

**New Working-Time Models: Scope for Qualification Processes?
The Example of Knowledge-Intensive Activities in Germany**

Contribution to the 8th International Symposium on Working Time (SITT)
Held in Amsterdam (14th – 16th March 2001)

1. Introduction

In a society which is performing the transition from an industry-based society to a service and knowledge-based society at a constantly rising speed, continuous qualification and further-training processes in the course of a person's entire business life and working time are linked in a very contradictory manner. This is because the need for continuous further training and the necessity of making time for education available is growing on the one hand, on the other hand, however, it is particularly the labour potential of well-qualified specialist staff which keeps on being exploited more extensively (and intensively) so that hardly any time scope remains for qualification processes. Especially the working times of high-qualified personnel continue to increase, whereas the working times of low-qualified staff continue to decline.

A similar imbalance can be observed with respect to the participation in further training measures. If such training is sought at all, it will be the majority of already well-qualified employees who will participate in qualification measures. Correspondingly, the Information System "Further Training" reveals that the participation in such measures strongly varies depending on business standing: Whereas in the year 1997 only 17% of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers took part in such measures, this rate amounts to 49% in the group of qualified employees, and it rises to 56% in the cohort of managerial-employees cohort (Kuwan 1999, 40). In general, the participation in further training measures has considerably increased over the past few years - among all Germans in the age group between 19 and 64 years. In 1994, the participation rate was 24%, whereas the 1997 figure already amounted to 30%.¹ This increase is mainly attributable to the

¹ Since 1998, the participation in further training of the entire German population has been surveyed. Earlier figures solely referred to those individuals who were gainfully employed at the time of the survey or earlier on. This extension of the target group, however, increased the participation rate by only one percent. It is consequently the gainfully employed who take part in further training measures.

following measures: "Special breaking-in courses " and "courses for adaptation to new work tasks". The permanent demand for updating job-related qualifications thus already mirrors statistically. The 1999 IAB Company Panel supplies current figures on further training. According to their findings, the significance of further training has slightly increased, compared with 1997. However, the Panel also observed that it is mainly the qualified employees who seek further training (in West Germany 32%, in East Germany 38% - Compare: Total employees: 18.4% in West Germany, 22.6% in East Germany.² Despite an increasing participation in further-training measures, a substantial shortage of specialists is being deplored, which does not affect the IT trade alone. Therefore, further-training investments must be continualised and an enforceable claim for participation in further training measures must be agreed.

In a society which increasingly depends on knowledge and qualification, companies must commit themselves more strongly than to date, and, all counts made, also in their own interest to an integration of further training into everyday work life. The realised necessity of permanent learning can only materialise practically if sufficient time is reliably provided and rooted in the framework of existing work structures. What is needed is an integration of time periods for vocational qualification/further training into existing working-time structures. Since recently, investments into the labour potential of employees have also been supported under the keyword "investive working-time policy" in the Alliance for Labour, Education and Competitiveness". It contained suggestions as to how working-time policy and qualification policy as well as the necessity of life-long learning could be merged into one single policy concept. A call for qualification during the entire working life is being supported and fostered, which, in view of the rapidly changing work contents, work equipment and work structures is both necessary and desirable. "Long-term working-time credits" are considered a tool for "situation-oriented investments into further training, old-age provisions and into early retirement in the framework of old-age pensioners' part time employments" (Press and Information Office 2000). At the same time, it is the order of the day to counteract the frequently deplored shortage of specialist staff especially in the growth sectors, which is aggravated further by demographic trends.

The Contribution in hand will focus on the question whether a flexibilisation of working times and flexible working-time systems can be used for a binding regulation of study

² Cf. IAB Documentation No. 2/2000: Further Training: Qualification of the Qualified, p. 10.

times, which prerequisites would have to present and which conflicts of aims and inconsistencies can be detected in company practice. The last-mentioned aspect will be studied by referring to the example of the IT industry. Subsequent to this step, one attempt at reliably rooting qualification with binding force by means of collective agreements applicable to the IT industry, will be presented. This attempt will be contrasted with the working-time practice in IT companies. The problems emerging for the employees during implementation will be identified and a set of binding rules for future action be defined, which will not only institutionalise the entitlement to further training, but which will also establish rules of practice as to how these entitlements can materialise on a broad basis.

2. Company practice: Are reorganisation measures and the introduction of flexible working-time models being put to use for developing a systematic further-training strategy?

The introduction of flexible working-time models usually goes along with processes of reorganisation, lean production, decentralisation strategies of companies and marketisation. It is the ultimate goal of all of these measures to foster improved absorption of market fluctuations, to help corporate actors react more contiguously and faster – i.e. more flexibly – to changing and sophisticated customer requirements and to save costs at the same time. On the one hand, this is done by means of a more effective and more extensive utilisation of production machinery (for example by an extension of machine running or operating times, on the other hand by a more intensive utilisation of the labour potential available.

