

‘Simple jobs’ for disqualified workers. Employability at the bottom of the labour market

Eva Nadai & Anna Gonon

to be published in: Christian Suter/Jacinto Cuvi/Philip Balsiger/Mihaela Nedelcu (eds.). The Future of Work. Zürich: Seismo, <https://www.seismoverlag.ch/de/open-access/>

1. Introduction

Employability is a key issue in discourses and policies addressing the social consequences of labour market transformation driven by rapid technological change and globalization. Knowledge and skills are commonly regarded as the core ingredients of employability. Therefore, those labelled as *unskilled*, because they lack formal occupational qualifications are *disqualified* as *unemployable*. At best they seem fit for ‘simple jobs’, which do not require any occupational qualification beyond a short initial training on the job. Yet, routine manual and cognitive jobs are less and less available, which puts low-skilled workers at high risks of unemployment and precarity (Bolli et al. 2015; Crettaz 2018; Murphy and Oesch 2018; Nathani et al. 2015). In parallel to the marked decrease of low-skilled jobs, the proportion of workers without post-compulsory education has fallen; in Switzerland only 11 percent of the population are unqualified, with differences according to age, gender and nationality (BFS 2020). To the degree that low-educated workers have become a small minority, the lack of qualifications constitutes a stigma in its own right. The unskilled are discredited as deviant from the norm and their abilities are systematically underestimated (Gesthuizen et al. 2011; Solga 2008).

The debate on the decline of low-skilled jobs rests on the assumption of a correspondence between the quality of jobs and the quality of workers. Yet, critical sociologists maintain that supposedly simple jobs are actually more complex than meets the eye and that upskilling is taking place within the remaining low-skilled jobs: depending on industry and job higher technical and social competences are required such as digital literacy, numeracy, communication abilities and the like (Abel et al. 2014, Bosch and Weinkopf 2011; Hilf et al. 2018; Holtgrewe 2015; Krenn et al. 2014; Nickson et al. 2017). Skills or qualifications are neither fixed characteristics of workers nor objective features of a job. Rather, such categories are *effects of valorisation* in particular historical and local contexts. To say that a job or a worker is ‘unskilled’ implies a judgment on the social and economic worth of the activity or the person. Which skills are deemed valuable or are recognised as occupationally relevant

qualifications in the first place is determined by economic and political institutions, power struggles and conflicts that reach beyond the immediate workplace. The construction of qualification is a multi-level process involving educational systems, labour market policies, business enterprises, migration regimes and the transnational division of labour in a globalised world (Atzmüller et al. 2015; Demazière and Marchal 2018; Hilf et al. 2018; Holtgrewe 2015; Krenn 2015; Tranchant 2018; Vallas 1990).

This chapter focuses the firm as a crucial site of valorisation. Drawing on the theoretical framework of the Economics and Sociology of Conventions (EC/SC) it examines the *relation between low-skilled jobs and workers* from the perspective of quality conventions for labour. On what grounds and in which jobs are workers without formal qualifications still regarded as valuable labour and how is valorisation tied to a firm's coordination of production and its employment strategies? EC accords the enterprise a central role as 'the principal actor deciding on the value of workers' (Larquier 2016, 36). Hence, skills are not valuable in and of themselves but only inasmuch they are valued by a specific firm. We will show, first, that the value of low-skilled workers is contextual insofar it is just as much based on their fit into an existing work organisation and company culture as on their individual abilities. Second, the relation between the fit into the coordination of production and value can go both ways: firms can select workers who fit the skills requirements of a job, or they can adapt technical and organisational formats to the abilities of the available workforce. Third, certain qualities are valued and devalued at the same time: they constitute significant criteria for the selection and evaluation of workers, yet they are not acknowledged as occupational qualifications.

The analysis is based on data from an ongoing qualitative research on the constitution of the employability of low-skilled workers in five different industries.¹ The following section presents the theoretical frame and describes the database of this study. In the third section we analyse the 'simple' jobs in the study firms and how these companies legitimise the use of low-skilled workers. The fourth section examines the qualities of workers that employers expect: which abilities, behaviour and personal traits characterise the valuable worker in low-end jobs? The chapter concludes with a discussion of our findings.

¹ The research is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (grant 1000_175842). Together with the authors Robin Hübscher and Anna John collaborate on the project.

2. Theoretical framework and empirical database

In everyday language the term qualification refers to the certified proof of a specific education and training. For the Economics and Sociology of Convention it has the more encompassing meaning of attributing properties to social objects as well as conferring a quality or value (Diaz-Bone 2018, 143). A prominent explanation for the low value of unqualified workers holds that educational attainment serves as an indicator of productivity and trainability; the lack of qualification therefore signals low productivity (Gesthuizen et al. 2011). In contrast, Salais (2001) argues that labour and its value do not yet exist at the moment of selling it in the market, i.e. when employers and workers enter into an employment contract. What matters is not the work per se but ‘the (very material and singular) product of work’ (Salais 2001, 7). Hence, the value of labour is only realised at the moment of selling the product in the market. Hiring thus requires prognostic judgments on how the prospective worker contributes to production and market success.

Valorisation comprises two analytically distinct operations: valuation as ‘adding value to something’ and evaluation as ‘producing a judgment by assessing the value of something’ (Bessy and Chauvin 2013, 85). In their studies on recruitment and performance assessments EC/SC scholars demonstrate that these two operations are inseparable (Bessy et al. 1999; Bourguignon and Chiapello 2005; Eymard-Duvernay and Marchal 1997; Kozica and Brandl 2015; Larquier 2016; Marchal 2015; Marchal and Rieucan 2010). The main thesis is that the quality of (prospective) workers does not exist independently of the interlinked evaluation practices of different groups of actors, with the firm being the most important actor. In Eymard-Duvernay’s (2012, 11) concise formulation: ‘The judgment is the operation that creates the value’. The dispositives of evaluation define and select the information that constitutes the basis for testing qualities like competence, productivity and performance. Attributions of quality refer to the alignment of the competencies and characteristics of the person with the specific exigencies of production (Diaz-Bone 2009, 180) – the value of workers is therefore contextual. In the labour market there are at least two “critical moments” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2011, 55) when the value of a person is at issue: the moment of recruitment and the (recurring) moments of performance evaluation during employment.

