

Individual and Social Economic Dimensions of Work Addiction*

by Holger Heide (2001)

A. Preamble:

Work addiction is in the process of becoming a mass phenomenon. It is no longer an affliction restricted to hard working managers. Here I would like to relate some experiences and present some hypotheses which may help to throw some light on the causes of work addiction and help to explain its rapid spread.

The following hypotheses and experiences represent a summary of the interim results of research being conducted by the Social Economic Research Institute (SEARI) at the University of Bremen into the differences in work addiction between East Asia (in particular Japan and South Korea) and Europe, but also into what they might have in common. The comparison between East Asia and Europe is interesting from several points of view. It would appear that in Japan and Korea, for instance, it is less a dependency on work, or jobs, or achievement, but rather a dependency based on the work environment, i.e. the enterprise, the working group etc. In recent years a certain convergence between the European and the Asian types of work addiction has become apparent, but notwithstanding, the differences between them remain considerable.

This brings us to the second focal point of our research. Namely, to what extent is the increasing incidence of stress connected with new models of personnel management which are being introduced in Europe. A main feature of these new models is a shift of responsibility for the management of work and working hours towards the individual employee.

This may have considerably more to do with the meaning of work addiction than simply the number of hours worked per day.

In adopting a social economic approach we are attempting to overcome the constraints of mainstream economics in order to encompass other aspects which are normally considered as belonging to the realms of sociology, psychology or cultural anthropology - and we make no pretence at being experts in all these fields. The object of investigation calls for an integration of various scientific approaches and methods rather than an eclectic addition of the results of different disciplines.

I have purposely chosen to use the words "work addiction" and not "workaholism". Persons who boldly brag, "I am a workaholic", are usually quite ignorant of the fact that the condition constitutes an illness, and such a brag more often than not reflects a feeling of pride in the person's capacity to work, stamina, or simply a gesture of defence.

B. Work addiction in the work society

Although people in pre-modern times were certainly by no means inactive, what we understand by the term “work” nowadays is a product of capitalist industrial society, or modernity. Western work ethic – certainly since Max Weber – is generally connected with protestantism, in particular in its Calvinist guise. That may be a correct characterisation. But it is decisive to understand that the work ethic did not just drop from heaven one fine day, nor did it simply develop in some strange unknown way.

The cult of self-discipline (‘worldly asceticism’) which was developed through the struggle of the newly evolving bourgeoisie against the apparently “wasteful” and “uncontrolled” lives of the feudal aristocracy created with it the basis for a subordination to discipline imposed by others, from which grew the ‘duty to eradicate laziness’ (Thomas Carlyle). Behind this consequence lies the truth that the bare existence of the seemingly ‘lustful and lazy’ lower classes prevented the bourgeoisie from abreacting their obsessional neurosis. It is a fact that the work paradigm had to be imposed upon the vast masses of the working class by means of brutal and bloody violence throughout the unparalleled historical process of industrialisation.

This was preceded mentally by the process of de-spiritualisation which resulted from man being freed from a specific form of external dependency on the land in feudalism. Independence from the land – that might even seem to equate to independence from nature altogether – especially from one’s own inner nature. Such a perception reduces nature from being the source of life to becoming the mere object of human will. From the re-awakened awareness of the divine in man people did not arrive at the conclusion that man was an integral part of a greater whole, but rather they assumed the place of the deposed Creator.

This separation from Self, ultimately the concept of man being object of his Self, the feasibility mania, and the ubiquitousness of competition became generalised via the societal trauma that was connected with the historical process of capitalist industrialisation referred to above. The paradigm of feasibility characterises man in the modern capitalist society. The historical process outlined here is the process in which *uno actu* modern society has evolved into an addictive society¹.

In our society addiction is virtually inevitable, since it “keeps us from fully experiencing the pain of the isolation, dishonesty, illusion, and self-centeredness of living in a world we have created” (Schaefer 1998, 183) and which we constantly reproduce in our daily lives.

¹ The connection between addiction and capital has been investigated in Heide (2000a).

Today we talk of a 'work society' because 'work', especially in the form of gainful work, has assumed a position of total dominance in our understanding of society as a whole. This has been handed down to us through the generations and we have long since internalised its principles. These principles have become "second nature" to us. It is precisely due to its high ethical valuation, or social standing, that work proves to be a particularly dangerous means of addiction. But how does an individual actually become addicted to work? Let us first take a look at the main characteristics of work addiction.

