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Paradoxes from the Individualization of Human Resource Management: The Case of Telework

Laurent Taskin
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ABSTRACT. In the context of change to the “new modernity” described in Beck’s work, companies develop management modes and methods that focus more and more on individuals. Constitutive of the individualization process, human resources practices have become ambivalent as the process itself. This contribution examines how a managerial and organizational innovation as telework contributes to the process of individualization, and the paradoxes it addresses to management. At the interface of the social and the technical, teleworking appears as a flexible arrangement, meeting employees’ and employer’s demands – which is a characteristic of the process of individualization – by simultaneously fragmenting collectivity, exposing individuals to social risk, and producing exclusion. The authors focus on two consecutive paradoxes of such individualized managerial practices: the individual–collective dilemma and the autonomy–control paradox. Finally, the paper reveals HRM as a new institution of individualization in a world where regulation functions are more and more transferred to individuals themselves.

KEY WORDS: flexibility, human resource management, ICT, individualization, organization, telework, work

In recent years, the organizational world has been affected by major changes in economical as well as in political, social, and technological fields. This phenomenon is often described as the “age of modernity”, by reference to both a well-tried reality and a period of history. The analysis of modernity refers to several breakings but overall to an acceleration of rhythms. Many factors lead modern societies to transform themselves at more and more accelerated cadences. Among them, Giddens quotes globalization, information economy, and democratization.¹ The way how individuals free themselves from the social frames that structured industrial societies plays a major role in the Giddens and Beck’s analysis of transformations of advanced modern societies (Vendramin, 2004). Actually, according to Beck (2001), the current acceleration of the individualization process constitutes the key element of the modernity radicalization.

Facing this “modern” context of change, companies suggest innovations to manage people at work that integrate business needs for adaptability and flexibility – in a rather mechanistic and contingent way. Moreover, human resource management (HRM) is promoted to a strategic issue with a double objective: trying to integrate people into a “modern” company as well as answering the needs of employees concerning autonomy and responsibilities (Le Goff, 2000). *De facto*, some management tools seem to support visions of a fragmented society and a segmented employment market. As part of this individualization process, HR practices tend to partly

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individualize contracts and contacts (Louart, 1994). In that way, the relationship between individualization and new HR practices and forms of organizations appears circular, or reflexive: individualization seems to be a prelude for, as well as a consequence of, managerial changes. Within companies, the notion of individualization covers a double phenomenon: on the one hand, it refers to the fact that elements of the contract between employee and employer (job description, salary, career, etc.) depend on individual characteristics directly linked to the worker himself (motivation, talent, individual performance, etc.); on the other hand, it means that each individual is largely responsible for his own present and future situation (Galambaud, 2001).

Therefore, the process of individualization expresses itself through managerial modes and methods that are more and more centred on the individual and that try to integrate individuals' needs. Beyond the consideration that some managerial practices, announced as social innovations, may constitute social regressions for individuals, this paper illustrates how HRM takes part in the ambivalent process of individualization using the case of telework. Ambivalence certainly is the main characteristic of the process of individualization that sustains both integration and exclusion: while it differentiates on the basis of individual characteristics, it constitutes a collective process; while it makes people more autonomous, it constrains their actions; while it constitutes a social innovation, it contributes to fragment collectivity, exposes individuals to social risks, and produce exclusion.

At the interface between social and technical fields, teleworking appears as a flexible arrangement – a mutual flexibility – meeting employees' and employer's demands. Asking for the subjective involvement of individuals, teleworking – requiring autonomy and responsibility – contributes to the emergence of a new social contract which is best characterized by the notion of “individual responsibility” (Schots and Taskin, 2005). Therefore, telework has to be considered as a tool of flexibility that gives “room for manoeuvre” adapted to problematic situations. This room for manoeuvre is potentially favourable to employees as well as employers, but they can also lead to mutual prejudices (Taskin and Vendramin, 2004).

This contribution aims at studying the paradoxes that individualized HRM practices address to the management itself in its role, function, and theoretical foundations. In the first part, the concept of individualization is developed and discussed from a HRM perspective. Then, the case of telework is studied in order to illustrate individualization in HRM practices. Telework also reveals some paradoxes for individuals and organizations. We focus on two consecutive paradoxes of such managerial modes: the individual–collective dilemma and the autonomy–control paradox. The final discussion addresses ethical issues related to HRM practices and theoretical corpus, by questioning the legitimacy of the common prime mission of HRM – integrate people *into* the organization – since regulation institutions have been internalized by individuals. Moreover, we question the relevance for HRM to constitute an institution of individualization as such, since it no longer focuses on personnel administration, which clearly referred to collective dimensions.