The notion of quality convention reflects the contextuality of valuation. It is a central premise of EC/SC that social situations are characterised by a *plurality* of possible logics of

coordination and evaluation to which actors can refer to justify actions and evaluations. Quality conventions rest on overarching moral ‘orders of worth’ and provide evaluation frames and tests for situationally appropriate judgments on the value of persons, objects and actions (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). Conventions function as equivalence principles that allow the ranking of objects according to their relative worth. Of the eight conventions currently established in EC/SC (Diaz-Bone 2018, 146-164), the market and the industrial convention are most relevant for the valorisation of low-skilled workers. In the *market convention* value is determined by demand and tested in the situation of a transaction. Of little worth are those objects or persons that are not in demand and meet with rejection, for instance workers whose productivity seems questionable because of some stigma (Nadai et al. 2019, 16). The *industrial convention* values predictability, efficiency and professional expertise. The important evaluation criterion is the functionality of persons for the coordination of production: their productive capacities and their ability to ‘integrate themselves into the *machinery*, the *cogwheels* of an organization’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 205, original emphasis). Moreover, we argue that the firm is not just a site of production but also a social entity – a kind of community. Hence, the *domestic convention* too comes into play. In this convention value is tied to relations: the person is assessed within networks of interdependencies, trust and loyalties. Trustworthiness, ‘membership in a closed universe’ (ibid., 166), and loyalty to superiors are prerequisites for the worth of the subordinate. Convention-based valuation is not just a discursive operation but must refer to external arrangements of objects for the assessment of the qualities and relative worth of social entities (Diaz-Bone 2018, 166). As mentioned before the coordination of production is the foremost reference for the valuation of labour; formal qualification being the other main object for the assessment of individual workers. For EC, both work organisation and educational diploma are examples of ‘investments in forms’ that stabilise the practices of coordination and evaluation (Thévenot 1984; 2001).

The empirical study that provides the data for this analysis examines the constitution of employability as a pragmatic, dynamic and interactive process (Promberger et al. 2008). It combines the perspective of unskilled workers, firms and private and public labour market intermediaries using semi-structured qualitative interviews, which are complemented by documents. The focus is on five industries with a high percentage of low-skilled jobs and workers: catering trade, construction, cleaning, manufacturing, and retailing. Firms were sampled from these industries, while the sample of workers covers a wider range of industries

because of horizontal mobility in the course of employment trajectories. Intermediaries include commercial personnel staffing agencies and public agencies for the job placement of unemployed people. The database comprises 33 interviews with HR staff and managers of 27 firms, 10 interviews with intermediaries, and interviews with 39 workers.² The analysis presented here is based on the interviews with firms. Seven of the 27 firms are SMEs with less than 250 employees. About two thirds of the interviewees are local HR managers, direct supervisors, production managers or SME-owner-managers who have operational responsibilities for the recruitment and performance evaluation regarding low-skilled workers. One third of the interviewees are specialised or high-level HR managers or branch managers who are not directly involved in recruitment and performance evaluation but have a profound knowledge of the firm's employment strategies. The interviews pertained to the function of low-skilled workers for the coordination of production, employment conditions, work organisation, recruitment practices (including the relations to temporary staffing agencies), and skills requirements. The study follows the principles of grounded theory methodology with respect to the intertwining of sampling, data collection and data analysis; data analysis is based on the coding techniques of Strauss and Corbin (Strübing 2014).

3. 'Simple Jobs'? The use of low skilled workers in the coordination of production

Asked what jobs they offer to low-skilled workers, managers often begin with a description of the lowest functional levels in their company, as the following statement by an HR manager in the retail industry illustrates:

Regarding competences, it is really an assisting function. There is a boss telling you what to do. You are guided and supervised by someone experienced. And tasks are precisely defined within the context of the organization.

The concept of a function as it is used in this statement refers to the abstract task that is defined independently of the person who performs it (Acker 1990, 148). Companies invest in the specification of tasks in order to stabilise a certain coordination of production (Thévenot 1984, 16). As our data show, low-skilled workers perform a range of tasks with quite variable requirements.

² To capture the dynamic nature of employability workers are interviewed up to three times over a period of three years. The number of interviews refers to the first interview wave.

In *catering*, low-skilled workers primarily work backstage as ‘kitchen helps’: they clear tables, put dishes in dishwashers, store clean dishes and they assist the trained cooks in preparing ingredients and arranging food on plates. They mostly perform manual routine activities. The work of preparing dishes is divided into highly specialised and hierarchic functions. ‘The chef reads out the order and then plates are prepared, and everybody has his own part which he has to put on the plate’, an HR manager tells us. Before being served, each plate is checked by the chef. However, low-skilled employees work as waiters, too. This job implies more discretion and a broader variety of tasks, such as preparing one’s serving station (bread, cutlery, napkins) depending on the expected number of guests, taking orders and communicating with customers. It also includes cognitive requirements, as waitresses need to have some knowledge about the menu, ingredients and allergens and they must add bills, calculate change or handle electronic cash registers.

In *retailing*, the jobs performed by low-skilled workers are diverse, too. In large stores, they are mostly employed for routine tasks, such as stocking shelves or operating the till. In smaller stores, low-skilled workers are responsible for almost anything related to running the store: cleaning and tidying, taking delivery of the goods, preparing stock, presenting goods on the shop floor, serving customers and explaining them the products. They perform thus not only what Pettinger (2004) calls routine service but also the more complex personal service. Besides manual and interactive activities, the job includes administrative tasks, such as ordering goods, settling daily takings and depositing them in the bank at the end of the day.

In the *construction* sector, low-skilled workers start in the function of a ‘handyman’. Since heavy physical labour performed with ‘shovel and pick’, has mostly been replaced by machines, as an HR manager explains, they mainly ‘clean up and carry stuff’. Autonomous decision-making and cognitive requirements are rather restricted in this job. However, it is common that after some years of experience or after having attended a course, workers are charged with more demanding tasks, such as formwork or operating machines. It is not unusual that low-skilled workers move up to the position of a general foreman.

In *industrial production*, low-skilled workers are mostly employed in manual routine jobs. They pack goods, wash and prepare food at the assembly line and they are charged with re-filling material in machines. Task discretion and overall cognitive requirements are limited, although some companies have implemented teamwork and digital devices as means of work

coordination or charge low-skilled workers with quality control. Moreover, in most of the industrial companies of our sample, some low-skilled employees work in the higher-level function of machine operator.

In the cleaning sector, the range of activities of low-skilled workers is very narrow. Most of them are employed in so-called ‘maintenance cleaning’. According to the widespread ‘district system’ (Hieming et al. 2005, 115) workers always clean the same rooms following a standardised plan. Their job is thus very repetitive and does not imply any discretion. A regional manager of a large cleaning company describes the activities performed by a maintenance cleaner in detail:

She prepares her cart. She checks if she has the right cloths. We work with four colours. The red cloth and the red detergent are for toilets. The yellow detergent and cloth are for mirrors and glass. Blue is for surfaces and green for kitchen areas. [...] Then she has a cleaning plan. It is a very simple plan. It has, activity, for example, vacuum-cleaning floor, cleaning table, cleaning cornices, maybe removing cobwebs, and then it has Monday until Friday, and then you have a cross for Monday and Wednesday and so she sees for every day what she must do [...] When she is done, she goes down to the cleaning room, she checks if she has enough detergent, cleans her equipment, disassembles the vacuum cleaner and so on. And then she signs that she has performed her tasks today according to the plan.