C. Characteristics and process of addiction

Characteristics

In a similar way as in the case of other drug based and non-drug based forms of addiction we are able to identify the typical symptoms of addiction in work addiction as follows:

- repudiation (either in the form of total repudiation or belittlement of the problem, by bragging to be a 'workaholic', for instance).
- compulsiveness, which includes the inability to relax and often the tendency to dream about leisure, or the future in general, during the work time and subsequently – brought on by a guilty conscience – to think about work during leisure time.
- ensuring 'supplies' and constantly making plans to ensure that the work does not run out. This can express itself in the postponing of jobs to be done, or the tendency to delay completion of a particular job – this often assumes the form of 'perfectionism'.
- Insincerity, self-isolation and ruthlessness – against oneself, one's own health and by virtue of adopting a victim attitude, more and more against the social environment – result almost inevitably from all these attempts at coping with the addiction, without ever actually recognising it as such. This aspect is the connecting link to the "contagious" destructiveness of work addiction.

Types

There are a number of rational classifications for types of work addiction (e.g. Fassel 1994, Richter et al. 1984), many of which bear an astounding resemblance to alcoholism. Here I would like to deal with the distinction between just two of the basic types. This is because I find this distinction to be of great significance and also because their interpretation has often led to misconceptions.

In the first group there is – at least to the outside – the successful hard worker, whether in the form of continual compulsion or in bouts of hard work, whether overtly or in secret. In the other group we find the unsuccessful who regard themselves as 'failures'.

People who seem to love their work more than their family or friends, who constantly maintain that they 'really enjoy' their work, who have their work in mind even while falling asleep and who become impatient with others who find other things more important, would have to be included in the first category.

Those whom I would include in the second category feel above all a fear of their work, they find it difficult to make a start, they interrupt their work at any excuse, often feeling other needs which 'disturb' them during their work and therefore make it even more difficult to concentrate. Simultaneously they place demands upon themselves, demands which are so high that they almost inevitably end in disappointment, constantly reinforcing their loser or victim self-attitudes. These people often feel ashamed for their inability to work and therefore, on top of having to do their work, are also constantly expending effort in trying to hide their inability.

In both cases, though, it is their preoccupation with their work which provides the "kick". Often the first form develops into the second form at a later stage.

Stages

Just like any other form of addiction, work addiction proves to be dynamic: In the early stages it is mainly the feeling of achievement, the enterprising spirit, the drive to prove oneself. The actual confirmation which is bound to ensue within the social environment spurs on to greater deeds. Work – and above all the results of successful work – is often experienced as a "high". Due to the high esteem attributed to work in modern society, over time there is usually a constriction of interest onto the means of addiction. Often followed by a "hangover", accompanied by inability to concentrate and circulatory disturbances and more and more often the awareness: "I feel, I must do something about it".

Eventually the 'high' becomes more and more difficult to achieve, it remains only for short periods, until eventually it slowly dawns upon the addicted person that he really has to do something about it before his health is ruined. He repeatedly experiences, though, that he is unable to do this and feels he is being driven in some way. The discrepancy between the backlog of work which still has to be dealt with and his ebbing physical and psychic reserves; the discrepancy between the mental will on the one hand and, on the other hand, the diminishing physical capacity to cope with the situation leads to an ever greater expenditure of effort in order to put the problem out of mind, to find excuses, to cover over, to suppress and manipulate. This stage (at the latest) ushers in other forms of addiction, because of their relieving effect: very often excessive smoking and alcohol consumption and – not least due to the fact that family and partnership no longer function – sex and love addiction.

It is not until work is actually interrupted due to ill health that many work addicts seriously begin to think about finding a way out of their predicament and seeking medical advice and therapy. More often than not, though, it is only the symptoms of the

illness which then receive attention (i.e. hypertension, stomach ulcers, coronary disease, etc.) since, as opposed to alcoholism, an accepted diagnosis for work addiction does not yet exist. However, work addicts often contribute to this state of affairs themselves – in “relapses”, so to speak – by convincing both themselves and their therapists that it really is only the symptoms which constitute the illness (cf. already Mentzel 1979, 125).

