1   The individual in the changing working life: introduction

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Working life has undergone changes since the 1990s that have entailed both threats and challenges for employees. While these transformations have resulted in advances and benefits for some employees, they have been experienced less positively by others. When examining these changes, it is therefore essential not only to focus on what has actually taken place, but also to take the perceptions of individuals into account. By expanding the knowledge of both the negative and positive aspects of working life from the individual's perspective, we can gain a better understanding of the nature of the changing working life. Such knowledge would help provide insight into individuals' reactions and also aid in determining how different aspects of working life can be dealt with in the most positive way. The purpose of this book is to provide a step in this direction by focusing on how individuals react to the salient phenomena of contemporary working life, and how organizations can provide the most beneficial environment for their employees.

Working life in transition

Observers describing the emerging working life indicate that recent decades have been marked by a number of transitions (e.g. Burke and Nelson, 1998; Tetrick and Quick, 2003). These changes include technological advances that minimize the need for manual labor, improvements in information technology that maximize the accessibility and ease of communication, and expanding globalization that has made it possible for employees from different parts of the world to call each other colleagues. The new conditions employees face have been both dreaded and welcomed, and the reactions to these circumstances are varied as well as contradictory. For example, the new technology has been hailed for its power to facilitate work and speed up work processes, as well as for its role in putting people in touch regardless of distances or location. However,

1

this ease of communication has often brought with it an increase in interruptions throughout the workday, making individuals too accessible, and making it more difficult to disengage from work when needed.

Another development is that heavy manufacturing jobs are now made easier with the help of new technology. The labor markets of industrialized countries can be characterized by a moving away from manufacturing jobs, with an increased number of jobs not being directly related to manufacturing a product, but rather to providing a service (ILO, 2006; Tetrick and Quick, 2003). At the same time, as technological advances have made jobs less labor-intensive, many employees have been made redundant, contributing to the loss of employment for large groups of people (Pfeffer, 1997). This also involves an increase in the portion of the labor force that is engaged in white-collar or professional work, as opposed to manual types of jobs. The changes in the type of work that is carried out are also reflected in the general increase in the proportion of the population acquiring higher education in the industrialized countries. Education and training throughout the career has become more common (Eurostat, 2005), making the workforces of many countries the most educated yet, and increasing the potential for employees to continuously develop and further their own competencies. This improves the employability of individuals by providing more alternatives in the labor market and also potentially increasing individuals' leverage in negotiations (Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth, 2004). Besides serving as a personal resource, the development of skills and knowledge, and the accompanying generally higher education level among employees, contributes to a more competitive labor market, as a greater number of people are qualified for each available job.

The transition from manufacturing to service jobs implies that a larger proportion of workers enjoy less physically strenuous jobs and less exposure to physical health risks. Moreover, as a consequence of the gradual shift from production to service, employees have been given greater independence and self-direction. However, these types of jobs bring about new types of demands. Since the performance outcomes rely less on the tangible products of traditional manufacturing jobs, work goals and tasks have become less concrete (Tetrick and Quick, 2003). This has resulted in employees being given more responsibility in deciding when work goals have been reached or when a task can be considered completed or adequately carried out, which may be difficult when goals and tasks are vague. Such vague tasks may be stressful for employees, rather than empowering, especially given the ever-increasing pace at work. Statistics show that the output per person has increased by 15% during the last decade (ILO, 2004), indicating that employee productivity is higher than ever. The greater demands on employees to be independent

and effective, along with the increased pace at which work is expected to be carried out, may result in a generally more demanding work situation for employees.