Compared to shop assistants or waiters, the contact with customers is very limited in cleaning, unless workers are promoted to the position of an ‘object manager’. In this function, they supervise a team of cleaners and they are responsible for contacts with customers (Benelli 2011).

Explaining why they hire low-skilled workers, the interviewed managers refer to two main arguments. First, they argue that some of these jobs are ‘auxiliary’ tasks, i.e. jobs that were created to assist other functions. The job of a handyman on a construction site, for example, consists in being at the foreman’s disposition. Kitchen helps relieve the skilled cooks from the lengthy and painstaking task of cutting large amounts of vegetables and retail workers who replenish shelves and operate tills enable the self-service of customers (Pettinger 2006). The classification of these tasks as auxiliary mirrors the low valuation of the included activities. ‘Auxiliary’ jobs contain tasks that rank low regarding social prestige. Many of them involve cleaning activities. Moreover, they are considered as simple because they mostly consist of

manual routine tasks that can be performed without technical knowledge. At least, the required skills have not been formalised – there is no corresponding training in the vocational education system. Based on this evaluation, wages in these jobs are low.

The *formatting* of auxiliary tasks as *distinct jobs* is typical of a work organization which is based on a strong division of labour and hierarchy. Given the lower labour costs for low-skilled workers, it can be part of a cost-saving production model and employment strategy. The HR manager of a large catering business explains:

When we look for a kitchen help or something, then there is actually almost nobody with training, but as a matter of fact, we do not look for anyone with training. First, because of the wage, and second, we made the experience that nobody with training wants to work as kitchen help.

Referring to the labour supply and the skill level of the available workforce on the one hand, the HR manager makes clear that on the other hand, the lower pay is the central reason for hiring low-skilled workers in this job. This employment strategy is based on the format of work coordination: instead of integrating the tasks of a kitchen help into the job profiles of a skilled cook or waitress, they are constituted as distinct jobs. This implies a strong operational division of labour. In manufacturing, the lower labour costs for low-skilled workers can be a decisive factor in the design of the production process, especially regarding the degree of automation. While there are still tasks that cannot be automated without producing too much waste, like for example the filleting of oranges and limes, in other cases, the labour of low-skilled workers is simply cheaper compared to the alternative of automation:

People standing at the machine, putting toothbrushes in boxes, people who fill the machine with toothbrushes, you could automate everything, that's no question. But depending on the batch size³, it isn't profitable. And because of that, we will always need people doing manual work. (HR manager of consumer goods manufacturer)

Since machines must be rebuilt depending on orders, automation only pays off for large quantities (Abel et al. 2014, 73, 190-198). Work coordination is thus not determined by the available technologies, but also by employment strategies which in turn are influenced by the availability of cheap labour (Wickham 2011, 236). By formatting auxiliary tasks into distinct jobs instead of integrating them in the job profiles of skilled workers or automating them, the

³ The batch size is the amount produced at a time without stopping the production process.

employment of low-skilled workers can thus be an integral part of the companies' production models.

The second argument managers bring forward in order to explain the employment of low-skilled workers is the *shortage of skilled workers*. In this case, the employment of untrained workers is not embedded in a specific production model, but rather appears as a makeshift solution given the lack of trained applicants for jobs where apprenticeships exist, such as waitresses, sales assistants or masons. The lack of skilled workers on the labour market is reported in several industries. The skills shortage is often explained by the decreasing attractiveness of an apprenticeship, for example of manual work compared to white collar work: 'Many just want to be in the office and not outdoors on the construction site anymore', an HR manager of a construction company says. The devaluation of some occupations in the service sector has been driven by the extension of opening hours, the increasing share of part time jobs and declining wages (Bosch and Weinkopf 2011, 182; Cianferoni 2019). Accordingly, the HR manager of a retail company explained that 'finding qualified workers for a part time job *with training* is a lot more difficult'. The devaluation of apprenticeships and occupations thus creates job opportunities for low-skilled workers.

Accepting low-skilled job applicants for positions where formal degrees could be required is a common practice in industries with persisting skills shortage and can thus become part of a company's employment strategy. The more common this practice, the more *blurred the boundaries between low-skilled and skilled jobs* become. Especially in industrial production and the construction sector, firms use their low-skilled employees in entry-level jobs as recruitment pool for skilled positions. The production manager of a plastic manufacturing company explains:

The market is not huge. We have employees in packaging that we notice, they are good. We might promote them a little. We've taken some of them in the machine hall and started an internal training. And we've trained them as machine operators. And now they work as machine operators.

As this statement illustrates, there exist internal labour markets for low-skilled workers too. While in general, companies' support of further training courses is particularly low among low-skilled workers (Wotschack and Solga 2014; Wotschack 2017), the companies in our sample selectively invest in the training of low-skilled workers to meet their needs of skilled labour. Recruiting internal employees from entry-level jobs for skilled and supervising positions also

allows to *use their implicit operational knowledge* and to benefit from the authority that some long-standing workers enjoy among their colleagues.

The use of low-skilled workers in skilled position raises questions about the *recognition of practical skills and experience*. In the construction sector, the recognition of practical experience is institutionalised in the form of a nationally binding collective bargaining agreement, granting workers with a certain level of work experience the right to a higher wage category. Moreover, the industrial relations organisations have been investing in an extensive education programme for workers without vocational training in order to address the increasing skills shortage. In the absence of such formats that guarantee the valorisation and development of practical skills, the employment of low-skilled workers can also reinforce the process of devaluation of professional skills in an occupation. In the retail industry, the increasing presence of low-skilled workers contributes to the process of dequalification (Demazière and Marchal 2018, 23). In our data, their employment is often commented with the statement that non-professional knowledge and competences count at least as much as professional skills (Hilf et al. 2018, also see 4).

