

Informal Networks and Risk Coping Strategies in Temporary Organizations: The Case of Media Production in Germany

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Key words:

biography;
uncertainty;
flexibility;
networks; project
work

Abstract: The erosion of internal labor markets, together with the rise of flexible forms of work such as projects, increases uncertainty regarding the coordination of work and labor market transactions, and it makes employment, income and career perspectives less predictable. This paper addresses the questions of what, if any, kinds of institutional and social-structural conditions are able to provide stability in the absence of the open-ended employment relationship, and which individual certainty strategies are used. On the basis of qualitative, semi-structured interviews with experts and project workers in the German television and film industry, it is argued that the institutional and social-structural context matters crucially for individual strategies to reduce uncertainty. More specifically, this paper aims at contributing to a better understanding of the interrelationship between networks and biographies, and of the interaction between networking and other forms of coping with risks and uncertainty.

Table of Contents

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. Alleviating Risks and Uncertainty in the Absence of Internal Labor Markets](#)
- [3. German Television and Film Industry as a Project Labor Market](#)
- [4. Data and Method](#)
- [5. Risks and Uncertainties in Flexible Labor Markets](#)
 - [5.1 Recruitment practices in the German television and film industry](#)
 - [5.2 How careers develop in projects in the German television and film industry](#)
 - [5.2.1 Labor market entry](#)
 - [5.2.2 Maintaining employment](#)
 - [5.2.3 Project careers](#)
- [6. Conclusion: Interlinked Protective Action?](#)

[References](#)

[Author](#)

[Citation](#)

1. Introduction

Recent transformations in the sphere of work mark a shift towards more flexible arrangements of the organization of production as well as of the regulation of employment, thus confronting actors with increasingly uncertain perspectives (cf. KALLEBERG, 2009). Projects play a prominent role in debates about the change of work and employment relations, as production in post-industrial societies is increasingly structured by networks and more flexible, "post-bureaucratic" forms of cooperation (CASTELLS, 2001; 2004, HECKSCHER & APPLGATE, 1994; MIDLER, 1995; KOCYBA & VOSWINKEL, 2008; BOLTANSKI & CHIAPELLO, 2003, pp.152ff.). Project forms of work organization provide a particularly

illuminating case for investigating risk coping strategies in flexible work contexts, because they differ from internal labor markets in several aspects: Projects are one-off activities and temporary forms of organization that aim at performing a complex, often incompletely defined task in a limited period of time (see FAULKNER & ANDERSON, 1987, pp.880ff.; GOODMAN & GOODMAN, 1976, p.494; JONES, 1996, pp.59ff.). Therefore, work volumes and qualification requirements are hard to predict and to schedule in advance. Tasks and positions are assigned temporarily for the duration of the project or one phase of it. This temporariness, flat hierarchies, and the demand for flexibility, which result from unstable and unpredictable workloads, are not easily reconciled with the concept of careers in internal labor markets. Furthermore, the flexibility demands in project industries give rise to the use of atypical forms of employment, such as freelance work and fixed-term employment, where the employment relationship is open with regard to content, but not duration (MARSDEN, 2004, p.659). Deviations from the standard employment relationship, however, entail certain risks and uncertainties regarding income and social security. [1]

Particular occupational groups, such as artists (MÜLLER-JENTSCH, 2005; PELIZÄUS-HOFFMEISTER, 2008), did always have to deal with flexibility demands and uncertainty regarding their income and career perspectives. However, due to the spread of flexible forms of production and employment, these biographical risks and uncertainties seem to affect an increasing share of the working population. For instance, while typical examples of project forms of work organization include the construction industries (STINCHCOMBE, 1959; SYBEN, 1997) and professional work (MINTZBERG, 1979), advertising (KOPPETSCH, 2006; GRABHER & IBERT, 2006), the information and communication technology industry (BARLEY & KUNDA, 2004; SAXENIAN, 2001) and the media industry (BAUMANN, 2002; BAUMANN & VOELZKOW, 2004; FAULKNER & ANDERSON, 1987; JONES, 1996; SYDOW & STABER, 2002; MARRS, 2007; GOTTSCHALL & KROOS, 2007; HENNINGER & GOTTSCHALL, 2007), "projectification" of the firm (MIDLER, 1995) also affects traditional sectors such as the automobile industry (ibid.). Furthermore, as a consequence of growing unemployment in most industrial countries over the past decades and with changes in the organization of work, the universality of the stable, open-ended employment relationship has been brought into question (STRUCK, GROTHEER, SCHRÖDER & KÖHLER, 2007). A shift toward more flexible forms of work and employment can be considered to have far-reaching consequences for the German labor market, in which the protection and regulation of stable full-time employment by collective agreements, labor legislation, and social security law (BOSCH, 2004, p.618) is considered to provide employees with planning perspectives, security, and access to welfare benefits. The standard employment relationship has been closely associated with the emergence of the so-called "normal biography" (OSTERLAND, 1990). Accordingly, deviations from standard employment affect the life course and biographical planning perspectives, as not only careers but also employment and income perspectives will become less predictable. [2]

In this paper, I take a closer look at the ramifications of flexibilization and deregulation of work and employment, at the risks and uncertainties that workers are confronted with in such work contexts, and how they perceive and cope with them. More specifically, I investigate what, if any, kinds of institutional and social-structural conditions are able to provide some sort of stability in the absence of the open-ended employment relationship, what "social devices" for reducing uncertainty (BECKERT, 1996), and what strategies of biographical certainty (ZINN, 2004) are used in these contexts. [3]

