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The New Work

> It's all about "time to market." You're in a hurry and things change all the time. If you can't get your products out in time, they will already be old when they get out. The timeframe between your product idea and one or two competitors getting an equal product onto the market is very narrow. So, when you're piloting a project, you're hurrying, hurrying, hurrying. Always running, not to miss the train.

In a sparsely furnished office in a suburb south of Stockholm, Peter is trying to explain what his work is all about. Leaning forward and gesticulating, he constantly checks his watch. From time to time he is interrupted by his mobile phone ringing or by colleagues poking their heads through the door to ask about something. With a tired look he apologizes each time.

> I guess we're at least trying to stay ahead of the crowd but we can't keep up with the trend leaders, so we're probably lagging behind a bit. This means it's always stressful and products are always outdated. The competition is unbelievable.

Peter is one of the founders of one of the many IT companies that started up at the end of the 1990s. He started the company together with two course mates from university. Since then they have grown into a company of around ten employees, but Peter and his cofounders are still there, doing most of the work. This was also the original idea. They have no plans to expand, but rather see the company goal as cooperating and working together. Or, in Peter's words: "we like to race and wrestle one another. We enjoy it."

Peter is a modern entrepreneur. Being one of the founders, the life of the company is his life. He also expects the same commitment from his co-workers. The company runs a profit-sharing system by which everyone

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receives a certain percentage of the profit. Peter sees this as an incentive for everyone to help out and "do their bit," but he also feels that it comes natural – after all, to them the company is a communal project. The company per se does not interest him. The point is not to create or set up a business. It is rather the particular way of working he likes. He wants to do what he enjoys doing, and to be able to take that initiative by himself. As he says, to get the information you need when you need it, and arrange meetings with the people you need when you need them. For Peter, working with people with whom he gets on well on a common project, and at the same time being his own boss, is what makes his work so appealing. Just the same, it forces him to work a lot. And life outside work, if it exists at all, suffers the consequences.

> On my wife's twenty-fifth birthday, I didn't get home until after midnight. [laughter] I couldn't go home. I just couldn't. We had to deliver next day, and the stuff wouldn't work.

Stella, a colleague of Peter's, also senses the impact of their hard work and has seen her health affected. She suffers from insomnia and high blood pressure. It feels strange to be struck by problems like these when you are so young, and she does not quite know what to do about it. Changing the particular way of working would be difficult. She has only just discovered its appeal, and cannot imagine an ordinary "nine-to-five job." At the same time she is slowly realizing that the problems will not just go away. Still, she and her colleagues have been aware of the risks, and possibly even been challenged by them.

> After all, we have created this situation ourselves, because we're eager for this to work. Then, you'll have to assume a larger role. At the same time we've tried to say that maybe you can't work like this for more than three years.

Running a business in such a competitive industry is, for both Peter and Stella, a way of testing themselves and stretching the limits of their capacity. The company itself is, in Peter's words, just a "tool" to develop yourself and your role in life.

In an apartment not far away, Monica is waiting for the phone to ring. She is employed by the hour by a sizable labor recruitment firm, performing less complicated office tasks.

> If you're lucky you get to know about it the evening before. Around three–four in the afternoon they call and ask if you can work the next day.

> The worst is when they call at half past seven in the morning and tell you you need to be at work at half past seven.

Monica is 45 years old and a single mother. She used to work as a secretary at a larger company but was forced to quit when it was reorganized. Since then she has been back at her old workplace several times in temporary hired positions. Most of the people there are new, but the tasks she is assigned are more or less the same as those she performed earlier. She also does not understand why she was laid off in the first place. Even though she is not particularly fond of the tasks, she has no problem carrying them out. Instead, it is the way in which she has to work that she dislikes: that she can never know when or if she will be working. It is far too uncertain.

Monica has no specific education and does not believe she will be able to get a more "developing" job. In her youth she spent all her time doing sports. Even though she is still active and gets a few jobs coaching junior athletes, there is no future for her in sports. She also finds it difficult to relax and to use her spare time for anything constructive.

> There is no relaxation. You always have at the back of your mind that: I wonder if they'll call? Should I prepare for tomorrow? Should I send away the kid? Even though you're free, you can't unwind. But you're thinking: are they going to call tomorrow? Will it be long until there is a new job this time?

She is registered as part-time unemployed with the national job agency. But she expects no help, at the most "a public labor market measure project, or something like that." In a way it is good, as it keeps her from "falling out of the system," but it does not do anything for her. "If I get stuck with something like that I'll just have to do it. But it's not something I look forward to, if you know what I mean."

Her replies are laconic and overall she gives a rather apathetic impression, adding that she feels exploited, excluded, and discarded.

> Sure, when they want you they want you. But if there's no work, you're no one, and then you can stay home. And *that*, that's exploiting people, isn't it?

Even though Peter, Stella, and Monica perhaps are not representative from a purely statistical point of view, their stories are not entirely uncommon. They certainly represent two extremes, but much of what they describe is in many ways typical of what we would like to call "the new working life."

There is a widespread perception of a fast tempo. There is the very tangible experience of abrupt turns, fluctuations, and constant changes. But there is also the paralyzing fatigue and feeling of uselessness. There is the sensation of having freedom and control, in work as well as in life. But there are also experiences of being imperiled and abandoned. There are expectations of development and future possibilities but also depressing sensations of uncertainty, insecurity, and frustration. On the one hand, the new working life provides expanded possibilities and a new kind of freedom. On the other hand, it can lead to increased exclusion. The life of work increasingly resembles a giant switchboard which either connects or disconnects people.