Having become part of a firm's employment strategy, the systematic use of low-skilled labour can entail specific *investments in the forms of work organisation*. Several form investments in our data aim at the simplification of communication, because a large part of the low-skilled workers are migrants with limited command of the local language.⁴ A manufacturing company, for example, installed touch screens at the assembly line that show visual symbols such as laughing or crying smileys and numbers in the colours green, orange or red in order to inform workers about the accuracy of working steps and about the status of the whole production process. For instance, if a symbol is showed in red, it means that a machine is not running properly anymore and that the shift supervisor must be notified. Colours as means of codified communication are also used in cleaning companies, for instance the standardised colours of cleaning cloths mentioned above or the 'parrot plan' to instruct workers about the work schedule. The rooms and areas to be cleaned on a given day of the week are marked with colour schemes that can be understood without reading skills in the local language. Other companies also use linguistically homogenous teams who can speak their own languages as a principle to overcome difficulties in communication.

⁴ In Switzerland, they count as 'unskilled' although they might have a formal education certificate from their home country. In many cases, foreign certificates are not recognised as equal to Swiss qualifications.

4. Low-skilled and (de)valued

The jobs for low-skilled workers described by the firms of our sample cover a range from shovelling earth on a construction site to explaining customers the origins of the food on their plates in a restaurant or calculating personalised discounts in a department store. Employers tend to ignore these differences with the sweeping statement that ‘everybody could do this’. If a job is so simple that it is *within everybody’s reach*, then those doing the job are *interchangeable*. Consequently, it would not matter who is doing those ‘unskilled’ jobs and firms might as well draw lots for them. This is obviously not what happens. If probed a little further, employers do elaborate on the skills needed for these ‘simple’ jobs and on the individual differences between basically interchangeable workers. Firms therefore still have to specify worker quality, albeit below the level of formal qualification, and they must select individuals possessing the required qualities out of an undistinguished mass of low-skilled workers (Demazière and Marchal 2018). Beyond the moment of selecting workers, qualities are also tested recurrently through informal observation on the job and formal performance assessments. In the recruitment process assessment is often implicit: managers refer to their ‘gut feeling’ to explain that a candidate is just right for the job (Hassler et al. 2019; Imdorf 2010). Nevertheless, this gut feeling is based on the observation of a worker’s actual performance during a trial period of varying duration before employment, which is a common practice in low-skilled jobs (Hassler et al. 2019; Hieming et al. 2005; Marchal and Rieucan 2010). Moreover, some firms of our sample use standardised checklists for the assessment of the trial day, by which the recruiters’ intuition is controlled to a certain degree. Likewise, performance assessment during employment is a blend of the day-to-day informal observation by supervisors and yearly formal employee assessments, where the responsible supervisor typically checks, ‘has he performed quantitatively, performed qualitatively and are our values there’, as the HR manager of a large catering firm describes the logic of the evaluation.⁵

In public and scientific discourses on changing demands in the labour market, non-formalised skills are discussed under the label of key competencies (e.g. OECD 2019). Key competencies are supposed to be necessary and useful in any occupation, but especially important for those who lack formal knowledge and training. At the bottom of the labour market, the idea of key

⁵ A few firms of our sample do not use formal performance appraisals in low-skilled entry-level functions.

competencies is toned down to ‘basic competencies in the workplace’. Basic competencies comprise the same areas as key competency frameworks, but on a lower level: oral and written communication, numeracy, digital literacy, and various social competencies enabling teamwork and the like. The language of key or basic competencies does not appear in our interviews but to some degree it is recognisable in the description of the valuable worker. Yet, managers and supervisors emphasise different skills and expect much lower competence levels than political and educational discourses would have it. While the qualities of a ‘good’ worker in low-skilled jobs vary with industry, job, and work organisation two features stand out in all five industries selected for our study: *fitness and fitting in*.

Physical fitness is hardly ever mentioned in discourses of technological change and labour market transformation. Rather, discussions about digitalisation or automation are mostly ‘disembodied’: they focus on the replacement of manual jobs by technology and on the increasing level of cognitive skills that workers need (Aepli et al. 2017; Nathani et al. 2017; OECD 2016). However, in the remaining jobs at the bottom of the labour market fitness in terms of strength, stamina and overall physical health is still crucial, because workers lift heavy weights, they stand and walk for hours, they work night shifts etc. (Hassler et al. 2019; Hieming et al. 2005; Krenn et al. 2014; Tranchant 2018). Both, the fit body and fitting in socially, take on contextually different forms. In manual jobs in construction, manufacturing and cleaning, *physical fitness* comes in the shape of sheer bodily strength and robustness, or as dexterity. Robustness is assessed by an informal inspection of the body: recruiters look at the hands, posture, build etc. to estimate the worker’s suitability for the job:

Well we don’t say show us 20 push ups ((laughs)). But sometimes you see people and you’d think they’ll never make it. ... We wouldn’t take on a woman, who’s 165 [cm] ... and rail thin to hang up salami. For this job we do need a man. (HR manager, meat factory)

In addition to physical strength, the good worker also possesses a certain mental hardiness. The ideal construction worker, for example, must be able to endure changing weather conditions and the bodily pain of a long workday’s exertion. ‘You must be a robust person, you can’t ache all the time’, a manager stated.⁶ Apart from the informal impression that a worker is physically suited for the job, firms are legally obliged to arrange (recurrent) formal medical tests for

⁶ Robustness and strength are gendered insofar employers have a male or female body in mind for jobs that are themselves gendered. However, the physical demands do not stem from the job per se. Rather, Sardadvar et al. (2015) argue, the gender-typing of the job influences whether it is perceived as physically demanding, hence requiring the quality of robustness. Dexterity is likewise gendered, namely as a female quality.

certain jobs, e.g. if the work organisation involves regular nightshifts. While physical fitness and health are obvious aspects of worker quality in manual jobs, it is an issue in service jobs too: in catering and retailing workers also lift goods, they unpack and process stock, clean shops and tables, are on their feet all day and even though they do not work nightshifts, the irregular working hours are mentioned as an additional stress that worker must be able to cope with (Hieming et al. 2006; Monchâtre 2018; Pettinger 2006). For tasks that cannot be automated in a profitable way physical fitness is thus an indispensable quality: the worker's well-functioning body takes the place of the machine to ensure the smooth coordination of production.