On the basis of interview data with industry experts and with project workers in the German television and film industry, I argue that employment flexibilization in non-professionalized industries increases the dependence on informal support, and hence on informal networks. Informal networks are used as a "social device" (BECKERT, 1996) to reduce uncertainty by those recruiting and by those trying to gain access to projects. Affiliation to informal networks is one form of labor market closure that makes employment more secure for those included. Nevertheless, the following distinct features of informal support increase the uncertainty of employment prospects. Criteria for gaining access to informal networks are diffuse, particularistic, and therefore not transparent. A use of networks which is too extensive and explicit tends to erode their foundation. In addition, stabilizing relations that help to secure employment tends to impede horizontal and vertical mobility, and constrains alternative strategies to secure employment, career advancement, and income. As a result, the dependence on informal, non-institutionalized forms of labor market closure restricts individual opportunities to pursue alternative strategies of biographical certainty. [4]

This paper is organized as follows: First, I briefly review and discuss propositions about what structures the labor market and careers, and what orientates biographical action in the absence of internal labor markets (Section 2). After a brief description of the German television and film industry case (Section 3) and the data and methods (Section 4), I present empirical results on why networks are relied upon in project labor markets and what structures and orients biographies of project workers (Section 5). Lastly, I will discuss the findings (Section 6). [5]

2. Alleviating Risks and Uncertainty in the Absence of Internal Labor Markets

The emergence and the erosion of the institutionalized life course (KOHLI, 1985) and the so-called normal biography (OSTERLAND, 1990) have been attributed to the dominance and the decline of the standard employment relationship. This paper concentrates on an industry in which, as a consequence of processes of decentralization, outsourcing and subcontracting, the standard employment relationship and internal labor markets are largely absent. The absence of internal labor markets makes employment, income, and careers less predictable. Are there alternative ways of stabilizing employment and career perspectives? Below I will briefly discuss some answers to this question offered by the sociology of work and labor markets. [6]

Processes of de-institutionalization introduce biographical uncertainty on the individual level (WOHLRAB-SAHR, 1992, p.220). Following ZINN (2004), we can distinguish between individual strategies to reduce uncertainty on the level of interpretations (certainty constructions) and action strategies (protective action). Regarding action strategies, project workers might change their occupational specialization and adjust their qualification on the basis of anticipated changes in market demands. This is in accordance with the *Arbeitskraftunternehmer* or "entployee" thesis, which suggests that current changes in the organization of work and employment put more emphasis on self-control, self-responsibility and self-adjustment to expected market demands, and a strategic use of networks (VOß, 2001a, 2001b). Furthermore, it has been argued for artistic labor markets in particular, that holding multiple jobs in different areas more or less related to the original occupation contributes to a diversification of risks of employment and income (MENGER, 1999, p.562; O'MAHONY & BECHKY, 2006, p.925). Another strategy involves the use of networks to acquire referrals (O'MAHONY & BECHKY, 2006, p.928). These assumptions would suggest a high rate of inter-firm mobility or self-employment as well as of occupational mobility. Furthermore, permanently changing qualification demands require life-long investments in qualification, thereby blurring the boundary and sequencing between training and work. Transitions are formed by individual adjustments to supply and demand in the labor market. [7]

However, I will not only look at individual strategies, but also account for the social-structural, cultural and institutional rigidities that may reduce uncertainty. These "social devices" (BECKERT, 1996) include "all forms of rules, social norms, conventions, institutions, social structures, and power-relations that limit the choice set of actors and make actions at the same time predictable" (p.820), and they can be re-introduced after processes of deregulation and de-institutionalization (p.829). [8]

Professionalism as a principle of organizing work, labor markets, and careers (FREIDSON, 2001) might provide for some continuity for both workers and employers. According to SENGENBERGER (1987, pp.126ff.), certified occupational qualifications and training paths are defined and coordinated on a supra-firm level in occupational labor markets. These certified qualifications serve as criteria in decisions on recruitment, advancement, and compensation. For workers in highly unstable employment relationships, certified (and thereby transferable) occupational qualifications and restricted access to a labor market segment can alleviate labor market risks. Thus professional institutions provide for a stable labor market status, independent of organizations (STINCHCOMBE, 1959). For firms they can reduce uncertainty in the recruitment process (SENGENBERGER, 1987, pp.126ff.; TOLBERT, 1996). To the degree that project industries form occupational labor markets, unstable employment is accompanied by occupational stability and specialization, and transitions (labor market entry as well as inter-firm mobility) are mediated by formal occupational qualification. This, however, presupposes the existence of standardized training schemes and strong professional associations which train and control their

members, along with occupationally structured labor markets and work organizations that orientate recruitment and biographical planning. [9]

