1. Introduction: makeshift work in a global labour market

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In the contemporary world, labour markets and the everyday lives of work are being radically transformed. The guiding ideals for how labour markets should be organized are strongly influenced by fluctuations in the economy and by the direction of ideological winds. In this way, the labour market represents a good indicator for broader changes occurring in society. In 2007, the collapse of the financial market in the US had repercussions all over the world. Many countries fell into recession, the effects of which were dire and immediate, both in the financial world and in the manufacturing industry. Entire regions across the world were soon faced with the threat of mass unemployment. People who had never before had cause to worry about what it might mean to lose their jobs entered the ranks of the unemployed for the first time. For some, redundancy notices came quickly and seemingly without warning; for others, they were more expected. The crisis hit some parts of society hard, resulting in unemployment levels we had not seen since the beginning of the 1990s. A large part of the world is now getting used to unemployment numbers that were recently seen to be unacceptable.

After this economic slump, the labour market has become a tougher, more competitive place than it has been for many years. Already with the crisis of the 1990s the labour markets of the Western world underwent significant changes and a different labour market emerged. The neoliberal political ideas of free markets, free trade and emphasis on individual entrepreneurial capabilities and skills as an ideal for organizing society and the labour market slowly gained ground (Harvey 2005; Peck 2010). Twenty years later this ideal had become naturalized as a policy formula for solving problems with unemployment and social exclusion in many countries formerly guided by other ideals, such as an active labour market policy with the goal of protection and full employment rather than
workfarism and activation (Daguerre 2007; Larsson, Letell and Thörn 2012; Rogowski, Salais and Whiteside 2012).

The mobility of finance capitalism challenges the capacity of nation states to control transnational corporations by way of political action and legislation. As corporations go global, they are contesting national regulations of workers’ rights and human rights, operating across seemingly liminal regulatory spaces. With the limited capacity of nation states and international institutions to oversee the extent to which globalizing corporations are adhering to legal frameworks, work conditions are increasingly subject to voluntary regulations operating at transnational levels. New regimes of accountability aiming to institute ethics and social responsibility in organizational practice are being circulated globally (see, for example, Dolan and Rajak 2011; Scherer, Palazzo and Matten 2009).

With local economies being increasingly tied to global financial flows, national labour markets are as well drawn into the wider circuits of economic activity. In the words of Harper and Lawson (2003: xvi): ‘There is no greater issue in the current configuration of work than globalization.’ The increased global interconnectedness of markets has had a significant impact on the shaping of national labour markets. As noted by Dicken (2004: 538), ‘a whole set of interconnected processes operates simultaneously to produce the changing map of employment, its reverse image, unemployment, and the increasingly uneven map of income.’ Similarly, as stated by Scholte (2005: 222), ‘[a]ccelerated globalization has affected not only the opportunities of waged employment, but also the conditions of work.’ In a general sense, globalization processes put downward pressures on benefits, wages and safeguards, particularly for unskilled and semi-skilled labour. In the search for new markets and profitable production arrangements, corporations are outsourcing and externalizing their operations across great distances. Globalization moves jobs such as software development, customer services and assembly work to different places in the world depending on proficiency, wage levels and production costs.

Globalization has been a key force in the displacement of Fordist models of work and production and a concomitant decline of the Fordist social contract (Sholte 2000: 222–3). This move places the worker more clearly at the mercy of market demands and fluctuations, and under more fickle labour contracts. This development, Sholte notes, has affected the North particularly strongly, altering expectations of social provisions, benefits, rights and duties of workers. Flexibilization has contributed to the deregulation of the Swedish labour market, and to the advancement of short-term or contingent contracts (see for example Aronsson 2001;
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Furåker, Håkansson and Karlsson 2007; Håkansson, Isidorsson and Kantelius 2013). The advancement of the notion of ‘employability’ (see Garsten and Jacobsson 2004; McQuaid and Lindsay 2005; Peck and Theodore 2000), pushed by large-scale organizations such as the EU and the OECD, has further fuelled flexibilization, through an accent on the capacity and agency of individuals to create their own job opportunities and careers. In a similar way, notions of ‘entrepreneurship’ and ‘lifelong learning’ highlight the readiness for change and for learning-to-learn anew that are deemed necessary in the competitive global labour market (see Weinert et al. 2001). Buzzwords such as these, however fluid and polyvalent, offer a sense of direction to what might otherwise be experienced as the opportunistic and chance-like movements of contemporary capitalism.