Fitting in pertains to social skills, but not so much to the isolated, learnable skills listed in catalogues of key competencies. Rather, fitting in is a matter of attitude: the willingness and ability to adapt to the demands of the firm and the team. Essentially it means *to know one's place within the social order of the firm*, which includes docility (Tranchant 2018, 126) and accepting the given employment conditions (Smith and Neuwirth 2009; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Workers should show a well-balanced blend of adaptation and self-determination, as the HR manager of a restaurant chain said: 'We don't want someone who just does what he's told but who thinks independently ... but a lot is already given'. Fitting in encompasses general virtues like punctuality, reliability, precision and flexibility regarding working hours, shifts and tasks on the one hand; on the other hand, contextually specific requirements. On the most basic level, in the absence of specific qualifications the *willingness to work hard* is the foremost distinguishing characteristic of the valuable low-skilled worker in all the industries of our sample. This attitude expresses itself in the often-used phrase of 'seeing the work', i.e. in carrying out necessary tasks without and beyond explicit orders. As Kleemann et al. (2019, 182) note, even in middle- and low-skilled jobs subjectivation is used as a functional resource to increase productivity. The worker who 'is proud to be kitchen help at [the firm]', a restaurant manager explains, 'goes the extra mile, is happier, healthier, less absent from work, and, yeah, more productive'. In other words, it is the productivity-enhancing subjective identification with the job and the particular company – the enthusiasm and loyalty of the happy kitchen help – that constitutes the value of the low-skilled worker.

Fitting in through subjectivation is even more important in interactive service jobs: especially salespersons are expected to *actively project their identification with the firm and the products*

they are selling. For the manager of a low-end retail chain the lack of formal qualification does not matter, if the salesperson feels and demonstrates ‘passion’ and regards the firm as ‘an extremely cool brand’. When firms look for this kind of intense personal identification, they appeal to salespersons as ‘worker-consumers’ who bring their extra-occupational enthusiasm for and knowledge of particular goods and brands to the job (Nickson et al. 2017, 698). The phenomenon of the worker-consumer has been described for upscale retail stores, where employers exploit personal identification to attract middle-class workers to jobs with poor employment conditions (Williams and Connell 2010), but we also find it in the low- to mid-scale shops of our sample. The following quote of a department store HR manager points to another use of the worker-consumer:

If we take the fashion department, if a fashion-conscious lady or gentleman ... you feel, she has a flair, they know what they can put together for you, what type you are. You can have that without formal training in fashion. Beauty is the same: if someone never leaves the house without make up or invests a lot of money in cosmetics, then she can sell that just as well as someone with training.

The ‘flair’ of the worker-consumer fuels her passion for the job and at the same time compensates for the lack of vocational training. The privatisation of skills – the fact that she acquired her competence informally in her private life – in turn makes her a cheaper worker. In the above quote it remains implicit that the fashion and beauty conscious salesperson uses her flair not only to persuade customers but also employs it for the aesthetic labour of embodying the products and brands she sells (Nickson et al. 2017; Pettinger 2006). The *quality of embodying the firm* is deemed important in waitressing too (Monchâtre 2018), where the waiter or waitress should match the target customers of a restaurant with respect to age or style. The interviewed managers in the catering industry also regard some vital skills like a flair for selling or friendliness as innate traits which cannot be trained. ‘You can learn everything else’, the HR manager of a large catering firm declares, ‘but you cannot learn friendliness’.

In interactive service jobs so-called soft skills like friendliness and situationally appropriate demeanour at the same time constitute *technical skills* in that they are indispensable for the core task of the respective jobs (Pettinger 2006). Nevertheless, as the examples of sales flair, friendliness or product knowledge show employers tend to discount such vital competencies as personal traits and incidental knowledge. The same *contradiction between demanding certain qualities and denying their occupational nature* applies to more obviously technical

skills like numeracy or the ability to handle machines and digital technology. Digital literacy, for example, is simply taken for granted. In the key competencies-discourse digital skills are regarded as crucial for employability and the digital illiteracy of the low-educated is presented as a pressing educational problem (Aeppli et al. 2017; OECD 2015). In contrast, the firms of our sample stress that ‘we have employees who don’t speak German well and who don’t have a diploma, but we don’t have stupid workers’ (HR manager of a cleaning company). He and the vast majority of the interviewed firms argue that the digital technologies used in low-skilled jobs (tablets, touchscreens, handheld product scanners) are not more sophisticated than the smartphones and other electronic devices most people use in private life anyway.⁷ With this argument a category of required skills is again reinterpreted as a privately acquired matter-of-course competence. On the other hand, managers see digital skills as a generational issue and believe eventual problems will fade away naturally with younger digital natives entering the labour market. Until then, eventual deficits are tackled by simplifying the technology (see 3.) or by relying on the self-organisation of teams, as the manager of a consumer goods factory explains: ‘If there are five people at a machine and one is maybe sixty and has respect for [using a tablet] then the 22-year-old does it and she does it in a completely natural way’. In this case one worker’s uneasiness with digital technology is unproblematic as long as another team member can step in. From the manager’s point of view the lack of skills of the individual worker is irrelevant, if the team as a whole can guarantee the smooth operation of production. Thus, the essentialisation and privatisation of skills creates the *interchangeability of workers* which in turn disqualifies them as lacking distinguishing occupational qualities.⁸

The interchangeability of workers is in tension with the requirement of *loyalty*. Loyalty to the company is an important quality which firms try to gauge in the recruitment process, as the manager of a retail chain explains: ‘If you check the CV you want someone who has been longstanding somewhere so we will also have them for many years’. Too many job changes are a signal for low quality: either for poor performance or for a tendency to disloyalty. The

⁷ Digitalisation does, however, exacerbate the issue of literacy and proficiency in the local language, because the technology necessitates some reading skills to understand task menus and instructions. For both, digital and language skills requirements, there is a clear difference between the jobs at the very bottom and jobs that are just one rung higher on the ladder. For entry-level jobs outside interactive service work the expected skill level is very low whereas workers with special tasks (e.g. machine operator) or supervising functions need to be able to read and communicate in German – partly, to be able to follow the necessary training courses for the higher-level job.

⁸ Interchangeability is mentioned by some firms in a positive way as ‘polyvalence’: the ability to perform diverse tasks. Yet, sociologists argue that polyvalence adds to disqualification because workers cannot develop special skills and because it is not recognised as a skill in its own right (Cianferoni 2019; Demazière and Marchal 2018; Tranchant 2018).

loyalty of workers guarantees a stable core workforce, which allows the use of the workers' practical knowledge honed in years of experience on the job as well as profiting from well-functioning teams (Abel et al. 2014; Hassler et al. 2019; Krenn et al. 2014). Except for the catering industry where high staff turnover is prevalent, the firms of our sample claim that a high percentage of their workers 'stay forever', i.e. for many years or decades. On the other hand, firms are interested in flexible employment to adapt to fluctuations in production. Hence, temporary work is widespread, especially in the construction and manufacturing firms of our sample where workers are hired almost exclusively through temporary staffing agencies. In addition to the advantages of flexibilization, temporary employment also provides a convenient practical test of the quality of the worker (Promberger 2012; Tranchant 2018). 'If it doesn't match, the temporary agency has to supply more people', remarks the manager of a food processing factory. In this way, workers can be returned on short notice like defective parts of a machine. The interchangeability of workers is thus a necessary condition for this kind of flexible use of a temporary workforce. Yet, there is also an element of stability and loyalty within the flexible employment of interchangeable workers. First, 'good' temporary workers may be transferred to regular employment.⁹ Second, the firms often take on the same temporary workers during peak production periods for years. Because these workers have proved themselves and are already familiar with the tasks and work organisation, there are no costs for initial training. In this way, the respective workers stand out from the indistinguishable pool of low-skilled labour and become valuable in a specific context.