Alternatively, networks might become increasingly important in the absence of internal labor markets. Various strands of literature hint at this possibility. Researchers on risk and criminology have lately argued that social capital significantly mediates the perception of and response to risk and uncertainty (see BOECK, FLEMING & KEMSHALL, 2006). Furthermore, in organization theory networks have been proposed as an alternative coordination mechanism for complex, short-term collaboration (see the concept of project networks by SYDOW & WINDELER, 1999). This notion emphasizes the embeddedness of short-term projects within more stable networks between organizations and persons. Moreover, the well-established tradition of research on the role of networks in labor market transactions (see, among others, GRANOVETTER, 1995, 2002; MARSDEN & GORMAN, 2001) highlights the information-processing capacity of social relations. More specifically, it has been argued that information exchanged informally within networks substitutes for reliable occupational credentials (BAUMANN, 2002) and stable intraorganizational communication channels. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that labor markets which lack uniform training and protected occupational titles are likely to be structured by more flexible and less formalized criteria, such as affiliation with social networks, which might not be associated with occupational and firm boundaries. Since it has been shown that labor market segmentation by formal qualification affects the life course (BLOSSFELD & MAYER, 1988), it should also become apparent in the life course of workers when labor markets are structured by networks instead of qualification. Furthermore, informal social relations might help to cope with uncertainties of flexible work and employment (OSTERLAND, 1990, p.359). [10]

To sum up: in the absence of firm-internal labor markets and professional institutions, we would expect that investments into qualification or networks are used to adapt to changing market demands. The ways in which individuals perceive and respond to risks and uncertainties that are attached to short-term employment relationships, however, should be strongly influenced by their ability to foresee changing demands, to have access to training, and to make strategic use of networks to increase their employment and career opportunities. It can be assumed that this ability is also influenced by the institutional and structural context, i.e. the "social devices" that structure the labor process and the labor market. [11]

3. German Television and Film Industry as a Project Labor Market

Below, I will concentrate on the German television and film industry as a highly flexible, project-based labor market. After the break-up of the public broadcasting monopoly in Germany and the approval of private broadcasters in the 1980s, the production of television content underwent dramatic changes through processes such as decentralization, outsourcing, and subcontracting. This marked the change from the vertically integrated broadcaster to the publisher-broadcaster model and witnessed the erosion of internal labor markets in media production

(BAUMANN, 2002; BAUMANN & VOELZKOW, 2004; TUNSTALL, 1993). Independent production firms were used by the public broadcasters (mainly the Second German Public Broadcasting Corporation/ZDF) only to a limited extent. The new private broadcasters first bought content from the US market and then increasingly organized the production of their content in networks, making use of already existing production firms and thereby increasing demand for these services. With rising competition, public broadcasters also opted more and more for contract production in networks (ELBING & VOELZKOW, 2006; WINDELER, 2004). Thus, after the emergence of private broadcasters, labor demand in the private production market rose throughout the 1990s, right up to the economic crisis of 2000/2001. [12]

Labor market entry in the television and film industry is only marginally regulated. Entry paths into employment by independent production firms are extremely heterogeneous, with an emphasis on experience rather than credentials. Training is conducted rather informally and on-the-job, under the supervision of the respective higher positions during subsequent projects. However, during the 1990s, several universities and vocational schools established degree programs for occupations such as director of photography (DoP), focus puller, director, or scriptwriter, thus challenging the established model of informal training and gradual advancement through assistant positions. Because of the many different and competing training and entry opportunities, the qualification structure of this field is still highly heterogeneous. [13]

Furthermore, projects in the television and film industry are usually so intense that it is impossible to carry out more than one at a time. Their duration varies from a few days (for commercials) to 6 to 8 weeks for a movie or several months for a television series. During a project, the working hours are usually very long, ranging from 10 to more than 15 hours a day, thus often exceeding the limit which is set by the labor protection laws. Except for series that are produced in a studio, film projects (particularly the filming) are carried out at a place chosen according to the script and therefore projects require regional mobility of the staff. The work of project members is highly interactive and interdependent. [14]

In most cases, a production firm (which is commissioned by a broadcaster or operates on the basis of funding by federal state agencies) employs a director of production, who hires the director. The other heads of department then recommend members of their department¹. Employment in the television and film industry, particularly in the independent production market, lasts for the duration of the project only, and recruitment usually takes place within a short time period, so that employment prospects are highly uncertain. Moreover, it is important to note that the employment status can vary according to the hierarchical position within the project: Those who occupy supervisory positions in the teams, such as the director and the DoP, work as self-employed and can, if their work is

1 A camera crew consists of the camera-loader or clapper-loader, the assistant cameraman or focus puller, the grip, the camera operator, the DoP, as head of department. Usually each position is filled with only one person. Depending on the type of production, the size of the camera crew can vary.

classified as artistic and independent, gain access to the health and pension insurance scheme provided by the *Künstlersozialkasse*. In contrast, project workers in assistant positions are employed for the duration of the project only, are subject to social insurance contributions, and can become entitled to unemployment benefits if they work for at least 360 days in the two years prior to unemployment. However, due to the seasonality—film projects are rarely carried out in winter—and the unpredictability of employment on film projects, the interviewees found it hard to accumulate enough working days to make themselves eligible for unemployment benefits. Income between two projects therefore depends on the income paid during a project and on the regularity of employment. [15]

In short, project workers in the television and film industry face risks and uncertainties that are related to securing income and employment by gaining access to a sufficient number of reputable projects, and to making career advancements despite the informal and unsteady assignment of tasks and positions. In Section 5.2, I will describe how project careers develop in this flexible labor market. Particularly, I will focus on the interrelationship between biographies and networks, and how risks and uncertainties are perceived and coped with. [16]