Influence over decision-making and work processes, as well as a sense of empowerment, have traditionally been regarded as positive aspects of work, contributing to positive work outcomes (e.g. Hackman and Oldham, 1976). The idea that independence and influence over work augment satisfaction and well-being in the workplace has been applied to job design and work organization, and an increasing number of employees in many occupations have experienced decentralization and self-direction (Theorell, 2003). Such discretion can be positive for employees, in the sense that it lends a feeling of control, which is often suggested to lessen the negative impact of demands (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). However, the question of whether self-direction always constitutes something beneficial for the employee has become an important issue in contemporary working life (Allvin, Aronsson, Hagström, Johansson, and Lundberg, 2006). If self-direction is not accompanied by clearly delineated tasks and demands, there is a risk that independence becomes a burden for employees, who may experience accountability without the necessary authority. The presence of resources is crucial for whether a situation is interpreted as a threat or a challenge (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). This issue is important in the context of the relation between demands and resources, and illustrates how something generally beneficial, such as self-direction, which is positive in combination with adequate resources, may become a burden when the necessary resources are not present (e.g. Demerouti, Nachreiner, Bakker, and Schaufeli, 2001; Karasek and Theorell, 1990).

The business climate has generally become more competitive, and organizations have had to cut costs and increase their flexibility in order to be able to respond to changes in market demands. One way of achieving numerical flexibility is by hiring a larger proportion of employees on fixed-term contracts, and, indeed, the number of employees in different types of so-called flexible or contingent employment has grown over the past decades (Aronsson, 1999; Connelly and Gallagher, 2004). Part-time employment has increased slightly since 1990 (OECD, 2005a), and can be associated with part-time unemployment and the underutilization of employees. The growing utilization of non-standard types of employment indicates that a smaller proportion of employees are now formally attached to an organization via full-time, permanent contracts, and has resulted in employees being categorized as either part of the core or part of the periphery of the organization (Aronsson, Gustafsson, and Dallner, 2002). A less formal organizational attachment has been

associated with stronger experiences of uncertainty among employees
(Isaksson, De Cuyper, and De Witte, 2005), but also with a greater
flexibility for both organizations and individuals (Reilly, 1998). A less
permanent attachment between individual and organization has the
potential of being both an asset and a threat to the individual. While
less static employment relations provide the individual with a certain
amount of flexibility, these types of contracts expose the individual to a
great deal of unpredictability, and this development has been related to
increased feelings of uncertainty, more negative attitudes, and perhaps
even stress on the job. However, studies investigating the psychological
impact of temporary status have not been able to unanimously conclude
whether temporary employees fare worse or better in terms of well-being
and work attitudes, compared to their colleagues holding permanent
contracts (McLean Parks, Kidder, and Gallagher, 1998).

In relation to this, another recent development reveals that in spite of
the reduction in the total rate of unemployment during the last few years,
the proportion of employees who have been unemployed at some point of
their career has increased. Employees in many different types of jobs have
experienced unemployment at some point in time, and during the 1990s
it became evident that even highly educated persons were at risk of losing
their jobs. Unemployment is therefore no longer primarily something that
happens to workers during plant closures or downsizings; rather, the
movement in and out of work has become more frequent (Kanfer,
Wanberg, and Kantrowitz, 2001). A person's career is no longer neces-
sarily continuous, but is likely to be broken up by different types of jobs
and periods of unemployment (Super, 1992). These new types of
employment and career patterns point to a development where tradi-
tional theories, which assume that work is full time, permanent, and
performed at a particular place intended for work, are put into question
(Connelly and Gallagher, 2004).

In the wake of increased technological advances and new types of work
tasks, work has become less dependent on the place where it is carried
out, and it is increasingly common for work to be performed in places and
at times which traditionally have been reserved for leisure time. The
boundaries between work and non-work are at risk of becoming more
blurred for many groups of employees (Arthur, Inkson, and Pringle,
1999). Moreover, the larger proportion of women in the workforce, as
well as of dual-earner couples and working parents, has increased the
number of roles that employees have to distribute their time between
(Hakim, 2000). This has led to more frequent interference between work
and the part of life which is supposed to be devoted to activities other than
paid work (Byron, 2005). Less distinct boundaries have been associated

with an increased flexibility for the individual, since employees to a greater extent may choose when and where work should be carried out, but this flexibility also brings with it the risk of work intruding on life outside of work and causing an imbalance between work and non-work roles (Allvin *et al.*, 2006). Such an imbalance not only entails that individuals will be less able to regard time at home as time away from work, as they find it more difficult to fulfill the requirements of the different roles, but also has been associated with negative consequences for individuals, such as wanting to leave the organization or mental distress (Frone, 2003).

