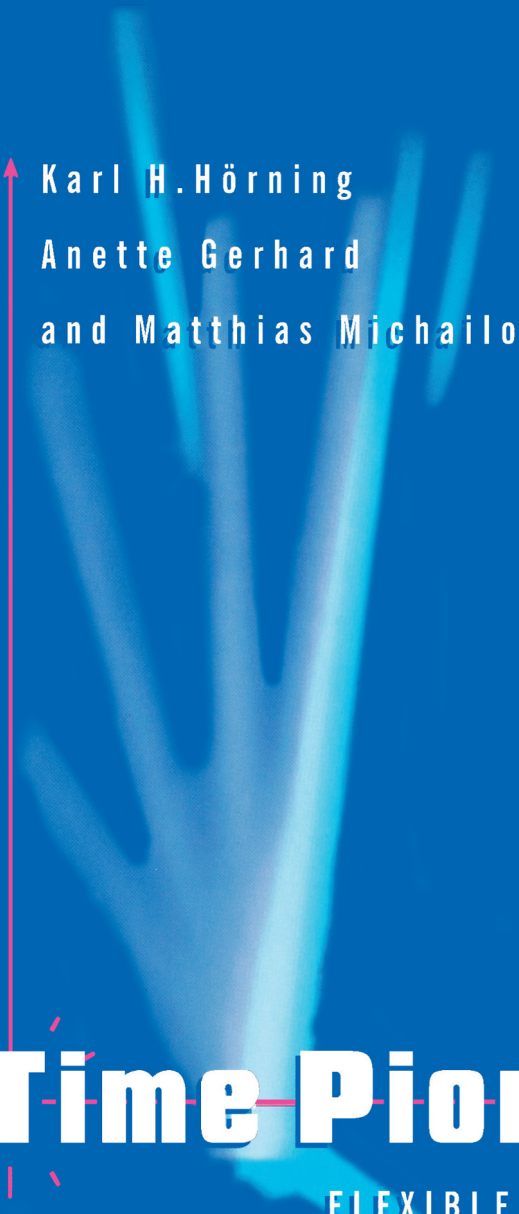
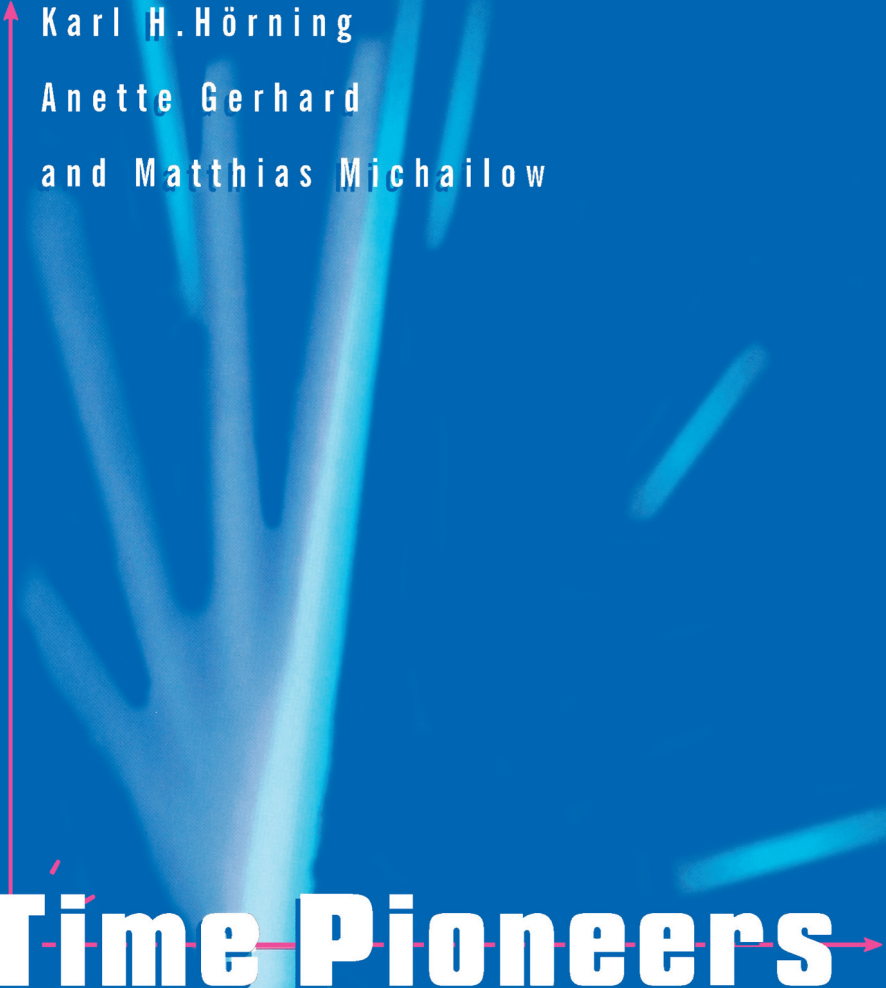