Individualization and HRM

When speaking about “individualization” the temptation is often great to assimilate this collective process to “individualism”. The latest consists in considering each individual as the responsible actor of her or his professional path, subtracting society and employer from any collective responsibility, and in transforming the constraint and collective character of a process in an individual and voluntary step (Vendramin, 2004). It is well to distinguish the process of individualization from the neoliberal idea of the free-market individual to which Ulrich Beck refers as the *institutionalized individualism*: “the ideological notion of the self-sufficient individual ultimately implies the disappearance of any sense of mutual obligation – which is why neoliberalism inevitably threatens the welfare state” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: xxi).

According to Beck's work (2001), the sociological understanding of “individualization” is ultimately bound up with the question of how individuals can demystify this false image of autarky. Certainly, a commonly shared stereotype is that individualization breeds a “me-first” society. Indeed, erosion of economic, social, and cultural references, changes in

types of employment, as well as some neoliberal discourses, support individualistic behaviours of newcomers on the labour market: stability and permanence principles – such as fixed term contracts and full-time employment, or subordination and dependence with regard to a single employer – are no longer the basis of employment relationships.

This inherent ambivalence emerges in the description of the individualization process by Lallément (2001: 40): “Carrying at the same time a supplement of autonomy and of dependence, a dynamic such as individualization is at the centre of a new contemporary way of envisioning the link between work and action: employees are more than ever put in situations where they are responsible for their productive acts (with the related implications in terms of stress, differentiation race, etc.) but do not have all the resources they need to accomplish some tasks. Neither are they able to control the networks they are placed in.”

The ambivalence of the individualization resides in the fact that it constitutes a process of individuals’ differentiation, based on individual characteristics, but that acts both on an individual and a collective level (Vendramin, 2004). According to Becks (2001), central institutions of modern society – basic civil, political, and social rights, but also paid employment and training and the mobility necessary for it – are geared to the individual and not to the group. This is the case of managerial principles and practices too.

Especially, HRM integrates individuals’ needs. This can be observed by the fact that the situation of each person (his/her activity, his/her remuneration, his/her career, etc.) is related to individual elements specific to that person (talent, individual performance, merit, motivation, competence, even elements of chance, etc.) and by the fact that each person is largely responsible for his/her present or future situation (Galambaud, 2001). According to Thévenet (1999: 10), this individualization process “does not consist only in the individualization of remunerations and of training policies, but also relates to everyday HRM policies which are made of managerial relationships and of permanent dealings with behaviours and attitudes at work”.

Notwithstanding, HRM uncontestably plays a major role in the process of individualization. Beyond the individualization of wage policy (Servais, 1989) and of career paths, instead of a seniority-

based management (Dany, 2002), individuals are more and more responsible for themselves (“to be the actor of his/her own professional life”), and for the use of a lot of tools that HR just suggests, even informally (communication, training, etc.). For practitioners, backed up by consultants, human resource management refers to the management of a specific asset – manpower – that is seen to be a strategic variable that links characteristics and values to individual competencies of people (Storey, 1989). Of course, this process of individualization in HRM practices remains ambivalent. By focusing on the fundamental role of the intra-team cooperation (exposed initially by Elton Mayo and rediscovered in the knowledge management work),² Oiry (2000) shows that the individualization of HR politics affects the open process that constitutes cooperation. He observes individuals’ needs to redefine the HR rules to preserve cooperation in teamwork. Since the individual becomes nomadic, he has to be much more the “rule finder” himself (Lash, 2001). This new capability seems to be related to the individualization process.

According to Vendramin (2004: 53–55), who draws up a “shopping list” of individualized HR practices, the changes affecting HRM modes are largely inspired by the context of individualization. The process of individualization is thus integrated in new human resource and organizational principles, contributing to freeing employees from the organizational constraint and enabling them to be fulfilled in their jobs: (i) the questioning of hierarchies and control; (ii) the valuation of autonomy, and (iii) the need for individual competencies. Applying those principles – through management by objectives, individual appraisal practices, or even individual arrangements or negotiations – HRM tries to make as many employees as possible responsible for their professional future, their employability, and their career paths (Galambaud, 2001).

