Challenges of Work Design -
The Changing Role of Participation

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Session: Strategies for organisational change and the role of participation

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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**

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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**

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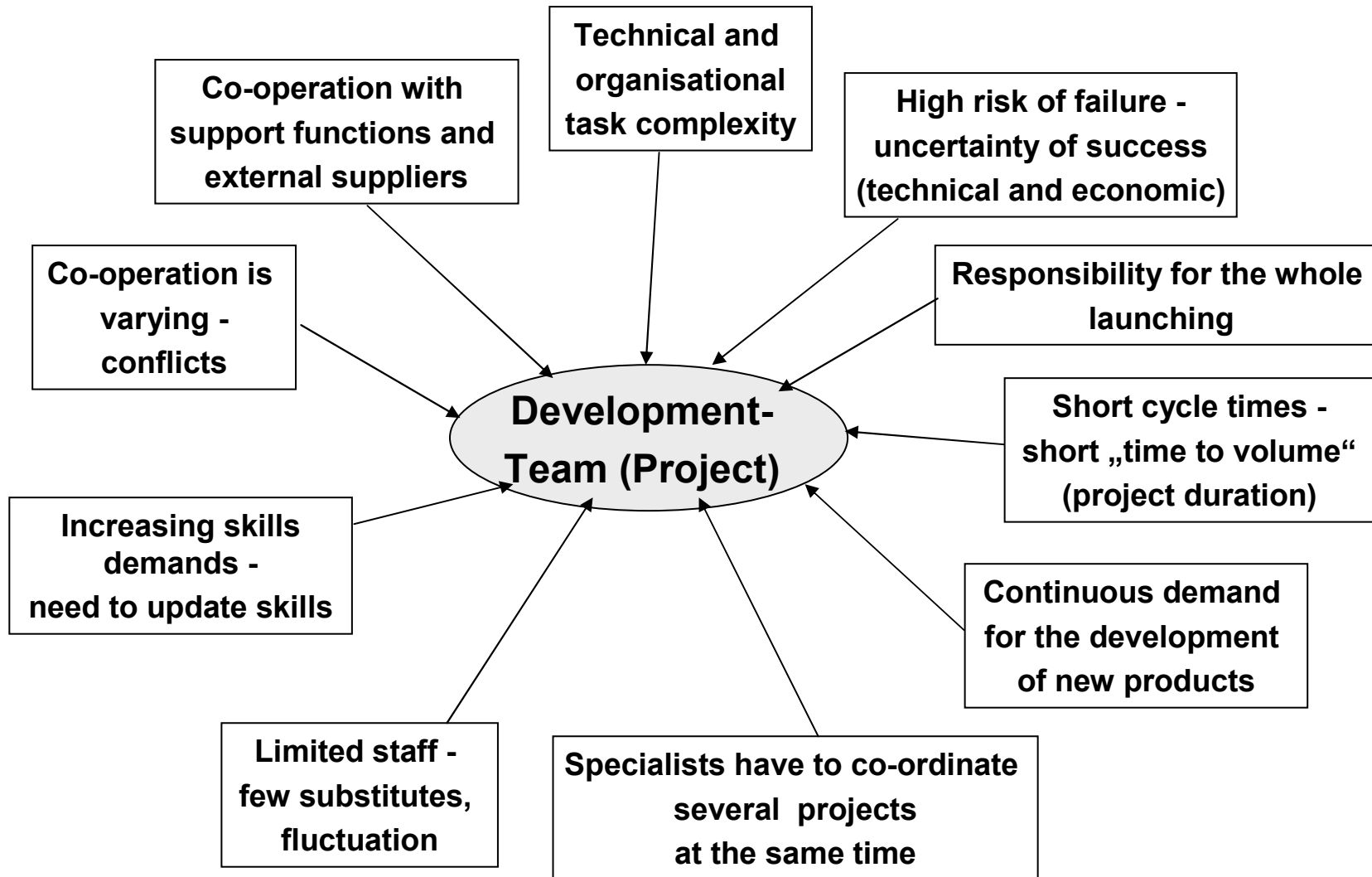# Challenge: New logic emerging ? (1)

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

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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

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Work situation of teams in product development (telecommunication sector)

Technical and organisational task complexity

Co-operation with support functions and external suppliers

High risk of failure - uncertainty of success (technical and economic)

Co-operation is varying - conflicts

Responsibility for the whole launching

Development-Team (Project)

Short cycle times - short „time to volume" (project duration)

Increasing skills demands - need to update skills

Continuous demand for the development of new products

Limited staff - few substitutes, fluctuation

Specialists have to co-ordinate several projects at the same time

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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?**

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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**

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