In the framework of these flexibilisation requirements, employees come to play a decisive role: Due to the application of lean principles to company structures, which often goes along with personnel cutbacks, due to the gradual elimination of company hierarchies, which entail decentralisation of responsibility and a transfer of decision-making processes to the place where value-added processes are at work, flexibilisation at the outset always means continuously increasing flexibility of employees. Employees are not only required to be flexibly utilisable in terms of time (to be achieved via flexible working times), but, to an increasing extent, also in terms of content. This dimension particularly

addresses the functional flexibility³ of employees, i.e. their level of qualification and multifunctional placement to the highest possible degree ("Multiskilling"). As we know from research work on teamwork as a new organisational tool, the successful introduction of teamwork depends on whether or not the qualification employees working within a group/a team is at a similar level so that mutual substitution becomes possible. At this point companies realise that a reorganisation of work processes will not be possible without qualification measures. However, these qualification measures usually take place in the form of training on the job (cf. Lindecke 2000, 202), which means that they fall into the category of adaptation training rather than into a strategy of permanently integrated further-training strategies.

Although the introduction of flexible working-time models always goes along with the change of work organisation and vice versa, although changes in work processes always have an effect on the working-time structures of companies, the kicked-off processes do not progress as systematically as they are claimed to have in retrospect. In company practice, no simply structured cause/effect-chains can be detected. There are rather complex processes, in the course of which much experimental work is done, external advice/consultation solicited and the attempt made to increase international competitiveness by means of new management concepts such as the "breathing company" or the "learning organisation".

The complexity of co-ordination requirements with respect to processes of change in companies definitely increases at several levels: Changing work contents require changing forms to go along with them, including correspondingly adapted forms of working-time organisation. Inversely, the introduction of new working-time systems is not a one-issue- or single-measure event. It requires/involves supporting measures: If, for example, improved co-ordination of working time and work load is to be achieved in the framework of optimising in-house production processes, a type of working-time flexibilisation will be indispensable which allows the co-ordination of differently located operating/working times within specific departments/functional areas of the company. Not only must the working-time structures of value-chain areas organised according to the principle of labour division be co-ordinated, for example in order to improve delivery

³ Functional flexibility means that changes in work content, work equipment and work organisation are mastered without changing staff strength and structure. Individual adaptability and willingness to learn are key characteristics expected of employees with a view to maintaining flexibility. It is a general trend

power and reliability. Changes in working-time organisation must also take into account that companies do not consist of independently operating units. Temporal tuning of intercompany co-operation (particularly self-explanatory in the case of outside suppliers) must precede an introduction of new working-time systems. (Positive) interlocking and synchronisation of working times between the companies implies still higher demands on an innovative working-time management. It consists in shaping working-time arrangements in a way that the much propagated and promised working-time sovereignty becomes a reality for employees. An aggravating factor is that the scope of time sovereignty is filled in very different ways, depending on the various groups of employees. Working-time preferences of employees may thus differ to a considerable degree. Here, intercompany regulatory structures are required which best perform the balancing act between individual, operational and collective interests.

Since these processes, as described above, often resemble a “muddling through” process, which means that they do not operate systematically, but at best pragmatically, important changes of basic conditions are often not set in motion or sufficiently taken into account. This observation is particularly true of a lasting qualification policy, because long-term strategies have nothing whatsoever to do with ad-hoc measures for adaptation qualification, but require firm rooting of qualification times in the work process.

This tendency is considerably strengthened by the increasing delegation of responsibility for working time, work commitment and qualification. For example, there will be a huge gap between planning and implementation, for instance of a specific working-time model, if more time autonomy is intended to be granted to employees in theory, when corporate structures continue to adhere to old and stuck hierarchies so that there is no sufficient scope for employee participation in planning decisions and resource allocation. The gaps and planning deficits occurring in the process of company reorganisation remain rather concealed as long as employees are increasingly confronted with the need to cushion the effect of these gaps under the guise of a “learning organisation”.

The requirement of companies to continue in their lean production process for reasons of competition and in order to gear working time and work organisation to this goal in the optimum manner, usually goes along with an interest of companies in saving personnel expenses. To many companies, cost-saving seems to be the only key to competi-

that apart from technical qualification, so-called key qualifications such as willingness and capability to co-

tiveness. Therefore cost savings and investments, for example, into the preservation of fitness for work and into its improvement via education, do, at least at first sight, not go together to the mind of many companies. An implementation of qualification processes may of course prove indispensable in the course of the reorganisation process. As far as possible, further-training measures will thus take place near the work place. The duration of more time-consuming, external training measures in Germany usually varies between 1 and 5 days, whereas, for example, in Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden training measures lasting for more than 5 days are found much more frequently (EPOC survey/special analysis, Table 14, quoted acc. to Bosch 2000, 39).

Quite in contrast to this increased significance of corporate further-training processes and the new guiding principle of the learning "organisation" conjured for years, the real situation in the companies is lagging far behind these ideals. The "learning organisation" thus becomes a perfect incarnation of euphemism. Further-training practices in companies do not only depend on innovative guiding principles which are rightly deemed appropriate in the framework of an enlightened management practice, but they continue to be substantially shaped by long-established, frequently stuck structures geared to improving primary work processes – far less than to systematically organised further training processes. Innovative structural reforms are frequently obstructed on their way and thus proceed poorly co-ordinated because they remain too strongly hooked on selected individual measures. In order to drive forward a conscious and deliberate process of structural development, further training will have to be established as an integral part of corporate work processes, although this may often seem to be inconsistent with the precept of economic rationality, which usually strives for short-term success, instantly measurable in terms of figures.⁴

Long-term investment into employee qualification can only be effected by means of a consistent and mandatory further-training policy put to work on a broad basis. It must be borne in mind that learning-on-the-job cannot replace formal learning processes altogether. Especially in a setting marked by high innovative speed, theoretical and practical learning processes must be closely linked. To do so, study units are required which can hardly be handled during working time. However, the prevailing practice consists in

operate, self-initiative etc. are required – the entire person(ality) is thus in high demand.