4. Data and Method

In this paper I will focus on the television and film industry as a labor market that is characterized by short-term employment relationships and a low degree of professionalization, and where networks are important for coordinating both the labor process and the labor market.² A study of biographies in this field allows the following questions to be addressed: How do network structures relate to individual strategies of adjustment to changing market demands and of coping with uncertainty? Do informal networks support labor market transactions while providing project workers with stability and biographical orientation? [17]

In the study on which this paper is based, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 24 architects and 33 project workers in the television and film industry (mainly camera crew members, along with video camera operators, and members of departments such as costume and set design, administration, cutting, and production company management). Also, I conducted 16 expert interviews with representatives of professional chambers (for architecture and engineering), unions, and professional associations on the general labor market situation, the interest representation as well as organization and employment practices in the field. [18]

The following analyses concentrate on the 17 camera crew members (6 female, 11 male) who work in the field of scenic production, i.e. movies, television series, advertising. There is no quantitative data on the demography of the media sector's work force. However, the interviewed experts (representatives of

² For a comparison of project labor markets where the degree of professionalization is low (media) and high (architecture), see APITZSCH (2009 and 2010, forthcoming).

professional associations, unions, employers) and other studies on the German media (MARRS, 2007; MARRS & BOES, 2003; BAUMANN, 2002) hinted at the heterogeneity of qualification profiles and of forms of employment. The sample was drawn from the list of members of professional associations and from the internet database Crew United, the most popular platform of freelancers in the media industry which provides basic information on their film credits, training and on the region they prefer to work in. The interviewed project workers lived in a large city that is one of the five media clusters of Germany. Therefore the labor market situation was the same for all respondents. The sample reflected the heterogeneity of qualification profiles. However, I concentrated on project workers with 10 to 20 years of work experience, because they can be expected to be more experienced with vertical and horizontal mobility, with economic boom phases and downturns, and with labor market characteristics in media in general. To be able to compare the perception of the work situation and flexibility demands as well as a potential impact of the increase of formal training between older workers and labor market entrants, I completed the sample with younger workers. [19]

To understand the specific interplay of temporary work organization, social relations on the one hand, and transitions and biographical orientations on the other, I conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews. These interviews aimed at a reconstruction of work histories and of the evolution and structure of their ego-centered networks. In addition, respondents were asked how they proceed when asked to fill subordinate positions. Introductory questions and some of the network questions were defined in advance, but the interview also allowed for an adaptation to the specific situation and was more open in the first and main part (see HOPF, 2000, p.351). [20]

Starting with an open, introductory question ("How did you come in touch with the film and television industry for the first time?"), the main part of the interview consisted of narratives on the work history. However, it only partly resembled the narrative biographical interview (see SCHÜTZE, 1983; HOLTGREWE, 2002; KELLE & KLUGE, 2001, p.19). In order to reconstruct major transitions such as the training-to-work-transition, changes of positions, occupations and forms of employment, more specific questions were asked after these narrations if necessary. Also, the interviewees were asked about future perspectives and expectations regarding their career. [21]

There are several standardized instruments for studying the structure of ego-centered networks (see, for example, SCHWEIZER, 1996; JANSEN, 2003; MOLINA, 2001; PFENNIG & PFENNIG, 1987; WELLMAN, 1979; IBARRA, 1992, 1995). However, these are hardly compatible with more open interview forms that aim at biographical narratives. Since this study tried to improve the understanding of the interaction of the life course and personal networks, a twofold strategy was used to reconstruct the role of networks in context of life course events. After the biographical narratives and questions on major transitions, each interviewee was asked few questions on what role personal relations play for him or her (such as "Were there any persons of particular importance to your career? Who were

they? Could you specify their role?"). In addition, personal networks were reconstructed during the analysis of biographical narratives (for a similar approach see KÜHN, 2002). [22]

For the analysis, the interview transcripts were coded. As codes I used life-course related categories (such as training, training-to-work transition, first position, change in vertical position) in order to be able to reconstruct the work histories and how major transitions occurred (for a similar strategy see KÜHN, 2002). These codes were refined and complemented by the use of sensitizing theoretical concepts (such as network multiplexity) as well as by the use of sub-categories built from a comparative analysis within and between cases. A program for qualitative data analysis, MAXQDA, supported data handling and facilitated the comparison of coded text passages across interviews, thereby allowing for a more fine-grained comparative analysis of the material (see KELLE & KLUGE, 1999). I reconstructed and interpreted the work histories, network integration, planning perspectives and recruitment experiences first on the level of single cases and then as an inter-case comparison. Of particular relevance for the comparison were different training backgrounds, gender and age groups. [23]

5. Risks and Uncertainties in Flexible Labor Markets

5.1 Recruitment practices in the German television and film industry

In temporary organizations such as film projects, the questions of how to coordinate work and how to recruit qualified and motivated workers become more pressing. Since the interviewees were not labor market entrants, most of them were experienced in making decisions regarding the hiring and promotion of assistants, such as interns, camera loaders or focus pullers. Their recruitment criteria and practices shed light on the functioning of the labor market in media production. Camera crew members in the field of scenic production of fictional contents, such as films and soap operas, rely almost exclusively on recommendations and direct contacts for filling assistant positions. These contacts involve former assistants, colleagues, and equipment rental agencies, which trained assistants in handling cameras. This confirms the findings of other studies that have revealed the crucial role of informal networks in recruitment processes in the US-American (FAULKNER & ANDERSON, 1987; JONES, 1996), the British (BAUMANN, 2002; BLAIR, 2001), and the German film industry (BAUMANN, 2002; MARRS, 2007; MARRS & BOES, 2003). The use of informal networks in recruitment processes has been explained by the capacity of informal contacts to reduce uncertainty about occupational qualification in the absence of standardized training and credentials (BAUMANN, 2002). [24]

