

Abstract

Title: Performative Capacity (Competence to act) or Learned Helplessness?
Learning processes in manufacturing blue collar workers

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The manufacturing industry was the area of research of this dissertation and the development of the lower organisational levels was the perspective. The overall approach to the problem was to illustrate which circumstances operate in the workplace at the entrance in working life- but above all at work- that may result in a risk of resignation or helplessness and what fosters performative capacity (that may correspond to competence to act) in manufacturing blue collar workers. Two questions were defined and discussed in each study:

1. Which expectations of control at work do manufacturing blue collar workers have when newly hired. Do their expectations of benefit from their work change during their period of employment?
2. What are the factors that foster and counteract developments towards increased performative capacity during the period of employment?

There were two studies with manufacturing blue collar workers as participants. In the first study 134 participants answered orally or in writing the first above mentioned question. Data analysis revealed three patterns of development concerning expectations of control: a) expectation of control promotes development of performative capacity; b) none expectation of control signifies risk for passivity or learned helplessness; c) an active instrumental attitude may signify independence of performative capacity. Conclusion: there is a challenge for management to create work organisations asking for continuous learning.

In the second study interviews of 30 manufacturing blue collar workers were analysed. The interviewees worked at a company, which since the beginning of the seventies had gradually introduced changes of the working organisation to group-oriented ways of work according to a Scandinavian model, in which one of the leading ideas was to concentrate on work enrichment in form of enhanced competence development for all interested members of the manufacturing groups. Towards the end of the eighties the company went through a number of crises. A new industrial management decided to discontinue the ongoing processes of work organisational development and instead to concentrate on a cognitive strategy, in which they tried to influence the norms, ideas and behaviours of all employees in the direction of a common acceptance of the new visions and goals laid down by the management. The analysis of interview data showed that the implementation of the new strategy aroused feelings of offence and disengagement and experiences of forced conformity for most of the participants in the study. The core category was identified as a basic social psychological process – "To conquer or to be dispossessed of control".