If the work addict is unable to regain control in the critical stage, the addiction gets completely out of hand. The endeavour to overcome the victim role by means of becoming perpetrator results in increasing ruthlessness against others as well as against the own person. The ability to get along with colleagues, superiors or subordinates – which was never an easy undertaking – becomes utterly hopeless. An outward appearance of supposed normality can often only be upheld by means of a changing cycle of pep pills and barbiturates. Alongside the acute physical symptoms a moral decline now sets in. This whole process invariably culminates in a heart attack, or something similar. The dynamic proceeds often at a greater pace for those persons who belong to the category of losers, although this group seems to be more able to break the cycle once it has reached a critical stage.

D. Background and causes of work addiction

A closer analysis of the behaviour surrounding addiction reveals that at the root of the problem there is a “process of addiction”. The driving force of this process appears to be fear, sometimes overt, sometimes barely concealed under the surface of consciousness – or even sometimes massively covered up in the subconscious mind. Ultimately, fear is expression of a separation from Self. Research into psychic traumata has thrown some light on precisely how this separation is brought about.

As a rule, infant traumata lie deeper than those experienced during youth or adulthood. One of the main reasons for this is the complete helplessness of the small child, who is utterly dependant on the unwavering love of an adult guardian. People whose own life is characterised by fear and suppression are often incapable of coping with the unrestrained emotions released by a child when expressing an immediate need, especially the need for love and affection. Often the fear of the adult of being confronted with one’s own so carefully suppressed emotions triggers a defensive reaction. Therefore the child does not receive the feeling of security it needs to be able to have the feeling of belonging, of being part of a great whole of this world, of experiencing spirituality via empathy – in short: to be able to learn how to live. It is in this way that fear is handed down through the generations. “The parents become a trauma for their children” (Schmidbauer 1998).

Young children develop “survival strategies”, they learn “roles” which enable them to survive. They are roles because they cease to be orientated to the child’s real personal needs; The child learns to orientate and adjust herself to the expectations of others on whom she depends. As result of constant repetition of this state of affairs, as well as the

constantly underlying fear of “falling out of the role”, the roles eventually turn into patterns. When the child loses the ability to feel her own real needs, she has to learn to achieve. Such aspects like “relation work” or even “love work” become crucial, they are aspects of “adaptation efforts”, originally developed in order “to please the parents”.

The great significance these patterns exert, often over whole lifetimes, becomes apparent when one realises that the very process of socialisation represents a cumulation of impressions which occur successively, one after another. How we deal with any one particular situation or constellation we may find ourselves confronted with is also preshaped by experiences we made on an earlier occasion. Adults, therefore, are all the more mentally vulnerable the less developed their personality is, the less autonomy they possess. This is why an analysis of the individual’s own particular process of socialisation is so crucial for arriving at an explanation for the addiction.

Thus the pattern of achievement plays a crucial role in the process of addiction and it is the pattern of achievement which lies behind many forms of addiction, at least all forms of relationship addiction in the broadest sense². Whether such a pattern leads to work addiction in particular depends on how “successful” the pattern has been lived in childhood and youth and especially how it was lived at school, i.e. to what extent the pattern was repeatedly corroborated and verified.

The failure of attempts to achieve or perform at an early age may lead to the “loser/victim attitude” referred to above. This type of failure together with setting impossibly high demands on oneself result in the feeling of being lamed when faced with work to do, the feeling of not knowing where to begin, no longer being able to work at all.

The two apparently contradictory manifestations: “hard worker” versus “work inhibited” may thus on the one hand be explained with reference to the particular stage of addiction which has been reached; however, the second type is also to be found in “beginners”, and that often has to do with earlier experiences of failure when trying to fulfil the demands placed on the capacity to achieve, whether they were one’s own expectations or those of others. I am of the opinion that an addiction to “work avoidance” does not exist. I contend we are dealing with one and the same means of addiction – sometimes successful, sometimes unsuccessful – that of addiction to work.

E. Who are the work addicts?

Let us now make a closer inspection of whom we are talking about. Which members of society find themselves in a position to gratify their addiction? Who are the people who are able to move through the various stages of work addiction? When we focus on the

² Cf. Voigtel who for his explanation of addiction focusses on the concepts of calculability, reliability, availability of the means of addiction (Voigtel 1996 – quoted in Subkowski 2000, 261). These are aspects of feasibility and control which in the last analysis are concerned with things which first have to be achieved.

work addicts, in the general sense of the term, it becomes obvious that these must be people who have been presented with the opportunity to indulge their addiction in the first place. I will initially divide them into two categories:

On the one hand there is the group who serve as model for most studies of work addiction which have been made to date; it comprises for example:

-Managers, politicians (whose reputation, power, income depend on "indefatigable" effort):

-Professional artists, poets, writers (reputation and income, too) and other "self-employed professionals", including physicians, tradesmen, and not to forget the farmers (income aspect);

-Clergymen, teachers, hospital staff, community workers (social vocations, callings, often involving verification of self-image).