Despite its powerful homogenizing force, globalization is not a single unified process or phenomenon, but a complex assemblage of interrelated processes. Globalization does not occur in the same way everywhere. Rather, large-scale processes interact with particular national institutional structures, policies and systems of meaning to articulate quite specific outcomes. In this sense, large-scale economic developments do not involve the stamping of identical imprints across the world, but their outcomes are contingent processes, which depend on their interactions with locally specific circumstances. Accordingly, the world of work is ‘creolized’ in particular ways, reflecting dynamic interactions of global influence and local cultural specificities (cf. Hannerz 1987). We thus need to be wary about generalizing too fervently about the implications of globalization on local or national labour markets and work practices. Whilst national labour markets are undoubtedly becoming increasingly drawn into transnational circuits, there is still a degree to which they are international in character, rather than globalized. National regulatory frameworks, conventions and traditions tend to retain some of their influence. Neoliberal ideals have had different impacts in state politics around the globe, mixing with other ideals and translating differently into differing political and organizational contexts (Bonoli and Natali 2012; Ong 2006).

Still, market-based solutions to labour market policy have influenced the welfare state politics of Sweden and have gained a strong hold as an organizing principle and ideal model for social life. The Swedish welfare state has been increasingly hollowed out and mass unemployment has become a reality in what used to be seen as a model case for a full employment society.¹ Social insurance entitlement levels and services have been reduced and subject to increasing sanctions. This is indicative of an increasingly neoliberal direction in labour market policy. This book
is about the sway of global market ideals and neoliberal politics into the Swedish labour market. It describes how the Swedish labour market is guided by a market- and bureaucratic logic that is manifested in both the organization of the labour market and in the shaping of the human being as an actor in the labour market.

TRANSNATIONAL IDEALS AND LABOUR MARKET MODELLING

In Sweden, and in other parts of the world guided by social-democratic welfare ideals, there has been a reorganization of the public sector from decommodification and removal of services from the market towards market-based solutions (Blomqvist 1996; Brunsson and Hägg 1992) and labour market deregulation (Blomqvist 2004; Garsten 2008). At the same time, social and employment policy in the EU have shifted focus from full employment and social protection towards promotion, activation and social investment (Daguerre 2007, Rogowski, Salais and Whiteside 2012, Larsson, Letell and Thörn 2012). This increased focus on workfare and activation connotes a particular way of governing human beings, replete with assumptions of individual agency, responsibility, and capacity to solve unemployment by the help of personal coaches and individualized incentives to work (Garsten, Hollertz and Jacobsson 2013). Responsibility is removed from the state and placed on the individual.

Depending on one’s viewpoint, these changes may be seen in the light of a ‘social investment perspective’ or a ‘labour market deregulation at the margins’ perspective (Bonoli and Natali 2012). The social investment perspective argues that states have moved away both from the Keynesian ideal and the neoliberal ideal towards a focus on social cohesion with maximized return on social expenditures (OECD 1997; Jenson 2010). It is understood that the best way to maximize return is by investment in children and human capital, and to encourage people to change their paths. Jenson writes: ‘There is now some consensus around descriptions of a shared package of policy design that is child-centred as well as employment friendly, and focused on investment in human capital as well as on breaking the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage’ (2012: 23). In this perspective, focus is placed on the social costs of unemployment benefits and social protection schemes and employment are promoted through, for example, in-work benefits to create incentives to work (Jenson 2012). The labour market deregulation at the margin perspective points towards the divided labour market consisting of core employees and flexible employees, for which the degree of social protection is to the
disadvantage of the latter group (Bergström and Storrie 2003; Garsten 2008). In this perspective, focus is placed on the changes and deregulation of laws and the organization of the labour market, with a view to its human and social implications.

In our view, the social investment perspective does not move away from neoliberal ideals and market-based solutions, as proposed by Jenson. The social investment perspective and the labour market deregulation at the margin perspective both focus on the neoliberal market with its emphasis on cost effectiveness, individual responsibility and deregulation of social protection in the labour market, albeit with very different points of departure. What these two differing perspectives make clear is that there is no convergence towards a neoliberal orthodoxy in any generalized sense of the term (Bonoli and Natali 2012; Scharpf and Schmidt 2000). The Swedish labour market is one example of how these ideals are played out, and how they are intertwined.