However, also extra-functional skills and personal traits play an extraordinarily important role in hiring decisions. Camera crew members attached as much or even more importance to extra-functional (DAHRENDORF, 1956; OFFE, 1970, pp.91ff.), diffuse and particularistic (PARSONS, 1951, pp.64ff.) criteria such as liking each other, "personality," being friends and having fun with each other at

work, than to professional qualifications. These preferences can be explained with the duration and intensity of collaboration:

"A working day during the shooting lasts 10 hours, as specified in the contract, often it takes longer. [...] And if you spend that much time at work, personal contact is very important. If good friends get on each other's nerves, it does not matter." (DoP)

"Of course I have my favorites, persons I like to work with. They have to be able to work under pressure, be reliable, and it should be in harmony. The team should be harmonic, it has to be a good match, only then it is fun, for everyone. A director of production has to motivate the staff." (DoP and director of production) [25]

These statements reflect the nature of the production process in the media industry, which is highly interdependent and interactive and involves long working hours. [26]

OFFE (1970, pp.93ff.) suggests to further differentiate between several subcategories of extra-functional skills. For instance, in work settings characterized by a high degree of interdependency, the contribution of a single worker, especially if in a lower hierarchical position, is hard to separate from the achievement of co-workers (OFFE, 1970, p.94). If mutual adjustment (MINTZBERG, 1979, p.3, 435) and collaborative skills (JONES, 2002, p.215) of team members are key to the production process and if performance pressure is high, the particularistic and extra-functional criteria described above can be assumed to play a particularly important role and individual achievement is hard to evaluate. In this respect, project work seems to resemble the work situation of former longshoreman as described by FINLAY (1982, p.52), where "a considerable proportion of what is usually described as 'skill' or 'competence' derives from the autonomous coordination of activities between gang members." Therefore it can be assumed, that interdependency and interactivity in project teams complicates the evaluation of the qualification and achievement of single project members. [27]

In addition, routines in informal coordination or mutual adjustment, the perceived similarity of work attitudes, and particularistic and diffuse criteria, such as sympathy or liking each other, "being on the same wavelength," humor and having fun with each other, develop and/or are evaluated in the course of collaboration. They depend on informal social relations, because they can be communicated only by informal recommendations and direct contact. The creation of cohesive and "harmonic teams" might be even consciously brought forward to compensate for difficult working conditions, to increase motivation and the capacity for mutual adjustment (see quotation above: "The team should be harmonic, it has to be a good match, only then it [work] is fun, for everyone. A director of production has to motivate the staff"). [28]

Thus, it can be argued that informal networks are relied upon in recruitment practices for film projects because they reduce, at least to some extent, the uncertainty in terms of the following aspects: The professional and extra-

functional qualification as well as the motivation and commitment of project members, the cohesion of the team, and the coordination of project work in the absence of bureaucratic structures and professional control. How this affects the career and life course of project workers will be discussed in the following section. [29]

5.2 How careers develop in projects in the German television and film industry

5.2.1 Labor market entry

Several aspects of working in the film industry appeared to be particularly attractive for respondents when they entered this labor market. Aside from their positive assessment of being part of the production of some innovative, creative cultural product, they particularly valued the opportunity to work at a variety of places with different people from project to project. As particularly attractive they viewed the sense of community that developed in the course of close interaction with "like-minded" people during long working hours and in the (scarce) leisure time spent together at remote places. [30]

The widespread practice of informal recruitment is mirrored in the individual work trajectories of the respondents: the interviewed camera crew members stated that networks had far more relevance for them than credentials, even if they held a university degree or had completed formal vocational training in their fields. One camera assistant recapitulated how she started working while studying film:

"There was a big production [...]. They hired me, and I earned quite a lot of money. After that, studying was secondary. While attending university, I realized pretty soon that a university diploma is not key to gaining access to this industry. My diploma was worthless, so to speak. Since then I have earned money and only studied alongside." (Focus puller) [31]

Formal applications enabled those lacking any industry contacts to obtain access to the lowest entry positions, namely internships at equipment rental agencies, film laboratories or, less frequently, film production firms. Formal applications served as an entry path for half of the 12 respondents who completed an internship before following either formal or informal training in the television and film industry. Alternatively, vocational training routes, such as "media designer in sound and vision" or certified engineer for camera assistance, or media-related university degrees were able to provide labor market access. [32]

5.2.2 Maintaining employment

As a consequence of the short-term and unpredictable nature of project work, employment prospects become highly uncertain. It is learned early on in a career, and widely acknowledged by project workers, that one cannot foresee the next appointment, let alone calculate long-term employment, income, and career perspectives. The following statements are typical of the view of the respondents:

"During a film production, I only learn after work when and how long I am supposed to work the next day. But this does not mean that I can rely on the schedule and know beforehand that I will have finished work at 6pm or 9pm. Therefore, it is almost impossible to make private arrangements. There is no way to plan anything, not even where your family is concerned." (Camera operator)

"It is very difficult—income security and social life is difficult. Regarding family and friends—you will be away for five weeks, and during that time you cannot even make a phone call at 5pm to ask how things are at home. Therefore, all attempts to, say, enroll on a language course fail regularly, because there is no continuity." (DoP) [33]