A striking feature shared by this group – apart from a certain degree of independence with regard to the organisation of their work which is prerequisite to it becoming a means of addiction in the first place – is that they are oriented primarily to their field of activity, to their "dedication" (that can assume the guise of "mission", or "passion", or simply the drive to help others). The actual orientation to work is often a secondary effect, which nevertheless becomes particularised with time; this becomes evident among other things in the various stages of addiction mentioned above. For this group work addiction clearly acts as a "drug", tending to produce a stimulating effect.

There is, though, yet another type of work addiction which – as a rule at least - receives much less attention³. Long periods of hard work in a subordinate position with low responsibility can become a routine and result in a loss of livingness. People in subordinate positions who for their whole lives have had to take orders from others - who themselves would like to flee the working situation but never actually manage to do so (whether for objective or subjective reasons) – often endeavour to drown their frustration over lost life in – of all things – work. That is to say, they apply work as a means of suppressing emotion. This group would seem to be less oriented to achievement and incentive, and more to work itself. Other people apart from those actually employed in paid work, like housewives or pensioners, for instance, may also belong to this group. In such cases the habit exerts a more sedative effect, helping to suppress unbearable emotions.

The persons in question "learn" that hiding themselves behind work can make life easier, especially when alternatives seem too difficult to realise. This often results, for instance, in the willingness to do a second job, "black work", community help, etc.

³ This is perhaps due to the fact that the people who are involved professionally in the investigation into work addiction often themselves belong to the above first mentioned group of addicts

The pattern followed can be better described as adaptation, as passive subordination to the demands of work society. Adaptation and subordination can also be seen as a result of trauma, in much the same way as orientation to high achievement. They can also be a post-traumatic syndrome.

F. The world of work in East Asia

This is precisely the right place to mention something about the world of work in Japan. Work addiction in East Asia is much more clearly connected with attempts at adaptation than in the West. High achievement is expected as result of pressure to adapt. Throughout the whole process of socialisation it is the orientation to adaptation which plays the predominant role.

At school the children are expected to be high achievers, especially whilst preparing for examinations when it is a matter of course that they are expected to work into the night. Education in Asian countries has more to do with learning by heart than it does in the West. After graduating from school or university they join an enterprise. There it is the human resources department and higher-placed employees who pick up where the school left off. At the work place then, too, it is adaptation of the individual and fitting into the group which are uppermost. Paradoxically, what appears to be orientation to the group is in effect result of an extremely individualised competitiveness within the group. For the work society in Japan, just like in the West, is a product of capitalistic modernity and it is not, as sometimes mistakenly supposed, based on some kind of peculiarly Asian "tradition". Its realisation can be identified as a physical, psychic and social process of destruction. I do not intend to elucidate further on this aspect here⁴. Suffice it to say that the consequences are not fundamentally different from those in the West.

Basically, it is possible to identify two types of work addicts: I would like to characterise the first type as those – similar to the West – who occupy jobs which grant them a certain independence in the organisation and execution of their work. The formally dependent members of this group – often after having already fulfilled overt or hidden "self-commitments" - find themselves under strong mental pressure from their superiors and/or the group. From the outside it appears that their extra effort for the firm is "of their own free will". It is "in their own interest" that they cannot afford to take time off or go on holiday. Conform with Fucini, Kumazawa calls this "enforced voluntarism" (Kumazawa 1999, Fucini 1990).

The second type of work addict emerges as a consequence of enforced, long, very often unpaid working hours, a phenomenon which is much more widespread in Japan than in the West (the Japanese language contains an expression for "service overtime"). Its implementation is brutal. The Japanese, whose socialisation has prepared them for it,

⁴ For further comments cf. Heide 2000b; for in-depth analysis of associated social upheaval see Kumazawa 1996 and Halliday 1975.

simply subject themselves passively. Should their subordination and adaptation be incomplete they are subjected to degradation and humiliation from their superiors and colleagues alike which can be described quite simply as mobbing.

