

## **Missing in action: Manager and organisational standardisation**

Organisations have a long lasting tradition to see designing of their workflows and business processes as a core managerial task. In an era of organisational standardisation production, and increasingly office work have been central object to standardisation, for which the coordinates and aims are increasingly dominated from outside the organisation: consultants, global players, auditing and certifying processes. Although standardisation is often seen as an impediment to innovation, the unprecedented flow of new product developments is more and more organised by innovation routines which impose bureaucratic structures. Innovation, usually seen as an immanent risky procedure spiked by imponderable situations only highly qualified workers can handle, is tamed by rigid project management and by that tried to make as predictable as accountable.

The proposed contribution will provide thorough empirical insight into different approaches of organisational standardisation focused on innovation work. The results to be presented are based on qualitative case studies, located in two different German industries considered highly innovative: manufacturing and Information Communication Technology (ICT). 90 explorative interviews with employees and management as well as representatives of work councils from six companies, accompanied by various group discussions lay the empirical foundation. It will be outlined how organisational standardisation affects not only the work of employees in R&D but the day-to-day practice of managers, too.

The results will outline how employees – mainly engineers and software developers – feel restricted by organisational standards in their creativity and autonomy of action, and experience their work as extremely ex- and intensified. As managers are not the main designers of work organisation anymore, employees and work councils alike somewhat loose their natural target for complaining and conflict: with organisational standards, the manager as a figure creating work organisation is missing in action. As standardisation processes are triggered mainly by outside actors, in-house manager see themselves as victims, too: forced to introduce and foster organisational standards that reduce their role to bystanders and dutiful maintainer of said standards. Operational managing becomes less about decision making or determining forms of work coordination, task division and job procedures, but more about caring for motivation and team spirit, qualities of work that are thoroughly undermined by organisational standards. While victimised by organisational standards on one hand, managers on the other are their most enthusiastic apologists: each new standard is embraced as means for own career opportunities, and for fighting out intra-organisational quarrels with other departments and/or projects about resources. The presentation first will empirically retrace the day-to-day implications organisational standards in innovation work entail for managers, employees, and work councils. Second, the empirical observations will be theoretically discussed, linked to the labour process debate and to a critical approach of sociology of management. Although other aspects of the underlying research projects have been presented to scientific audience, the outlined results referring to the role and action of management have not been presented or published yet, whether in a national nor an international context.