# Changes in Job Structure and Trade Union Priorities

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## Introduction

The main concern of this chapter is to illustrate changes in the job structure of the 14 countries' employees surveyed in 1985, 1995 and 2000 and, where possible, to identify the patterns in the division of labour created by possible shifts in the nature of tasks within production and, thereafter the effects on trade union issues. Developments in production over the past decade or so may have impacted on the positions of various groups of employees (for example, blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, technicians, engineers and managers). Changing job structures might not only have significant consequences for the relative positions of these employees but might also influence the use of human resources and, through this use, might challenge the priorities of trade unions at the firm level. In addition to analysing these changes, the chapter also makes theoretical and methodological contributions to labour process debate on the viability of so-called 'new-production concepts' (Kern and Schumann 1984) – a debate that started in the first half of the 1980s and is still very lively in both Europe and the US.

The Denki Rengo project covered a 15 year period and three surveys. The first survey was conducted over 1984-85 in ten countries. It was then repeated over 1994-95 in 15 countries and over 1999-2000 in 14 countries. The methods used in the latter two surveys were basically the same as those used in the first. The core research tool consisted of a standardised questionnaire for an employees' attitude survey and a 'social audit' to collect non-attitudinal contextual data to help interpret and assess the opinion-based experiences. There were some changes to the samples over the three surveys that might have influenced the interpretation of the issues evaluated in this chapter. During the first phase of the project (1984-85), the sample plants were selected according to the criteria of sector and size. The following four sectors were selected: Heavy Electric, Light Electric, Telecommunication and Parts Producer. One large and one smaller firm were selected from each sector. The smaller firms were those with less than 300 employees and the larger firms employed over 500 employees. During the second survey (1994-95), only large firms were selected, with at least two firms per sector. This compromise in sample design can be explained by the difficulties in accessing firms for the purpose of survey.[4] In the third phase of the project (1999-2000), the approach of the second phase was adopted.[5]

The differences in the structure of the national samples had both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, using various and changing sectors allowed the collection of a great variety of information during the period of investigation, and helped generate better understanding of a variety of labour relations problems at the firm level. On the negative side, the variations in the samples between countries limited the generalisability of the research findings. As a consequence, it is impossible to evaluate the statistical representativeness of the Denki Rengo data. However by including a combination of macro- and meso-level analyses with micro, firm level analysis, the extent of the generalisability improves and the Denki Rengo research method can be offered as a 'documented hypothesis' (Makó *et al.* 2000). In

addition, Denki Rengo data is often complemented by data from other but similar research concurrently conducted by members of the Denki Rengo research team.

## Changes in Job Structures

Having evaluated the survey data on the present job structure of the population survey (5241 respondents) made during Phase III of the Denki Rengo International Survey in 2000, a general picture emerges. The largest pool of jobs still comprised blue-collar workers (38%), the second largest group (28%) was formed by the aggregated data of technicians (15%) and engineers (13%), then came white-collar workers (17%) and the combined figure (11%) of supervisors (6%) and managers (5%). Comparing the job structures by countries, the following patterns were identified: higher than average numbers of blue-collar workers were found in China, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, ROC (Taiwan), Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. It is interesting to note that the share of blue-collar workers was higher than average in all the former European former state socialist countries, except Poland.

The number of white-collar workers is higher than average (17%) in Poland (36%), Japan (28%) and the USA (22%). The average occurs in the Czech Republic (17%). The lowest share of these employees was registered in Italy (7%) and China (5%). Technicians and engineers together represent – as already mentioned – the second largest group of employees. Their number is higher than average in the following countries: Italy (46%), Japan (46%), Slovenia (35%), Finland (31%), China (30%) and France (29%). The lowest scores were registered in the former state socialist countries – with the exception of Poland and Slovenia – that is, in Hungary (8%), Slovakia (11%) and the Czech Republic (14%). The combined number of supervisors and managers (11%) is higher than average in the following countries: Korea (29%), the USA (28%), Finland (17%) and Slovenia (15%). The lowest numbers were found in Japan (4%) and Italy (1%). All figures are presented below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Present Job Structure by Country (2000 data in %)**