The New Inequality

But, you might wonder, what is new about this? The life of work has always divided people into those who are above and those who are below, those who exploit and those who are exploited, those who have power and those who lack it. This is of course true and the new work is no different. The life of work has not become less unequal, quite the opposite. What is new is instead the way in which the inequalities are distributed.

In order to explain this, we need to go back to the stories of Peter, Stella, and Monica. We can distinguish three experiences they all seem to have in common. First, there is the experience that time has become more urgent and demanding. For Peter and Stella this means a higher tempo and changing conditions. There is no upper limit for how much, how well, or how fast they are expected to perform. At the same time they must constantly be aware of the conditions and prerequisites. Working a lot, well, and fast with something that is already dated and nobody wants is not just useless, it is a waste of time. Time is stalking Monica as well. But for her it is all about seizing the opportunities that are offered. She is unable to relax as she can never know when, or if, the phone will ring. Conditions are constantly changing, and she never knows what tomorrow will bring. A consequence they all suffer is increasing fatigue, exhaustion, and possibly even burnout.

The second common experience is to have more control on a smaller scale, but less on a larger. For Peter and Stella this manifests itself in that they have substantial freedom at work. No one tells them what to do. At the same time they are subject to the unconditional demands of the industry, market, and competition. These demands rule their work as inevitably and

mercilessly as an assembly line, although not in as much detail. What is more, the work is ruled without any regard for human limitations and social obligations. Saying that Monica is in control on a smaller scale may sound odd or insensitive, but her workday is, in a certain sense, not limited by the rules of work, but instead open and dependent on her personal choices. At the same time, these choices are severely constrained by events quite beyond her scope and control. Another way of expressing this problem is that people's control in their work has increased, whereas their control over the conditions of work has decreased. As a consequence they have parallel experiences of freedom and lack of security.

The third experience is the number of opportunities that are offered through work, and all the expectations they give rise to. In the case of Peter and Stella, these concern successes, personal development, doing what you want to do, and having fun. Just how they imagine this is, of course, individual. Their stories, however, hint that the world is at their feet and that everything is possible. A female colleague of theirs at another company describes her plans for the future as follows.

> On the whole, I think I know fairly well what I want to do further on. I know I want to develop this company, and we have discussed having children in maybe three years or so, in order to first get the company going ... Then I would like to get a PhD in the USA, and afterwards I would like to work helping women in the third world ... or some form of international engagement, although not in any traditional organization.

But as the opportunities and expectations skyrocket, our abilities to respond to and benefit from them are still as limited as ever. We cannot do all that we want when we want it. Nor can we do it all at once. There are limits to how much we can work and at the same time lead a meaningful personal and social life outside work. Friends, family, personal economy, time, and finally our body fail us. There is also a limit to how much we can learn and how much we can adapt. Organizations may have become more flexible, but human life still requires a certain measure of stability. Although capital is now transient and global, the workforce is still stationary and local.

Monica had had the same experience too. She had also seen opportunities and had expectations. But in her case the possibility of realization lay not in work, but in sport. She expected her job to provide her with the social and economic stability her self-realization necessitated. But when the workplace was being reorganized, her education, experience, and abilities were not

enough. When demands increased, conditions changed, frustrating her expectations. Hence, the third common experience is that the individual, with her physical, cognitive, social, and economic limitations, finds it increasingly difficult to match all the opportunities work has to offer, the expectations it harbors, and the demands that it makes. The result of this growing discrepancy is not just heightened pressure and stress, but also, as in Monica's case, frustration or even depression.

In a certain sense, these three types of experiences are all general, though the perception and awareness of them will of course vary. On the other hand, the consequences differ. Although everyone senses the speed and pace of change, not everyone is exhausted or burnt out as a result of it. Even though the displacement of control at work versus control of working conditions is felt by all, some experience it as enhanced freedom, whereas others experience it as lessened security. Although everybody sees the opportunities and harbors expectations for their work, not everyone is able to take advantage of and realize them. Here yet another inequality materializes. It is, however, not an inequality between those at the top versus those at the bottom as that would require a static order. The fact that some people have not been overcome by fatigue or burnt out by the fast pace and changing nature of the new work does not mean that they never will. Nor is this an inequality between the exploiters and the exploited, the prerequisite of which would be a zero-sum game in which everyone takes part and is needed. The ability of some to take advantage of and realize their possibilities and expectations does not dictate the inability of others. Finally, it is not the inequality of those who have power and those who lack it, which would require two or more hostile parties controlling each other or having a social relation to one another. The relative success of Peter and Stella is, after all, not based on them exercising power over people like Monica.

The emerging inequality is therefore not a social inequality, in that it is not distributed through social relations. Instead, relations between the concerned parties are similar to those between participants in a marathon. In a marathon it is pointless to speak of the differences between the runners in terms of social relations such as power, exploitation, or subordination. Either you are in the race or you are not. As long as you are in the race you can either be in the lead, in the pack, or behind. Each individual participates according to her own capabilities, and needs only the other participants to calculate her relative position. In other words, there is no evident relation between the runners other than their relative positions. The leader of the race is in the lead irrespective of how many runners are tailing him or have

interrupted the race. The very last runner is last, regardless of how many are ahead or of how far ahead they are. The race as a whole is completely independent of the individual effort. A slow runner will not lower the tempo of the other runners, but will simply be left behind. Or, to rephrase it, the only one to care, or even notice, if a runner is left behind is that runner.