AUDIT CULTURES IN THE LABOUR MARKET

At the same time as the market logic works as a guiding principle for how to organize labour markets and labour market policies, they are also permeated by a bureaucratic logic where work practices, employment measures, workers and unemployed alike are classified and made measurable to show performance; by scholars understood as the bureaucratic heart of neoliberalism (Power 1997; Rose and Miller 1992; Shore and Wright 2000). A useful concept pertaining to these processes is the notion of management bureaucracy (Hall 2008). Hall describes management bureaucracy as a way to capture the market and client ideals with the advancement of ‘audit society’ (Power 1997) and increased bureaucratization. Garsten and Jacobsson (2013) argue that these bureaucratic ‘techniques of legibility’ allow for an organizational ‘reading’ and processing of individuals and work practices in the labour market. Through the usage of routines, typologies, diplomas and certifications the strengths and weaknesses of individuals and work processes are made legible, and the bureaucratic apparatus enhances its governing functions. Legibility thus makes individuals and work practices ‘process-able’ (ibid.).

Techniques of legibility are closely related to the bureaucratization processes guiding the audit society (Power 1997) or audit cultures (Strathern 2000a), which entail that both individuals and organizations are becoming subject to increased scrutiny and control. The need for auditing is based on a lack of trust in the process (Power 1997) and a
tendency to place trust in the seeming objectivity and political neutrality of numbers (Strathern 2000a). Indicators are used as instruments to guide and govern. The use of statistics then becomes a way of governing by numbers (Miller 2001). That which is ‘political’ moves from the realm of interests and values into the realm of technologies such as indexes, indicators and statistics.

In audit cultures, the organizing of labour market policy and work practices in public organizations has been dominated by the management techniques of New Public Management (NPM) (Hood 1991; Sahlin-Andersson 2001; Shore and Wright 2000). In its general form, NPM is based on the conception that goals must be set and then evaluated by results, in the form of indicators and statistics, to be able to hold someone accountable. The results are then often ‘benchmarked’, with ‘best practices’ and ‘good examples’ produced and presented. These management techniques derive their direction to a large extent from the management ideal of transparency, of making things or processes visible (see, for example, Garsten and Lindh de Montoya 2008; Hood and Heald 2006).

The notion of ‘transparency’ suggests that regulation may in part be accomplished by way of revelation (Florini 2003). The idea is that by making information about policy-making processes, decision-making, environmental and labour practices or budgets accessible to the public, and to international and transnational organizations, governments and corporations are forced to be accountable and trustworthy. Transparency, then, gives the impression of being all good and neutral. However, there is nothing innocent about the idea of transparency (Strathern 2000b). Much may be hidden behind the ‘veil of transparency’ and what is made transparent is a matter of choice (West and Sanders 2003: 26). Still, the management ideal of transparency works as a regulatory mechanism, giving weight to audit procedures and techniques of legibility in the management of individuals and work practices in the labour market.

**MAKESHIFT WORKERS: EXPECTATIONS AND OBLIGATIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY LABOUR MARKET**

As a consequence of new political ideals, ever more responsibility is placed on individuals to make themselves employable in order to fit the demands of the labour market (Garsten and Jacobsson 2004; Larsson, Letell and Thörn 2012). This applies in particular to people who are
looking for work, but also to those who already have a job. The ideal employee is ‘the enterprising self’ (Miller and Rose 1995), capable of carving out his or her niche in the labour market. People are encouraged to be creative and autonomous, crafters of their own success. Ideally, they should be imaginative and responsible, but also risk-taking, open to change, hard-working, self-reliant, optimistic and self-assured (Heelas 1991; Ho 2009; Martin 1997; Thedvall 2004). Quite simply, the individual is expected to be entrepreneurial. This is thus a different type of idealized citizen than that encouraged in industrial society’s ‘organizational man’ (Whyte 2002). The contemporary ideal is a person who jumps from job to job and welcomes change, who takes responsibility for both her or his work and career, someone who is imaginative, self-assured and optimistic: the flexible and employable person (Barley and Kunda 2001; Garsten 2008; Garsten and Jacobsson 2004).

