

# ***Rationalisation, individualisation and de-collectivisation: Challenges to the socio-cultural regulation of work***

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## **ABSTRACT**

In a neo-liberalising economic climate evident in many OECD countries, elite economic and business leaders encourage a highly rational strategic managerial action in the restructuring of production organisations toward flexibility and contingency and rapid response to dynamic market environments. An ensuing deregulation of employment relations has stimulated much academic and trade union commentary that raises pressing concerns over the individualisation of employment relations, and consequences of a further weakening of collective action in wage bargaining and in the social regulation of work.

Critics argue that trends toward decollectivisation and individualisation in employment relations intensify managerial control over the labour process and heighten rational, atomised individualism. Elite workers may benefit from individualisation, but for the majority of workers the uncertainties and risks of individualised employment relations portend greater worker subjectification to powerful, heteronomous control and exploitation.

At the same time, however, accompanying and consequent of the trends of hyper-rationalisation and liberalised workers other cultural trends add further complexity to these developments. Alongside the technological and managerial imperatives promoting a decollectivisation and desocialisation of economic work participation, a heightening cultural turn of interests mobilises complex currents of action. The cultural turn toward a greater reflexivity, heightened individualism and self-expressivism that includes for instance identity-based life-styles and demands for work-life balance across industries raises new socio-cultural demands and agendas. This paper considers prospects for the utilisation of these rising demands alongside the challenges of de-collectivisation in the socio-cultural regulation of work.