⁴ This is substantiated in a study carried out by Goltz (1999), where intercompany further training is described as being entangled in a polarised thicket of well-established and inherited structures on the one hand (inertia) and required cultural or organisational change (movement).

an increasing delegation of responsibility for an adequate acquisition and setting up of qualification to the employees, or, to be more precise, to individual (usually higher qualified) groups of employees. These will find themselves confronted with the problem of bringing qualification measures into line with their further working requirements. According to Bosch (1999, 30) the paradox comes about that “working time can only be redistributed through an active qualification policy, but that an increased qualification level, at least over the past few years, has been going along with an extension of working time”.

The training and further training processes that must be realised due to the increased demands made on employees, are as a rule only then financed by companies if these expect higher and especially short-term realisable productivity, motivation and loyalty of their employees. This, too, has hardly anything to do with a lasting, medium- and long-term qualification policy of companies. Employees, in turn, will only invest into the acquisition of general and specific knowledge and skills, if they in turn can expect improved job security and better career and advancement prospects. Finding an answer to the question of whether these two kinds of expectation can really be reconciled and whether they will definitely lead to the win-win situation promised, requires extensive negotiations processes and sets of mandatory rules to be fixed. These will be studied below.

In order to illustrate the connection between working time, work organisation and qualification, I shall concentrate in my Contribution on the growing area of knowledge-intensive services, in which – as the mere name suggests – the employees’ knowledge constitutes an indispensable prerequisite for company success, which implies that the preservation and the cultivation of this knowledge must be integrated into company practice.⁵ My focusing on employees in knowledge-intensive services serves focalising the thesis debated in this context, that namely in areas where human resources and their intellectual potential, resp., are more important than ever for company success –

⁵ In the wake of work reorganisation, the significance of „qualified work“ is on a continuous increase. The expansion of knowledge-intensive product areas and of production-related services goes along with a loss of significance of classic industrial work in terms of quantity. However, restrictive work which is strongly based on labour division is not all being disposed of to the same degree. It is rather that this type of work continues to prevail in mass-production oriented industrial work. By means of decentralisation, outsourcing and segmentation of production, restrictive work still hold the fort. The progress conjured in statements about the future quality of workplaces and labour in a knowledge- or information-based society has so far only materialised for a minor, though growing part of the employed population.

qualification is not yet integrated systematically enough into company practice – i.e. in the sense of specifically tailored periods of time

The following expositions will refer to case studies from the IT industry, which have been conducted at the IAT in the framework of the internationally comparative research project on “New Forms of Employment and Working Time in the Service Economy” /“NESY”; Voss-Dahm 2000).

3. New forms of work(ing time) and qualification processes in the field of knowledge-intensive services

One special feature about the growth sector called information and telecommunication technology (IT) resides in the fact that its success primarily depends on the “gold in the head of employees”. Employees and their available knowledge, resp., constitute the most important resource. However, in view of radical technological changes propelled by exactly that knowledge, knowledge is not a static commodity, but must be continuously updated. Investments into human resources in the form of permanent further qualification are, not at least because of the existing shortage of specialist staff, indispensable. Therefore, the contradiction between cost-saving intentions cherished by the companies on the one hand and investment requirements in qualification measures on the other hand can best be traced by referring to this work field. However, there is one special feature about knowledge-intensive services worth emphasising: Since the employees and not the employers are the owners of the most important means of production, investment into such employee knowledge hold the risk that this knowledge will not remain in the companies to benefit them. Companies therefore try to have their employees contribute financially to more comprehensive qualification measures, because such measures, they argue, will in the long run improve their employees’ labour-market opportunities, so that qualification will be in their own interest. This line of thought shall be set forth in the following.

What strikes about new forms of work organisation is the fact that companies realise the necessity of continuous personnel development, but that they tend to re-delegate the efforts connected with it to employees working in these fields. So, the gradual abandonment of attendance control in qualified activities often goes along with the introduction of trust-based working time. The decisive aspect about work is the work result and the fulfilment of goal-setting agreements. Employees frequently try to dispose

of qualification deficits detected upon task fulfilment by further qualifying during their working time (or leisure time). Even if training and qualification measures have been ordered, it is the employees who have to ensure smooth co-ordination with daily labour. If the responsibility for a further development of exacted qualifications rests with the employees themselves, it will be them who can be called to account if tasks are not performed at the desired speed and in the expected quality, due to lack of knowledge and skills. This externalisation of costs for the preservation of the means of production “knowledge” bears much upon the above-depicted target conflict of companies: On the one hand, they depend heavily on the preservation and the setting up of this knowledge, on the other hand this knowledge will never pass into their possession. On the one hand, tying well-qualified specialists on a long-term basis to the company is a goal; on the other hand and at the same time, investments into education and qualification are to be kept down to the lowest possible level.