The norm of the enterprising, entrepreneurial worker goes hand in hand with the notion that people’s knowledge and skills often have a ‘best-before’ date. And the wheels are spinning faster and faster. The average period of employment at each employer is becoming briefer, the ‘best-before’ date of education and training becoming shorter, employment contracts becoming less fixed, project-based employment more common, and career paths less and less standardized (Augustsson and Sandberg 2004; Beck 1992; Bosco 1997; Hansen and Orbán 2002; Sabel and Zeitlin 1997). In today’s work life, learning has also come to be seen as a fixed point of reference from which people can navigate (Raelin 2008, OECD 1996). Since the late 1990s, lifelong learning has outcompeted all other terms in the field to the extent that we can talk about a discursive or policy epidemic (Jarvis 2007; Nicoll 2006). In December 2006, the European Commission and the European Council also issued a recommendation on lifelong learning. The background to this initiative was that the education systems of most of the member countries still targeted young people, the participation of adults in learning and education was not increasing fast enough, and that low-skilled people educated themselves only to a much lesser extent. The EU hereby underlined the importance for member states to create functioning infrastructures for adult learning (European Commission 2000, 2006). In the EU, learning has also come to replace education in many contexts (European Commission 2006). This signals not only a linguistic change, but a different way of thinking, acting and organizing, where focus is placed on people’s capacity for individual learning, rather than on the provisions of the educational system or on the labour market system.

Sweden exemplifies well the wider trends of these ideals as the all-encompassing solution for labour market efficiency.
For the most part of the late twentieth century, the Swedish labour market was guided by ideals of full employment and active labour market policy (cf. Furäker and Blomsterberg 2002; Ohlsson and Olofsson 1998). Historically, these ambitions were articulated in the Swedish model, which combines key economic and political objectives into a shared theoretical framework, within which an active labour market policy plays a decisive role. Active labour market policy in this approach focused on labour market training programmes of the unemployed to fit the demands of the labour market. In this approach, social security was also seen as a precondition for economic development. The community’s acceptance of economic change was thought to be based on employees’ perceptions of enjoying some degree of social security. This is still the case, but the very idea of what social security means has shifted towards more of a makeshift ideology.

This makeshift ideology emphasizes in a nutshell the principle of exchangeability of people. The employment situation is characterized by a continued and constant exchange situation where the performance of employees is continuously under the microscope, and investigated with various performance instruments to ensure and make clear that the exchange takes place in the most economically rational way. As a whole, the new labour market entails a challenge – not only for the unemployed, but also for those who already have jobs. Being employable is today essential, regardless of whether one has a job or not. The exchange process itself has thus come into greater focus for the cadre of organizations that support the Swedish labour market.

The makeshift ideology has particular organizational manifestations. The Public Employment Service in Sweden has, for example, undergone a radical reorganization (for details see Chapter 2). In 1993, the state monopoly on employment services ended and there is now a range of actors other than the state engaging in employment services. These new rules have cleared the way for a brokering market. Temporary staffing agencies in the labour market have grown strong (see, for example, Bergström et al. 2007; Håkansson and Isidorsson 2004; Koene et al. 2014). Coaching firms are another group of private actors that in various ways mediate, or prepare people for employment (Benson 2008). The Swedish state and the Public Employment Services have instead taken on a more controlling role, making sure that the unemployed follow labour market regulations for receiving unemployment benefits.
For the unemployed, labour market policy and regulations have an increased focus on workfare and activation with an enhanced emphasis on matching, supply and demand, and competition rather than labour market training programmes and skills development. Activation in Sweden has, over the last decades, and even more so during the conservative alliance government in the period 2006–2014, shifted towards individualized solutions such as job coaching and the Job and Development Programme (Garsten, Hollertz and Jacobsson 2013). In relation to these changes, the social security of persons has become increasingly connected to their ability to work. Stricter eligibility criteria for unemployment insurance have been introduced, requirements on occupational and geographical mobility increased, participation in active measures no longer qualifies for a new benefit period, a time limit for unemployment insurance has been introduced (300 days; 450 days for parents with children in the household under 18) as well as sanctions for non-acceptance of an assignment to a programme or an ‘appropriate job’ (Bengtsson and Jacobsson 2013; Garsten, Hollertz and Jacobsson 2013). Furthermore, Sweden has implemented strong activation principles, not only in unemployment insurance but also in health insurance, and introduced new requirements in order to qualify for social assistance (Bengtsson and Jacobsson 2013; Björnberg 2012; Garsten, Hollertz and Jacobsson 2013).