| Country | Blue- collar workers | White-collar workers | Technical employees* | Managers** | Others | No answer | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *China* | 48 | 5 | 30 | 7 | 3 | 8 | 100 |
| *Czech Republic* | 57 | 19 | 14 | 7 | 2 | 0 | 100 |
| *Finland* | 34 | 14 | 31 | 17 | 2 | 2 | 100 |
| *France* | 66 | - | 29 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 100 |
| *Hungary* | 69 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 100 |
| *Italy* | 44 | 5 | 46 | 1 | - | 3 | 100 |
| *Japan* | 18 | 28 | 46 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 100 |
| *Korea* | 24 | 15 | 25 | 29 | 5 | 1 | 100 |
| *Poland* | 24 | 36 | 21 | 10 | 3 | 5 | 100 |
| *ROC**** | 43 | 11 | 24 | 18 | 1 | 3 | 100 |
| *Slovakia* | 64 | 12 | 11 | 7 | 6 | - | 100 |
| *Slovenia* | 39 | 8 | 35 | 15 | 3 | 0 | 100 |
| *Spain* | 59 | 11 | 22 | 7 | - | 1 | 100 |
| *USA* | 19 | 22 | 26 | 28 | 5 | 0 | 100 |
| Average | 38 | 17 | 28 | 11 | 3 | 2 | 100 |

Note: * technicians and engineers
** supervisors and managers
*** ROC or Taiwan and throughout the chapter

Job structure in itself reveals little about the nature of jobs, specifically these jobs' task composition or task environment. To be able to map changes in work, it is necessary to

systematically analyse the labour process of these workers. Due to the limitations of this chapter, such analysis here focuses solely on blue-collar workers.

## Changing Tasks: 'New Fordism' rather than 'Post-Fordism'?

Within the 'labour process school'[6] there is continuous debate about shifts in production paradigms in the core manufacturing industries, for example cars and chemicals, and service industries, such as fast food restaurants, financial services and call-centres (see Thompson and Warhurst 1998). This debate has intensified with the 'new production concept' of Kern and Schumann (1984) and claims of a 'new economy' (Leadbeater 2000; Soete 1997; Cairncross 1997).

Changes in the organisation of production can be variously explained by the introduction of new technology, and changes both in product and labour markets. To capture the nature of these changes, labels are often used, such as 'flexible specialisation' (Piore and Sabel 1989; Streeck 1987; Sabel 1982), the 'new production concept' (Regini 1995; Kern and Schumann 1984; Schumann 1988), 'lean production' (Womack *et al.* 1990) and the 'Toyota' versus 'Uddevalla' models (Ohno 1989; Sandberg 1995; Micelli 1995). What is common to all of these models is that they advocate the emergence of a new production model of post-Fordism, encompassing skilled and more autonomous work.

Here it is not possible to go into detail. Instead the Belgian 'Trend Study' group's approach will be tested. This group's work is based on systematic research of changes in work in the chemical, automobile, machine tool and clothing industries. According to this empirical research, changes in the labour process do not represent a radical break with the Fordist or Taylorist production paradigm. The Trend Study group argues instead, not for Post-Fordism, but for 'neo-Fordism' as a label to capture the cumulative or mutant changes in the organisation of production and its effects on work (Huys *et al.* 1999).

Adapting the approach developed by the Belgian Trend Study group, the following dimensions were distinguished and measured in the Denki Rengo Survey Phase III:

- Taylorist or Fordist concepts in organising jobs are measured by the dimension of 'concentration ... this means separate staff services fulfil the various functions related to planning, programming, maintenance, quality assurance, etc.' (Huys *et al.* 1999: 70).
- The neo-Taylorist or neo-Fordist approach to organising jobs implies 'deconcentration' of the above-listed supporting functions or the re-integration of preparatory or staff services (or part of them) into the jobs of production workers.[7]

Changes in the job structure (or the 'task environment') of blue-collar workers identified between 1995 and 2000 are illustrated in Table 2 below.