The new work is characterized by this particular kind of inequality. Stella and Peter are, in Peter's words, lagging a bit behind the leaders, whereas Monica has fallen far behind. Using another sport metaphor, we could even say she is on the bench. The inequalities between them do not primarily have to do with their jobs but with their individual capacities and opportunities. Peter can feel that it is getting more difficult, but there is still hope for a placement. Stella is beginning to notice her body reacting to the pace and worries about having to slow down and get stuck somewhere in the pack. Monica, on the other hand, is having doubts whether she will be able to hang on and finish the race at all. Peter and Stella are both young and well educated. Their mental and physical conditions, however, seem to differ. Monica has the physical requirements, but she is getting old. She does not have any kind of higher education, and on top of that she is a single mother and sole provider. Their opportunities for finishing the race all differ.

Perhaps we should better add that we, in underlining individual differences, by no means deny the existence of widespread power discrepancies and other social inequalities. On the contrary, these injustices to a large extent contribute to the differences in individual opportunities. But differing individual opportunities cannot be reduced to social differences. Differences in personality, attitudes, age, language, and cognitive, economic, biological, intellectual, physiological, and many other differences also play a significant role. Taken together with the "traditional" social differences, they generate the aforementioned individual opportunities. Of interest here, and what makes this more than the trivial statement that we are all different, is that the new work exploits and even presupposes such individual differences.

New Markets and New Structures

If the traditional inequality of work traces its origin to the hierarchical order of the workplace, the new inequality originates rather in the competitive nature of the contemporary labor market. The opportunities of the individual are decided not by her objective position within the organization,

but by her relative position on the market. A person who is attractive to the labor market does not have to feel insecure. He or she has the possibilities to negotiate good working conditions, whereas those who are not attractive will be left at the mercy of a callous market.

It is not uncommon to explain this new inequality in terms of work and labor markets being influenced by a more liberalist, even neo-liberalist, policy. This statement is habitually used to claim that deliberate strategic political decisions have invested the market forces with more space for action. The fact that work and labor markets have been partially deregulated as a consequence of political decisions is true, as is that many of the decisions initiating these deregulations were taken within the framework of a neo-liberal agenda. This is valid internationally and especially if focusing on Anglophone countries. But though neo-liberal elements may be identified in the politics of numerous countries, it is still not possible to accuse all countries, including Sweden, of having conducted neo-liberal policies. Certainly, it is also up for discussion just how deliberate and strategic the decisions have actually been. Perhaps it has rather been a series of adjustments to growing pressure from international trade and competition. But it is difficult to deny that market forces have had their influence enhanced in work and on the labor market. Without downplaying the impact of political decisions, we would like to suggest an alternative representation of recent developments – a development where the internationalization of business has been an important driving force.

In Sweden, and in many other European countries, work and labor markets are relatively well regulated. Not only employment and wages but also working conditions and the job environment are regulated by laws and central agreements. These laws and agreements essentially mirror the balance of strength between the different parties on the labor market. They, so to speak, constitute the existing frontier between the parties, and they are changed by the unions advancing their positions on the employer, or by the employer doing the same thing vis-à-vis the unions. In other words, the regulation of work mirrors not only the diverging interests of the parties, but also their interdependence.

At least this can be said to have been the case up until the 1970s, when a substantial portion of the Western world stumbled into economic crisis. When their profits fell, companies were forced to finance their investments through raised prices and increased credit. This in turn led the unions to compensate their members by demanding wage increases, which shrunk profits and pushed prices even higher. The welfare state and bank system,

through transfers and credits, acted as buffers by keeping up consumption and production in an inflation-triggering upward spiral. The result was simultaneous stagnation and inflation (aka stagflation).

In order to raise profits and speed up growth, companies increasingly turned to new markets abroad. This was mainly achieved through investment in other industries and in foreign companies. In the 1980s, Swedish investment abroad had already grown to twice the size of domestic investment. Swedish companies merged with, bought, bought stakes in, and entered into alliances and cooperation agreements with companies all over the world. Companies in other Western countries made similar investments. Through this strategy, companies expanded their markets beyond their national borders, first in neighboring countries and the Western sphere, later a few countries in Asia and Latin America, and during the 1990s the former Eastern bloc, followed by China and India. Simultaneously, companies were cutting their previously strong ties to unions and the welfare state in their country of origin. Instead of relying on these institutions, companies have become increasingly dependent on one another, as owners, partners, customers, or competitors in supranational commercial networks. Thus, companies do not necessarily relocate abroad, though this of course also happens, but rather they sign agreements, cooperate, and carry out transactions amongst themselves quite independently of national borders. And this is not only true for large corporations. Small- and medium-sized companies also take part in such transactions, or depend on them as subcontractors, at times several layers deep.

Not only has this worldwide "structural change" reduced companies' dependence on national and cultural roots, it has also increased the impact of the market forces. And the expansion is not just geographical. Parts of the developing countries and the former Eastern bloc have opened up to trade on free market conditions, but the expanding influence of market forces can also be felt in the national economy, between different sectors. In a majority of Western countries, most significantly perhaps in the Anglophone world, the publicly financed sector is increasingly operating on market principles. But the change has increased the impact of market forces in an even wider meaning. This has been done through the growth of the financial economy, through the development of new economic control systems, and through the development of new information technology. We will touch briefly on each of these three areas.

The growth of the financial economy originates, in slightly simplified terms, in companies' need for money to expand on the international

market. Between 1984 and 1991, Swedish companies invested more than €22 billion abroad. Investments on this scale, within such a short period of time, require a sizable injection of capital. The lion's share of this capital was obtained through loans and other forms of credit. Traditionally, this has been arranged through a few institutional intermediaries, primarily banks. If a company needs a lot of capital relatively quickly, however, this may constitute a serious obstacle. Hence, during the 1970s, and still more during the 1980s, companies in growing numbers started to bypass these intermediaries and turned directly to investors on the financial market. Consequently, the world stock market's turnover increased dramatically throughout the 1980s. At the start of the 1970s, the turnover of financial transactions was twice that of the trade in goods and services, but in the first years of the 1980s it grew to a ratio of 10:1. By the mid-1990s the ratio was 70:1 (Dicken, 2003).