The above themes are developed in the chapters of this book, and a number of concrete examples from the labour market in Sweden are given. In Part I, we discuss the changes in the Swedish labour market from an organizational perspective. The focus here is on how the infrastructure for employment services has changed, how governance of today’s employment services differs from that of the past, and how people who work as counsellors, employment officers and career coaches view their task, and how lifelong learning is used as an organizational tool. In Part II of the book, we relate all of this to the perspective of the human being.

A MARKET FOR MEDIATING EMPLOYMENT TAKES SHAPE

In the first part of the book (chapters 2–7), we describe what the market for employment services looks like, the various functions of the different actors, and how these functions differ from one another.

In Chapter 2, Jessica Lindvert describes how government influence over the labour market and employment services has changed. The Public
Employment Service is now only one of many actors in a growing employment services market (though it remains a controlling body for the unemployment insurance fund). The Public Employment Service no longer holds the unique status as an employment agency it used to hold. In today’s labour market, we can distinguish at least four types of employment brokering agencies whose activities are primarily aimed at getting people into employment: a first group is made up of the established government agencies, such as the Public Employment Service and the Social Insurance Agency (Försäkringskassan). A second group comprises staffing agencies and insurance companies, and a third group consists of stakeholders, like union organizations and employer associations that collaborate by way of so-called employment security councils. A fourth group are the in-house actors, consisting of ‘employer rings’ set up between companies or in larger company groups via job exchange centres or transition units (Bäckström 2006).

Another new development is the sorting of jobseekers into different categories, divided up among different employment services actors. For its part, the Public Employment Service increasingly works with jobseekers furthest from the labour market, such as new immigrants, people on long-term sick leave, youths and people with disabilities. This is a part of the Public Employment Service’s political mandate (SFS 2007:1030). On the private side of employment services, agencies tend to specialize in different occupational categories and industries. For example, there are currently staffing firms that specialize in health care, sales and marketing, higher education, or in ethnic and cultural expertise. Here, a market based on a logic of differentiation is emerging, where specialist skills and expertise is considered to facilitate the mediation of employment (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013).

In chapters 3, 4 and 5 we show how the Public Employment Service organizes itself in the employment services market. In Chapter 4, Julia Peralta points out significant differences between the tasks of the placement officers (employment officers) and the counsellors. The division of roles is based on a division between, on the one hand, jobseekers defined as ‘self-reliant’, where the work of the case officer is concentrated on matching jobseekers to employers and, on the other hand, groups defined as problematic, where the activities have to a greater extent to do with activation. The role of the placement officer is to maintain a good reputation outwardly, with employers, companies and society at large. Similarly to how brokers pack and sell products, placement officers work to match ‘suitable’ jobseekers to employers and companies; here, it is a matter of a speedy process where things move
very quickly. In cases where the Public Employment Service’s job is to mediate work rapidly, the placement officer plays a central role.

The Public Employment Service’s second main group, the counsellors, act increasingly as therapists for people further removed from the labour market and where they, through conversation with the jobseeker, try to find paths to activity. It is more common for the counsellors to see their work as a calling, and the educational backgrounds of these case officers are often in health care, behavioural therapy or education. The task of the counsellor is similar to that of a priest or therapist as a spiritual caregiver. In cases where the task relates to activating and helping weaker groups, the counsellors take a dominant role and their work is focused on helping the jobseekers to understand what they want.

Chapters 3–5 also discuss how and with what ambition employment officers classify and categorize people. In Chapter 4, Lars Walter describes how the jobseekers must learn what it means to be a jobseeker, in accordance with the demands placed on them by the Public Employment Service. Walter describes a process of gradual adaptation to the expectations expressed by case officers and to the structures that apply. In the introductory phase, the jobseeker has a relatively high degree of autonomy. If a person registers as a jobseeker, follows the rules and maintains contact with the Public Employment Service, that person may choose to present him- or herself and seek the jobs that he or she wishes. In a second phase, when an action plan is drawn up, the relationship changes in that the job search builds more on the idea of jointly formulated goals and strategies. In this phase, the Public Employment Service is responsible for monitoring compliance and has a greater ability to initiate sanctions. When a jobseeker, in a third phase, loses her unemployment insurance and becomes registered in the job and development programme, individual autonomy is further reduced in that the jobseeker’s situation is even more tightly regulated, managed and controlled. Thus, the descriptions used in the classification become more than just descriptions; they become an expression of governance and control.