Individualization constitutes an on-going process that leads to considering the relation to “work” and “collective” in a differentiated way. This process as experienced in organizations – through HR methods that integrate individuals’ needs – also leads to a lot of paradoxes and unintended consequences that can be illustrated by telework. Of course, as argued above, this phenomenon of individualization is neither a new phenomenon nor specific or limited to flexible

practices as telework. It refers to a lot of other HR practices – knowledge management, training, assessment, appraisal, etc. – and is even qualified as a “logic of individualization” that characterizes HRM.

Telework, the ambivalence of individuals’ demands

Behind traditional forms of flexibility, Vendramin and Valenduc (2002: 46) identify and define the flexibility of work location as “the diverse forms of teleworking, the remote access to the employment market or consumer market, the delocalisation and, roughly, all geographical forms of work organization requiring ICT capabilities for working everywhere”.

Considered first as an exclusively technological innovation, telework is nowadays a component of a flexible way to manage work, a tool of flexibility that gives room for manoeuvre adapted to problematic situations (Taskin and Vendramin, 2004). Those opportunities for action are potentially favourable to employees as well as to employers, but they can lead to mutual prejudices too, as we will explain below.

Telework refers to carrying out a professional activity, fully or partly, at distance (i.e. outside the traditional workplace, where the result of this work has to be delivered, and away from any physical capability to monitor the execution of tasks), and requiring information and communication technologies (ICT) use.³ Telework is then characterized by (a) the distance, i.e. a spatial and temporal dispersion, and (b) the use of ICT.

Telework refers to a multiform set of reality and practices. Previously described in relation to the place where the work was done, its characterization depends nowadays on several parameters : location(s), frequency, kind of arrangement (formal/informal), initiative to telework, flexibility of schedule, and performance monitoring (Allen et al., 2003; Feldman and Gainey, 1997). According to some of those characteristics – those that may be used to describe the type of *despatialization* associated to telework (Bridoux and Taskin, 2005) – we can identify in the literature different forms of telework. A commonly used typology comes from the European Commission’s surveys and distinguishes between home-based telework (permanent or alternative), occasional telework (that refers to a

telework arrangement concerning less than 1 day per week), mobile or nomadic telework, teleworking from telecentres or satellite offices, and independent telework (Empirica, 2000). Of course, these forms of telework can be combined.

(A) Why teleworking?

The reasons to favour teleworking differ according to which actors we consider. Broadly speaking, employers expect “quick wins”: increase in productivity, decrease in overheads and estate costs, and even reducing absenteeism (Jackson and van der Wielen, 1998; Lindorff, 2000). Anyway, telework is often adopted in a rational perspective, i.e. to reduce commuting times, to improve service to the customers, to improve ICT use or to extend flexibility (Baruch, 2000; Konradt et al., 2003). Employees themselves expect greater autonomy and flexibility that could lead to better balancing private and professional duties. Thus, the motivations of both employers and employees relate to mobility and flexibility matters.

Nevertheless, employers perceive telework as a “win-win” arrangement, as a mutual flexibility for employer and employee, with quick wins but doubts regarding its management. The feasibility of such a balanced arrangement depends on the conjunction of several characteristics and on the job itself (Peters et al., 2004): organizational, individual, and household. Baruch and Nicholson (1997) argue that telework is often adopted in line with employers’ arguments (costs rationalisation) because of the scarcity of the conjunction of the previous components.

(B) Who teleworks?

The key role of ICT in telework practice explains why it first developed in the IT sector. Nowadays, teleworkers are mainly “knowledge workers”, i.e. highly qualified white-collar workers (Daniels et al., 2001). Telework in Europe is done alternatively, from different workplaces that can combine with each other, and is a matter of males and high qualification (Emergence, 2002; Empirica, 2003). Those *knowledge workers* are typical of the activity IT, financial services, advice, and consulting sectors,

which are characterized by project work, high autonomy, strong values and culture, informal arrangements (flexibility), and management by objectives, among others (Daniels et al., 2001; Vendramin and Valenduc, 2002).

