions in their European Commission translation, and have varied in the speed and scope of structural reform. Forms of work organisation and forms of management still differ, too, as we have seen throughout this study. The relationship to work also varies by country, even if there are shared features, such as the rise in expressive expectations, the desire for meaning, the persistence of instrumental expectations, and—almost everywhere—the convergence in the expectations of women and men.

But nowhere have firms established conditions that would lend plausibility to the idea of work being "the first need of life". This would likely require, as Isabelle Ferreras has recently argued, that the firm cease to be an affair of the private sphere alone and become in a sense a public space, and that work itself, rather than being ruled by a relationship of strict subordination, become a shared project governed by all involved: capital, labour and external stakeholders.[4] In reality, even the objective of quality employment once adopted by the EU, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, has fallen by the wayside. The immense expectations invested in

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[4] Isabelle Ferreras, *Gouverner le capitalisme. Pour le bicamérisme économique* (Paris: PUF, 2012).

work thus remain unfulfilled, at least for the great majority, even in the countries where these are greatest.

Are such expectations even realisable? In *The Case for Working with Your Hands* Matthew Crawford argues—very much as Friedmann did—that work has lost its meaning through the division of labour, and also, and more fundamentally, as a result of the development of capitalism and the wage-relation, and will not recover it while these are still with us.[5] In their book on the meaning of work, which they explore through people's relationships to work, Mercure and Vultur, on the other hand, see the possibility of a mutually beneficial convergence in the "elective affinities" between changes in the system of production and today's new expectations of work, at least for those ready to take the road of flexibility and the entrepreneurial self. They identify the emergence of two types of work orientation compatible with the new norms of management prevalent in modern organisations, associated with highly educated individuals who are prepared to invest themselves in work, who look to it for individual development and personal reward, and have no problem with modes of flexibility that suit their own needs and expectations. As Mercure and Vultur explain, the new forms of organisation, which valorise individual initiative and promote competition, accord with the new, individualistic and agonistic values of some of the highly qualified young, who are prepared to involve themselves totally in a project so long as their efforts are rewarded.

Can the same be said of Europe? Everything will depend on the forms that flexibility takes there, and on Europeans' ability to accept or power to oppose them. In fact, the picture drawn by Mercure and Vultur suggests that young people in Québec are much more prepared to accept the flexibility firms ask for than are their counterparts in France, for example. But economic crisis may well overcome reservations: it was in response to Germany's economic difficulties in the early 2000s that the Hartz reforms were introduced, radically polarising the country's active population by obliging some to accept hyper-precarious mini-jobs and forcing the long-term unemployed to find

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[5] Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin, 2009), published in the UK under the title *The Case for Working with Your Hands: Or Why Office Work is Bad for Us and Fixing Things Feels Good* (London: Viking, 2009).

work at any price, while the more highly skilled remained protected. It is economic crisis, too, that has seen Spain and Italy—known for the rigidity of their labour markets, according to the OECD—drastically rewrite their employment protection legislation, and France seek to "secure jobs" with legislation making it easier to sack people, in line with the demands of the employers' federation. Economic crisis and the uncontrolled development of the digital economy could well bring with them a new phase of flexibilisation and labour-market reform that would make the kind of work that Europe's people hope for an even more distant prospect, at least for the great majority, while doing nothing either for the wider distribution of skills that is the precondition for a high-value-added economy.

Yet another outcome is possible, and could become a reality if the ecological crisis were to be taken seriously. For it is now clear that we need radical changes not only in our modes of production and consumption but also in rates of growth and types of production, if we are to bring about the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions required to avoid catastrophic global warming. Reduction of the rate of economic growth and the greening of industry might well offer an opportunity to change work as well, so long as Europe proves capable of anticipating change and finally implementing effective retraining and job-protection mechanisms across the continent. The transformation of Europe into a region capable of a new prosperity and a redefined progress[6]—measured by the availability of decent work and the ability of workers and consumers to collectively control the sustainable production of goods and services so as to meet their essential needs—might serve its citizens as a concrete utopia, one that would offer them work that they recognise themselves in.

The reinvention of work thus entails taking seriously the hopes and expectations of so many of Europe's workers, young people and women among them: for meaningful work that allows the expression of individuality and makes a useful contribution to society; decent work that fits in with the rest of life and enables workers to fully play their parts as citizens, friends and parents; civilised work that is fairly shared among all members of society.

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[6]Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet* (London; Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2009); Isabelle Cassiers, ed, *Redéfinir la prospérité* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Aube, 2010).

Methodological Note

The "Social Patterns of Relations to Work" (SPReW) research was carried out under the EU's Sixth Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration. Extending over a period of 27 months between 2006 and 2008, it brought together researchers from 6 countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Portugal) and trade union and government partners. The goals of the research were to examine changes in the relationship to work across the generations, to identify the factors making for solidarity or tension between the generations, at work and in related contexts (family, transition to adulthood, etc.), and to explore the political challenges and other implications of these changes.

The research involved qualitative, quantitative and comparative studies. The qualitative study was based on 163 narrative interviews (some 25 per country) grouped by age (under 30, 30 to 49, 50 and over). The interviewees were all in employment, whether permanent or precarious; women and men were interviewed in more or less equal numbers; and all skill levels were represented. A common interpretative framework was developed for the content analysis of the interviews. The individual interviews were supplemented with 18 group interviews (3 per country)

intended to further explore issues raised in the individual interviews and to identify areas of intergenerational tension. The quantitative study involved the secondary analysis of data from existing international surveys European Values Study (EVS), International Social Survey Program (ISSP), European Social Survey (ESS) and from relevant national surveys in the countries involved. The comparative study looked at national examples of good practice regarding intergenerational collaboration, youth integration, knowledge transfer and active ageing at work, setting these in the context of EU policy.

More detailed information is available at www.ftu-namur.org/sprew

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