
The recognition of work

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Abstract

The following article argues that recognition structures in work relations differ significantly in the sphere of paid work in contrast to unpaid work in private spheres. According to the systematic approach on recognition of Axel Honneth three different levels of recognition are identified: the interpersonal recognition, organisational recognition and societal recognition. Based on this framework it can be stated that recognition structures in the sphere of paid work and in private spheres differ very much. Whereas recognition in private spheres depends very much on personal relations, thus on the interpersonal level, recognition in employment relationships can be moreover built on organisational structures. Comparing recognition structures in both fields it becomes apparent, that recognition in field of employment can be characterised as much more concrete, comparable and measurable. Therefore, it can be concluded that the structural differences of recognition contribute to the high societal and individual importance of employment in contrast to unpaid work in private spheres.

Keywords: Recognition, work, changes in work, gender relations, reproduction

JEL classification: J39; M12; M14; M54

Introduction

Recent developments in the field of work caused significant changes in the individual conduct of life. A series of empirical studies show that former stable employment conditions erode and become more and more insecure. Discontinuities in employment increase especially because of the process of flexibility which is expressed in flexible working hours, places, and qualifications (Hielscher & Hildebrandt, 2000; Kratzer, 2003). Atypical employment conditions as well as (temporal) unemployment seem to become the prevalent model of work. Although employment conditions become more and more insecure, the individual importance of work increases. Work becomes essential for the individual construction of identity and provides to an increasing degree self-fulfilment as well as

self-affirmation for the individuals. Therefore the subjective dimension of employment gains especially in high qualified occupations in importance. This becomes especially true for women, as they have increasingly cancelled the traditional gender contract. An occupation and work does play an important role in female biographies (Krings, 2006).

The flexible organisation of work, its high individual importance as well as the modernisation of gender relations cause changes in the traditional arrangements between work and life. While the sphere of work becomes increasingly important for both sexes, the sphere of life loses in importance, both, on a societal as well as on an individual level. This article aims at an explanation pattern for this development. In the following it will be argued that society-wide recognition structures are important preconditions for the high importance of paid work in contrast to the sphere of private life. The sphere of private life covers a variety of aspects, the management of 'everyday life', citizenship engagement, and so on.

In this context 'recognition' will be understood as an analytical sociological category which can be used to explain individual action and social processes. In recent developments recognition structures in the sphere of work changed. The hypothesis of this article is that recognition structures in working life can be used to explain the prominence of the sphere of work in contrast to the sphere of life. In order to develop this hypothesis theoretically, referring to the actual debate on changes in work it is shown in which ways the relationship between work and life changed. Afterwards the debate on recognition and work will be used to analyse recognition structures in work. On the basis of these debates, a theory-based explanation pattern is offered to explain the high social and individual importance of working life in society as a contribution for the theoretical debate on work and recognition.

1. Actual debate on the sociology of work

The German debate on changes in work refers mainly to two central concepts which were also broadly discussed on the international level (Flecker, Papouschek & Gavroglou, 2006), the concepts of boundaryless work ("*Entgrenzung*") (Gottschall & Voß, 2005) and subjectification of work ("*Subjektivierung von Arbeit*") (Moldaschl & Voß, 2003). Both concepts focus on the development that employment and the sphere of life become intertwined strongly.

The concept of boundaryless work emerged from the debate of flexibility and refers to the blurring of boundaries that were typical for the Fordism. While the organisation of work becomes more flexible, boundaries such as

fixed contracts, the limitation of working hours, spatial aspects and the separation between working time and leisure time diminish widely (Kratzer, 2003). The employees develop individual strategies to cope with the changed demands and circumstances in work, i.e. an increasing degree of self-organisation would be such a strategy. The ideal type of a "boundaryless employee" is represented by the model of the labour entrepreneur ("*Arbeitskraftunternehmer*") (Pongratz & Voß, 2000). The labour entrepreneur describes an ideal future model of an employee who not only works reliable but also organises himself effectively as a reaction to the changed organisation of work in companies, i.e. project based work within flat hierarchies. The employees get more responsibility and organise their working tasks and time by themselves. This effective self-organisation is characteristic for the labour entrepreneur. Furthermore he takes the control of his work by himself and is able to estimate even the value of his work force. This behaviour cannot only be found in work but also in private spheres which become effectively organised and are often aligned along the demands of work.