The purpose is to destroy the individual identity, making those persons who are the objects of the exercise once again the victims of the societal process of destruction. Perspectively this aims to an identification with the firm. With the subsequent repeated calls for self-sacrifice the workers are made eventually "dependent" on the firm⁵. Here it is the actual work situation which becomes the trauma.

Excessively long working hours are regarded as normality, especially in the case of white-collar jobs in large offices. Secondary addictions may emerge as the consequence (especially alcoholism, gambling, excessive sex) together with psychosomatic expressions of destruction as result of humiliation at work and possibly a guilty conscience due to neglecting the family. It would appear that long working hours contribute to perpetuating the separation from Self by keeping the victims permanently "out of breath", so to speak. The effect of work addiction would therefor appear for both mentioned groups of addicts more as a stimulant.

Every year in Japan 10,000 working careers end in Karoshi (death through overwork) and Karojisatsu (suicide due to stress at work) and experts put the number of persons in jeopardy of meeting such a fate at around ten times this number (Kumazawa 1999). Some of the suicide notes left behind by many victims of Karojisatsu throw some light on the underlying problem. Such suicide notes reveal that the victims usually explain their action to their families or their companies by either taking the entire blame for failure on themselves, or they make others (their boss, the work group – but seldom the firm as such) responsible⁶. It would therefore appear that these persons no longer take the responsibility for their lives, thus representing further evidence of an acute stage of addiction.

G. Changes in the work society of the West

In spite of the significant number of jobs which fall under the first category mentioned above, the vast majority of jobs until now are those belonging to wage and salary dependent employees who have little scope themselves for determining the content of their work, let alone the number of hours which have to be worked. Typical for this in the hitherto, so-called Fordist, system is work based on the following of orders passed down from above ("commando"). Typically, work and work conditions are regulated by collective agreements between employers and trade unions. Such collective agreements

⁵ That this phenomenon might not be quite specifically Japanese is made understood in Wilson Scaef/Fassel 1994, 100 pp.

⁶ I am grateful to Professor Keita Takeda of Aichi University, Toyohashi, for this refence.

regulate the conditions of work, including the hours to be worked, as well as the structure of remuneration.

Responsibility is located in the hierarchy "upstairs" and the workers themselves are not permitted to participate in this responsibility. The fact that the workers bear no responsibility may well make things "easy", in the sense explained above.

Thus, the control on the part of the "employer" belongs to commando and with regard to "the struggle between labour and capital" it is subsequently not merely a question of wages and conditions of work, but also that of the efficiency of the control.

The non-participation in responsibility for wage and salary dependent workers refers to the work place as such. It is solely the "employer" who is able to provide and, if needs be, "safeguard" the work place. Demands for the "safeguarding of jobs" are directed solely towards the leaders of the enterprise, its management. The enterprise is exposed to market competition. The management has the task of transforming the market competition in commando.

In the wake of the much acclaimed "globalisation" and the subsequent neo-liberal restoration, for some years now there has been a trend towards the emergence of a new system of work organisation. This began with the pressure on enterprises to become more flexible, among other things with regard to more flexible working hours. The prerequisite for more flexibility entails more control and more refined forms of control. For example, the increasingly sophisticated systems of monitoring working hours provided by the application of micro-electronics. Although this initially presents a solution to a problem, eventually the increase in control becomes dysfunctional: The workers perceive an increase in control as a constricting confirmation of their inferiority, giving rise to frustrations which, for the enterprise as a whole, translate into a drag on productivity. Increased control also entails increased direct costs of control. The consequences of this have brought on a trend towards the "delegation of responsibility" and a subsequent breakdown of hierarchies and control which has been accompanied by management structures becoming "leaner". In particular this has led to the gradual abolition – by the management, no less - of clocking-in and other systems of monitoring working hours which for decades have been the object of protest from workers and their unions.

This results in a situation whereby wage and salary dependent workers have gradually become less and less directly under the actual commando of higher-placed employees in the company hierarchy, to be confronted instead directly with the constraints of the market economy: and this is increasingly ruthless. This equates to a trend towards making employment more "precarious" inasmuch that the employer has passed on the responsibility for job security to the employees of the firm: "Do what you like, as long as it's profitable!" (Glißmann 2000).