The importance of social relations in the work context has increased. Traditional human service occupations, such as those within health care, have always involved a high degree of social interaction, but in addition to these, the growth of service production has expanded the need for people to interact in a variety of other types of occupations. Another aspect of social relations is that between co-workers, and changes in employment relations also bring about changes in the types of social relations that develop in the work context. The increased heterogeneity of workers, in regard to both gender and ethnicity, should also be mentioned in the context of relations associated with the work situation. The proportion of women in the workforce has steadily grown during the twentieth century, and in many countries women constitute approximately half of the employees (OECD, 2005b). Also, with the increased migration between countries, employees originate from different cultures and ethnicities to a greater extent than before. It has been suggested that a heterogeneous workforce promotes creativity and the exchange of different ideas, and prevents stagnation, when individuals with different backgrounds and frames of reference jointly solve work tasks (Jackson, 1992). However, heterogeneity can present problems not previously encountered for the same reasons that it contributes to creativity. Individuals who do not have similar frames of reference run a greater risk of misunderstanding each other and, perhaps, ending up in conflicts, which does not enhance productivity or creativity.

An individual perspective

Working life has the potential to affect the individual both positively and negatively. A positive work situation is often associated with demands that are not too difficult for the individual to handle. The perception of demands is affected by the extent to which an individual perceives herself as having control of or access to adequate resources for dealing with the demands (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Karasek and Theorell, 1990).

The subjective interpretation of objective phenomena is central for how individuals react in a working context. A particular situation may be interpreted as a challenge instead of a threat if the employee perceives that she has resources and opportunities to deal with the situation in a satisfactory way (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Such perceptions of resources and opportunities are dependent on individual characteristics, but also on the context in which the individual works (Katz and Kahn, 1978). Thus, an individual's reaction to a certain phenomenon has to be viewed with respect to both individual and situational characteristics, since both are central to the individual's interpretation of the situation (James and Sells, 1981).

As reports of new demands and challenges for employees are put forth, an increased research interest in how individuals and organizations are affected by these developments has emerged. Investigations have shown that individual reactions may be grouped into three very general categories: attitudinal, behavioral, and health related (Jex and Beehr, 1991). Attitudinal reactions, such as job satisfaction or commitment to the organization, influence how the individual will approach her work tasks (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Locke, 1976). The work situation can also give rise to behavioral reactions, such as performance, turnover behavior, or compliance with safety regulations (Probst and Brubaker, 2001; Steel and Ovalle, 1984). Health-related reactions, such as mental health complaints and somatic symptoms, are also often associated with stressful conditions at work (Spector, 2000). Reactions to working conditions may be both positive and negative. For example, a positively perceived work climate may give rise to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, inspire good performance, and enhance well-being. On the other hand, a negatively perceived work environment has been consistently associated with detrimental reactions such as negative attitudes toward the organization, lowered performance, and health complaints.

Individuals exposed to demands attempt to handle these in ways that minimize their negative impact. Naturally, organizations and management are also affected by employee reactions and coping behaviors (cf. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984). For instance, employee work attitudes, turnover behaviors, and performance affect the productivity of the organization, and employees on sick-leave present costs for both rehabilitation and loss of work input (Matteson and Ivancevich, 1990). Thus, how individuals handle their work situation becomes a concern for the organization as well. Moreover, organizations constitute an important part of the equation, which produces reactions among employees since the context in which the individual works is central to perceptions of stress and reactions to demands (cf. Katz and Kahn, 1978).