In which way is the responsibility for knowledge preservation and extension delegated to the employees? Here, forms of work organisation and introduced working-time systems enter into a disastrous alliance: As regards the trust-based working-time arrangements frequently found in the IT field and in other knowledge-based fields of activity, for example, the following effect reciprocity can be observed: Employees are entrusted with an extensive time autonomy in the sense that a time and attendance control are fully abandoned by companies. What counts is solely the work result, which, however, is to be furnished within a formerly fixed and definitely not self-defined time frame. It is true that the project teams which are often found in these fields of activity (must) control work contents, labour division and resource allocation decentrally. However, their attempts at carrying out prior task planning with as much precision as possible is made against a background of profit-making targets and measures of performance on the part of the companies – targets and MoPs that can neither be really influenced, nor met.

Empirical studies have meanwhile provided ample evidence that target fulfilment in these circumstances often goes along with over-length working time exceeding contractual working times by far (cf. for example Wagner 2000, 139 ff). And excessive working times as a token of high labour intensity hardly leave any scope for systematically planned qualification periods.

The concept of trust-based working time also provides for a specific type of dialogue between employees and their superiors, in which the participants focus on whether or not work results and the time spent on their achievement are in a reasonable balance. In the course of these dialogues employees can document, by reference to their individually recorded working times, that their contractual working time did not suffice for the accomplishment of a given task; they are required to indicate so-called overload situations. In such a setting, employees are responsible for furnishing evidence that the desired output was only possible, due to organisational or structural deficits, by means of increased labour. In other words: They have to prove that it was not lack of competence / qualification, insufficient labour intensity or weak organisational skills which have caused excess working hours. Tracing the roots of excess hours and, above all, how to remedy them, is being increasingly delegated into the employees' area of responsibility. Quite according to the spirit of the frequently propagated flattening of hierarchies, employees are thus taking over a role which employer and superiors, resp., formerly had to fulfil.

The superiors, whose task it had formerly been to keep organisational basic conditions and market requirements out of operational processes, thus acting as buffers and selecting agents themselves, are increasingly backing away from these duties. The consequence is that employees, especially those in customer-oriented service sectors, are being more and more directly exposed to market compulsions and to customer requirements. Peters (1999) terms this mechanism "indirect control". It is no longer the superior who sets clear targets, thus exercising direct control, it is the employees who internalise market requirements, in an effort to fulfil them to the best of their knowledge and belief. Since, on the one hand, employees assume increasing responsibility, but nevertheless continue to depend on a general setting which they cannot influence, they often get entangled in contradictory decision-making requirements⁶, which Kühl (2000, 114 ff.) aptly describes:

„The tensions between stability and change (in the case of corporate reorganisation processes, GS), which formerly had to be endured mainly by master craftsmen and employees handling orders, must now be borne by production workers. [...] On the one hand, companies propagate the binding force of goal-setting agreements, on the other hand employees are expected to disregard them if need be. On the one hand employees feel bound to assume re-

⁶ Management literature holds in store another fitting term to describe this contradictoriness: „Management of dualities, i.e. the ability to pursue contrary directions of action at the same time. Companies are bound to centralise (e.g. in order to maintain a consistent strategic orientation) and they are bound to decentralise at the same time (for example in order to be near to the customer).“ (Oechsler 2000, 47).

sponsibility for overall results, on the other hand they only have very restricted possibilities of influencing quality, cost, and sales. On the one hand, employees are expected to enlist external services in order to save costs, on the other hand they are required to purchase products from their own divisions because of the overall profit situation. On the one hand, employees are required to seek a largely autarkic organisation of their units, on the other hand it is required that no redundant functions develop in the whole concern."

On the one hand, a decentralised form of work organisation requires more self-initiative and assumption of responsibility by the employees working in their realm. On the other hand, such conferred responsibility and self-initiative calls for organisational scope (both in terms of content and time). Work to order, rigid definitions of work steps on the one hand and personal initiative on the other hand are not compatible.

In order to really act on their own authority, employees not only need to be entrusted with the responsibility for the work performance expected of them, but they must also be enabled to co-determine the basic conditions and the resources required for task accomplishment. What comes first in this respect is co-determination in matters of sufficient personnel allocation. For example, in order to cut back on excess working times effectively, all the more when these constitute the rule and not an exception, the remedy of choice would be a recruitment of additional staff. However, since companies are interested in low personnel expenses for reasons of cost and competition, it cannot be expected that these participation rights with respect to personnel resource allocation will really be created. This connection is aptly shown by Voss-Dahm (2001, 14) in her own Conference Contribution:

„In the logic of the management [...] the profit yielded by a project is the larger, the fewer resources are consumed for personnel and equipment. Moreover, the utilisation rate within a project increases, the fewer work conferences are held, the fewer personnel is employed in support functions, the fewer time is spent on qualification measures, the fewer employees are absent, for example, due to sickness, the fewer time is reckoned for the breaking-in of personnel that is new to a project."

Especially as regards of qualification measures which would have to be recognised and accepted as an integral part of daily working time, employees are being entangled in an aggravating dilemma: Well- or high-qualified employees in particular strive for distinguishing themselves as key players on company grounds. They show strong commitment to their work and wish to furnish proof themselves of their being able and willing to accomplish the tasks set to them satisfactorily - one might be inclined to add "whatever the cost of it". What it will cost, at any rate, is a temporally extensive utilisation and consumption of their working time, which may easily reduce to absurdity the promise of

time autonomy and more self-determined work organisation to absurdity. If qualification measures are not rooted in a mandatory manner, for example, by deliberately reserving time buffers for qualification during working time (training on the job) and by quantifying them beforehand, this will necessarily entail an extension of working time.