The fulfilment of a contract of work is thus no longer restricted solely to the criterion of placing one's labour at the disposal of the employer for a certain number of hours – this is what appears to be an increased measure of freedom. Today's work contracts increasingly call on the worker to accept responsibility for the economic success of his labour. Studies in different sectors of industry show that wage and salary dependent workers are now working longer hours: they work longer and more intensively and under greater stress – and they work in isolation from each other.

Although the conditions of work which have been negotiated collectively with the labour unions are formally still in place, the employers are prepared to disregard the contractual working hours and the workers are obviously prepared to work overtime voluntarily. This may even reach a point whereby employees actually object to being reminded by members of the works council or trade union officials of the late hours sometimes being worked. A secondary effect (at least in this context) is that the unions are facing a great challenge in failing to recruit potential new members.

The new form of working-time management exploits the interest of wage and salary dependent workers in more self-determination. It is precisely in this way that it results in an increased identification with work, due to the expectation that this will provide the self-assurance so craved for. In this way work can become a means of addiction for an increasing number of workers. Experiences show that the first symptoms of a *"loss of senses" at work, of feeling driven, of fear*, can develop very quickly. The workers often experience a tangible increase in stress (Glißmann 2000b).

The explanation for the spread of work addiction is thus that increasingly broader groups of dependent employees are receiving a greater degree of independence with regard to the organisation of their work and that the work as a "drug" is becoming available to broader categories of people, indeed, is even being forced on them. Furthermore, for more and more people "work" as an addiction is changing from a sedative to a stimulant.

However, this can only be explained by external criteria: A "drug" is being proffered in a new form. As always, it is crucial to explain why dependent workers should be "willing" to accept this identification with their work. For an explanation of the general predisposition to addiction we can draw on the causes outlined earlier. Perhaps an explanation for the shift of work addiction in the direction of becoming a stimulant should be sought in connection with the general increase in stimulating activities which is also evident in leisure occupations during our so-called "free time". Moreover, the spread of work addiction itself constitutes a contribution to the general increase in stress in society which has resulted in the massive intensification of all kinds of addiction. Sedative effects, on the other hand, are more probably expected from chemical drugs (cf. Amendt 2000).

Intermediate conclusion

Work addiction is on the increase. The system needs work addiction. It is proffered by enterprises who are the dealers in the work drug (Richter 1984, 7) and it is willingly consumed by the addicts who have been predisposed towards it. The deeper reason is a suppressed fear, and a consequence can often be a further increase in fear.

The enterprise first takes notice of work addiction once it threatens to become dysfunctional for the aim of the business. The problem, then, is to permit work addiction, but only to the extent that it can be kept under control – probably an addictive illusion in itself. For the work addicts themselves the problem begins at a much earlier stage and is of deep-rooted significance.

H. Coping with work addiction

As in the case of other forms of addiction, it appears to me that we have to consider three important facts:

-Since it is an disease born of society, one should not attempt to seek any blame in the persons it afflicts. On the other hand, it is futile to point out that there is need for a change in society. How should a society comprised of addicts free itself from addiction?

-The focus of remedy cannot be primarily the “drug”, either; there must always be the inner “willingness” to consume the means of addiction.

-Even though it is the primary socialisation which is the most important cause, that does not mean that the past must be or can be changed, it is always an issue of the present.

This entails as a consequence:

Those affected are now adults and must reorganise their lives, ceasing to push responsibility for their lives onto others, but assuming the responsibility themselves. And the cure is not to be seen in isolation, but must equate with a collective learning process for the recovery of the ability to communicate with one another. The actual remedy will vary with respect to the different societal situation of the work addicts and the subsequently different expression of their addiction.

Apart from psychotherapy, about which I can say little at this point, an important instrument for remedying the condition may be seen in the self-help groups which already exist, for example along the lines of the 12-step programme proposed by Workaholics Anonymous. This applies especially to the first mentioned group of work addicts referred to earlier who occupy more or less independent positions or with a relatively broad opportunity to determine their work themselves and subsequently have unhindered access to the “work” drug.

For the rapidly growing group of those people who – in spite of being dependent employees of companies – increasingly are having to bear the burden of extra responsibility for their jobs, the work location, i.e. the place of work is becoming more important also as the location for recovery. This can mean in effect that the people in an enterprise – once they have become aware of the destructive whirlpool of work addiction – attempt to overcome their *loss of senses* and arrive at a state of self-reflection, that means to discover themselves and in so doing discover others and overcome the isolation⁷.