5. Conclusions

Low-skilled jobs are on the decline without vanishing completely and workers without formal qualifications have become a small minority within the labour force. They bear considerable risks and penalties like unemployment, low pay and the social stigma of being 'unskilled' and unfit for more than 'simple' jobs. Yet, to a certain degree they are still in demand and – as we observe for our interview sample of low-skilled worker – some of them have surprisingly stable employment trajectories or even experience modest occupational advancement. This chapter examined the relation between low-skilled jobs and workers from the EC/SC-perspective of

⁹ Only one manufacturing company of our sample does not offer permanent employment to low-skilled workers at all. The other firms use varying combinations of temporary workers alongside permanent employment contracts. Thus, we find a segmentation within the already peripheral labour market segment of low-skilled jobs (Köhler et al. 2017).

valorisation and asked on what grounds firms value workers without occupational qualifications. Our findings show that low-skilled workers can be *employable despite (or because of) the lack formal qualifications* and some of the key competencies deemed essential in discourses on the transformation of the labour market. In the eyes of employers, the important issue is the fit of the whole workforce with the firm's specific coordination of production which, in turn, is subject to change according to the availability of suitable labour.

The match between worker and work organisation is both technical in terms of skills and productivity and social in terms of adapting to the firm as a community. Workers are judged for what they are able to do and for who they are. On the whole, their value rests on a *compromise between the interchangeability* of a nondescript category of workers lacking formal qualification or individual distinction *and the stability of a loyal workforce* with particular qualities that match the work organisation and company culture of a specific firm. The good low-skilled worker fits the coordination of production like the cog in the wheel by supplying mostly physical capacities wherever it is not profitable or feasible to replace humans by machines, or where skilled workers are hard to find. In other words, workers are valuable within the rationalities of the market and the industrial convention. According to market logic the disadvantage of the worker – the low wage justified by the lack of qualification – is attractive for firms deliberately looking for low-skilled workers as cheap labour. Routine, mostly manual and cognitively undemanding tasks are split off from skilled jobs and formatted as distinct 'simple' jobs for 'everybody'. Workers in these jobs are then also valued according to the logic of the industrial convention for their '*capacity to ensure normal operations*' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 204) by performing the basic tasks that keep production running. Insofar the distinguishing feature of the individual low-skilled worker is fitting into the social order of the firm by proving motivation, identification, loyalty and the right blend of personal initiative and following orders, value is also constituted according to the domestic convention. However, we find a segmentation of the low-skilled workforce: a growing number of temporary workers is not admitted to stable membership in the company community, thus not only excluded from statutory rights of stable employment (Tranchant 2018) but also from the implicit moral obligations of employers for their staff beyond the work contract. Nevertheless, loyalty is still valued outside permanent membership: the fact that firms regularly re-employ the same temporary workers points to a compromise between market, industrial and domestic convention. Recurrent temporary employment ensures a pool of loyal, tried and tested

workers who are available and fully functioning ‘just on time’ whenever they are needed without causing costs while they are not.

The political and academic discourse on employability in face of the rapidly changing world of work is very much future-oriented: the emphasis is on estimating trends in labour and skills demand and on policies to ensure the supply of employable labour. At the same time, political and academic discussions on employability tend to put a ‘singular focus on the individual and what might be termed their “employability skills”’ (Mc Quaid and Colin 2005, 205). In contrast, the firms of our sample are primarily concerned with the present and evaluate workers with regard to their *collective* workforce, within the context of the *current requirements of the work organisation*. As we have seen, individual deficits, e.g. regarding language or digital skills may be compensated to a certain degree by the combined capacities of the team.¹⁰ Moreover, for some jobs firms cannot just replace less skilled individuals with higher skilled ones because workers with formal qualifications would not accept these low-paid ‘simple’ jobs. Rather, employers use makeshift solutions to work around pervasive problems like e.g. the low German language proficiency of a largely migrant workforce. They count on the collective capacities of teams – sometimes deliberately composing teams to that end, e.g. linguistically homogenous teams. And they integrate cognitive requirements into technology so tools and machines can be handled with a minimum of technical, language or digital skills. In this way, the *format of the coordination of production is altered* to make jobs ‘simple’ and to adapt to the qualities of the available workforce. The other way around, in industries with a pronounced skills shortage low-skilled workers are sometimes promoted to positions which are usually occupied by qualified workers. Both observations demonstrate that there are neither clear demarcations between ‘unskilled’ and skilled jobs nor between ‘unskilled’ and skilled workers.

While the formats of production may be transformed in response to labour supply by creating simple jobs, firms are careful *not to format valuable competencies as qualifications*. As shown, some skills are not acknowledged as occupational qualification even though they are deemed essential for the job. Rather, they are naturalised as innate personal traits or privatised as taken-for-granted basic knowledge that ‘everybody’ can transfer from private life to the workplace. Although they have a value for firms and job applicants are screened for these skills, such

¹⁰ Compensation is not tolerated for limited individual physical fitness, however (Nadai et al. 2021, in press).

seemingly extra-occupational qualities are not valorised in monetary terms or recognised as professional qualification. Competencies that are immediately useful for production may be trained on the job or with short courses, yet this kind of skills enhancement is rarely formatted by means of certificates, job titles and occupational classifications. It can help the occupational advancement of individual workers within a particular firm, but it does not alter the distinction between qualified and unqualified workers and jobs. Workers without formal vocational training may be employable but they remain disqualified as ‘unskilled’.