It is especially these groups of employees who, due to their legitimate career interests, get themselves into a dilemma which can hardly be solved individually. It consists of high motivation at work, strong commitment and career orientation, on the other hand there is a simultaneous interest in a high degree of time autonomy, an improved compatibility of professional and extraprofessional interests and time requirements. As case studies and available reports⁷ on company experience illustrate, this predicament is far from being an occasionally emerging individual problem, but the dilemma has rather structural causes. Working-time forms such as trust-based working time, in which results and not the time spent on it counts, contribute to disguising the structural causes and to perpetuating the individual explanatory disaster.

4. The de-individualisation of conflicts in terms of work(ing)time conflicts by means of collectively binding rules

The starting point of a solution paving the way out of this dilemma thus cannot be found at an individual level, because a major part of what is being demanded of employees in the framework of discussions about entrepreneurially minded and entrepreneurially acting personnel under the headword of "flexibility" as a new qualification, reveals itself, upon looking at it more carefully, to be truly a well-disguised demand for their willingness and ability to adapt. The features often emphasised as being a token of self-determined work, namely the "creative" and autonomous elaboration of solutions to problems, boils in practice down to a fulfilment of set targets - involving pressure to perform, long working times, psychical pressure going along with it, and fiercer pressure of competition among the employees themselves. The chances potentially inherent in the new forms of working-time organisation cannot really unfold to full bloom because they continue to be realised in a restrictive setting imposed by managements.

⁷ For a detailed portrayal of the work situation of high-qualified employees in the IT services sector, please refer to the brochure „Denkanstöße“ [„Brainfood“; CZW] of the IBM project „My time is my life“, entitled „Mit Haut und Haaren. Der Zugriff auf das ganze Individuum“ [„From Head to Toe“. The Grip on the Individual“; CZW] (edited by the IG Metall members at IBM, May 2000).

The starting point for employees and for the institutionalised stakeholders representing their interests must therefore reside in creating possibilities of co-organisation and code-termination on questions relating to this general setting. In terms of working-time organisation and qualification this means that attempts must be made at establishing collectively binding regulations.

By referring to the example of the meanwhile widely spread working-time accounts⁸ it can be shown that these will be a “double-edged sword” as long as accumulated time credits are a mere counterpart of high volumes of excess working hours. Time credits which cannot be reduced over a long period of time conceal understaffing, with a “flexibility illusion” being the consequence (Lehndorff 2000a, 72). This illusion is maintained by the trend towards an extension of compensation periods. In contrast to standardised working times, working-time accounts (can) open up chances for increased time prosperity of employees, by granting them a reliable time frame for the realisation of extraprofessional time requirements and interests, and also for meeting ad-hoc requirements resulting from life contexts. However, the risks still lie in the fact that, finally, company issues will always determine the distribution of working time and that, in case of conflict, private interests of employees have to be and actually are subordinated. And these risks exist especially when personnel ceilings are not sufficiently strong.

The benefit of working-time accounts for the employees thus rests on two pillars: In the first place, there must be a binding regulation of entitlements with respect to account management and withdrawal of leisure time. In the second place, however, it is especially the conditions of work organisation (e.g. transparency of the order picture and of personnel allocation, transparency and critical examination of implicit performance standards underlying goal-setting agreements) which, at the final count, restrict time prosperity and must therefore become the target of institutionalised negotiation processes.

Especially in the field of highly individualised working-time arrangements, as they continue to gain ground in the realm of highly qualified employees, only “such working-time regulation can endure in company practice [...] which employees understand to be in their individual interest. Therefore, working-time regulation will have to offer, apart from substantive rules and collective rules of practice, “grips” or even “handrails” to the individuals” (Lehndorff 2000b, 31). When shaping new forms of working-time organisa-

tion it must be increasingly taken into account that the individualisation of working times has already considerably advanced and that individual employees (or employment groups) may feel collective package deals to be inadequate for a settlement of their own situation. Especially qualified groups of employees with a relatively high level of work autonomy require such “handrails” as a safe starting basis in the sense of starting points or orientation aid for the defence of their time interests. For example, staff dialogues might be used for re-delegating working-time conflicts back to company responsibility, by linking negotiations on the reduction of permanently high working-time credits to issues relating to the question of proper personnel placement. Such settlements might be shaped in procedural manner⁹: If, for example the average credit amount in working-time accounts of a specific department/project team shows a high level, negotiations on new recruitments will be mandatory. In this context, there’s a lot to be said for a formal rooting of participation rights of employees in order to support them in potential negotiations and in order to strengthen their articulateness. An issue to be solved in this context might be the question of how a future interest representation policy might reconcile individual participation rights and collective codetermination in an intelligent manner so that both ways can mutually stimulate and supplement each other.

In the following, an attempt at taking into account the complex regulatory contents of working time and qualification within a collectively binding trade agreement for the IT industry will be presented. Subsequently to this, the regulatory elements elaborated in there will be submitted to critical analysis.

5. New collectively agreed approaches on the topics of working time and qualification by example of the supplementary trade agreement at debis

Especially in the field of high-qualified activities, the practice of considerable accumulations of time credits from habitual extra work is gradually evolving in the context of working-time accounts. These time credits are often difficult to reduce or compensate by time off, resp., within reasonable periods of time or within defined compensation periods. In this context, the idea of establishing long-term accounts is often pondered, which –as provided for in the supplementary trade agreement elaborated by IG Metall

⁸ Zur zunehmenden Verbreitung von Arbeitszeitkonten s. Bellmann/Ludewig (2000), Groß/Munz/Seifert (2000), Deutscher Industrie- und Handelstag (2000).