(C) *Telework as an individualized mode of management*

As underlined by Harris (2003: 425), “teleworking has gained an image of a *liberating form of employment* through working in a home environment free from the stress of daily commuting, with greater autonomy to organize the working day and the opportunity to work undisturbed by office politics and distractions”. The mastery of time and the balancing of private and professional roles allow work to penetrate into the private sphere, with unexpected consequences: lengthening of the working time, family related tensions, and an increased availability to the company (Taskin and Schots, 2005), that constitute the ambivalence of such an arrangement, see below.

Telework is in most cases an informal arrangement between the employer and the employee: between 65.5 and 90.4% of the teleworkers telework informally in Europe (depending on the country), this means without clear arrangements in their employment contract (Walrave and De Bie, 2005). Telework is therefore a tacit and individualized agreement. Since the workplace refers now to sharing desks or “hot desking”, telework is often asked for by the employees themselves, in an informal way, to have the opportunity to work in a more quiet place: home.

Those compromises define an employment relationship where the flexibility of work appears to be mutual and balanced. Teleworking asks for “trust management” (Baruch, 2000). Indeed, since telework constitutes an interpersonal and tacit arrangement in this sector, trust becomes the key of the employment relationship, which takes place in a changing environment (Dambrin, 2004; Musson and Tietze, 2004).

(D) *Telework ambivalences*

Asking for the subjective involvement of individuals, teleworking – requiring autonomy and responsibility

– contributes to the emergence of a new social contract where exchange becomes “commitment, competition of the individuals versus development opportunities offered by the company” (Veltz, 2000: 203). Beyond loyalty – an outgoing social value in a world characterized by precarious involvements – a notion that characterizes better the employment relationship is “individual responsibility”. Alternate, occasional or mobile telework are part of those compromises between the pressure of objectives and the need for a relative quality of life. Those compromises are continuously temporary, not optimal, individual, and informal or tacit (Taskin and Vendramin, 2004).

Of course, it may lead to a recalibration of the employment relationship that could become a less relational and more transactional relationship with lower employee expectations and emotional commitment but greater realism about reciprocity and increased individual freedom (Harris, 2003). Based on our own research work and on the literature dedicated to telework, we identify three specific ambivalences: (i) the intensification of work; (ii) the social isolation; and (iii) the “do-it-yourself” rule.

Intensification of work

Time management – more than place or localization management – is nowadays an important incentive to the adoption of telework, both for employees and employers. Telework indeed allows reducing the time spent in transportation and, more generally, to manage the unexpected, the delays. It allows working without idle time between demand and supply (Taskin and Vendramin, 2004). From this flexibility, teleworkers hope to gain the possibility to be more available for their families (Musson and Tietze, 2004). Those “small arrangements with time” constitute the origin of major tensions between private and professional times. By reducing stress related to work, home-based telework seems to increase the level of stress related to private life (Konradt et al., 2003), what may contribute to increasing the individual’s mental burden and stress. According to Mann and Holdsworth (2003), telework may, in this case, seriously threaten an employee’s health. The fundamental question is to know to what extent an employee can put limits to the intrusion of work into her/his private life. Is the

teleworker able to find an equilibrium that is her/his own, and to fix limits that the employer cannot cross?

The increase in quantitative productivity that is often associated with telework comes from both the reduction of breaks and disturbances (working time becomes more crowded time) and the lengthening of the working time (Bailey and Kurland, 2002; Daniels et al., 2001). Telework therefore consists in a superposition time (working time at home is added to traditional working time) instead of a substitution time and is really a factor of intensification. As working time lengthens and becomes greater, absenteeism diminishes. Employees tend to work even if they feel low in health. Again, this illustrates the employee's inability to clearly distinguish private from professional life.

Social isolation

The "despatialization" relative to the practice of telework, generates a feeling of social isolation. This lack of face-to-face interactions may become clumsy for teleworkers who can feel "invisible" for the company (Cocula and Frédy-Planchot, 2000) and feel less committed to the organization (Bélanger, 1999; Harris, 2003), which contradicts commitment theories that positively link the level of autonomy to organizational commitment. The social isolation, which can have a deep impact on job performance, by negatively influencing organizational commitment, is another illustration of ambivalence. As argued by Bridoux and Taskin (2005), social isolation may finally constitute a threat for knowledge transfer, by affecting an individual's satisfaction and performance.