As companies mortgage their future profits through the sale of shares, the shares themselves achieve a certain value. In order to procure the necessary amount of investment or risk capital from the financial market, a seemingly unavoidable side effect will be the independent trade in shares and other securities. The larger the yield of the shares, the larger the trade will be. By the mid-1990s, an enormous 90 percent of all financial transactions were made up of speculative trade. Only 10 percent were immediately related to trade and the production of goods and services (Dicken, 2003). Speculative trade in shares does not concern itself with company profits per se – it only speculates in the expectations of such profits. This means that companies, in order to procure the capital they need, have to raise or at least maintain expectations of their profits. They, quite simply, must satisfy investors' constant demands for higher and shorter-term yield. Companies, in other words, are drawn into the game of speculative financial trade. This fuels the speculative trading further, as well as making company boards increasingly shortsighted in their actions.

The intrusion of market forces in companies is, however, not just a question of strategy but also of management. As companies expand, develop, take over, cooperate, or in other ways interact with other companies, they also come to span more and more areas and activities, rendering an overview of the activities more difficult. Different and differing products, techniques, competences, languages, and cultures – geographical as well as professional and industry-specific – meet and are coordinated within the framework of the company. It is impossible for the company management to know about every part of and premises for their activities. Instead, the

common language becomes money. The company is divided into several self-supporting profit centers, subject to internal demands for returns, and controlled by sophisticated accounting systems. A profit center which does not live up to standards is sold, back-scaled, or closed down, and new activities bought in its place. The directorate sees the company simply as a collection of accountancy entries, which may be combined or manipulated into generating more or less short-term profits. The background for this view of company management is found in big American corporations' countermove to the anti-trust laws of the 1940s and 1950s. To ensure continued growth, companies were forced to expand into different industries and, as a consequence, diversify their activities. In order to control the company, advanced systems for financial control were developed. This attitude and these accounting systems later spread and became increasingly universal as companies in the 1970s and 1980s were expanding abroad (Fligstein, 1990).

However, the sizable financial market and advanced accounting systems of today would not have been possible without the new technology developed in the 1970s. The economic prerequisites of the new work have uninterruptedly developed throughout the post-war years, but they received a decisive push through what Manuel Castells (1996) calls "the information technology revolution," that is, the development of microelectronics, computers, and telecommunication. With the assistance of microelectronics, information processing could be built into all kinds of machines. Personal computers made information processing immediately accessible to individuals, and telecommunication tied them together in global communication networks. The development within each respective area was so fast that it truly deserves the epithet revolution. Microchips shrunk rapidly, while their capacity increased. Computers also became smaller, gained additional applicability, and became more user-friendly. Telecommunication sped up, was expanded, and increased its applicability as well. And to top it off, it all happened in little more than a decade. The development started in 1971 when Ted Hoff, an engineer at Intel, invented the microprocessor and ran until 1983 when researchers at Berkeley adjusted UNIX, an operating system enabling computers to communicate with each other, to the TCP/IP protocols that enabled communicating computers to be linked together in networks. Adding to this the development of other means of communication (satellite transfer, mobile telephony, fiber optics, etc.), we have the basis for the global communication network and a prerequisite for the international economy (Castells, 1996).

What we see here is that the enhanced influence of market forces by and large can be grasped against a backdrop of the international expansion of business. This expansion, in turn, has been an important driving force in the exploding development in financial markets. It has also played a decisive role in the growth and spread of the new economic systems for management and control that now, to a great extent, dominate work. Even if the emergence of the new information and communication technology is not directly derived from the international expansion of business, the continuing development and spread of the former is unthinkable without the contribution of the latter. Without taking any further stand on which is the chicken and which is the egg in this cocktail of factors, we would like to point to a development that, though in clear interaction with political institutions, to a large extent is quite beyond the reach of any effective political influence.

It is also against this backdrop that the labor market, despite existing and still substantial regulation, has grown more individualized and market-like. Although the dominant form of employment is still permanent employment, the number of temporary workers increased from about 10 to 15 percent during the 1990s, and this through a string of contract forms: by the hour and project employment, stand-in and probationary employment, as well as short-term contract employment to meet the temporary needs of the employer. During the 2000s there has been a stagnation and they constitute about 15 percent of the Swedish workforce. A reason for this stagnation is deregulation of public employment services in Sweden, which has resulted in a strong growth of hire agencies, Swedish and internationally based. Workers employed by hire agencies substitute temporary workers. The number of self-employed, that is, those with a private business and no employees, is similarly increasing. The same goes for part-time workers, who now make up more than 20 percent of employees.

Furthermore, we may state that competence demands have grown and changed. Since the beginning of the 1990s there are large losses of employment opportunities in the traditional sector of the manufacturing industry. In the same period, the service sector and the service content of the remaining industry jobs have grown. Qualification demands at work have also increased, mainly through the disappearance of low qualified jobs while other more highly qualified jobs have appeared. It is generally the case that knowledge-intensive jobs increase, while capital-intensive activities decline. One consequence of this development is that many of those who lose their jobs have problems finding new ones. They are simply not qualified enough or they lack the right "competence profile."