Camera crew members usually have demanding working hours. In addition, the length of a working day depends on the former day's results and thus is only usually known from one day to the next. The lack of predictability of working time and the intensity of project involvement make it particularly difficult for project workers to reconcile work and personal life. Family life, hobbies, further training, friendships or relationships with people outside the film industry are hard to maintain:

"Everything that could distract you, be it friends, family, children, is counterproductive. [...] The female DoP that I know, who are successful, they think 150 percent in film. They live film. They do everything for film. None of them has a family. To be successful as a female DoP you must not have a family." (Focus puller) [34]

As a result, friends and partners of the respondents were increasingly recruited from the pool of colleagues. [35]

Informal networks and, more specifically, repeated cooperation between supervisors and their assistants are used as a strategy to reduce uncertainty. For those recruiting, the repeated collaboration with familiar personnel reduces the uncertainty regarding both professional and extra-functional qualification (see section 5.1). For the recruited, it increases their chances of gaining access to projects and improves their ability to make plans. These strong vertical relations result from a selection process from project to project, where not only the work but also personal traits, the similarity of work attitudes, humor, life styles, and other extra-functional criteria are used, which are mainly particularistic and diffuse in nature. As is explained above (and in more detail in APITZSCH, 2009), the particularism of recruitment is mainly due to the lack of universalistic criteria for evaluating work and qualification, and the time spent together in close interaction, both at work and after, in places distant from the respective home and non-work-related contacts. In addition, to work with people on a friendship-like basis, sharing the sense of humor, and "being on the same wavelength" not only eases the coordination of work, which is mainly based on informal interaction and personal control; it also compensates for stressful working conditions such as extremely long working hours and time pressure. Eventually, directors finish up working with only a few DoP on a regular basis, who themselves tend to recruit from a small pool of camera assistants. [36]

As a result, stabilizing these vertical relations is the essential prerequisite for access to employment. On the one hand, after entering the labor market, making contact with future employers and assistants should, to a certain degree, be an unavoidable byproduct of project work—given its interactive nature. On the other hand, activities such as visiting award ceremonies and local industry-related events, going out and hanging out together after work despite a 10 to 15-hour working day enable the intensification, maintenance, and extension of networks, and improve employment opportunities. This is illustrated by the experience of a camera crew member:

"There are many who go for a drink at night, who socialize a lot, but do not work as good as me. But they have their contacts, they are buddies, adventurers, and get more jobs than I do." (Focus puller) [37]

However, these requirements also put employees under intense pressure to adjust to a certain lifestyle. Despite such irregular activities outside of work, vertical relations can be stabilized mainly at work, because the flexibility and intensity of project inclusion does not allow for regular activities and meetings, even between projects. Therefore, not working together regularly threatens the very basis of employment and income prospects. [38]

Against the background of increased restriction of access to unemployment benefits through labor market reforms and the low degree of professionalization in this field—unprotected occupational titles, non-standardized training routes, and heterogeneous entry paths—one might expect that an "entroyee"-like (VOß, 2001a, 2001b) adaptation to demand and supply should be the predominant reaction to insecure and interrupted employment. However, this does not seem to be the case: access to a certain area of the television and film industry (such as commercials, movies, TV shows) requires working experience and employment referees, which again requires some continuity of employment in this field. In addition, there is little overlap in the networks of people who work in different fields, as is described by the interviewed camera crew members:

"Actually, there are many different universes in media: the movie field is disconnected from the documentary field, which is disconnected from advertising." (DoP)

"I worked on 90-minute-movies. And then, by working with these DoP, it became rather one-sided. They work on TV series more often than not; therefore I'm in the TV series field, though I didn't really aim to be. But they don't make movies. And now it's difficult, because I hardly know any DoP from the movie business. Therefore I can't work for a cinema movie production company, because they always employ their regular assistants." (Focus puller) [39]

Furthermore, project workers who try to switch between subfields and occupations have to cope with negative evaluations from potential employers and supervisors:

"I'd rather keep it [the contacts to colleagues in different fields] separate, of course. Otherwise they pigeonhole you: Oh, he works in the area of documentaries! Or: He can't do documentaries; he only works in movie productions. [...] But I am rather reluctant to say that I work as a cutter. This is always seen as a defeat: Oh, he also has to work as a cutter, alongside." (DoP) [40]

These experiences allude to the existence of norms of occupational stability which might hamper more flexible changes in activity. [41]

The necessity to intensify and stabilize employment-relevant social relations places several constraints on the use of alternative strategies for securing employment, career, and income. One such strategy is the often-proposed option of "diversification" (MENGER, 1999; O'MAHONY & BECHKY, 2006), i.e. working in different parts of the film and television industry, in different positions or occupations and departments. Another is to form weak ties (GRANOVETTER, 2002) or intensify contacts to other supervisors. Finally, investing in training to open up alternative employment opportunities could be regarded as a rational strategy in these flexible labor markets (VOß, 2001a, 2001b). However, these forms of protective action are in conflict with the dominant structure of such labor markets, because strong vertical relations tend to erode and therefore to lose their protective function if they are not stabilized on the basis of regular interaction. [42]