⁹ An analysis of works agreements conducted by Heidemann (2000) substantiates that they increasingly plan rules of procedure which do not relate to the issue itself, but to the handling of information, consultation and decision-making.

and debis for “Conditions of Work Tailored to the Service Industry” – may increasingly also be used for qualification periods by means of so-called study-time accounts. In terms of employment figures, the debis company is the leading supplier of IT and financial services in Germany. This trade agreement thus represents an attempt at establishing a mental merger of issues relating to working-time organisation and qualification and, in a way, also it also recognises and accepts that especially in the area of qualified work continuous updating and further development of qualification must needs be integrated into working life¹⁰ The most essential regulatory items in this respect are as follows:

- Young (!) employees and all newly recruited employees have a standard working time of 40 hours per week (with 35 hours being collectively agreed), project-related working times are even longer. With advancing age, working time can be gradually shortened to 35 hours.¹¹
- Individual working-time budgets can be agreed. This new form of working-time organisation allows the voluntary agreement on individual working hours deviating upward or downward from the collectively agreed standard working time. This individualised working time is agreed project- or task-related for a period of max. 12 months. The working-time budget reflects target hours and represents an attempt at quantifying projects, tasks and individual interests of employees beforehand in terms of time. None of the accumulated hours will lapse, but will be credited to a 5-year-account.
- Both a 5-year-account and a long-term account/working-life account were established. The credit ceiling for the 5-year-account is an annual amount of 135 hours. Thus the maximum account balance is limited to 550 hours if the compensation pe-

¹⁰ I am concentrating on this collective bargaining agreement because it constitutes a far-reaching attempt at reconciling working time and qualification requirements. By referring to it, the persisting deficits in terms of work organisation can be traced. However, the topic of in-company further training is increasingly being topicalised in the policies of interest representation bodies of companies. The WSI Tariff Archive provides a well-founded survey on collective bargaining agreements concluded to date on the issue of „Qualification and Further Training“ (Bispinck/WSI Tariff Archive 2000).

¹¹ Newly recruited staff start at a standard working time of 40 hours. These standard hours, which are differentiated according to age, amount to 40 hours until the 50th year of age has been reached, from then on until completion of the 52th year of life, it goes down to 38 hours, from then on and until the 54th year of life has been reached, 36 hours, and from the 55th year of life onward 35 hours. There is the possibility of agreeing an individual standard working time ranging between 35 and 50 hours (cf. Bensel 1999, p 25ff). However it will hardly be expected that a young employee will voluntarily choose to work less than the implicit company standard suggests because this might be interpreted as evidencing lack of commitment.

riod is maximally used. If the accumulated credits cannot be reduced completely during this lapse of time, they will be transferred to the long-term account, which in turn can be used in order to reduce the working-lifetime amount of hours, or it can be used for taking time off in blocks. Account credits are created from the difference between the collectively agreed working hours and the working time individually agreed between employer and employee. Extra hours cannot be credited to this account.

- Time credits which have accumulated in the 5-year-account can be used for qualification measures. An employee is entitled to 5 days of further training not ordered by the company. This entitlement to further training may also be bundled up. In the case of a maximum bundle, the employee is entitled, under the provisions of the collective agreement, to 25 days of further training once in 5 years. The costs of these further training measures are borne by the employer, employees will contribute half of the amount of time required in the form of leisure time from their time credits.
- Employers will bear both the costs and the time required for qualification measures which serve the accomplishment of current tasks, which predominantly have the character of a breaking-in measure or which convey company-specific information. The questions as to which time periods are scheduled for these measures and as to whether these qualification measures will take place on or off the job, have not been regularised.

6. Conclusions for a future regulation of working time and qualification

Regarding the feasibility and implementation of such arrangements, I deem some scepticism appropriate in view of the previously (in Chapter 3) described work and working-time organisation in IT companies, although this trade agreement should be considered positive for the mere reason because it takes up issues relating to existing working-time conflicts and company experience in this field (over-length working hours, lapsing time credits, necessity of permanent qualification). There are hardly any employees in the IT sector, for that matter, who get along with the collectively agreed 35-hour-week. There are major time credits in working-time accounts, with gradual reductions being hardly possible within the existing compensation periods because work intensity and scope remain unchanged. The establishment of 5-year-accounts, however, only postpones the

problem of work overload in a certain respect. The differentiation of standard working times according to age shows moreover that the extensive utilisation of young labour is of paramount importance to the companies. As the fitness for work gradually wanes with growing age, the standard working time will also be reduced.

The feasibility of individual entitlements to further training also deserves critical evaluation, and in two respects: It is certainly a positive feature that the allocation of qualification periods in a setting of permanently changing work contents and technological innovations and the preservation of qualification of the employees is considered an entrepreneurial task. However, it is not necessarily comprehensible why employees should make a contribution to this basically entrepreneurial task by sacrificing their prior temporal input, because the enhanced and updated qualifications will after all be of benefit to the companies – even if they were sought with a view to improving personal levels of qualification; boundaries will be fluid here. The decision on which of the further-training measures suggested by employees will be enlisted is subject to the superior's approval anyway. It cannot be assumed that an employer would agree to a joint financing of further-training measures if he or she did not expect some benefit for the company.