The "do-it-yourself" rule

Since telework implies the multi-localization of employees (to which the concept of despatialization refers), Felstead et al. (2003) identify the challenges it addresses to traditional management control. They argue that the workplace represents the "visibility" (the capability to observe the employee) and the "presence" (the capability of the employee to interact with co-workers) of employees. Those two dimensions are the essential components of the traditional management control. In this perspective, the phenomenon of despatialization, related to the telework practice, will modify both the "visibility"

and the "presence" of workers, which will affect the coordination of the working team and, finally, the control modalities (Schots and Taskin, 2005).

Broadly speaking, managing telework constitutes a real challenge, especially in terms of employment relationships: how to control remotely, indeed, but also how to commit, coach, and coordinate employees remotely? The traditional answer is trust management. This assumes self-assertive, autonomous, loyal, and responsible employees and constitutes a real transfer of responsibility and risk, as we will show below (Dambrin, 2004). The ambivalence here consists in the widespread control and monitoring methods that we observe in relation to teleworking, strongly contrasting with the assertion of self-managing employees that is often argued. According to Harris (2003) and Deffayet (2002), for the first time at least, telework contributes to duplicating formal procedures of quantitative feedbacks, referring to the paradox of "autonomy under control" (Galambaud, 1988; Pagès et al., 1998).

(E) Risk and responsibility transfer

Telework is accompanied by a deep transfer of risks and responsibilities from the company and its management to the individuals at work. By relying on the self-governing and the autonomy – let's speak about Beck's concept of self-assertion – telework indubitably postulates the "insourcing" of a lot of responsibilities and risks in private instances (Lash, 2001). Of course, telework is characteristic of particular methods of management – taking place according to specific corporate cultures – that ask for more subjective commitment of individuals.

Flexibility of work location remains closely related to the physical structure of the organization. Telework constitutes an alternative to the workplace that is no more adapted to the achievement of tasks requiring a certain degree of concentration. Telework is most often asked by the employees themselves in order to have the opportunity to work from a more quiet place: the home. This is a real transfer of responsibility: it is no longer the company's concern to offer adapted premises, this responsibility is outsourced to employees! Telework means – at least in part – a transfer of workplace, especially in the case of home-based teleworking. While

telework remains informal, i.e. telework consists in a tacit arrangement between the worker and his manager or hierarchy – this transfer is synonymous with a transfer of risk: equipment, overhead costs (warming, energy, etc.), and even security are now the responsibility of the employee.

Seen as a flexible solution to organizational issues (productivity, costs, absenteeism, control, trust, flexibility, mobility, etc.), as well as an answer to workers' personal needs (commuting time, schedule, professional–personal life, etc.), telework is developing in organizations and gaining in visibility, even if it still suffers from a lack of clarity, mainly related to managerial and legal aspects (Empirica, 2003; Walrave and De Bie, 2005). Nevertheless, this managerial and organizational “innovation” presents some ambivalences. These are not specific to teleworking, they also highlight ambivalences in several managerial practices and, in particular, HRM practices. We will focus on two paradoxes that seem to be relevant to the prime mission of HRM (i.e. integrating people into the organization): managing the relations between individuals and collectives on the one hand, according autonomy but ensuring control on the other hand.

Paradoxes

(A) The individual–collective dilemma

The relationship between individuals and collectives is probably one of the greatest ambivalence when analyzing HRM practices. This question seems to be constitutive of the HR mission the objective of which is to integrate individuals by letting them share a collective interest. Assuming that tensions may appear between individuals and this collective interest is not new. Nevertheless, through new management practices, such as teleworking for example, the ambivalence seems to gain in complexity, especially when considering discourses that are used to promote such managerial innovation. As we explained above, while teleworking has a huge potential of individualization (e.g. evaluating flexible and personal arrangements), it is also presented as a tool of flexibility that contributes to bring people together by sharing time availability and space and by supporting teamwork.

These tensions may also be observed through other HR practices such as, for example, knowledge management. The basis of knowledge lies in the individuals themselves. But the strategic value of knowledge appears when it is shared through the organization; then we speak of a core competency that allows the company to develop as a learning organization (El Akremi, 2005; Nonaka et al., 1996; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990). Managing knowledge from a HRM point of view, therefore, means focusing on individuals and developing tools to recognize, develop, assess, even remunerate their skills, aptitudes, and knowledge (Devos and Léonard, 2002). At the same time, these tools have to make sense in the organizational performance objective. Here too, the HRM practices have to rely on individuals to answer collective needs.