Karl H. Hörning
Anette Gerhard
and Matthias Michailow



Time Pioneers

FLEXIBLE WORKING TIME
AND NEW LIFESTYLES

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*Flexible Working Time and
New Lifestyles*

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Translated by Anthony Williams

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Foreword to the English Edition

Many stories are told about time. Those told by men are frequently different from those told by women, those told by managers different from those told by blue-collar workers, those told by philosophers different from those told by sociologists. This book describes a system of time as perceived and contested by a group of our contemporaries. The curious features of the German debate on working time may surprise English-speaking readers, but beyond these peculiarities, they will quickly realize that they are familiar with the cultural backdrop against which the debate is taking place. Like all good stories, this one has no ending: its heroes are distrustful of visions and utopias. All their attention is focused on the present. The flexibilization of their working time is intended to secure them the maximum degree of flexibility at this point in time. They have no desire to arrange and plan everything; on the contrary, they wish to be able to react swiftly to changing circumstances. To this end, they want to 'have more time'. Thus, this book focuses on the 'presence of time'. For those who perceive that the main problem with time lies in 'time' and orientate themselves accordingly, the timescale of activity is the present.

However, although the book is about pioneers, it is not an heroic story. Their actions are directed against a life model which promises to elevate to the status of 'master of all things' those who, via a process of rationalization, achieve an heroic victory over time and the 'wastage' of time. In the eyes of the time pioneers, this is a futile struggle, since the sum total of that which has been achieved

this century is not more, but less time. The time system which, following a great deal of effort, obtains today is characterized by a scarcity rather than a surplus of time. And as, so to speak, a 'perverse' side effect of equality between the sexes, this 'lack of time' also affects women.

Thus, it is not time control which becomes the key issue for the – male and female – time pioneers, but rather careful and independent time management. The flexibilization of working time is an essential prerequisite of such time management, yet on its own it is far from adequate, since the time gained can easily result in boredom. Although new forms of working time flexibility augment the dispositional freedom of the individual, they also abrogate certain collective rhythms of the time system which for so many people are a source of guidance and support.

It is possible to relax the rigid time systems of social life. Whether or not the resulting opportunities are exploited depends on the ability of individuals to develop time systems of their own which are able to overcome the exacerbated problems of coordination and self-discipline. This is due to the fact that in post-industrial society the task of constructing a life over time and in time is becoming increasingly complex and imposes great demands upon the individual.

One of the most puzzling findings of this sociological study is that the time pioneers do not (wish to) know what to do with the increased amount of free time on their hands. The purpose of their struggle was not to obtain more time off work, but more free time. They secured greater room for manoeuvre for the purpose of managing their time and themselves more effectively. They do not regard free time as a vacuum calling for rapid utilization and occupation. They wish to 'disencumber' time, not pack it full of activities again. Ultimately, they take the view that time should be utilized for the purpose of shaping their own lives.

The fact that time thus becomes a problem and an issue for individuals means that they begin to reflect upon time references: they gradually develop a 'reflexive time consciousness'. Thus, they are constantly aware of 'time'. They utilize the time which they have gained as a result of the flexibilization of their working time for the purpose of initiating a process of time management, and thus of self-management. Therefore, they are not simply time pioneers, but also pioneers of self-centred time. They take the time to reflect upon time, and thus also upon themselves in time, and to discuss the matter with others.

In so doing, they not only seek to escape the perils of harassment

and lack of time, but also to learn more about themselves. Whether or not they will be successful in this quest is rather uncertain. The experiment is underway: some are in the process of abandoning it, others are in the process of telling new stories.