In addition to the corrosive effect that interruptions to repeated cooperation have on the stability and employment-enhancing function of social relations, securing employment by relying on networks is a risky strategy for two more reasons. First, access to those networks rests on diffuse and particularistic criteria, which are by definition hardly transparent or calculable (see Section 5.1). Second, networks cannot be instrumentalized too openly and too extensively without threatening their emotional basis—the use of social capital always has to be obscured (see BOURDIEU, 1983). Thus the support for gaining access to projects by recruitment or by the recommendations of former supervisors is neither guaranteed nor transparent. This problem can be illustrated by the following statements:

"There are always premiere parties [...] where you have to show your face. And maybe, somehow, something results from that—hopefully. And as I said, this only helps if the others like what you are doing. It does not have to be good or bad. You just have to give the impression that it was better than something else. There are many colleagues who have no work. That's how it is. The number of productions has declined, and they are distributed unfairly. [...] I could make four movies in September and I know at least four colleagues who don't work in September. And they are no worse than me." (DoP) [43]

To sum up, to rely on networks makes the employment prospects of project workers only a little more predictable, given the informality and particularism of recruitment strategies, while hampering alternative strategies to reduce uncertainty. [44]

5.2.3 *Project careers*

The degree of artistic freedom and innovativeness varies with the hierarchical position rather than with the project phase: the so-called "heads of department" such as DoP (other "heads of department" being the director, set designer, make-up artists, and property masters) are expected to display creativity and originality. Conversely, assistants, such as focus pullers, camera loaders, and camera operators are meant to fulfill routine tasks and, in so doing, follow the instructions of their respective line supervisor. Formal and informal training paths coexist, and there are at least two competing career concepts for camera crew members. One career concept highlights the importance of gradual progression from assistant to supervisor positions. Here, assistant positions are defined as a form of on-the-job training to prepare for the role of the DoP, who is responsible for the aesthetic and artistic design of the film. The other career concept views assistant positions such as focus puller, camera operator, and camera loader as more technically oriented occupations. In contrast, the DoP is viewed as a rather artistic and creative occupation, which does not require, or may even exclude, the experience gained in technical and assistant positions. This ideal of occupational specialization is illustrated by a quote of a DoP:

"To my mind, there are two different occupations: the one is rather technically oriented, and as a director of photography you should be able to operate the camera and should know about lights. Light for the DoP is like color for the painter. You have lamps, technical staff, and operating the camera is like driving a car—you should know how to get from A to B. It really is that easy. For it [working as a DoP] means: telling stories, knowing how to tell them emotionally, how to visualize them—this is the creative part that is normally the most important. And that's what I am interested in. And assisting the DoP as a focus puller is different. That's why I never really wanted to, and I also see today—for example, my assistant, with whom I work regularly—he would like to become a DoP. But he lacks this dramaturgic, artistic, aesthetic thinking. Because he has taken care of the technical issues for 15 years [...]" (DoP) [45]

This career track seems to correspond to the establishment and diffusion of academic programs that lead more or less directly to positions such as the head of department. In contrast, the first career model suits the more traditional, informal training route, where assistant jobs are viewed as rather transitory positions where on-the-job training takes place. However, jobs and responsibilities are assigned only temporarily by directors or directors of production, and hiring for higher positions presupposes recommendations and/or personal knowledge of the applicant. [46]

At first sight, both progression from lower assistant to more responsible positions through training on-the-job and job assignments after the completion of a film-related university degree seem to be rather contingent. For example, one interviewee resumed working as camera loader and focus puller after graduating from university with a camera-related degree in the mid-1990s. At the same time, two respondents started working in the role of DoP directly upon graduation.

Another respondent, who entered the field as an intern, had worked as a focus puller for 15 years at the time of the interview, while another progressed from focus pulling to the position of DoP within 6 years. Thus, career outcomes differ markedly, even though these interviewees faced similar labor market situations when they were already working as a focus puller or entering the labor market after graduation in the mid-1990s, during a boom period for the film and television industry. [47]

A closer comparison of their work histories shows that completing formal training enhances employment opportunities. However, this is less due to the skill certificate itself, but rather because studying provides the opportunity to gain practical experience, to produce presentable sample work (i.e. short films), and to establish contacts with prospective producers, directors, and DoP. Formal training thus provides industry contacts and work samples, which are the key to employment after training. [48]

The two university graduates who entered the labor market as DoP did so by working on the film projects of former fellow students, who specialized in direction:

"Afterwards, after university, I started working directly, and had a good start because of these two movies I made for the diploma. Then I got another project. And then— what is always important—if you have collaborated before. I worked with a now famous director, who I worked with for the final diploma movie. She asked me to join her for her next movie, too. This is what I always tell my students, when I teach once or twice a year: take care of the teams that you establish at university, because they make labor market entry much easier. Because if a director develops a movie later on, and has already worked with you successfully at university, there is no reason to not work together again." (DoP) [49]

For the second project, one of the respondents was recommended by a former professor, and the other was recruited by a director with whom he was privately in contact. [50]

In contrast, the third graduate moved to Germany after completing her film studies at a university abroad and started out with formal applications, resulting in her acquiring an assistant rather than a supervisory position. This confirms the recruitment pattern described before: Only entry positions are occasionally filled with candidates who apply formally, while informal recruitment practices dominate the labor market processes. During the first years of her career, the respondent faced difficulties in establishing informal contacts within the industry. Finally, she met a DoP whom she could assist regularly and thereby secured employment. However, retrospectively she concluded that strengthening ties to senior positions made it difficult, if not impossible, to get to know directors more closely and to progress toward the position of a head of department. [51]