In Chapter 5, Ida Seing looks at the processes of coding jobseekers with reduced work capacity done by the Public Employment Service. In this way, the jobseekers are sorted into different groups that are targeted by different intervention packages. The Public Employment Service’s prioritizing of the so-called weak groups is expressed, among other ways, in the rapid increase in the number of people with disabilities registered since the beginning of the 1990s. One of the government’s interim targets includes that employment levels for people with disabilities should in the long term reflect their representation in the population as a whole. The
target group’s employment level should also increase more rapidly than the rest of the labour force (Prop. 2007/08:1, Expenditure Area 13).

A second trend that we draw attention to involves the Public Employment Service’s increasingly audit- and assessment-related methods for administrating the flow of people from unemployment into new jobs (chapters 3–5). It is through these methods that labour market policy is turned into action. The work of coupling jobseekers’ experience and knowledge to a standardized taxonomy involves certain experiences being routinely defined as important and others as less so. By extension, the taxonomy means that a norm is established for what is desirable. The growing emphasis on the case officer’s controlling function demonstrates the increased importance placed on legalities and equal treatment of jobseekers, and increased efficiency in the handling of jobseekers.

Yet another change investigated here is that more initiatives towards cooperation are now taken between government agencies, municipalities, companies and other organizations. When it comes to work-related rehabilitation, one often looks for common solutions whereby different organizations are responsible for different parts of the process, for instance, for counselling, investigations, rehabilitation and preparatory measures. For example, in 2008, the Public Employment Service and the Social Insurance Agency entered into more extensive cooperation in the area of rehabilitation. The Public Employment Service also works with other so-called complementary actors, such as private job coaches.

Today, staffing firms are established employment brokering agencies, both in recruitment services and in terms of contracting and temporary staffing. In Chapter 6, Gunilla Olofsdotter shows how staffing firms learn to handle competition and relations with client companies. The penetration rate of staffing agencies (i.e. how large a percentage of the employed population that work for staffing agencies) in the Swedish labour market was estimated to be 1.5 per cent in 2013 (scb.se/aku), showing a strong growth rate during the years of the financial crisis, since 2009. There is reason to believe that the actual number is even higher. Many jobseekers pass through a staffing agency during the course of a year, without being directly employed by them. Another reason why the penetration rate may presumably be somewhat higher is the fact that the number of employed includes not only people who are actually working, but also people enrolled in labour market measures. Gunilla Olofsdotter describes how staffing firms have become actors to reckon with in both temporary staffing and long-term recruitment of labour, and how their clients must learn how best to make use of them. A market has emerged in the competition between staffing agencies and the job opportunities offered by client organizations. Temporary staffing also lays bare certain tensions.
and imbalances in the labour market. The mobile work lives of contracted consultants, with short-term social relations and high demands on adaptability, are up against the norm of traditional permanent employment and the desire for long-term employment at a single workplace. The presence of staffing agencies, at first perceived as an exception, and in certain cases as a threat to established norms, is now an accepted feature of the labour market.

In Chapter 7, Ilinca Benson addresses the development and normative message of transition agreements. Almost half of all employees in Sweden are covered by transition agreements. In order to meet the growing demand for this type of protection in working life, an actual market for transition services has emerged, with commercial actors, government actors and other stakeholders. Benson shows that the transition programmes offered in the transition agreements differ in some respects, but that they often contain some form of assessment of the unemployed person’s prospects of getting a job, starting a business, or in some other way becoming a member of the working population. The programmes often contain counselling on how to look for a job and an action plan. Transition actors see looking for work as a skill that needs to be taught, and which is best achieved through personalized advice or coaching. Benson highlights that this trend implies that market logic increasingly forms the basis, or is at least held up as an ideal, for social relations between actors in the labour market. This means a shift in norms – from employment security to employability. Employment security is based on a worker’s relationship to an employer – where the security lies in the employment relationship. Employability, on the other hand, is based on the employee’s perceived value in the labour market. This in turn entails that a job in itself does not guarantee security – it is instead a matter of ensuring that one remains attractive and in demand in the market.