At the same time, as traditional jobs in the manufacturing industry become fewer and far between and the highly qualified white-collar jobs are on the rise, the number of low qualified service industry jobs is increasing. The growing service sector, however, has limited opportunities to compensate for the shrinking sector of manufacturing industry. While middle-aged male industry workers who have been made redundant certainly find it difficult to go back to school in order to get the right kind of knowledge and the right attitudes for getting a new job, it is just as difficult for them to fit into the service sector, dominated by young people, women, and immigrants. Today's unemployment is in this sense structural rather than dependent on current fluctuations of labor.

The international expansion of business and the surge in market influence, however, have not changed the labor market solely through the growing demands on and competition for the jobs. The surge in question has also meant that the general demands collectively made on employed industry workers have been exchanged for the individual, or even personal, demands on highly qualified employment or less qualified service jobs. In effect, competition increasingly hinges on individual rather than collective traits. The market forces consequently have not only become increasingly important on the labor market, they have moved closer and become more invasive to the individual.

The New Work Life

In this altered state of affairs, companies have become more aware of competition. As a result, they have also adjusted their organization. They have cut down on personnel to become more cost-efficient and they have sold off, shut down, or outsourced unprofitable segments of their operation. At the same time, the organization of work has adjusted to the various demands particular to the business. In cases where the demands are not obvious, goals not clearly defined, or where their definition instead is an integral part of the job, the traditional organization has become more relaxed, or sometimes even deregulated. Instead new rules and norms have been developed – rules expecting individuals to adjust their work continuously to changeable demands. By contrast, jobs where demands are relatively simple, specified, and repetitive have seen the organization grow tighter and more detailed. The employment relation has been subject to similar adjustments, and at times, as in the case of labor firms, it has

been sidestepped altogether. The philosophy behind this is, of course, that employees should be fed in to work as easily as they are shipped out. Thereby the workforce can be adjusted to the fluctuating demands of work.

The continuous adjustments of companies to the market, as well as the subsequent work organization strategies, however, place a great strain on the individual. When the set of rules regulating the individual job relaxes or disappears altogether, the need for the individual worker to plan, organize, and take responsibility for the completion of work becomes increasingly important. The same thing happens, although inverted, when the set of rules is tightened and the employment relation is restricted. The individual is forced to adjust within an ever-shrinking scope of action.

The demands put on the individual are also not clear and straightforward. They are, rather, multidimensional. There is the cognitive knowledge, meaning the demands for "technical" knowledge made on the individual in relation to his or her specific tasks. For certain jobs these demands will be so complex and comprehensive that they overwhelm the individual through the sheer quantity of information, sometimes even exceeding her ability to absorb it. As a consequence the demands are displaced and focus is shifted to the practical capacity of identifying, handling, organizing, and applying the knowledge needed for the moment.

While the requirements for technical and explicit knowledge in that sense become more practical and implicit, the demands for social knowledge, on the other hand, become more technical and explicit. The requirements for social competence, social networks, and social capital become ever more important for an individual to do the job, advance within the organization, and if necessary find a new job. Hence, both the technical and social knowledge needed in the work of today are more personal, portable, and refer to the capacity for adjusting to different situations. As a result, a large part of the universal premises of work disappear. Instead of collective usefulness and community, work becomes more of an individual project for personal development or survival.

The same is true for the relationship between work and private life. The more flexible the organization of work, the more blurred the distinction between work and private life. Where to draw the line becomes a question of negotiation between the parties concerned. It is then up to the individual to establish and maintain personal limits. How the individual shapes her life and relates to her job is hence more and more dependent on individual opportunities and preferences. This also means that conflicts, problems,

and the experience of balance in the relationship between work and private life will seem to affect each individual differently.

Stress and other health consequences brought about by working life must also be considered, to an increasing extent, against a backdrop of the plethora of differing working conditions and individual requirements found in work. Health problems generated by companies' demands for flexibility are only to a limited extent attributed to organizational restrictions, low mental requirements, and lack of influence at work. Instead they follow from the fact that individuals strain themselves beyond their capacity in an attempt to meet the demands of a job with no clear boundaries. Further, they concern individuals' feelings of insecurity and uncertainty when facing unreasonable or unformulated demands. These also concern individuals being forced to accept working conditions they normally would not accept for fear of being excluded, marginalized, or sidestepped. Finally, these health problems will not be countered with more information, negotiations, laws, job design, or preventive work environment measures. Instead it is the individuals themselves who have to ration their efforts, make counter-demands, and increase their employability.

We can conclude that the new work is based on individual differences and opportunities. The dynamic of working life is created through the accentuation and exploitation of these very differences. It forces the individuals to compete with one another and in the process accept higher demands. It encourages them to develop and take additional responsibility for their work. It also compels them to exploit their potential and strain themselves to, and sometimes beyond, their capacity. It is perhaps best to point out that this does not necessarily mean that working conditions have deteriorated. Quite on the contrary, measured by traditional standards they have in many cases improved substantially. These working conditions, however, are linked to other conditions. Much more extensively than previously, they are tied to individual performance and responsibility. This is perhaps also the most important difference between the work we have been used to during most of the twentieth century and the new work that is emerging. Working conditions are to a lesser extent clear, unconditional, and universal. Instead they are tied to specific conditions and dependent on individual opportunities, situations, and performances. Previously fixed boundaries are blurred, and it is up to the individual to find new points of reference from which to navigate.

What is so New about "The New Work"?

We have tried to give an introductory picture of what we mean by the new work. Before we go on, however, we should perhaps mention a few things about the expression itself. When speaking about "the new work," two objections are immediately voiced. One objection is that the phenomena in question in most cases have been present previously in one form or another, and that they hence are not very new at all. The other objection is that the difference between the old and new work is exaggerated. Alternatively, that there is no difference whatsoever and that no change has actually occurred. In order to prevent these objections from recurring and annoying the reader, we think that it would be appropriate to bring them up at the start and, insofar as it is possible, explain how we relate to them. Therefore, we will deal with them here, in due order.