References

- Abel, Jörg, Hartmut Hirsch-Kreinsen, and Peter Ittermann. 2014. *Einfacharbeit in der Industrie. Strukturen, Verbreitung und Perspektiven*. Berlin: edition sigma.
- Acker, Joan. 1990. Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies. A Theory of Gendered Organizations. *Gender and Society*, 4(2): 139-158.
- Aepli, Manuel, Vanessa Angst, Rolf Iten, Hansruedi Kaiser, Isabelle Lüthi, and Jürg Schweri. 2017. *Die Entwicklung der Kompetenzanforderungen auf dem Arbeitsmarkt im Zuge der Digitalisierung*. Bern: SECO.
- Atzmüller, Roland, Stefanie Hürtgen, and Manfred Krenn. 2015. *Die zeitgemäße Arbeitskraft. Qualifiziert, aktiviert, polarisiert*. Weinheim/Basel: Beltz Juventa.
- Benelli, Natalie. 2011. *Nettoyeuse: comment tenir le coup dans un sale boulot*. Zürich: Seismo.
- Bessy, Christian, and Pierre-Marie Chauvin. 2013. The Power of Market Intermediaries: From Information to Valuation Processes. *Valuation Studies*, 1(1): 83-117.
- Bessy, Christian, François Eymard-Duvernay, Guillemette de Larquier, and Emanuelle Marchal. 1999. Les institutions du recrutement. Approche comparative France/Grande Bretagne. *Centre d'Etudes de l'Emploi, La Lettre Nr. 60*: 1-10. <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02137462/document> (accessed June 15, 2020).
- BFS (Bundesamt für Statistik). 2020. *Höchste abgeschlossene Ausbildung in der Schweiz*. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/bildung-wissenschaft/bildungsstand.assetdetail.11627129.html> (accessed July 2, 2020).
- Bolli, Thomas, Christoph Breier, Ursula Renold, and Michael Siegenthaler. 2015. Für wen erhöhte sich das Risiko in der Schweiz, arbeitslos zu werden? *KOF-Studien, No. 65*: 1-82.
- Boltanski, Luc, and Laurent Thévenot. 2006. *On justification: economies of worth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Boltanski, Luc, and Laurent Thévenot. 2011. Die Soziologie der kritischen Kompetenzen. In Rainer Diaz-Bone (Ed.), *Soziologie der Konventionen. Grundlagen einer pragmatischen Anthropologie*. 43-68. Frankfurt am Main: Campus.
- Bosch, Gerhard, and Claudia Weinkopf. 2011. „Einfacharbeit“ im Dienstleistungssektor. *Arbeit*, 20(3): 173-187.

- Bourguignon, Annick, and Eve Chiapello. 2005. The role of criticism in the dynamics of performance evaluation systems. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 16(6): 665-700.
- Cianferoni, Nicola. 2019. *Travailler dans la grande distribution: La journée de travail va-t-elle redevenir une question sociale?* Zürich und Genf: Seismo.
- Crettaz, Eric. 2018. Working Poor in der Schweiz: Ausmass und Mechanismen. *Social Change in Switzerland*, N°15. https://www.socialchangeswitzerland.ch/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Crettaz_Working_Poor_Ausmass_Mechanismen_Sept2018.pdf (accessed September 12, 2018).
- Demazière, Didier, and Emmanuelle Marchal. 2018. La fabrication du travail non qualifié. *Travail et emploi*, 155-156(3): 5-30.
- Diaz-Bone, Rainer. 2018. *Die "Economie des conventions": Grundlagen und Entwicklungen der neuen französischen Wirtschaftssoziologie* (2 ed.). Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.
- Eymard-Duvernay, François. 2012. Du chômage keynésien au chômage d'exclusion. In François Eymard-Duvernay (Ed.), *Epreuves d'évaluation et chômage*. 9-46. Toulouse: Octarès Editions.
- Eymard-Duvernay, François, and Emmanuelle Marchal. 1997. *Façons de recruter: le jugement des compétences sur le marché du travail*. Paris: Éditions Métailié.
- Gesthuizen, Maurice, Heike Solga, and Ralf Künster. 2011. Context Matters: Economic Marginalization of Low-Educated Workers in Cross-National Perspective. *European Sociological Review*, 27(2): 264–280.
- Hassler, Benedikt, Lea Widmer, Thomas Geisen, Nathalie Amstutz, Nico Scheidegger, and Nadine Wenger. 2019. Arbeitsplätze ohne formale Qualifikationsanforderungen in der Schweiz. Rekrutierungsstrategien von Unternehmen und deren sozialpolitische Bedeutung. *Zeitschrift für Sozialreform*, 65(2): 147–174.
- Hieming, Bettina, Karen Jaehrling, Thorsten Klaina, Achim Vanselow, and Claudia Weinkopf. 2005. *Stellenbesetzung im Bereich „einfacher“ Dienstleistungen. Abschlussbericht einer Studie im Auftrag des Bundesministeriums für Wirtschaft und Arbeit, BMWA-Dokumentation Nr. 550*. Berlin: BMWA.
- Hieming, Bettina, Karen Jaehrling, Thorsten Klaina, Achim Vanselow, and Claudia Weinkopf. 2006. Der Arbeitsmarkt für „einfache“ Dienstleistungstätigkeiten – Beschäftigungschancen für gering Qualifizierte? *Sozialer Fortschritt*, 55(8): 208-214.
- Hilf, Ellen, Heike Jacobsen, Bärbel Meschkutat, and Katja Pohlheim. 2018. Berufsfachlichkeit im Einzelhandel – eine umkämpfte Ressource. *Arbeits- und Industriesoziologische Studien*, 11(1): 60-75.
- Holtgrewe, Ursula. 2015. Einfachdienstleistungen in der Fläche - die Unterseite der Tertiarisierung: Dienstleistungsgestaltung und -politik in schwierigem Gelände. *Arbeits- und Industriesoziologische Studien*, 8(1): 5-20.
- Hürtgen, Stefanie. 2015. Qualifizierung und Polarisierung im transnationalen Raum der Lohnarbeit. Die zeitgemäß (un-)qualifizierte Arbeitskraft als betrieblich und gesellschaftlich konstruiertes Herrschaftsverhältnis. In Roland Atzmüller, Stefanie Hürtgen, and Manfred Krenn (Eds.), *Die zeitgemäße Arbeitskraft. Qualifiziert, aktiviert, polarisiert*. 27-124. Weinheim/Basel: Beltz Juventa.