And last but not least, we want to emphasize the tendency towards the increasing responsibility placed on the individual in searching for a new job. For example, the Public Employment Service has introduced individual action plans where the jobseeker and the public employment officer together draw up a plan for how the jobseeker is going to find employment. The individual action plan has become an important tool in the public employment officer’s everyday work (see Chapter 3 by Lars Walter). If we turn our gaze to recent reforms, we see that the Public Employment Service has been working to redirect its arsenal of measures from conversion of people’s skills (fitting the labour market) by training and practice to a focus on the individual’s ability to transform her- or himself to become employable. The recipe of the day calls for providing
support to those who have recently become unemployed – entirely in line with the general trend towards an increased focus on the individual’s responsibility and ability to take initiative. Increased emphasis is placed on the case officer as an assessor or verifier of which jobseekers are employable, to what extent a jobseeker is employable, and the extent to which a jobseeker qualifies for unemployment insurance. This discussion leads us to the second part of the book.

THE HUMAN DIMENSION IN A CHANGING LABOUR MARKET

In the second part of the book, chapters 8–12, we describe the contemporary labour market from the perspective of the human being. Today’s labour market places demands on people to be able to take initiative, to plan, to organize and to perform complex work tasks (Boud and Garrick 1999; Thång 2006). ‘Career School’ sections in daily papers inform people how they can show that they are ‘right for the job’ or how to ‘spring clean’ their CVs. In today’s labour market, a person can sell him- or herself as a worker in a market, as a competent market actor (Benson 2008). It is quite simply a matter of making oneself employable. Catchwords in today’s labour market are for employees to be flexible, independent and accountable. One theme addressed in the book is what the demands for industrious, entrepreneurial people mean for the employee?

An important platform for understanding the individual’s conditions is the organizational change that has taken place in the labour market and in the organization of work. Temporary employment positions are now more commonplace than they were in the beginning of the 1990s. Flexibility in the labour market to a certain extent requires more mobile actors, with transferable skills, that can fit together like Lego pieces in a complex organizational game. From an employer’s perspective, it is also easier to make changes to the staffing structure and to assemble a workforce according to the business’s needs. With a more varied selection of organizations offering employment services, staffing solutions, skills development and rehabilitation, the relations individuals have to these organizations also become different. People’s sense of belonging to an organization changes, as contracts become more transient.

In Chapter 8, Erik Berntson discusses the ‘new’ psychological contract that is governed by catchwords such as exchange, flexibility and development and what it means to ‘feel employable’. Perceived employability has become central for an individual’s health and well-being, but also for
how he or she operates in the workplace. Perceiving oneself as employable is a way to gain control over one’s own work life, it provides scope to act both externally, by being able to change jobs, and internally, by signalling that one believes in one’s own worth. Regardless of whether the individual actually changes jobs or not, the perception of being employable itself is a way to cope with a flexible work environment. For the individual, this means a lifelong commitment to improving one’s employability, which in practice means lifelong learning.

Yet another trend addressed in this part of the book is the need for individuals to showcase knowledge and skills to be viable in the labour market. In order to get a job, it is important that relevant knowledge be documented in the form of transcripts, diplomas, certifications or authorizations (Garsten et al. 2006). In Chapter 10, Renita Thedvall discusses the focus on evidence-based practice in social work, implying that the decisions of social workers must increasingly be based on scientifically proven knowledge. There must be visible evidence that an intervention works. Experience-based knowledge, which is harder to verbalize, is given less space. This has also had consequences for how social workers perform their work. Demands to make one’s knowledge visible have meant an increase in social workers’ administrative burden, as the time it takes to conduct investigations has increased (Thedvall and Rossi 2009). This trend has led to a change in how individuals learn their jobs at the social services office. More emphasis is being put on formal, standardized courses in evidence-based methods. It is formal, visible and articulated knowledge that dominates skills development in the social services office.