If it were accepted and approved that qualification periods are also required during job hours, this would have an immediate effect on personnel allocation and would have to be taken into account right from the start when calculating project budgets. Since these calculations, however, are based on optimum profit expectations, it can be feared that further-training measures financed by employers will be kept to the lowest possible level and that in the end the individually initiated qualification measures beyond job hours will again be in high demand.

Consequently, the question crying for an answer is rather how, in view of existing work overloads (both in terms of time and content), qualification periods during job hours can be cut out and bindingly agreed – not only related to individual qualification measures as a result of staff dialogues, but also as a collectively settled minimum entitlement to further training during job hours for all employees. Individually agreed qualification measures that are ordered by the company are usually occasion-related. More basic qualification measures are desirable, however, they can only be taken advantage of on condition that there are time buffers. This, in turn, frequently involves a paradoxical situation for employees: Time buffers are usually created when a project is running out

or when over-capacities have arisen, with the respective employees not yet having found a new sphere of activity. On the one hand, there would be sufficient temporal scope for qualification in such circumstances, on the other hand, however, there is uncertainty as to the question into which direction the employee should further qualify because his or her future field of activity has not yet been defined. In such interim periods where there is no clear project assignment, the fact that project costs (and thus also qualification costs) are usually allocated and settled in a project-related manner, more or less forces the impossibility or non-allocation of qualification measures in periods of time which would otherwise be perfectly suited for such measures. In company practice, it thus proves very difficult to find time blocks appropriate for qualification measures.

In view of the paradox described above, I see the danger that solely the entitlement to 5 days of further training per year fixed by way of collective bargaining will be used for basic qualification processes. Half of the time required for such basic measures will be contributed by the employees themselves by withdrawing time from their working-time accounts. The concentration on study blocks for which employees use part of their accumulated time credits, furthermore competes with legitimate recreation, relaxation and regeneration interests.

The agreed arrangements as to working time and qualification are not complete in themselves, but require supplementary thought: To date, they have failed to take proper account of the basic conditions of work. Negotiation processes with respect to resource allocation, conditions in terms of work organisation, substitution arrangements, and distribution of powers have not been settled with binding force so far, and thus keep the overload predicament lurking everywhere. The attempt at quantifying probable workloads beforehand by means of individually agreed working-time budgets encounters the difficulty of defining *ex ante* what can hardly be calculated without full knowledge of the basic conditions. Relief from daily time pressure in a setting of high work intensity can furthermore not be achieved by a postponement of that relief to a later date. In the same way, qualification measures implemented during job hours only make sense if the existing pressure on work and time is not aggravated by participating in such measures.

As I see it in full consideration of the specific conditions of work in knowledge-intensive fields of activity, scope for qualification periods can only be created in the wake of flexi-

ble working-time systems, if standard working hours are shortened a priori and if qualification periods are actually included in plans as integral parts (cf. Wagner 2001). The common practice, however, is rather – as it is revealed by the exemplary statement of an employee from the IT industry – that *“there is a deficit in employee qualification [...] The company does not consider further training interesting until such knowledge is really needed in a project. However, then it is usually too late to enrol for corresponding seminars.”* (quotation taken from Voss-Dahm 2000, 32). In order to “ease time-critical phases” (Voss-Dahm 2001, 16), suitably preplanned and broad qualification measures are required. In the IT sector, the following possibilities were detected:

- (1) The preconditions for substitution arrangements must first be created by setting up broad-levelled qualifications within the workforce.
- (2) Support from other project teams (here again it is true that specialist knowledge which can only be supplied by only a few key employees prevents support). To this adds that existing time-account arrangements suggest using time credits for leisure activities in less work-intensive phases. Teams in overload situations can therefore not always count on specialist support from their colleagues.
- (3) Additional new recruitment
- (4) Clear-cut task definitions and co-ordination with customers/clients at the time of order placement, ruling out of permanent changes in task content in the course of the project, which usually lead to project prolongation (cost-neutral in the client’s view).

Only an analysis going down to the tiniest detail of the existing work organisation and a harmoniously tuned reorganisation would be a symbol of genuine recognition of the necessity of life-long learning during the work process. The periods of time required for such procedure must be fixed with binding force and integrated into the real conditions of work. The same is true for the suggestions developed in the framework of the Work Alliance for an investive working-time policy. The utilisation of working-time accounts, which it also provides for, for qualification measures initiated by the employees also requires regulation of the conditions in terms of work organisation, without which it will not be able to work. In view of the much-deplored shortage of specialists and the demographic trend to be expected, it may well be assumed that it will be of paramount

importance both for companies and for politics not only to exploit the labour of highly-qualified employees in the short term and to the maximum extent, but to maintain and preserve it – both in the medium and in the long term.

