

The social construction of a "flexible workforce": an ethnographic perspective



The trope of flexibility



- ❑ New ideals – new utopias, aspirations
- ❑ Mobilizing metaphor
- ❑ Normative implications
- ❑ Provides directionality
- ❑ Inclusionary and exclusionary
- ❑ Travels and translates differently into different contexts...



The mobility imperative



- Translocal movements
 - Between organizations
 - Between projects
 - Between workplaces
- Between social communities
 - "The stranger" – *in* the place but not *of* it
- Contemporary nomads - or workplace vagabonds
- Blended workforce, transient ties
- Readiness to move

Temping temporalities



- Flexible time, fragmented time
- Focus on the "here and now", "just-in-time" – expanding present
- Kairotic time – punctuated, rhythmic, accelerates, stops
- Short planning horizons
- Scripting
- Mobility and temporality as stratifying factors

Culture of preparedness

- "Be a gumby"

- ❑ Preparedness for change, learning and risk
- ❑ Strategies to handle change and uncertainty
- ❑ Flexibility and adaptability as solutions
- ❑ Evaluation as a normality



Actorhood

- ❑ Presupposes the agency of individuals
- ❑ The individual as locus for risk, responsibility and reward
- ❑ Emphasis on individual performance, recognition and reward
- ❑ Self-disciplining implications



The reflexive individual

- Continuous evaluation
- "The evaluative gaze"
- Self-monitoring
- Self-discipline, impression management, emotion work
- Construction of narratives of self and career



The cultural organization of discontinuity

- ❑ Dreams and aspirations ...
- ❑ Orientation towards the needs of the market
- ❑ Culture of preparedness
- ❑ Re-allocation of risk and responsibility
- ❑ Layered regulation
- ❑ Frictions... as well as possibilities