The 'labour entrepreneur' is an ideal model for knowledge-intensive occupations like consultants, engineers, designers or architects. In the fordistic production regime boundaries between work and life are clear due to fixed institutional boundaries in work organisation (contracts, working time, and place of work). In contrast, new forms of work organisation in so knowledge-based work become in contrast to the fordistic production regime much more interrelated with the sphere of life.

The debate on subjectification of work describes the individual and subjective reception of changes in work organisation. The process of subjectification is described as a double-sided process. It refers on the one hand to the willingness of the workers to bring in their subjectivity, their personality and individualism into working processes. On the other hand the management of companies strongly aims at using the personal attributes of the workers. The "whole personality" is wanted and used in the working processes. Accordingly, personal attributes like social or tacit skills, languages and communication skills become increasingly important. As a consequence, the employees should identify themselves increasingly with their work. Consequently, their work becomes more and more important for the individual conduct of life, the formation of identity at work, and self-consciousness of the employees. Especially in high qualified occupations the subjective dimension of employment gains strongly in importance (Kleemann, Matuschek & Voß, 2003).

These findings show that although the framework and organisation of work changed and became more flexible and insecure, especially in highly qualified occupations work became even more important in the subjective preferences and the construction of identity.

2. Recognition and Work

In the German debate on sociology of work the topic of recognition in the field of work is only recently discussed and mostly elaborated in empirical studies (vgl. Holtgrewe, Voswinkel & Wagner, 2000a, Voswinkel, 2002). The comprehensive theoretical approach on recognition of Axel Honneth is an important reference point for these studies (cf. Honneth, 1994, Honneth, 2004). Taking into account the theoretical assumptions on recognition of Hegel and Mead¹⁴, Honneth points to three different dimensions of recognition: love, equal treatment in law and solidarity (social esteem).

The dimension love can be found in the private sphere in personal relationships where individuals are encouraged in their feelings and personal needs. The sphere of law is formed by the mutual recognition of individual rights through all members of the society. Solidarity covers the field of recognition that arises from certain contributions to societal aims. Based on this, individuals are able to assess their competences and their performance (cf. Holtgrewe, Voswinkel & Wagner, 2000b, Sitzer & Wiezorek, 2005).

The approach of Honneth was topic of an intensive scientific dispute (see Fraser/Honneth 2003, Zurn, 2003). In this article, Honneth's approach is used, because it allows analysing and defining systematically structures of recognition in the field of work. Hereby, the term 'recognition structures' covers societal, organisational as well as interpersonal characteristics of recognition and represents a structural category in certain fields of society.

Empirical studies in the field of work show, that organisational changes have a strong impact on recognition structures in the field of employment (Holtgrewe, 2000). Due to restructuring especially in transition phases from 'traditional' to 'new' forms of employment recognition structures change. The construction of recognition is increasingly conferred from the organisation to the single employees who have to reproduce it on their own. For the employees, this can be associated with high "subjective costs, painful and insulting experiences" (Holtgrewe, 2000: 81). The change of recognition structures from "traditional" to "new" forms of employment was accurately related to by Voswinkel. He distinguishes two modes of recognition, 'appreciation' (*Würdigung*) and 'admiration'

¹⁴ Hegel catches recognition as the permanent inner struggle of the subjects, between self-assertion and socialisation. Mead's work on identity is based on the relationship of the internal and external assessment for the formation of identity. In his attempt, the formation process of identity is understood as the integration of different identities that are on the one hand socially generated and on the other hand individually developed (cf. Holtgrewe/Voswinkel/Wagner 2000b, Sitzer/Wiezorek 2005).