This would constitute the manifestation of solidarity. We must beware, though, that this is unwanted by the management of a company and that they may even try to prevent it from happening⁸. The tangible success of active solidarity is, though, that the fear of exclusion, along with fear of loss of earnings, etc., is reduced in a real way and not only in theory (cf. Heide 1999a, 36). In contrast to the previously fear-driven *loss of senses*, once there is a partial overcoming of fear the possibility of self-reflection presents itself. However, this is just the first step, for self-reflection is neither primarily a cognitive, nor an intellectual issue. Since the underlying process of addiction is a deep-rooted pattern, the addicts must be prepared to change their previous way of life substantially. This often ranges far beyond the context of the firm and this is where the self-help groups mentioned above may come in particularly useful.

After all is said and done, the “virus” as we have shown has been introduced into society at large, the loss of senses at work contributes to an intensification of stress in society. The many other forms of addiction must also be encompassed. And here, too, recovery can not ensue in isolation, and health is also infectious.

On the other hand, I remain sceptical whether work addiction with its close link to the profit making thrust of enterprises can successfully be included in inner-company measures of prevention and intervention developed concerning alcoholism and other forms of drug-based addiction. This applies even more so to the various “therapies” which are proclaimed by business consultants and professional advisors. They are in essence always of a “functional” nature inasmuch as they are oriented towards improving the functioning of the affected persons in the sense of making them more efficient for the enterprise. Overcoming this fact will be difficult, despite all the “good will” and best intentions we might concede those involved, since a true recovery from the process of addiction implies the “danger” that such central concepts of the addictive society as profit, power and competition would be placed in question.

Deutsches Summary

Individuelle und sozialökonomische Dimensionen von Arbeitssucht

⁷ Cf. The interview with Glißmann, Chief Steward of the Works Council, regarding the case of IBM, Düsseldorf (Glißmann 2000b).

⁸ Ibid.

Arbeitssucht ist dabei, ein Massenphänomen zu werden. Sie ist nicht mehr bloß die Krankheit der Manager. Ich erörtere hier einige Hypothesen und Erfahrungen, die etwas zur Beantwortung der Frage nach den Ursachen beitragen können – nach den Ursachen der Arbeitssucht und nach den Ursachen ihrer Ausbreitung.

Arbeitssucht ist – wie jede Sucht – an die Verfügbarkeit der „Droge“, in diesem Fall Arbeit gebunden. Den Ausgangspunkt der Betrachtung bildet daher die Untersuchung des Verhaltens der mehr oder weniger „selbstständig“ Arbeitenden. An diesen Fällen lassen sich sehr gut die (individuellen und gesellschaftlichen) Hintergründe und Ursachen von Arbeitssucht sowie ihre verschiedenen Formen und die Stadien des Suchtprozesses verdeutlichen.

Diese in der herkömmlichen Arbeitswirklichkeit „westlicher“ Gesellschaften gefundenen Aspekte werden dann mit Erfahrungen aus der Arbeitswirklichkeit Ostasiens (Japans, Südkoreas) konfrontiert und – was gänzlich neue Einsichten vermittelt – mit den auch bei uns inzwischen verstärkt beobachteten postfordistischen Veränderungen der Arbeitswirklichkeit.

Der zerstörerischen Wirkung der Arbeitssucht über individuelle (Selbst-) Isolierung und Verschärfung der Konkurrenz und daraus resultierend permanentem Stress lässt sich nur durch Selbstbesinnung begegnen. Ausgangspunkt kann nur die Besinnung auf die je individuellen Bedürfnisse und Bedingungen sein und gleichzeitig ist klar, dass der Weg aus der Arbeitssucht niemals ein isoliert-individueller sein kann. Selbstbesinnung ist Teil eines kollektiven Genesungsprozesses, der die Grundlage für eine neue Solidarität legen kann. Dieser Genesungsprozess ist nicht einfach zu realisieren und muss mit Widerstand rechnen, weil er die zentralen Kategorien der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft wie Profit, Macht und Konkurrenz notwendig in Frage stellt.

Literature:

Amendt, Günter (2000): No Drugs – No Future. Über psychoaktive Substanzen im postfordistischen Zeitalter. Manuscript of an essay from a radio broadcast. Norddeutscher Rundfunk NDR4, 21 May 2000.