K. H. H., A. G. and M. M.

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K. H. H., A. G. and M. M.
Aachen, May 1990

Introduction

In human experience, time is a scarce commodity, and this scarcity of time is a millstone around our necks. Indeed, everyone complains of having too little time. Though not exactly egoists, nor heroes, people who consciously appropriate some time *for themselves* are something akin to explorers. Such people set their own time standards, while others, possessing no such standards, squander time because they do not realize that they actually have any time in the first place. These explorers adopt a different approach towards time management, and thus they are pioneers who, possessing time, have less need for other possessions.

Studies of the contemporary world consistently reveal that an independent approach towards time management would seem set to become one of the major questions of our age, and one which has already been the object of much theoretical deliberation and speculation. However, hitherto the actual opportunities for and possible forms of such an approach to time management have been largely ignored. 'Time pioneers' are people who strive to realize their conceptions of time at work and in their everyday private lives, in the process of which they confront obstacles and interruptions and develop independent forms of time management. On the one hand, they endeavour to introduce some degree of flexibility into their working time, thus distancing themselves from the ideals of the employment society. On the other, they couple these aspirations to flexibility with demands 'for more time for themselves', thus bringing into play the entire fabric of the way in which they fashion their lives.

The point of departure for our analysis is the flexibilization of working time. This was secured by the personal efforts of the time pioneers. They work much shorter hours and, where possible, gear their working time towards their own preferences. However, for the time pioneers, the additional time which this creates is not simply leisure time – it is ‘free’ time, time which they endeavour to manage as prudently as possible in order that it should not become immediately reoccupied with responsibilities and commitments. It is our hypothesis that, during the course of their independent struggle against the prevailing time structures, the behavioural and interpretive practices of the time pioneers increasingly assume the characteristics of an independent lifestyle.

In this respect, our analysis is fundamentally different from previous empirical studies. Such studies either investigate the problems of flexible working time to the exclusion of the accompanying social changes in the structures of working and private time, or they concentrate exclusively upon the question of changed attitudes towards time, time preferences, thus losing sight of the formative social force represented by changes in awareness. In contrast, we pose the question of how certain radical changes in the social conditions of work and time are absorbed by the time pioneers and become assimilated in their behavioural and interpretive practices. It is our opinion that these upheavals become particularly concentrated in the lifestyle of the time pioneers.

A full appreciation of this viewpoint requires the abandonment of conventional interpretive schemata inadequate to the task of explaining the processes of change which this analysis identifies, indeed, which portray such processes in the wrong light. A case in point is the fundamental question of the changing importance of work. Studies of the contemporary world are too precipitate in excluding from the work- and achievement-orientated society people whose ‘only’ ambition is to change it rather than to reject it outright. The time pioneers do not at all regard employment as a necessary evil. Quite the contrary: in fulfilling their responsibilities, they display motivation, willingness and commitment. Nevertheless, in order to avoid becoming appropriated by the demands imposed upon them by their employers, they harbour their own concepts with regard to the organization of their work. Their interest lies in gaining more time for themselves by adopting certain methods of organizing their working and private lives, rather than in the separation, overlapping and compensation of working and free time. In rejecting the established

working time standard, they adopt a position outside the universally accepted cultural model of the conduct of life.

To some degree, this study is an examination of a new stage in the conflicts over working time policy. Employees are rebelling against the unreasonable behavioural expectations imposed by inflexible, standardized working time. They are consciously and deliberately adopting an independent position and opposing such expectations with their own concepts of the relationship between 'work and living'. However, as a result, they now find themselves 'between the devil and the deep blue sea', sandwiched between the great antipodes. As yet, working time policy has no place for them. Employers are only willing to sanction flexibilization on their own terms, and the trade unions, fearful of employees forfeiting any employment protection rights, have hitherto consistently rejected flexibilization on this basis. Thus, the time pioneers are left to their own resources. They acquire their free time at the cost of a plurality of disadvantages, primarily labour intensification. Thus do opportunities and risks become personalized!

We encountered time pioneers in a wide variety of occupations and positions. They are middle-income salaried employees in commercial, administrative, engineering, social and teaching professions. Our target group comprises men and women in approximately equal numbers; a small proportion of them live alone, and a third have non-adult children. Their work is altogether different from that associated with typical part-time employment.