Beyond the problem of managing individuals in a collective perspective, these practices also lead to other societal and political consequences. For example, when analyzing the changes of employment through the management of competencies, Beffa, Boyer and Touffut (1999) present a typology of workers that is not based on traditional worker statuses (blue collars and white collars) but depends on the type of knowledge and abilities that they use on the job. A first category of workers is referred to “stable polyvalence”: they have important knowledge and abilities which are linked to a specific company. A second group of workers are presented as “professionals”: their competencies can be transferred to other organizational situations. The last cluster is called “market flexibility”: their competencies are highly standardized and can easily be transferred. By doing so, the emphasis is placed on individual performance and therefore raises the problem of exclusion: what would happen to workers who belong to the model of “market flexibility” when their competencies are no longer economically valuable? In this case, individualized management tools lead to the exclusion of some workers.

Moreover, the traditional qualifications structure and workers' statuses, results of collective bargaining, are abandoned to the benefit of individualistic employment relations (Stroobants, 1994). The emphasis is placed on the individual as her/his specific characteristic become elements of her/his individual contract with the organization. The

traditional collective contract and traditional organizational forms lack the flexibility that a globalized society asks for.

The idea of an individual flexible contract also raises the question of responsibility and autonomy of the contracting party: she/he establishes a flexible contract according to his/her personal interest and, as a counterpart, engages her/his individual responsibility in order to answer the organizational objectives. This question is part of a second paradox that we have to consider.

(B) The autonomy–control paradox

Individualized HRM practices often contribute to an increase in the employee's level of autonomy and responsibility. For example, when a company manages human resources on a knowledge basis, employees become responsible for their own competencies. They have to be sure that they own, develop and offer the right competencies, i.e. those that are needed by the company and therefore those that are valuable. Actually, employees become managers of their competencies and of their "career path" or "development opportunities".

The ambivalence lies first in the fact that this increase in autonomy and responsibilities also is a transfer of risks for employees: they are responsible for their own professional development and management as well as for the company's performance. The HRM department no longer acts as an active intermediate between workers and their contribution to performance, but proposes only the tools to support such behaviours. We have already illustrated this ambivalence in the case of telework, where autonomy comes together with a transfer of risks and responsibilities. But, while transferring organizational responsibilities on workers (career development, competencies management, work organization, etc.), is management not changing responsibility and role?

This risk transfer contributes to the intensification of the workload, and may lead to an increase in the mental burden of work (Gollac and Volkoff, 1996, 2000). Here, autonomy appears to be ambivalent, since "the individualization of objectives and performances reinforces the weight of the mental burden" (Hamon-Cholet and Rougerie, 2000: 251).

Moreover, if an increase in autonomy is usually associated with a decrease in the organizational control, e.g. hierarchical, it does not seem to be the case in companies developing individualized HR practices (Devos and Taskin, 2005; Hamon-Cholet and Rougerie, 2000). The ambivalence of those practices that promote autonomy consists, therefore, secondly in a multiplication of control modes, locations, tools, and indicators. Technologies play a major role by providing easily, even remotely, available monitoring information (diaries of the whole personnel may be checked at any time, from anywhere; Intranets and mobile technologies contribute to increase available time; performance can be monitored in "real-time", etc.). Organizational control tends to become more implicit, political, social, even cultural, but does not disappear at all. The legitimacy of the manager is questioned and individuals integrate norms and values simultaneously with the transfer of autonomy (Dambrin, 2004; Deffayet, 2002; Dimitrova, 2003).

Discussion

The process of individualization is neither an element specific to the organizations nor a recent phenomenon. Giddens (1992) considers this process in the context of globalization and relative to the evolutions of the democracies. If Giddens defines the phenomenon of individualization on a broader societal level, this contribution aims at analyzing the individualization at the organizational level, through the case of telework.