Organizations thereby play a vital role in providing resources for employees to deal with the demands organizations put on their employees (Theorell, 2003). It is important that organizations realize what measures they may take to affect working conditions in order for tasks to be perceived as challenges rather than threats by the employees.

In this context, the prevention of ill-health and negative attitudes, as well as the promotion of health and well-being at work, have become increasingly important (Quick, Quick, Nelson, and Hurrell, 1997). This includes organizational interventions and strategies to minimize the negative impact of work on employees, and also strategies to maximize positive factors to motivate employees and promote employee well-being. Such prevention and promotion programs benefit both employees and organizations, and organizations are well advised to be proactive in helping their employees to handle demands that arise in the course of work (Quick *et al.*, 1997).

Aim of the book

This volume aims to increase the understanding of the different emerging aspects of working life from the perspective of the individual experiencing these phenomena. This involves highlighting the research and theoretical developments that have occurred in recent years and discussing how traditional theoretical models can be used to understand the evolving working life. In doing so, one objective of the volume is to identify factors that individuals face in working life by focusing on how individuals are affected by them. This includes, for example, exploring what the threats and challenges are that employees currently face – as well as examining what the consequences of these factors are. No less important is the question of how well-being and behaviors at work are affected by current working life. Another objective of this volume is to reveal how employees deal with various aspects of contemporary working life and to provide direction for how individuals and organizations may better handle the negative aspects and take advantage of the positive aspects. It is important to know how individuals deal with the conditions they are facing and to look into how the associated threats and challenges can be handled so that individuals are not harmed. Not least of all, it is also important to explore what measures an organization can take in order to create working conditions that are beneficial for the both the vitality of the organization and the well-being of the employees.

In relation to this, research on working life has gone through changes to reflect the developments it studies. Such changes are gradual and perhaps difficult to notice, and therefore need to be explicitly discussed.

A discussion of the models that have been developed to help explain the more recent phenomena of contemporary working life is at present an important ambition. Traditional theories have been sufficient in some instances, but, in others, the transformations have brought about an emerging need for new theoretical frameworks – or at least amendments to existing theories. Additionally, in studies on work stress, it has become important for the researcher not only to assess whether there are problems in an organization or work group, but also to be able to suggest solutions and improvements, and to evaluate the effectiveness of these. This makes it necessary to reexamine the theories used as frameworks for understanding working conditions, and to reevaluate which methods are appropriate for studying contemporary working life.

In order to address the objectives presented above, the following chapters have been arranged in three parts. The chapters in the first part primarily focus on the identification of different factors in modern working life and their consequences for individuals. In the second part, the chapters describe different approaches that individuals take in handling aspects of working life and the consequences these approaches have. The third part contains chapters presenting what strategies organizations and research may employ in order to prevent negative outcomes for individuals and promote a positive working life.

Part I   Threats and challenges

The first part of this book focuses on the threats and challenges that individuals face in working life and the impact of these factors. The chapters explore the emerging phenomena in working life that affect employees and organizations in both positive and negative ways. These chapters also present theoretical models used to understand and describe contemporary working life.

The recent changes in working life have brought about a blurring of the various types of boundaries at work. Demands, for example, are often less clearly delineated, and the boundary between working life and life outside of work has also become less distinct. In chapter 2, Michael Allvin provides a theoretical discussion of the boundaryless working life, and presents an empirical study of employees dealing with less distinct boundaries.

In chapter 3, Johnny Hellgren, Magnus Sverke, and Katharina Näswall illustrate a number of factors present in contemporary working life and how they affect individuals. The chapter discusses new types of threats and challenges that have emerged during recent decades and contrasts these to traditional work stressors. The chapter also provides an empirical

illustration of the emerging constructs and their relation to employee reactions.