We conducted a detailed study into the motives behind the desire for changes in working time, how individuals secured the flexibilization of their working time and the consequences which they faced at the workplace as a result. It became apparent that the primary obstacle to the practical implementation of new working time arrangements are traditional conceptions of employment in the enterprise. The dispute concerning flexible working time is exposed as a cultural conflict at the workplace, a clash of incompatible cultural perspectives between employer and employee. We discovered that the cultural paradigm of the employment society, the paradigm with which the time pioneers are at loggerheads, still remains very strong.

This situation poses a serious dilemma for the time pioneers: from the standpoint of job content, they take their work seriously and approach the performance of their tasks with commitment, but they have no desire to become appropriated by the temporal, organizational, and particularly normative, demands of their employers. This

attitude brings obvious disadvantages and assessment deficits in its train. Employers are not so easily persuaded to accept such a rejection of the prevailing cultural paradigm of the employment society. The time pioneers do not adopt an instrumental attitude towards work: in other words, they do not constitute the drop-outs of a leisure and consumer society for whom employment is nothing more than an end to a private means. However, in the interpretive schemata of the time pioneers, the meaning of life is linked to certain forms of work: through the restructuring of the relationship between work and life, time assumes central thematic importance. Time pioneers desire interesting and skilled work, but also more time for themselves. However, it is not their intention that such free time should immediately become recondensed with other tasks and commitments. It becomes quite clear that their reorientation is not governed by 'another side', such as free time. New priorities are evolving *vis-à-vis* the way in which people conduct their lives, priorities which envisage a changed balance between work and life, thus undermining the strict segregation that exists between work and free time. These incipient independent interpretive schemata reveal some of the central elements of an independent 'lifestyle'.

This lifestyle is primarily characterized by two typical changes: the changed relationship between time and money, and the reordering of daily time schemata. Consequent upon their changed working time, involving in many cases a reduction in hours of up to 50 per cent *vis-à-vis* full-time employment, time pioneers suffer a drop in income level. They make strenuous efforts to determine for themselves the correct relationship between certain income levels and the time which is gained. They make no attempt to compensate for loss of income – in order to maintain living standards – by intensifying their levels of involvement in domestic work, consumption-related work or the black economy. Inveterate consumption patterns militate against the implementation of changes in the way in which they conduct their lives necessitated by the reductions in their income levels. From this perspective, time pioneers scrutinize and re-evaluate the role of money and consumption. Time enters into competition with money: it is employed as a means of increasing affluence; and, from a certain standard of living upwards, temporal affluence competes against material affluence. This is an attempt on the part of the time pioneers to distance themselves from the money–time dictate prevailing in the economic sector.

Our empirical analysis of the reordering of daily time schemata breaks new ground. Hitherto, the debate on working time has

completely failed to examine this question, and the burgeoning number of time theories also avoids testing them empirically. In contrast, our analysis focuses upon the changed time allocation practices and the changed interpretive schemata of time. By reorganizing everyday life in terms of time, the time pioneers acquire the ability to assume sole responsibility for time management, and thus opportunities to develop a new awareness of time. This is primarily geared towards achieving a lifestyle predicated upon flexible and disposable time structures in order to create 'more time for themselves'.

In turn, the availability of disposable time triggers a self-reflective process in the time pioneers: they now have the time on their hands to reflect upon time. The result is judicious time management, the foremost objective of which is the avoidance from the outset of occupying time or allowing it to be occupied. The time pioneers are convinced that this will facilitate the realization of their subjective aspirations in life. The new time management techniques and interpretive schemata largely bear the hallmark of this subject-centring.

Our analysis extends far beyond the issue of the flexibilization of working time. It is our opinion that far-reaching changes are discernible in the lifestyle of the time pioneers, changes which are particularly manifested in the problem of structuring time: time is now representative of something more. 'Time' symbolizes a different lifestyle, a lifestyle which is less subordinate to the unilaterally imposed demands of the industrial society and makes greater efforts to establish independent patterns.