- Imdorf, Christian. 2010. Emotions in the Hiring Process: How 'Gut Feelings' Rationalize Personnel Selection Decisions. In Barbara Sieben, and Asa Wettergren (Eds.), *Emotionalizing Organizations and Organizing Emotions*. 84-105. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kleemann, Frank, Jule Westerheide, and Ingo Matuschek. 2019. *Arbeit und Subjekt. Aktuelle Debatten der Arbeitssoziologie*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien.
- Köhler, Christian, Stefan Schröder, and Simon Weingärtner. 2017. Arbeitsmärkte. Wirtschaftssoziologische Perspektiven. In Andrea Maurer (Ed.), *Handbuch der Wirtschaftssoziologie*. 275-305. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Kozica, Arjan, and Julia Brandl. 2015. Handling Paradoxical Tensions through Conventions: The Case of Performance Appraisal. *German Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29(1): 49-68.
- Krenn, Manfred. 2015. An- und Ungelernte als Prototypen unzeitgemäßer Arbeitskraft in der "Wissengesellschaft". Stigmatisierung, Marginalisierung, Aktivierung. In Roland Atzmüller, Stefanie Hürtgen, and Manfred Krenn (Eds.), *Die zeitgemäße Arbeitskraft. Qualifiziert, aktiviert, polarisiert*. 125-194. Weinheim/Basel: Beltz Juventa.
- Krenn, Manfred, Ulrike Papouschek, and August Gächter. 2014. *Die Verbesserung der Erwerbschancen gering Qualifizierter durch lernförderliche Gestaltung einfacher Arbeit*. Wien: FORBA Forschungs- und Beratungsstelle Arbeitswelt.
- Larquier, Guillemette de. 2016. *Une approche conventionnaliste du marché du travail fondée sur le recrutement des entreprises*. Paris: Université de Paris Ouest-Nanterre La Défense. <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-01423201> (accessed January 12, 2017).
- Larquier, Guillemette de, and Emanuelle Marchal. 2016. Does the formalization of practices enhance equal hiring opportunities? An analysis of a French nation-wide employer survey. *Socio-Economic Review*, 14(3): 567-589.
- Marchal, Emanuelle. 2015. *Les embarras des recruteurs. Enquête sur le marché du travail*. Paris: Editions EHESS.
- Marchal, Emanuelle, and Géraldine Rieucan. 2010. *Le recrutement*. Paris: La Découverte.
- McQuaid, Ronald, and Lindsay Colin. 2005. The concept of employability. *Urban Studies*, 42(2): 197-219.
- Monchâtre, Sylvie. 2018. Embaucher ou habilitier ? Recrutement et espaces de (non-)qualification dans l'hôtellerie-restauration. *Travail et emploi* 155-156(3): 93-114.
- Murphy, Emily, and Daniel Oesch. 2018. Is employment polarisation inevitable? Occupational change in Ireland and Switzerland, 1970–2010. *Work, Employment and Society*, 32(6): 1–19.
- Nadai, Eva, Alan Canonica, Anna Gonon, Fabienne Rotzetter, and Martin Lengwiler. 2019. *Werten und Verwerten. Konventionen der Beschäftigung von Menschen mit Behinderungen in Wirtschaft und Wohlfahrtsstaat*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Nadai, Eva, Anna Gonon, Robin Hübscher, and Anna John. 2021 (in press). The social organization of work incapacity. Incapacities in the Swiss social insurance system and in the workplace. *Historical Social Research*, 46(1)
- Nathani, Carsten, Pino Hellmüller, Corina Rieser, Oliver Hoff, and Sujetha Nesarajah. 2017. *Ursachen und Auswirkungen des Strukturwandels im Schweizer Arbeitsmarkt*. Bern: SECO.

- Nickson, Dennis, Robin Price, Hazel Baxter-Reid, and Scott A. Hurrell. 2017. Skill requirements in retail work: the case of high-end fashion retailing. *Work, Employment and Society*, 31(4): 692–708.
- OECD. 2015. *Adults, Computers and Problem Solving: What's the Problem?* Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. 2016. *Getting Skills Right. Assessing and Anticipating Changing Skill Needs*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. 2019. *The Survey of Adult Skills: Reader's Companion, Third Edition*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Pettinger, Lynne. 2004. Brand Culture and Branded Workers: Service Work and Aesthetic Labour in Fashion Retail. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 7(2): 165-184.
- Pettinger, Lynne. 2006. On the materiality of service work. *The Sociological Review*, 54(1): 48-65.
- Promberger, Markus. 2012. *Topographie der Leiharbeit: Flexibilität und Prekarität einer atypischen Beschäftigungsform*. Berlin: edition sigma.
- Promberger, Markus, Ulrich Wenzel, Sabine Pfeiffer, Anne Hacket, and Andreas Hirseland. 2008. Beschäftigungsfähigkeit, Arbeitsvermögen und Arbeitslosigkeit. *WSI-Mitteilungen*, 61(2): 70-76.
- Salais, Robert. 2001. *A presentation of the French "Economie des conventions"*. Application to labour issues. Paper presented at the Work seminar of the ESCR-Center of Business Research at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00430648> PDF in EC (accessed March 20, 2017).
- Sardadvar, Karin, Angelika Kümmerling, and Darina Peycheva. 2015. Gender-Typing of Low-Wage Work: A Comparative Analysis of Commercial Cleaning in Austria, Domiciliary Elderly Care in Germany and the Waste Sector in Bulgaria. In Ursula Holtgrewe, Vassil Kirov, and Monique Ramioul (Eds.), *Hard Work in New Jobs. The Quality of Work and Life in European Growth Sectors*. 208-230. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Smith, Vicki, and Esther B. Neuwirth. 2009. Temporary Help Agencies and the Making of a New Employment Practice. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(1): 56-72.
- Solga, Heike. 2008. Lack of Training – The Employment Opportunities of Low-Skilled Persons from a Sociological and Micro-economic Perspective. In Karl Ulrich Mayer and Heike Solga (Eds.), *Skill Formation – Interdisciplinary and Cross-National Perspectives*. 173-204. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Thévenot, Laurent. 1984. Rules and implements: investment in forms. *Social Science Information*, 23(1): 1-45.
- Thévenot, Laurent. 2001. Organized complexity. Conventions of coordination and the composition of economic arrangements. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 4(4): 405-425.
- Tranchant, Lucas. 2018. L'intérim de masse comme vecteur de disqualification professionnelle. Le cas des emplois ouvriers de la logistique. *Travail et emploi*, 155-156: 115-140.

- Vallas, Steven Peter. 1990. The Concept of Skill: A Critical Review. *Work and Occupations*, 17(4): 379-398.
- Waldinger, Roger, and Michael I. Lichter. 2003. *How the other half works: Immigration and the social organization of labor*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wickham, James. 2011. Low skill manufacturing work: from skill biased change to technological regression. *Arbeit*, 20(3): 224-238.
- Williams, Christine L., and Catherine Connell. 2010. "Looking Good and Sounding Right": Aesthetic Labor and Social Inequality in the Retail Industry. *Work and Occupations*, 37(3): 349-377.
- Wotschack, Philip. 2017. Unter welchen Bedingungen bilden Betriebe an- und ungelernte Beschäftigte weiter? *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 46(5): 362–380.
- Wotschack, Philip, and Heike Solga. 2014. Betriebliche Weiterbildung für benachteiligte Gruppen. Förderliche Bedingungskonstellationen aus institutionentheoretischer Sicht. *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, 24: 367–395.