The case of telework raises several questions related to the intensification of work, to social isolation, to control design and, finally, to management, all being subsequent to this kind of transfer process we have illustrated. We combined these dimensions in two main paradoxes, common to several HR practices and affecting management and organizations. Undoubtedly, these paradoxes are, as many features of ambivalence, specific to the process of individualization as described by Beck (2001). Through the paradox between individual and collective, where the collective dimension seems to fade – which does not mean at all that any reference to the collective have disappeared (Zarifian, 2001) – we illustrate that the emphasis is now put on the

individual's characteristics (in order to assess the personal contribution and the commitment) instead of on more traditional references (as qualifications, career paths, "positions", or membership) while, e.g. teamwork is the new reference of people management and HR practices as well as the most recognized way to add value to business. Through the second paradox, dealing with autonomy and control, we showed the ambiguity and the limits of the transfer of responsibility that is often associated to a higher level of autonomy, namely the risks of the intensification of the mental burden at work (Mann and Holdsworth, 2003).

In the case of telework, individualization was characterized by transfers of responsibility and risk, which modify the managerial function itself, i.e. in terms of roles, expectations, supervision, and relationship. Following the logic of individualization of managerial practices, management processes are more and more ensured by a "management of proximity", even in the case of remote working! As a consequence, responsibilities and risks are more directly transferred to individuals.

Individualized HRMs also appears as the means for organizations to standardize the worker's profile towards flexibility, autonomy, self-management, responsibility, and efficacy. Such profiles are able to manage their own careers, as well as to jump at an opportunity in a favourable position of negotiation. By doing that, HRM acts as a political tool of regulation and also constitutes, as many of the individualized HR practices we have mentioned, a tool of exclusion. What about less autonomous, self-assertive people, those who are not in a favourable position to negotiate their status or developments opportunities (because of a lack of competencies, a non-strategic position or a non-core job)? Are they confined to precariousness of employment and status, unstable schedules, "deskilling" and meddling hierarchical control? (Manz and Stewart, 1997).

The fundamental – and in many regards, ethical – question we ask is related to the role and mission of HRM. If the prime mission of HRM consists in integrating people into the organization, does management not resigning in developing individualized HR practices, which just support the individual's needs of volunteer people? Of course, HRM remains a management function and, in this

perspective, is linked to performance requirements (Galambaud, 2001). Human management constitutes an *institution of regulation* – with its own rules, practices, reward systems, and values – that acts with the goal of reaching the required organizational performance level. But, are we not witnessing the birth of a two-level HRM that refers to work segmentations – the internal market, core competencies and non-core jobs (according to Atkinson's framework) – where employees from the same company benefit in different ways from HR practices, depending on their status, position or ability to position themselves in a power relationship, in a favourable way?

Finally, it is the mission of HRM that evolves. As an institution of regulation, HRM now guarantees general rules and procedures, inside which specific and personal arrangements can take place, instead of applying routines, which refer more to personnel administration. Tools and processes are used differently: the goal is no longer to supervise, to compare the discrepancy between what is done and the rules. The mission of HRM is to provide a favourable context to performance, through the elaboration of the general principles of performance that frame behaviours, culture, social interactions and the "self". HRM constitutes a new institution in Beck's perspective and, as part of the individualization process, its rules are part of people's minds.

This contribution has the limited objective to question some managerial practices and to contribute to an ethical perspective on the HRM's missions and developments. We suggest that HRM takes part in the individualization process by being as ambivalent as the process itself. Those ambivalences could be very damaging and need to be managed. HRM constitutes a real institution to which people give the roles and missions they construct, in a kind of enactment process (Weick, 1989). Whatever the adopted perspective, HRM remains a management function *en devenir*, in a context of change.

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Notes

¹ “La sociologie comme conscience de soi de la modernité”, talk with Anthony Giddens, in Cabin, and Dortier, (eds), *La sociologie, histoire et idées*, Editions Sciences Humaines, pp. 147–154, mentioned in Vendramin, 2004, *Le travail au singulier: Le lien social à l'épreuve de l'individualisation*. Louvain-la-Neuve : L'Harmattan, Academia-Bruylant.

² For some, knowledge and cooperation are the two faces of the same coin. Indeed, cooperation constitutes an intangible knowledge, according to the knowledge-based view, widely used in management studies (Nonaka, 1991).

³ Adapted from Breton (1994), *Le télétravail en France: Situation actuelle, perspectives de développement et aspects juridiques*. Paris: La Documentation Française.

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