Using the flexibilization of working time, this study introduces a research perspective which analyses the specific conceptions of life behind these changes. Without such an examination of these lifestyles, which exert so much formative influence and hence are themselves subject to such influence, it is impossible to fathom the underlying processes of this social change. Flexible forms of working are an expression of the upheavals occurring in the world of work and its industrial time regime. Our interest in forms of working time secured on an individual basis points beyond the narrow confines of flexibilization to the existence of an enhanced level of awareness of the phenomenon of time *per se*. The lifestyle of the time pioneers demonstrates that within the framework of the socio-cultural environment conceptions of life develop in whose interpretive schemata the problem of time is identified as a central theme. The time pioneers adopt an independently critical stance towards the prevailing time relations, which are manifested as scarcity and shortage of time and are concentrated in the characteristic topos of a 'society with no time'.

They react to society's surplus production of temporal demands, they keep these temporal directives in check and they endeavour to enhance the level of harmony between different time references.

By the manner in which the time pioneers assimilate certain upheavals in social time structures and develop changed time management techniques, they acquire a perception of time which ultimately fosters a lifestyle based on 'temporal affluence'. They still retain a 'pioneering' reputation as individualists and outsiders, and this reputation is repeatedly subject to confirmation and reinforcement, particularly in their working lives. However, in their own eyes, they are distinguished from the overwhelming majority of their colleagues less by being special or different in any way than by the conviction that the way in which they organize their lives constitutes an improvement in the quality of life over that which they enjoyed prior to securing flexibilization.

They prove themselves to be true pioneers by virtue of the fact that, in the face of great opposition, they establish new schemata in respect of the relationship between work and living, discover ways out of the crisis of the employment society via their form of participation in employment and gear the way in which they organize their lives, and their interpretive schemata, towards the constructive reappropriation of time for themselves.

1 Lifestyles and Time Relations in Flux

A different approach to time management is not the sole distinguishing feature of the time pioneers at the centre of this study: their lifestyle also provides a particularly striking indication of the radical changes currently taking place in modern society. In terms of numbers, the time pioneers are still rather thin on the ground, and can be investigated only by means of a systematic case study. Nevertheless, it is beyond question that they perform a pioneering role. Their participation in employment is marked by a flexible attitude towards time. This attitude can serve as a model in which changed aspirations and new interpretations, open to adequate explanation only against the backdrop of a general process of social transformation, assume definite shape.

Sociology is reluctant to provide the appropriate analytical tools which such an explanation requires. For this reason, the following chapter is devoted to expounding the theoretical and empirical basis of our study, and introducing the context of working time policy which is of such crucial importance.

1.1 The abandonment of old thought models

Sociology professes to investigate social reality by means of theoretically sound categories. This claim is being increasingly called into question by the realization that central sociological thought models

no longer permit an adequate grasp of significant changes in modern society. Sociology is harbouring growing doubts about the validity of some massive concepts from its nineteenth-century traditions. In problematizing 'work' and the 'employment society', for example, sociology has challenged the validity of a social model in which employment was crucial as the central category and the driving force behind a dynamic process of development. Modern research into inequality is similarly casting serious doubt upon the analytical explanatory power of the class and strata model.

All this has undermined key sociological categories which hitherto have spearheaded the analysis of social differentiation and integration almost as a matter of course. Widespread theoretical uncertainty is generating numerous exploratory attempts. The preliminary results of such attempts are still somewhat unsatisfactory, and it is therefore essential to examine them critically and to develop our own theoretical frame of reference as a basis for this study.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the category of 'work' was toppled from the pedestal upon which it had stood largely unchallenged for more than a century. This process initiated a debate on the 'crisis of the employment society', during the course of which employment forfeited its status as the structural centre of society, to which it had long been automatically assigned. For sociology, work was the axis about which all else revolved: from this standpoint, each and every sphere of life was organized in accordance with the requirements of employment; work overshadowed everything else, and its 'long arm' reached into every last nook and cranny of society.

Industrial sociologists were particularly disconcerted by this collapse. They found it hard to have to recognize the existence of social changes which fundamentally questioned the decisive influence of employment. Their analytical tools were not geared towards adequately recording forms of experience and sociation other than work, nor towards relating these forms to employment. Thus the claims about the 'decline in the significance of work' came as a serious shock to their system, and it was some time before they were in a position to redefine their research subjects (Hörning 1989).

Claus Offe (1983) in particular had appointed himself advocate of the 'crisis of the employment society'. He assembled a large number of indicators pointing towards the fact that employment had forfeited some of its determining force. In opposition to the concept of a standard form of employment, Offe maintains that individual employment circumstances are subject to such variation in respect of earnings, qualifications, security, social visibility and recognition, workload,