(*Bewunderung*). Appreciation means the valuation of work in the context of social affiliation as traditional institutions like unions and works councils give by recognizing the pure membership as a worker. Admiration in contrast marks the recognition that is given for extraordinary achievements, success or originality. His assumption is that recognition in work in terms of admiration becomes more and more important while the relevance of recognition in terms of appreciation diminishes. He analyses this development critically: the loss of the recognition of 'normal-achievements' can result in discouragement and the disability to guarantee recognition in the long term. Furthermore, the growing orientation on principles of performance causes increased demands for the individual employees, while principles of solidarity loose in importance (Voswinkel, 2002).

Recognition in "new" employment conditions is therefore closely connected with subjective attributes of the employees. However, these special characteristics are often not recognised sufficiently by the organisations. As a consequence, gaps of recognition occur because organisations up to now fail to assess and recognise the "unpredictable, obstinate but nevertheless necessary work action of the employees" (Kropf, 2005: 246). This gap has to be closed by recognising the "whole" person in organisations as the "whole" person also participates actively in work processes. This would be possible i.e. through participatory corporate structures. The findings of Kropf (2005) imply that recognition in the field of work is fundamental for the formation of identity and the self-conception of the employees. Thus, an extensive recognition of the person is claimed in the sphere of work. A consequence of this development is that recognition in other spheres of life like family or citizenship engagement becomes even more unimportant.

This article intends to show that recognition structures in the field of work can be used to explain the prominence of the sphere of work over the sphere of life. The theoretical debate of feministic theory is traditionally dedicated to the different appreciation of tasks and practices in the fields of paid work in contrast to the reproductive sphere. The neglecting tasks in the reproductive sphere due to the traditional division of labour as well as the traditional gender contract is criticised widely. In historic development social relations between the sexes formed a structural difference defining gender-specific recognition as well as disregard structures. All in all gender relations are still shaped by "asymmetrical relations of recognition" (Wagner, 2004), i.e. female care work is not recognised as "work" and female employment is lower assessed than male employment. According to Becker-Schmidt (2001) these gender-related super-/subordination relationships are of historical origin with a close connection to economical criteria and cultural pattern:

"Asking for the origin of such assessments, it becomes apparent that the socio-genesis of economical "quality factors" goes together with cultural pattern of assessment in which dichotomies are ideologically reflected: Mental work is higher than manual,

productive above unproductive, market-based above domestic, male above female" (Becker-Schmidt, 2001: 119).

These dichotomies seem to be key for the recognition of different practices shaping the social perception and evaluation of work. Employment gains increasingly in importance for women while having an unchanged high importance for men. This development is broadly reflected in the study of Arlie Russel Hochschild, *"The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work"*. She states that paid work has such a high relevance in life that it devaluates the family sphere. She shows along the criterion "time" that the sphere of the family becomes increasingly disregarded as well as alienated (Hochschild, 2006: 212f.).

Following the hypothesis of this article, the high social relevance and recognition of employment can be explained by structural pattern of recognition. Therefore relevant structures of recognition are identified and presented in the following in order to hint at structural differences.

3. Recognition structures of work

Following Honneth (1994) recognition can be systematised by mapping personal (love), performance related (solidarity) and institutionalised (law) pattern of recognition (see above). Comparing pattern of recognition in the "sphere of employment" with the "sphere of life" it becomes apparent, that both spheres differ in terms of recognition, i.e. high importance of personal structures in the sphere of life vs. high significance of the performance-related dimension in employment. More fundamental is the dichotomous structure of employment and work in the sphere of life¹⁵. Both reflect different types of 'work' but differ due to the degree of formalisation. While paid work is strongly formalised and institutionalised over contracts, payment and qualification, work and action in the sphere of life can be characterised by its informal structure. It is rather interwoven with the interpersonal level (O'Connor, 2007). Hence it depends on social and emotional bonds (Hess, 2005: 180).