Speaking about "the new work" is fraught with difficulties as it implies working life is not what it used to be. Depending on what is meant by "used to be," it is always possible to find traits that are, or at least seem, just like they used to be. A few reservations might thus be in place. The question is: what do we really mean when we speak about the "new" work? Without disclosing the actual content of this book, that is, enumerating phenomena, terminology, and theories we believe are new, we will here just briefly try to explain what we mean by calling them new.

Quite a few phenomena exist, of course, which are categorically new, for instance, information transmission and communication via fiber optics and satellite. Another example is the spread of personal computers and the extensive use of the Internet. Speaking about new information and communication techniques in general, however, can be more problematic as the history of calculators, telegraphs, telephones, and computers is rather long. So again the question is: when can we start calling these phenomena new?

A general answer is when the phenomena in question have grown in scope, become cheaper, smaller, or faster. Computers existed and were used already in the late 1940s, but they revolutionized working life only when they became small, fast, and cheap enough to be used to a significant extent by a critical mass and, not least, when the Internet was fully developed. The same thing goes for temporary employment. This form of employment has always existed, but only lately has it become more common. We could in the same breath mention international trade, relocation of jobs, and the use of flexible techniques of production. It may therefore be claimed that a previously

occurring phenomenon is new if it has gone through a significant change in sheer scope and quantity.

But there are also phenomena that we consider new, even though they existed previously to a greater extent. Working from home, for instance, was relatively common before the 1960s. In spite of this, we call telecommuting, in reality a form of work from home, a new phenomenon. It is also not very common, despite the considerable attention given to telecommuting during the 1990s, which could lead to a belief that this is the case. The reason for this misunderstanding is that the old and new versions of work from home have very little in common. Before the 1960s, working from home was mainly a female undertaking, involving women who performed low-qualified part-time office tasks or dressmaking, while at the same time watching children and tending to domestic chores. To this day, private daycare workers and teachers preparing classes and correcting tests represent the most commonly occurring forms for working from home in Sweden. What makes telecommuting a new phenomenon is not just the name, although this is not unimportant. Telecommuting is certainly work performed from home, but it concerns different groups and quite different tasks than traditional "homework." Telecommuters are mainly highly educated, male (at least when the expression was coined in 1970s America) white-collar workers, who have a regular workplace, but who choose to perform certain tasks outside of this workplace. This phenomenon probably existed earlier. Telecommuting was decisively introduced into the new work when it was carried out with the help of new information and communication technology. Using a mobile phone, personal computer, and an Internet connection, a wealth of office tasks can in principle be performed just as well from home as from the workplace. We can therefore argue that a previously encountered phenomenon is new if it has taken on a new meaning, involves new groups and tasks, or if the premises for it are new. We can also claim that it is new if it has gone through substantial qualitative changes.

Yet, a reason for calling an old phenomenon new is if it interacts with other phenomena, which need not be new either, to give rise to a new, more comprehensive phenomenon. Although the individual phenomena are not new, their interaction potentially is. For instance, a company selling part of its business to other companies is not a new phenomenon. Neither is cutting down on personnel or making working conditions worse. Not even closing down factories and moving the jobs abroad constitute a new phenomenon. But when Ericsson sells its manufacturing units for mobile phones to Flextronics, a Singapore-based subcontractor specializing in manufacturing

electronic components for businesses worldwide, and Flextronics speeds up the work pace, lowers social benefits for the employees, and finally shuts down several factories all over the world, relocating production to low-wage countries such as Malaysia, Poland, and China, we have a new phenomenon. By outsourcing cost- and personnel-intensive production to a subcontractor, Ericsson avoids both responsibility and fixed expenses. But not only that, Ericsson can also make demands on the subcontractor and squeeze the prices of their products. Instead of increasing the work pace, squeezing the cost of wages, and lowering social benefits in their own factories, Ericsson, through this sale, passes it all on to Flextronics. Similar agreements exist between many other companies.

Several new phenomena can be identified in this deal alone. Delegating production – a sizable, central part of activities most companies, old or new, would consider their very core – to a subcontractor is a new phenomenon. The existence of companies specialized in handling production for other firms around the world, companies that, like Flextronics, can be several times the size of their customers, is also a new phenomenon. Squeezing fixed costs for factories and personnel by systematically moving production to low-wage countries is yet another new phenomenon. A common characteristic for all these new occurrences is that they are a function of the global cooperation of companies. We can hence summarize that previously existing phenomena can be considered new if they are now part of a larger pattern that is new. We could probably go on enumerating reasons for calling old phenomena new, but we hope the ones we have mentioned will suffice. Instead, we move on to the second objection that the differences between the old and new work are exaggerated.

The New and the Old Work

When speaking about the new work one is also, explicitly or implicitly, commenting on the old. Contrasting and comparing to something old is a common technique for pointing out what is new. There is often a pedagogical point to this. Understanding a concept is easier if it is clear how it has evolved. But there are two problems with this way of arguing. The use of contrasts tends to exaggerate differences and creates a schematic and unfair dichotomy. Not only do the old and the new, through this, seem more homogenous, they are also made into each other's respective opposites. The second problem is that an order of succession is implied. The new order, it is

assumed, in all significant respects has replaced the old order. Both problems concern social changes and what is meant by it.

One recurring point of confusion when speaking of social changes has to do with the various levels that serve as a point of departure or reference. To put it simply, we can say that social changes unfold on three different levels.