Literature

Bellmann, L., O. Ludewig (2000), Verbreitung von Arbeitszeitkonten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, in: arbeit und beruf, S. 137 – 139

Bensel, Norbert, (1998), Arbeitgeber und Arbeitnehmer – Gemeinsame Verantwortung für die Zukunft!, in: Ackermann, Karl-Friedrich, Mathias Kammüller (Hg.), Firmenspezifische Bündnisse für Arbeit, S. 13 – 29 (darin: Der neue Ergänzungstarifvertrag für „Dienstleistungsgerechte Arbeitsbedingungen von debis und IG Metall)

Bericht der Benchmarking Gruppe des Bündnisses für Arbeit, Ausbildung und Wettbewerbsfähigkeit (Fels, Gerhard, Rolf G. Heinze, Heide Pfarr, Wolfgang Streeck) vom 21. Februar 2000, Arbeitszeitpolitik

Bispinck, Reinhard, WSI-Tarifarchiv (2000), Qualifizierung und Weiterbildung in Tarifverträgen – Bisherige Entwicklungen und Perspektiven (= Elemente qualitativer Tarifpolitik, Nr. 42), Düsseldorf

Bosch, Gerhard (1999), Arbeitszeitpolitik. Sieben Thesen zum Zusammenhang von Arbeitszeit und Qualifikation, in: Projektgruppe Lernzeit. Beiträge zur Zukunftswerkstatt „Zeitpolitik und Lernchancen“, Duisburg, S. 27 - 37

Bosch, Gerhard (2000), Der Zusammenhang von Arbeitszeit und Qualifikation (Gutachten), Gelsenkirchen, März 2000

Deutscher Industrie- und Handelstag (2000), Arbeitszeitflexibilisierung zur Steigerung der Wettbewerbsfähigkeit (= DIHT-Umfrage zur Arbeitszeitflexibilisierung), Berlin

Goltz, Marianne, (1999), Betriebliche Weiterbildung im Spannungsfeld von tradierten Strukturen und kulturellem Wandel, München/Mering

Gross, Hermann, Eva Munz, Hartmut Seifert (2000), Verbreitung und Struktur von Arbeitszeitkonten, in: Arbeit, Heft 3/2000, S. 217 - 229

Heidemann, Winfried (2000), Weiterentwicklung von Mitbestimmung im Spiegel betrieblicher Vereinbarungen. Edition 45 der Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, Düsseldorf

IAB-Materialien Nr. 2/2000, Betriebliche Weiterbildung: Qualifizierung der Qualifizierten, S. 10

Kuwan, Helmut (1999), Berichtssystem Weiterbildung VII. Erste Ergebnisse der Repräsentativbefragung zur Weiterbildungssituation in den alten und neuen Bundesländern (hg. vom Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung), Bonn

Krenn, Manfred (1999), Flexible Beschäftigte – ein neuer ArbeitnehmerInnentypus? Betriebliche Flexibilisierung im Spannungsfeld zwischen Anpassungsleistung an restriktive Arbeitsbedingungen und neuen Qualifikationsanforderungen, in: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft 25 (1999) Heft 1, S. 71 - 81

Kühl, Stefan (2000), Das Regenmacher-Phänomen. Widersprüche und Aberglaube im Konzept der lernenden Organisation, Frankfurt/New York

Lehndorff, Steffen (2000a), „Überstunden sind eine Droge“, in: Personalführung 1/2000, 72 - 73

Lehndorff, Steffen (2000b), Ist Arbeitszeit in Zukunft noch regulierbar?, in: Lehndorff, Steffen, Hans Jürgen Urban (Hg.) Wiederaneignung der Zeit. Elemente einer neuen Regulation. Supplement der Zeitschrift Sozialismus 4/2000, S. 15 – 33

Lindecke, Christiane (2000), Flexible Arbeitszeitorganisation in der Praxis. Eine Untersuchung in sechs Unternehmen, München/ Mering

Oechsler, Walter A. (2000), Strategisches HRM in einer Zeit flexibler Beschäftigung, in: Personalführung 12/2000, S. 42 - 49

Peters, Klaus (1999): Woher weiß ich, was ich selber will? Die Abschaffung der Stempeluhr bei IBM und die Frage nach den Interessen der Arbeitnehmer, in: Denkanstöße: Meine Zeit ist mein Leben. Neue betriebsspolitische Erfahrungen zur Arbeitszeit, Februar 1999

Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung (2000), Sozialpolitische Umschau, Ausgabe 22 vom 17.7.2000, Berlin

Seifert, Hartmut, Klaus Höfer (1998): Aktives Personalmanagement in der Praxis, Gestaltungsfeld Arbeitszeitkonten, in: RKW (Hg.) Schriftenreihe Personalmanagement Bd. 3, S. 23 - 38

Voss-Dahm, Dorothea (2000): Neue Arbeitszeit- und Beschäftigungsformen in der Dienstleistungsökonomie. Projektarbeit, Qualifikationsanforderungen und die Arbeitszeitsituation im Bereich IT-Services (vorläufige Fassung des Projektberichts, Manuskript), Gelsenkirchen Oktober 2000

Voss-Dahm, Dorothea (2001): Quo vadis Arbeitszeitregulierung? Or: The blurred link between work organisation and working time regulation. Beitrag zur SITT-Konferenz 2001 in Amsterdam

Wagner, Alexandra (2000a): Zeitautonomie oder Scheinautonomie? Arbeitszeitregelungen innerhalb und außerhalb von Gruppenarbeit, in: Nordhause-Janz, Jürgen, Ulrich Pekruhl (Hg.), Arbeiten in neuen Strukturen, München/Mering, S. 139 – 170

Wagner, Alexandra (2001), Lebensphasenspezifische Arbeitszeiten – eine Voraussetzung für lebenslanges Lernen. Empirische Befunde und strategische Überlegungen (Manuskript)