Furthermore, focus pullers who entered the field as interns or camera loaders and considered themselves successfully established found it hard to advance from

there to the head of department position, even if they studied film later. Aiming for more autonomy and the chance to creatively design motion pictures, one assistant specialized in using a particular camera type which is employed for specific settings in a film. Looking back at this change after one year, he concluded that he could still easily be recruited for assistant positions, while DoP whom he had worked for regularly in the past now hesitated to hire him in his new field of specialization. In contrast, the respondent who successfully advanced from focus puller to DoP within six years reported that he had been actively prepared, promoted, and recommended for this position by his retiring supervisor. The different aspects of mentorship, such as giving advice about the timing of the step-up, providing for informal on-the-job training and for recommendations, are seen as an important prerequisite for career advancements by other respondents as well. [52]

These cases illustrate the ambivalent role of networks in career trajectories and the way in which differences in work-related networks are related to different career tracks: Horizontal relations to directors, production managers, and cinematographers enhance employment in supervisory positions. Worker's vertical relations to supervisors, in contrast, secure employment and informal training opportunities, which however, if stabilized, might impede progression. But if the supervisors act as mentors, they are indeed a prerequisite for advancement. Interestingly, the establishment of formal training, especially of university courses, seems to be less relevant for providing professional skills and knowledge. Rather, studying film promotes careers in the television and film industry because it provides graduates with access to a position higher in the hierarchy of employment-relevant contacts. [53]

6. Conclusion: Interlinked Protective Action?

While recent debates on flexibilization and deregulation of work and employment tend to emphasize the self-responsibility of individuals to cope with new risks and uncertainties, we still know little about the interaction of formal and informal structures and individual strategies. Therefore, in this paper I investigated ways of coping with uncertainty not only on the individual level, but also on the level of labor market segments. I argued that networks will under specific circumstances gain importance as a means to cope with uncertainty. The German television and film industry studied in this paper is a highly flexibilized work and labor market context, which lacks standard employment relationships and institutionalized professional control. As has been shown, actors in this labor market seek alternative forms of stabilization. Particularly, they attempt to reduce the uncertainty regarding recruitment, the labor process and employment perspectives. Thus the capacity of informal networks to process information, to exercise control, and to provide for social support gains momentum. In addition to uncertain employment, income and career perspectives, the lack of universal and transparent criteria to evaluate qualification and work, the interactivity and interdependency of the labor process, the demanding working conditions and the difficulties to maintain non-work-related commitments further contribute to the particularism in recruitment. [54]

As a result, informal networks, particularly the vertical relations between supervisors and assistants, matter crucially for securing employment, income and career. They are the dominant "social device" (BECKERT, 1996) that reduces uncertainty in this highly deregulated and flexibilized labor market. This becomes apparent not only in the dominance of informal recruitment practices, but also in the role that formal and on-the-job training plays for the positioning of labor market entrants in the industry networks. Furthermore, it orientates individual strategies to reduce the uncertainty of employment, income and career tracks, in that project workers avoid interruptions to their regular cooperation with a supervisor: The respondents tended to refrain from altering the field of specialization and the work team, from long-term commitments to formal training, and from regular, non-work-related commitments. [55]

The use of networks to reduce uncertainty is, however, inherently dilemmatic. First, their maintenance requires certain lifestyle adjustments, such as devoting leisure time to meeting colleagues or canceling private appointments in order to work on a project at short notice. Second, the access to and the stabilization of informal networks rest on criteria which are rather particularistic and diffuse, but not transparent or calculable. Third, informal support cannot be mobilized too openly, too often and in a reliable way without threatening its foundation. Fourth, these networks play an ambivalent role in project careers. For those following the traditional career path of progressing by on-the-job training from assistant to supervisory positions, stabilizing vertical relations is crucial for securing employment. However, undergoing the transition from assistant to supervisory positions depends on the character of this relationship. Supervisors functioning as mentors matter crucially for this step-up, but can also prevent it in order to limit competition or to maintain continuity within their crew. University degrees in film can place labor market entrants more reliably in supervisory positions to the extent that studying provides horizontal relationships to potential directors and directors of production. Finally, the dominance of informal networks in regulating access to income, employment and career tracks hampers alternative forms of protective action. These alternatives are investments into further training and working in different subfields, occupations or with different supervisors. These strategies might provide opportunities to work, secure income and advance on a more regular basis. However, they also tend to interrupt regular cooperation and thereby threaten the employment-enhancing capacity of informal networks, which are the dominant recruitment channel. [56]

Hence, I argue that the social-structural and institutional context matters crucially for individual strategies to cope with uncertainty. This has been shown for a flexibilized, deregulated labor market segment with a low degree of professionalization. There, strategies for coping with uncertainty, and protective actions (ZINN, 2004) in particular, become closely linked to the relational context of individual biographies. Therefore, more specifically, this paper aimed at contributing to a better understanding of the dynamics of networks, and of the interaction between networking and other forms of coping with risks and uncertainty. [57]

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URL: <http://www.uni-due.de/soziologie/apitzsch.php>

Citation

Apitzsch, Birgit (2010). Informal Networks and Risk Coping Strategies in Temporary Organizations: The Case of Media Production in Germany [57 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(1), Art. 4, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs100145>.