Challenges of Work Design -
The Changing Role of Participation

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Session: Strategies for organisational change and the role of participation
Basic idea

- Participation of employees in work design is an accepted standard of work science and ergonomics (Luczack/Volpert et al. 1989)

=> referring to individuals and their competencies and flexibility as ‘experts’ of their jobs

=> ‘anti-tayloristic’ notion (Pruijt 2003)
  ∵ job enrichment
  ∵ integration of design and execution
  ∵ focus on human skills and commitment
  ∵ focus on autonomy and co-determination
Participation in a Tayloristic environment

Participative work design would support
- the improvement of working conditions
- the generation of commitment and work satisfaction
- the solution of design problems (in increasingly complex production and service processes)
- productivity improvement and the ability of the companies to cope with turbulent conditions
- industrial democracy approaches

joint perspective on restructuring
Challenge: New logic emerging? (1)

Company strategies

• ‘internalisation of markets’ - market related control processes
  - customer orientation
  - customising products and services
  - profit centres vs. external offers

• Process control via context variables
  - budget and objectives given
  - processes are less structured: limits of pre-defined tasks
Challenge: New logic emerging? (2)

Resulting conditions

- “unconfined jobs” (Hatchuel 2002)
  - pre-definition of tasks becomes difficult
  - tasks become increasingly context dependant
  - changing location/work places
- ‘Delimitation of Work’
  - tasks (work & work design e.g.)
  - working time
  - work vs. ‘non-work’
- increasing intensity of work - “Subjektivierung”
  - need to broadly apply individual skills and competencies
  - maximum of individual flexibility required
Work situation of teams in product development (telecommunication sector)

- Co-operation with support functions and external suppliers
- Technical and organisational task complexity
- High risk of failure - uncertainty of success (technical and economic)
- Co-operation is varying - conflicts
- Increasing skills demands - need to update skills
- Responsibility for the whole launching
- Short cycle times - short „time to volume“ (project duration)
- Limited staff - few substitutes, fluctuation
- Specialists have to co-ordinate several projects at the same time
- Continuous demand for the development of new products
- Short cycle times - short „time to volume“ (project duration)

Development-Team (Project)
Conceptual Limits of Participation Become Visible

Work task <=> problem / customer’s order
work design can only be done by the team

Indirect Forms of Control
highly qualified and highly motivated employees
=> Danger of “self-exploitation” while being highly committed

Skills Demands, Rules, and Resources available tend to become contradictory (work design, co-operation)
=> healthy conditions?

• Question: How should work be designed in order to enable employees to do their jobs until retirement?
• How to further develop the participatory approach?
Research Project “Sustainability in Project Type Work”

- identify contradicting demands, rules, resources in project teams
- identifying buffers and resources used to cope with changing challenges
- developing methods to support work design

- our approach
  - relational view: demands need to be evaluated in respect of tasks, rules, resources in projects
  - increasing need to take background conditions into account
  - work-life-balance as an issue