The data presented in Table 2 indicates that the process of de-concentration was more developed in Japan (112.6%) and Finland (67.7%); that is, in countries with mature capitalist economies. Labour processes in the firms of these countries were thus already structured along neo-Fordist rather than post-Fordist principles of work organisation by the mid-1990s. At the other end of the scale of work organisation, were the group of the ex-state socialist economies. In these countries, there was a radical increase in de-concentration between 1995 and 2000, namely tasks previously carried out by special groups or production supporting members of the staff – such as maintenance and repair, quality control and programming - became integrated into the jobs of blue-collar workers. The exception was Slovakia.

**Table 2: Changes in the Task Structure of Blue-collar Workers: Increasing 'De-concentration' (%)**

| Country | 1995 | | 2000 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Production related tasks* | Production supporting tasks** | Production related tasks* | Production supporting tasks** |
| *China* | 74 | 26.9 | 76 | 32 |
| *Czech Republic* | 66.2 | 33.4 | 65 | 55 |
| *Finland* | 81.4 | 67.7 | 86 | 84 |
| *France**** | 60.0 | 40 | 78 | 13 |
| *Hungary* | 58.9 | 40.7 | 57 | 51 |
| *Italy* | 63.7 | 47.1 | 65 | 32 |
| *Japan* | 59.9 | 112.6 | 53 | 116 |
| *Korea* | 55.3 | 42.9 | 85 | 45 |
| *Poland* | 74.6 | 13.7 | 59 | 41 |
| *ROC* | n.d. | n.d. | 38 | 34 |
| *Slovakia* | 79.2 | 30.2 | 78 | 31 |
| *Slovenia* | 67.8 | 23.8 | 70.0 | 42 |
| *Spain* | 87 | 16 | 97 | 1 |
| *USA* | n.d. | n.d. | 76 | 65 |
| Average | 70.2 | 48.2 | 68 | 48 |

Note: * Production related tasks = machine work or assembly.
** Production support tasks = maintenance or repair + quality control + programming (including software).
*** In the case of France, there was problems with the sample, see Maurice (2000).

The most radical increase in 'production supporting tasks' occurred in the following countries: Poland (+27.3%), Czech Republic (+21.6%), Slovenia (+18.1%) and Hungary (+10.3%). It is worth noting that the share of these tasks was the highest in Hungary during the second Denki Rengo International Survey of 1994-95: 40.7 per cent compared to the Czech (33.4%), Slovak (30.2%), Slovene (23.9%) and Polish plants (13.7%). These changes in the task environment of post-socialist plants are the result of the combined effects of privatisation, the utilisation of economies of scale at national, European or global levels, and rationalisation combined with an intensive use of IT in the emerging market economies in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region. This shift in work organisation suggests the appearance of the neo-Fordist production paradigm. Due to methodological problems, it is not possible to map national variations in the patterns of neo-Fordist divisions of labour.

**Table 3: The Role of Blue-collar Workers in Quality Control**

| Country | The participation of blue-collar workers in quality control tasks (%) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1985 | 1995 | 2000 |
| Hungary | 5.3 | 25.1 | 29 |
| Poland | 6.9 | 4.5 | 8.0 |
| Slovenia | 7.3 | 17.9 | 21 |

To illustrate the effects of both political-economic changes (for example the collapse of state socialism) and generic changes (the globalisation of national economies) in the CEE region at the level of the labour process and production supporting tasks, it is worth noting the increased involvement (participation) of blue-collar workers in quality control (QC) related activities. The most spectacular changes – in the countries participating from the first survey of 1984-85 - were registered in Hungarian (from 5.3% in 1985 to 29% in 2000) and Slovenian plants (from 7.3% in 1985 to 21% in 2000 see Table 3).

## Some Possible Implications of Changing Job Structures

With the intention of raising rather than answering questions, this section discusses some possible outcomes of the changes identified in production in the plants participating in the Denki Rengo International Survey. The period covered by this survey witnessed increased globalisation. Whilst the process of 'internationalisation' is based on the logic of exchange and the process of 'multi-nationalisation' on the logic of production, 'globalisation' is driven by the new social organisational logic of innovation. In this view, multinational corporations (MNCs) are not rooted '... in a single country with head-office and satellites, but operate on the basis of strategic contributions from several countries. The dispersal of strategic decision-making and activities provides an indication of the global corporation in this sense' (Martin 1998: 145).