Fassel, Diane (1990): Working Ourselves to Death. San Francisco.

Ferenczi, Sándor (1933): Sprachverwirrung zwischen dem Erwachsenen und dem Kind. Die Sprache der Zärtlichkeit und der Leidenschaft. In: Schriften zur Psychoanalyse. Bd. 2.

Fucini, Joseph, and Fucini, Suzy (1990): Working for the Japanese: Inside Mazda's American Auto Plant. New York

Gleißmann, Wilfried (2000): Ökonomisierung der „Ressource Ich“ – Die Instrumentalisierung des Denkens in der neuen Arbeitsorganisation. In: Denkanstöße. IG Metaller in der IBM. Mai 2000.

Halliday, Jon (1975): A Political History of Japanese Capitalism. New York and London.

Heide, Holger (2000a): Zur Bedeutung der Subjektivität für die südkoreanische Produktionsweise. In: Derselbe (Hg): Südkorea – Bewegung in der Krise. Bremen. (Atlantik).

Heide, Holger (2000b): Some observations on the so-called „creative destruction“ in the development of Japanese capitalism. In: East Asia and the Illusion of Inexhaustibility – Two notes. Arbeitspapiere zur sozialökonomischen Ost-Asien-Forschung. No 8. SEARI. Universität Bremen.

Heide, Holger (1999a): Gedanken über Solidarität. In: Gedanken über Menschenrechte und Solidarität. Arbeitspapiere zur sozialökonomischen Ost-Asien-Forschung. No .7. SEARI. Universität Bremen.

Heide, Holger (1999b): Arbeitssucht – Skizze der theoretischen Grundlagen für eine vergleichende empirische Untersuchung. Beiträge zur sozialökonomischen Handlungsforschung. Nr. 2. SEARI. Universität Bremen. The text can be downloaded from the SEARI website:

<http://www.seari.uni-bremen.de>.

Heide, Holger (1997): The Creation of Individual and Collective Strategies of Survival as a Precondition for Capitalist Development. The Example of South Korea. In: Proceedings of the 5th Int'l Conference on Korean Studies. Osaka. The text can be downloaded from the SEARI website:

<http://www.seari.uni-bremen.de>.

Herman, Judith Lewis (1992): Trauma and Recovery. New York.

Kumazawa, Makoto (1996): Portraits of the Japanese Workplace. Labor Movements, Workers, and Managers. Boulder, CO.

Mentzel, Gerhard (1979): Über die Arbeitssucht. In: Zeitschrift für psychosomatische Medizin und Psychoanalyse. Jg. 25. S. 115-127.

Pickshaus, Klaus (2000): Der Zugriff auf den gesamten Menschen. Neue Kapitalstrategien und das Arbeiten ohne Ende. In: Z - Zeitschrift für marxistische Erneuerung. Heft 41.

Richter, B., Gößmann, S., Steinmann, Horst (1984): ‚Arbeitssucht‘ im Unternehmen – Zur Genese und einigen personalwirtschaftlichen Konsequenzen. Lehrstuhl für

allgemeine Betriebswirtschaftslehre. Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg.
Diskussionsbeiträge, Heft 24.

Schaef, Anne Wilson (1998): *Living in Process*. New York.

Schmidbauer, Wolfgang (1998): ‚Ich wusste nie, was mit Vater ist‘. Das Trauma des Krieges. Reinbek.

Schmidt, Angela (2000): *Mit Haut und Haaren – Die Instrumentalisierung der Gefühle in der neuen Arbeitsorganisation*. In: *Denkanstöße. IG Metall in der IBM*. Mai 2000.

Schor, Juliet B. (1995): *The Overworked American – the unexpected decline of leisure*. New York.

Subkowski, Peter (2000): *Die psychoanalytische Sicht der Abhängigkeitserkrankungen*. In: *Psychotherapeut*. Bd. 4.

Voigtel, R. (1996): *Zur Diagnostik der Sucht*. In: *Psyche*, Nr. 8.

Wilson Schaef, Anne, and Fassel, Diane (1994): *The Addictive Organization*. San Francisco.

* This text was originally presented in a preliminary version in German at the Congress „SUCHT 2000“ held by the German Central Bureau Against Dangers of Addiction (Deutsche Hauptstelle gegen die Suchtgefahren) in Karlsruhe, Germany, 13th – 15th November 2000.