The first is the *empirical* level. By this is meant demonstrable behavioral changes or other material changes. In order to speak about a change in working life on this level, one should preferably be able to show that a majority of companies, workplaces, or employees have assumed significantly new characteristics or behavior. But there may be certain difficulties involved in this, as social changes do not happen overnight. A new phenomenon is also, by definition, a minor phenomenon. When it finally reaches major proportions it is no longer new. That is why one rather speaks of statistical changes. By this is meant a series of more or less distinct deviations in the pattern, for example, for income levels, GDP, or various response frequencies to surveys.

The second level is the *institutional*. This designates changes in or of the rules and norms by which we live. These rules and norms can either be formal or informal. In both cases, however, changes may be difficult to prove, as nothing needs to have changed on the surface of things. For instance, formal sets of rules may be unchanged, and people, when asked, still quote established norms and values. Rules and norms, as is the case, are not always changed by a majority vote. Rather, they can be likened to the rules of a game. The basis of game rules is that everybody follows them and the main reason why people follow the rules of a game is that everybody else does. It is therefore sufficient if one person, or at least a critical minority, no longer follows the rules for the whole game to fall apart. Until this happens, however, players will quote, by force of habit, the old game rules. It can therefore be difficult to find out whether institutional changes are underway by simply asking people about it.

The third level is the *discursive* level. This signifies the concepts and models we use in order to explain how everything ties together. Changes at this level are usually easy to point out, but significantly more difficult to verify on any of the other two levels. A further problem concerns the fact that concepts and models, in a very obvious way, are social constructions. They are formulated in a social context with all that this implies in terms of presumptions, perspectives, and intentions. As a result, concepts and models must always be interpreted and evaluated with this in mind.

Disagreement on concepts and models is hence only natural. When there is no longer disagreement the models in question are probably no longer new.

These three levels or perspectives are of course interconnected, but hardly in any clear, unambiguous way. It may nevertheless be assumed that the discursive level is the least permanent of the levels. New concepts and models are constantly being promoted. The institutional level is rather more sluggish. Rules and norms do not change very easily. In certain respects, the empirical level is perhaps the slowest moving of them all. In order for a new behavioral pattern to be charted, the old pattern must not only be dissolved, but a new one must be established. At the same time, it is at the empirical level that changes originate. They are, however, difficult to detect with comprehensive statistics. In order to detect changes at a relatively early stage, strategically targeted measures, or case studies, will have to be employed. However, these will always be open to criticism for being incorrectly chosen, over-interpreted, or biased.

We have studied changes on all three levels, but our focus is on the institutional level. When we speak about a new work we mean that the rules of work have changed or are changing. "Rules" do not necessarily imply formal sets of rules, laws, and agreements. Instead we focus on informal rules and norms that are consciously or subconsciously used in working life. The individual will experience them in the shape of various demands or expectations that the situation puts on her – and that she puts on herself. Such demands and expectations may be more or less explicit, as is the case with most of the traditional control systems used at work. But they may just as well be implicit and built into our knowledge in and about work.

When we claim that rules have changed or are changing, this should not be taken to mean that old rules are necessarily replaced by new ones. What is happening is more often that new rules and norms are added to the already existing framework. The reason for this development is the changing premises following the development of new markets, industries, and activities. In a long-term perspective this may of course involve the disappearance of old rules and norms. But a surprising amount of "old" rules and norms still remain in working life, although often in a modified form.

A substantial part of the rules concerning work were developed in and through the first factories. There were a vast number of rules for the behavior of workers, consolidated into coherent sets of rules concerning, above all, time and space. As explained by Shoshana Zuboff (1988), the purpose of this was to get the workers to stay in one place and

perform consistently within a given period of time. As factories, production, and machines grew and became more complicated, rules were also developed for the procedure of work and its administration. Perhaps the best-known representatives for this development were Frederick Taylor (1911; [1912]1977) and Henri Fayol (1916) respectively. They formulated and theorized rules that together formed what we today call the sequentially and hierarchically ordered "organization," an order dominating working life throughout the twentieth century.

Since the 1970s, however, companies' operating conditions have undergone substantial changes. Attempts have been made to adjust to these new conditions through the creation of more "flexible" forms of organization. The method, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, is the introduction of more flexible forms of work in which the individual to a greater extent defines, plans, structures, and takes responsibility for his work. But flexibility is also achieved through more flexible forms of employment, in which the individual to a greater extent becomes replaceable.

But the development of these new rules does not automatically imply the disappearance of the old rules. Many workplaces, possibly even a majority, are still using a traditionally sequential and hierarchical work organization. Even newly established industries and workplaces such as the expanding fast-food industry use it. Other workplaces have deregulated or eased up their rules to a certain extent. Examples of this phenomenon are the spread of flexitime and telecommuting. Yet other industries and workplaces have, as previously mentioned, developed very flexible forms of work. One need only look at the creative jobs characterizing small IT, media, and consulting firms in the 1990s. Working life, in other words, does not develop through the replacement of old rules by new ones. Instead, development comes in the form of additional rules. Rules do not change, they proliferate.

Consequently, we cannot point to an obvious difference between an old and a new working life. Rather, as rules of work are developed the heterogeneity of work becomes more apparent. An important assumption regarding the new work is that we live in a world of several different working orders. Today's work is not a unified whole, but consists of a plethora of simultaneous working orders. In other words, the work of today is distinguished by an augmented differentiation at the same time as we, through the new inequality, can distinguish an increased polarization. This is, in conclusion, how we perceive the relationship between the old and new work. New industries, markets, companies, techniques, and forms of cooperation have developed. These new phenomena, in turn, have changed the premises for other

industries, markets, and companies, forcing them to adjust to the new situation. These adjustments, however, occur in different degrees and in various ways. Hence, certain industries, markets, and companies remain relatively unaltered, whereas others have been changed to the core.

