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Knowledge and Work in
“Informational Capitalism”

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Outline

- Informational Capitalism and the Meaning of Informatization
- Changes in Work
- Information and Knowledge
- Informatization and Subjectivity
- Social Shaping of Information Technologies?
Trajectory to a New Epoch

- World Economic Crisis of Mid-70ies
- Answers: Globalization and Informatization
- Informational Capitalism (Manuel Castells)
- Digital Capitalism (Dan Schiller)
- Knowledge Capitalism (Alan Burton-Jones)
Globalization

- Intensified competition in world markets in 80ies and 90ies
- Development of world-wide specialized markets
- Growth of transnational corporations
- Neoliberalism, deregulation
- Social polarization, digital divide
Informatization

• Spread of digital ICTs
• Leading role of capital and finance markets
• Development of network technologies in 80ies
• Emergence of internet and esp. WWW technologies in 90ies
• Today: Change to SOA (Web Services based architectures as new paradigm)
Informatization – What’s New?

- Principally world-wide accessibility of any (all?) contents
- Central role of information not new
- Development of globalized socio-technical systems to generate, communicate and process information in “real time”
- Real world abstractly duplicated in the information sphere (“structural duplication process”)
Reflexivity of ICTs

- Computer the first and only “universal” or “symbolic” machine (Sybille Krämer)
- ICTs not (only) tools to support aims defined independently, but part of a total process, of a system
- Innovations are generated and in a process of cumulative feed-back used again to create more innovation
- New dimension of productivity, new potential
World duplicated as one of Information and Knowledge

- Facts and relations from the beginning understood and modeled as information and information process
- New is “the technology-based ability to develop knowledge which is mediated by digital media” (Helmut F. Spinner)
- The technification of knowledge in its information form is the step from conventional technification to informatization (Helmut F. Spinner)
Network Society

- Close orientation of economic activities to the market (“new immediacy of economics”)
- Spread of market-oriented forms of organization
- “Concentration on core competences”
  - New international division of labor
- Networks of firms, virtual corporations, horizontal organizations
Networked Organizations

- **Interorganizational Networks**
  ("Reorganization of Value Chains"), e.g. information processing networks (banking), production networks (car industry), project-centered networks (semi-conductor industry), outsourcing, off-shoring

- **Innerorganizational Networks**
  Group, team, project work; decentralization, flat hierarchies, profit centers, competition between divisions and sub-divisions of firms; financial instead of organizational walls and structures
Networking on the micro level

• **Interpersonal Networks**
  Rediscovery of resp. new interest in inner-organizational micro structures in various scientific disciplines; communities of collaboration, of communication, of practice.
  Why? Cooperation and communication on the micro level have become more important in economic, organizational and technological terms

• But in research only poorly investigated, a bit of a black box
Working Conditions

- Flexibilization of work, erosion of regulated “normal” work (in working time, employment conditions, career chances etc.)
- Part time work, contract work, contingent employment, decreasing job tenure
- High-performance workplace practices
- David Knoke: “New employment contract”
- Workers as “labor power entrepreneurs” (Günter G. Voss) or as victims of “drift” (Richard Sennett); biographical dimension
- Shift of power relations labor => capital
Skills and Competences

- Skills (acquisition, preservation, adjustment, furtherance) becomes the center of interests of employees
- "Life-long learning" more ideology than reality
- In spite of informatization crucial role of experience and experience-based knowledge
- Competences: Combination of continuously evolving skills and experience in work and social structures related to them
New organizational efforts

- Skills and competences generally transferred and learned not in a systematic way, but accidentally
- Especially in area of “high-tech qualifications” networks to exchange experience and knowledge
- Development of new guild-like professional associations (Chris Benner)
- Opening of some unions: New Unionism in the Information Revolution (Chris Benner)
Information vs. Knowledge

- Information is raw material: Abstracted and formalized content
- Information is always positively defined, only so it can be modeled technologically
- Knowledge is bound to the subject, always dependent on interpretation and communication (based on experience of all kinds, acknowledgement, certainty, reason)
- Knowledge defined only negatively, includes systematically “Non-Knowledge” (Helmut Willke)
Knowledge is social and political

- Knowledge can be supported by technology, but only partially
- It always will remain “tacit”, “implicit” or better “personal” (Michael Polanyi), i.e. bound to the person, to the subject
- Close connection to acknowledgement of knowledge and person
- “Knowledge is power” (Francis Bacon)
- “Knowledge is critique of information” (Gerhard Gamm)
Limits of Knowledge Technologies

- Hype of Knowledge Management since early 90ies has resulted in disillusionment
- Knowledge Management depends upon the working of networks, it presupposes a culture of acknowledgement, appreciation, motivation, and cooperation
- Potential conflict with motives of Knowledge Management: To mobilize all hidden resources in information and knowledge to make the corporation stronger endangers individual
Knowledge and Subject

- Increased importance of knowledge in economy and society means increased importance of the subject as the embodiment of knowledge for the working of economy and society.
- Fundamentally contradictory role (dialectic) of the subject: Formalization and objectivization vs. spontaneity, creativity, and reason, i.e. the constituent properties of the individual.
Formalization vs. Experience

- On one hand: Informatization (i.e. formalization) implies the dominance of objectivity, the setting of limits for identity and life perspectives.
- On the other hand: Exertion of subjectivity (which is experience-based) has become condition of productivity, is socially demanded.
- Knowledge processes are not one-dimensional, but contain a contradictory potential.
- The necessity to mobilize knowledge implies chances to realize subjectivity.
Social Struggle for the Subject

- Result: A new “struggle for the subject” (in the 20ies: Struggle for the “mass soul”)
- Strategies of “soft management”: Mobilizing motivation, engagement, adherence to organization goals, the active subject
- On one hand: Danger of the individual adapted and integrated completely into social demands (= dissolution of individuality, “corrosion of character”, Richard Sennett)
- On the other hand: Experience of loss and frustration by the subordination of subjective knowledge
Social Conditions for Action

- Where social contradictions conflict, individual and social scopes of action – and i.e. of shaping reality – emerge
- The struggle on shaping the future of society takes place – at least to a substantial extent – in the fields of information, knowledge, society and power relations (politics)
Shaping and Scopes of Action

• The shaping power of ICTs in work and everyday life is hardly to be overestimated
• The struggle against a certain ICT looks pretty like modern Don Quichotterie
• Social struggles take place in the run-up areas: In the shaping of the basic structure of information systems
• Here, power and freedom, come into conflict, sometimes in massive dimensions
What does Shaping of Technology Mean?

- If we want to realize scopes and moments of freedom against economic compulsions and strong power interests, we have to indulge into the shaping of organizations and technology themselves.
- Once they have taken shape the battle, as a rule, has been lost.
- What social scientists and humanities have to develop, is an attitude and culture of involvement into realities – which are shaped by information and knowledge technologies – and that in theory and in an shaping practice.
Thanks for your patience!

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