The transitions occurring in working life have brought about a need for up-to-date theoretical models that take new types of stressors into account. Traditional models have been criticized for their inability to accommodate today's emerging working conditions. As a reaction to this, in chapter 4, Jan de Jonge, Christian Dormann, and Marieke van den Tooren present a recently developed model of the stressor–strain relationship, which suggests that there needs to be a match between stressors, strain, and type of resource. The authors also discuss empirical evidence regarding the applicability of the model in working life.

One of the major recent changes has been the increasing move from permanent employment toward the use of more short-term, temporary employment, and other atypical forms of employment such as self-employment and independent contracting. These temporary workers may have different work experiences and be exposed to different health risks compared to permanent employees (Kochan, Smith, Wells, and Rebitzer, 1994). Less is known about whether the traditional models used in working life research can be applied to these types of employees, who have yet to receive the same amount of research attention as individuals employed under traditional arrangements. Several chapters in this volume focus on different types of non-traditional contracts in various ways. In chapter 5, Nele De Cuyper and Hans De Witte discuss the experiencing of job insecurity among temporary workers, investigate how employability may figure in this context, and offer an explanatory framework for understanding the various psychological effects of temporary and permanent contracts.

There has been little research on how other types of non-traditional workers, such as independent contractors, are affected in terms of health and well-being. In chapter 6, Daniel G. Gallagher identifies and discusses the work-related pressures and challenges that may affect individuals employed as independent contractors. The chapter also focuses on the effort to identify and model the types of factors associated with the independent contractor status that may influence individuals' levels of satisfaction with their employment status as well as their overall well-being.

As mentioned, it has been observed that the new flexible employment conditions contribute to less distinct boundaries between work and non-work, with the increased pace of work in many occupations making it more difficult to limit work to traditional work hours. As a consequence of this, the concept of work–family conflict has recently become even more critical than before, especially with the increasing rate of dual-earner couples alongside less strictly defined workplaces and work hours

(Allen, Herst, Bruck, and Sutton, 2000). The concept of work–family conflict can be contrasted to family–work conflict, a related but separate construct involving life outside of work interfering with work. Ulla Kinnunen and Saija Mauno devote chapter 7 to a literature review of research on the antecedents and consequences of work–family interference, and examine how this phenomenon can be related to contemporary working life. The chapter also discusses family–work conflict and how it differs from work–family conflict.

The proportion of workers who are self-employed was estimated to be approximately 8% in the European Union in 2002 (Eurostat, 2002), which points to the need for research on the situation of this particular category of workers. Many of these workers carry out their work in their own home, which increases the risk of interference between work and family life. In chapter 8, Toon W. Taris, Sabine A. E. Geurts, Michiel A. J. Kompier, Suzanne Lagerveld, and Roland W. B. Blonk discuss to what extent self-employed experience interference between work and family life compared to other employees. The chapter also presents an empirical investigation of how the interaction between work and home affects the attitudes and well-being of the self-employed.

The increased output per person indicates that the pace of work has become increasingly high. A high work pace and a pressure to perform at a rapid rate have increased the risk of incidents that jeopardize worker safety (Probst and Brubaker, 2001). Nevertheless, the specific working conditions that increase the risk of employee injury and that decrease safety may have changed with the transformation of working life. In chapter 9, Nik Chmiel provides a review of how research on safety at work has evolved since the 1990s and how management practices and views on safety are changing.

The impact of social relations at work has gained some empirical attention, yet little is known about how romantic relationships at work can be accepted without detriment to the work environment or output. Positive relationships in the workplace are likely to relate to positive attitudes and well-being, which makes the way romantic relationships are accepted and managed an important issue in today's working life. In chapter 10, Jennifer Carson and Julian Barling give an overview of the nature, development, and potential outcomes of romantic relationships at work, and show how these relationships are influenced by management policies. The authors also provide a novel view of romantic relationships as an occurrence that cannot be prevented, and postulate that such relationships may actually benefit employee well-being.

Diversity amongst the personnel places demands on employees and managers to handle new and perhaps unknown attributes in their