The Purpose and Structure of this Book

The field of interest of this book is vast. We will discuss organization and social theory, cognition and psychobiology. Nevertheless, the topics are united, at least in our opinion, by a common perspective. Our constant focus will be the individual, while trying to place her, as well as the theories concerning her, into a social context. The field of interest of this book is wide, also in the sense that we will bring up a multitude of, at times, seemingly disparate theories, concepts, and phenomena. Our reason for the absence of any coherent theoretical frame of reference is, quite simply, that no such frame exists. When our interest in the new work was first awakened sometime in the mid-1990s, many people were talking about it. From a scientific point of view, however, it was, in the popular phrase, all talk and no show. Since then things have definitely changed. A vast amount of studies, concepts, and perspectives, almost impossible to survey, have been introduced and discussed, both within and outside the world of scientific research. But a comprehensive framework on this research is still missing. There is no general agreement about what the new work is all about, what should be included in this concept, or even if there is such a concept at all. This book has been written as an attempt to remedy this situation and to create a comprehensive framework of these perspectives, theoretical approaches, and real working life changes during the last twenty years. We, however, do not make any claims to success in this project. Nevertheless, we hope, through this book, to contribute to the emergence of a greater understanding of this area as a whole.

We are not just researchers, we are also teachers. We educate students, are practicing social scientists, as well as researchers. Hence, the scope of the book mirrors the various parts and kinds of knowledge we believe are a prerequisite for understanding and approaching the new world of work. This also implies that the book should not be seen as a mere study of the various theories, concepts, or phenomena it deals with. *The first purpose* of the book is instead epistemographic, that is, to structure the area of knowledge, and to synthesize rather than analyze its respective parts.

On the other hand this should not be taken to mean that the book is purely descriptive, or that we entirely lack ambitions to theorize. We believe that there are some, more or less distinct, patterns that characterize the work of today. *The second purpose* of the book is therefore to try and demonstrate these patterns and how they recur in several separate areas of the new work.

As a result, the book is structured cross-dimensionally. First of all, it has been divided into six chapters, of which the middle four each treat a separate theme.

- *The first theme* concerns the new organization of work and is discussed in Chapter 2. In this chapter we account for various forms of flexibility and their corresponding organization of work.
- *The second theme* concerns the knowledge needed in the new work and is discussed in Chapter 3. Here four distinct dimensions of knowledge are discussed. First, the cognitive dimension, relating to the knowledge required to carry out the particular tasks. Second, the social dimension, meaning the knowledge needed to relate to other individuals in the work. Third, the societal dimension, by which is meant the knowledge of work as part of society. Fourth, the existential dimension, meaning the knowledge, or the self-image, we entertain of ourselves as employees and workers.
- *The third theme* treats the relationship of the new work to our private lives. This theme is discussed in Chapter 4 where we will briefly treat the various relationships between work and private life as described in previous research. We will then discuss the social demands put on us outside of work. Finally, we show how the relationship between work and private life appears in our research on boundaryless works.
- *The fourth theme* concerns the health consequences of the new work (Lundberg and Cooper, 2010). This is discussed in Chapter 5 where we cover stress research and its relation to a number of social problems. After this we discuss the new work as a cause of ill-health, as well as the new ill-health in society.

Theories and concepts relevant to the understanding of the themes are dealt with in their respective chapters. The chapters are in this way meant to serve as an introduction to their specific areas. In order to provide illustrations to the theories and concepts we treat, we occasionally use results from our own research as examples. The different themes and chapters are, when put together, meant to give a more comprehensive picture of the new work.

But the book also has another structural dimension. Three separate theses on the new work run, more or less distinctly, through all chapters of this book.

- *The first thesis* is that work is subject to a series of alterations in the way that it is regulated. By this we mean alterations aiming to make companies and organizations more flexible.
- *The second thesis*, which in part follows on the first thesis, is that the labor force is being individualized, or even autonomized. The new regulations expect the individual to identify, choose, plan, structure, and take personal responsibility for her work. This, in turn, presupposes certain abilities and talents, or at least the possibility to develop them. These demands collide with and, in certain cases, even break up the collectives and the social identity formed around work ever since the onset of industrialism. Instead, the individual is left to find his own way in an increasingly competitive labor market.
- *The third thesis*, which can also be said to follow from the previous two, is that work has become increasingly heterogeneous. When the conditions of work vary from one industry, workplace, and individual to the other, it becomes increasingly difficult to speak about work in general. Jobs are adjusted to their individual premises and are allowed to vary, depending on the context. This does not necessarily mean that work is flexible in relation to the worker. It might just as well mean that the worker needs to stay flexible in relation to work. The consequence, in any case, is that the variations of work increase.

This book is based on experiences and knowledge gained within the framework of a Swedish research program called "Boundaryless work." The program ran from 1998 to 2006. The book, however, is not an account of the program, or of the studies carried out within it. For such an account, we refer to the reports, articles, and theses that were written within the framework of the program. Instead, the book wants to give a more comprehensive view of the area concerned by the program studies, what we have here called the new work. For this reason, we will, in this book, deal primarily with theories, concepts, data, and research published by other scholars, Swedish and international. They will be presented in the text and referenced in the customary manner. From time to time, however, we punctuate the text with experience taken from our own research. When referring to our own experiences in this manner we imply research conducted and reported within the framework of the program. The function of these punctuations, then, is primarily to exemplify and illustrate, rather than verify, the present line of argument.