Working conditions: viewpoints from different generations

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Key questions for the seminar

- What is the meaning/the place of work?
- What is a good job? For whom?
- What is quality of work? For whom?
- Are generations different?

Challenges:
- Social cohesion
- Staying longer
- Increasing employment rates
Background (#1/2)

- **SPReW research** (Social Patterns of Relation to Work)
  - FP6, 2006-2006, BE, DE, FR, HU, IT, PT.

- **Key questions:**
  - Are generations different regarding work?
  - Are there trends that can affect the quality of relationships between generations at work?
  - What are the challenges for social cohesion?
The research process and methodology

- Analysis of existing literature / hypotheses
  - Desk research
- Changes in the relation to work / meaning for workers belonging to different generations / societal consequences
  - Statistical data, international surveys’ data, qualitative research (narrative interviews, focus groups)
- Highlighting the role of institutional factors
  - Cross-country comparative analysis
- Providing ideas to social actors and policy makers
  - Collection of good practices, dialogue workshops
Three generations at work: a balance of weakness and strength for each group (#1/2)

- Although other variables intervene (gender, level of qualification) in shaping the relation to work, generations appear to be “objectively” quite differentiated.
  - With few differences among countries, generations are diversely positioned on the labour market:
    - Young people (< 30)
      - more exposed to precariousness and unemployment
      - but benefit of positive educational and digital differentials
    - The adult generation (30 to 50)
      - usually enjoys a stable position in the labour market
      - but more exposed to the difficulties related to work life balance - critical position of adult women
    - The older generation (> 50) – when they are still at work –
      - enjoy the best wages and security and the highest representation by trade unions
      - but the most exposed in case of company restructuring because of deskilling
Moreover, different generations also show different cultures and expectations towards work.

- Young people (< 30)
  - Ask for more recognition, more social protection and higher income
  - but also for more freedom and opportunity of self-development

- The adult generation (30 to 50)
  - asks for social and company support to better reconcile work and family
  - but also for life-long learning measures in ageing-worker’s perspective

- The elder generation (> 50)
  - asks for recognition of experience
  - but also for the removal of constraints in working conditions
Different types of relation to work (#1/3)

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<th>Pragmatic Attitude</th>
<th>Reflexive Attitude</th>
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| |  - The largest group.  
   - All age groups but there a lower proportion of the middle-aged group.  
   - Men and women - no specific gender differentiation.  
   - People from all levels of qualification, but with a higher proportion of poorly qualified people. |  - The second largest group but less large than the first type.  
   - High proportion of middle-aged people.  
   - Higher proportion of women. Mostly middle and high levels of qualification. |
| Individualised Life Course | II. Work is a means for earning money | IV. Work is a cornerstone of the identity |
| |  - The smallest group.  
   - All age groups.  
   - A “man type”  
   - All levels of qualification. |  - Not very large, but larger than type II.  
   - All age groups but higher proportion of young workers.  
   - No gender difference.  
   - The average level of qualification is rather high. |
Some questions/issues for future surveys (#1/7)

- Qualitative approach + an overview and appraisal of 31 surveys (international + national or regional surveys in the 6 countries)

- First ccls:
  - Integrating surveys on WC/QOW-E/work value
  - a need for more sophisticated indicators of job satisfaction
Some questions/issues for future surveys (#2/7)

- A comprehensive understanding of the meaning of work:
  - Hypothesis of a fragmentation of the expressive type. There is a need for a better understanding of the meaning of instrumental and expressive relation to work.
    - Ex. Money does not only refer to an instrumental attitude towards work, but has also a symbolic value, as a measure of one’s values, as an objective sign of recognition and esteem, as a sign of emancipation.
  - Emergence of a polycentric conception of the existence and relativisation of the hegemonic value of work.
  - The centrality of work for self-fulfilment and definition of one’s identity can be relatively independent from the initial qualification and the content of the job.
  - Understanding the relational motivation in work.
  - Possible dissimilarities between the relation to work and the relation to employment.
Some questions/issues for future surveys (#3/7)

- The gender dimension of the relation to work:
  - Understanding the meaning of expressivity for men and women, at different life stages.
  - What are the gender borders within age groups? A hypothesis is that the gender borders are blurred among the young workers.
  - Contamination occurs between man and female styles and approaches to the relation to work.
    - Some main features of this contamination of models of relation to work are: the search for a different balance between work and the other spheres of life; changes in the centrality and meaning of work depending on the different life phases; discontinuity in the work trajectory – as opposite to the linearity of the male-bread winner path.
Some questions/issues for future surveys (#4/7)

Specific issues for the young workers:

- There is a strong linkage between work and moral issues, especially among young people.
  - Young people do not appear as empty of values and just aimed at self-interest and fulfiment of consumerist desires, they manifest deep sense of justice, values interpersonal relations and look for coherence between work and life as far as values are concerned.
- The quest for meaningful jobs and not just stable job emerges especially among the young workers.
- Even when work is a passion, it is one of the many passions young people have in their life.
  - Work is one of the ingredients of identity – but not necessary the main one (polycentrism in young generation attitude to work and life).
- A common desire for professional fulfilment, and differentiated strategies to deal with the lack of job satisfaction.
- Shortening of temporal horizons.
- Valorisation of a career model that is discontinuous and diversified but secure.
Some questions/ issues for future surveys (#5/7)

The perspective of trajectories:

- Heuristic pertinence of an approach in terms of trajectories combined with a theoretical weakening of the predictive role of the social classes for interpreting differences in attitudes, values, and experience among workers.

- The period of stabilisation in the work world for young generation is extending, and it develops as a process “of trial and error” in which a number of new beginnings, detours, interruptions have substituted the one way of the linear work trajectory.

- Need for a dynamic analysis of the relation to work from a constructivist viewpoint, as the crystallisation of a series of social interactions, and as the conjunction of a set of scattered elements and complex, multidimensional causalities.

- Family background is relevant. To have supportive/unsupportive parents, their level of education and work status play an important role in shaping the attitude towards work, the expectations and meanings people attribute to it.
Some questions/issues for future surveys (#6/7)

The intergenerational dimension:

- Homogeneity and heterogeneity within age groups.
  - Complexification of segmentation lines generating serious intra-generational disparities in the everyday working experience. No homogeneisation and unification of generations.

- Which awareness of being a generation?

- Perception of ages at work. Age appears as an unspoken issue. Does the non-perception of age acts as a brake to social change?

- Mutual stereotypes regarding age groups.

- Age dimension in competition? Where is the competition? Within age groups? Between adjacent age groups? Between the youngest and the older employees?

- Intergenerational conflict is not explicit, yet the social inequality between generations is real (instability, precariousness, insecurity versus stability in work positions and in social security benefits).
Some questions/issues for future surveys (#7/7)

- The intergenerational dimension:
  - Insecurity: old people seem to fear insecurity more than young though they did not really experienced it.
  - Place for cooperation and transmission. Functions, roles and status of knowledge transfer in organisations.
  - Respective status of accumulated experience and formal knowledge.
  - Innovation versus experience.
    - De-valuation of experience coupled with over-valuation of unquestioned and non-negotiated forms of innovation. Each one is associated to a specific age group.
  - Role of organisational climate (business cultures, age stereotypes, lack of common cross-generational experiences...).
  - Uncomfortable situation of some of those who are around forty years old and are experiencing a “sandwich effect” at work - captured between the older and the younger generations.
SPReW research

Information and reports available on
http://www.ftu-namur.org/sprew