Voswinkel (Voswinkel, 2005: 19f.) identifies three levels of recognition, interpersonal recognition (micro level), organisational recognition (meso level) and societal recognition (macro level). Within these levels the aspects of Honneth's analysis come into play:

¹⁵ In the feministic debate this dichotomy is criticised as "separation" of one part of work (domestic work) from the other part of work (paid work).

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- **Interpersonal recognition (micro level):** Through interaction individuals give and receive recognition or disregard. The forms of interaction are politeness, respect or impoliteness and ignorance, commendation and gratitude. In the sphere of employment, the interactions can take place between colleagues, with supervisors and customers. In the sphere of non-employment this interaction arises in the family and from the contact with friends and acquaintances.
 - **Organisational recognition (meso level):** Pattern of recognition is expressed in institutions and rules in organisation. Within employment recognition is implemented in a manifold way: through payment, careers, operational symbols of status, assessment of performance or rules of seniority. Within the sphere of life organisational structures are inexistent or - in the case of citizenship engagement - far less strong.
 - **Societal recognition (macro level):** On the level of society, the recognition of persons or social groups appears on the one hand through legal principles and on the other hand through social esteem. Recognition via law reflects equally distributed rights as well as regulations of the welfare state for certain social groups. Rights give recognition in both, the sphere of work and life. However, certain privileges of the welfare state are linked with employment, like social insurance and pension claims. Social esteem can be measured by i.e. wealth, position, power, certificates of education or prominence. Within employment prestige can arise from the occupation per se, the position in the organisation and the use of the qualification. In contrast, the visibility and measurability is less strong in the sphere of life, because work takes place in private spaces. Therefore recognition in the sense of social visibility is the appreciation of work in the sphere of life as contribution to society.

As said above, especially interpersonal structures (love) seem to be important in the sphere of life. Recognition in private spheres depends very much on personal relations, sympathy and antipathy and therefore cannot be planned and is indefinite. In the sphere of employment recognition could be additionally built upon organisational features. Due to formalisation it is possible to identify certain aspects and criteria for recognition as well as disregard. Criteria like qualification, position in the organisation or payment allow assessing the performance of the individual employee which reflects the dimension of solidarity (Honneth). This can be demonstrated by the symbolic meaning of titles (employee vs. worker), certain privileges and symbols (size of office, technical equipment...) in organisations (cf. Pastner, 1996).

Nevertheless, up to now, there are only few empirical studies that focus on recognition structures in private spheres of daily life. Whereas existing empirical studies focus more on the organisational level of recognition in work (Holtgrewe et al., 2000a) there is a lack of studies analysing recognition in the field of private spheres. Therefore a qualitative verification of the findings regarding recognition in different spheres (see above) would be very useful as qualitative approaches are appropriate to explore and narrow down new research fields (Flick, Kardoff & Steinke, 2000b: 17ff.). In order to close this gap the PhD project of the author intends to provide an empirical study in which recognition structures in the field of (private) life compared to the field of work are analysed coming from the subjective perspective of individuals being active in this field.

4. Conclusions

Recent changes in employment hint also at shifts in recognition structures in work: Work becomes increasingly interwoven with life, performance-oriented assessment gains in importance. The analysis of recognition structures in the sphere of paid work and in the sphere of life shows, that recognition in the field of employment can be characterised as much more concrete, comparable and measurable. The organisational form of employment is an important factor for this development. Furthermore institutional settings favour the system of employment in contrast to the sphere of life. It can be concluded that the structural differences of recognition structures in the sphere of work and the sphere of life contribute to the high societal and individual importance of employment in contrast to the sphere of life.

Next to these theoretical assumptions on recognition it is noteworthy that individual reflection and perception of structural recognition and disregard pattern forms a complex relationship. It consists of own biographical experiences, socialisation, collective models, subjective importance of internal and external self-assessment, and so on. However, as the literature analysis of this article implies so far, the personal orientation for work and life arrangements depend not only on individual preferences but also on organisational and institutional setting forming the framework for pattern of recognition and therefore for individual action.

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