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Abstract

Recent developments have caused important changes in the IT industry: while being considered comparatively resistant to international relocation of jobs for a long time, the IT industry's landscape has changed a lot in the course of the 1990s, when IT companies started to make use of low-wage destinations and integrated them in globally distributed workflows. According to many authors the internationalisation of the IT industry does not only put jobs in high-wage countries into jeopardy, but also fundamentally changes the organisation and control of labour. Usually, the IT industry is at the centre of attention of scholars focussing on kinds of “post-Taylorist” modes of production, i.e. labour processes that cannot effectively be controlled by the classical “command & control” structure of the Taylorist approach. Instead, management of IT work was said to be highly dependent on the employees, who have to be granted enormous autonomy in order to perform well. It is now argued that this situation will dramatically change due to the increasing internationalisation of the IT industry: global division of labour is expected to necessitate standardisation and formalisation of the labour processes that will lead to extended managerial control over the labour process and reduced autonomy of the employees in their work. So it is expected that in the course of internationalisation, the modes of work organisation and control in the IT industry will shift towards more direct and bureaucratic forms.

Drawing upon case studies in the Indian subsidiaries of two transnationally operating IT companies, the presented study critically questions this prognosis. The results clearly show that the forms of work organisation and control in the IT industry do not develop homogeneously or uniformly in the course of internationalisation. Instead, it is possible to identify specific modes of reorganisation with very different consequences for the employees' autonomy in the labour process. The modes of reorganisation are on the one hand determined by varying patterns of internationalisation in the IT industry. The present study proves that internationalisation works differently in IT service and IT product companies, a difference that significantly influences the way in which work is reorganised. On the other hand, examining the influence of the Indian IT labour market on the modes of work reorganisation, the study shows that the evolving modes of reorganisation cannot be fully understood without considering the interrelation between varying patterns of internationalisation and certain institutional settings of the host countries.