The idea that knowledge and skills must be made visible is also found in other areas of social care, such as home help services. In Chapter 9, Marie Hjalmarsson shows how attempts to rationalize home help and make it more effective led to an attempt to make the work practices of home help personnel visible. One instrument used by the municipality was to equip home help workers with handheld computers that they used to record the tasks they performed. However, since the computers only highlight work that counts as direct care, and not relational work, this creates challenges and tensions for home help workers. It is above all the elements in between, or ‘indefinable time’, that are problematic – since it is impossible to register and visibilize such work practices, and thus to demonstrate their value. When this indefinable time is removed from the workday, home help workers develop yet another experience-based skill – that of learning to balance their loyalties to the care recipients, their workmates and the employer, meaning that they break certain rules put in
place in the name of rationalization, but not others. This they do in order to continue to carry out their work satisfactorily. The micro-management of services that the care recipient has been granted makes these conflicting loyalties tangible and contributes to the renewed importance of the workers’ ‘balancing skill’.

In Chapter 11, Matilda Ardenfors and Jessica Lindvert illuminate the difference between formal access to skills training in working life and the ability to take advantage of it. Even if skills development is offered – on paper – in the workplace, there are a number of factors that prevent people from taking advantage of it. The study, which looks at the Swedish Police, Social Services, the automotive industry and the food industry, shows that access to professional development is dependent on where in the organization a person works, whether that person works in production or in an administrative capacity. Occupational groups whose work demands post-secondary education (policing, social services and administrative positions in the noted industries) generally have access to a larger range of formal professional development in the workplace than others. This study shows that there are a number of key factors that prevent employees from taking advantage of the training opportunities offered. For example, in many organizations, there are strong norms about collegiality and a reluctance to let the work team down. A lack of influence over work shifts as well as an inability to predict them also affects employees’ actual possibilities of taking part in skills development. The same applies to the ability to take part in training programmes outside regular work hours, a difficult equation not least for workers with young children. In addition, many also have doubts about whether the skills development offered can increase their employability outside the current work organization. As a whole, it appears that professional development in the workplace remains a resource primarily for employees who already have the key to lifelong learning and who already learned, during their education years, to seek out knowledge and learn new things. For others, the offer of professional development remains an offer that is not realized (see, for example, Lindvert and Jämbrén 2005; Garsten et al. 2006; Thedvall and Rossi 2009).

These chapters raise the question of whether lifelong learning with its positive connotations is perceived as an offer with no strings attached? Or should lifelong learning be seen instead as a decree that the self-regulating individual has become responsible for? Is lifelong learning changing to become more a demand than an option in the eyes of employees? And what type of knowledge – experience-based, tacit knowledge or standardized and textualized knowledge – is it that is encouraged? With these chapters in hand, Christina Garsten discusses
these issues in a concluding chapter, focusing on the trend towards exchangeability, measurability and accountability. In this final chapter, she argues that the normalizing practices that characterize the organization of the labour market reinforce the notion that the labour market is in some respects a market. These normative practices contribute to shaping human beings as a labour force and as a commodity in the labour market, and also shape the actors involved in employment services into market actors.

Work is a cornerstone of people’s individual and social development, as well as of the economy. How the mediation of employment is organized is a question that affects all agencies in society and has great significance for how working life is shaped. When the labour is reorganized, there is reason for us to contemplate the ensuing effects on individuals as well as on society as a whole. What are the practices that govern the brokering of labour? What assumptions do they build on? What normative messages are being conveyed to people in search of job opportunities? Sweden, with its long history of active labour policy and strong regulations, provides a poignant illustration of the transnational influences of changing policy ideals. It is with these questions that we embark on a quest to understand the new job market.

NOTES

1. Unemployment in Sweden in December 2007 was 5.6%, in the same period 2009 8.6%, and in 2013 7.5% (Arbetskraftsundersökningar, AKU, www.scb.se).

2. Research underpinning this book was made possible by different sources of funding (see each chapter for details). The synthetic work was realized by a research programme grant from The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences, Organizing Markets, coordinated by Nils Brunsson.

3. According to Statistics Sweden’s labour surveys (Arbetskraftsundersökningar, AKU, www.scb.se), fixed term employees made up 14.1% of the total number of employed persons aged 16–64 for the second quarter of 2010, compared to 10.5% for the same period in 1993.

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