This globalisation process has potential consequences that shape the continuity and changes in trade union priorities as reflected in the attitudes of employees of the 14 countries. The required trade union priorities of these employees are below in Table 4.

Evaluating the four top trade union priorities as revealed by employees' opinions, the following patterns can be identified:

- 'Job security' together with 'employment creation' and 'wage increase' rank first in both 1995 and 2000. There was a shift from 'wage increase' to 'job security' and 'employment creation' in Japan, China and Slovenia, and from 'job security' to 'wage increase' in the Czech Republic and Slovakia between 1995-95 and 1999-2000. No changes in priorities were registered in Korea, France, Italy, Finland, Poland and Hungary.
- New priorities were registered during the 1999-2000 survey: in third and the fourth places new and 'task environment' related issues appeared, such as 'working environment' in Japan ($4^{th}$), Korea ($3^{rd}$), China ($4^{th}$), the Czech Republic ($4^{th}$), Poland ($4^{th}$), Slovakia ($4^{th}$), Slovenia ($4^{th}$) and Hungary ($3^{rd}$), 'education and training' in Finland ($3^{rd}$) and Italy ($4^{th}$) and 'work hazard' in Poland ($3^{rd}$) and Finland ($4^{th}$).

These responses indicate that when once employees required 'traditional' so-called 'distributive' type interest representation, at the end of the twentieth century – in relative terms at least – there was a growing importance attached to such work-related variables as 'working environment', 'work hazard' and 'education and training'. The unchallenged importance of the 'distributive' type employee's expectation towards trade unions (e.g. employment security, wage increase) and the relatively weak appearance of expectations related to changing 'working environment' or to 'education and training' reflected cumulative instead of radical development in the organising principle of the labour process presented in the earlier section.

## Table 4: Ranking Trade Union Priorities: The Opinions of Employees

| Country | 1st Place | | 2nd Place | | 3rd Place | | 4th Place | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1995 survey | 2000 survey | 1995 survey | 2000 survey | 1995 survey | 2000 survey | 1995 survey | 2000 survey |
| *Japan* | Wage increase | job security | Job security | wage increase | working time reduction | social welfare | social welfare | Working environment |
| *Korea* | Wage increase | wage increase | social welfare | employment creation | Job security | working environment | work hazard | Social Welfare |
| *China* | Wage increase | job security | social welfare | Social welfare | holidays and leave | wage increase | work hazard | Working environment |
| *Germany* | Job security | n.d. | employment creation | n.d. | wage increase | n.d. | education training | n.d. |
| *France* | employment creation | employment creation | Job security | Working time | working time | social welfare | wage increase | Wage increase |
| *Italy* | Job security | job security | employment creation | work hazard | wage increase | Wage increase | working time red. | Education, training |
| *Spain (*)* | employment creation | n.d. | Job security | n.d. | education and training | n.d. | increase influence on management | n.d. |
| *Finland* | Job security | job security | employment creation | wage increase | wage increase | education and training | working methods | Work hazard |
| *Poland* | Job security | job security | wage increase | wage increase | employment creation | Work hazard | social welfare | Social Welfare |
| *Czech Republic* | Job security | Wage increase | wage increase | holiday and leave | social welfare | job security | working environment | Working environment /education |
| *Slovakia* | Job security | Wage increase | wage increase | job security | social welfare | social welfare | working environment | Working environment |
| *Slovenia* | Wage increase | job security | Job security | wage increase | working environment | working environment | employment creation | Social Welfare |
| *Hungary* | Wage increase | Wage increase | Job security | job security | employment creation | working environment | social welfare | Social Welfare |

Note: *In the case of Spain, the surveyed plant was non-unionised, belonging to the Mondragon co-operative. In 1995, non-union members in this plant were asked about the trade union priorities in union activities, but in the 2000 survey, this question was omitted.
** n.d. = no data.

When searching for explanations for these changes, it is worth stressing the recent effects of globalisation as measured in the Denki Rengo Survey through the 'impacts of foreign owned firms' on firm-level human resource management (HRM) practices. In measuring the influences of foreign owned firms, the following question was used: 'In your opinion, what are the impacts of foreign owned companies operating in your country?' The aggregated results are summarised in Table 5.

**Table 5: The Impact of Foreign Owned Companies on HRM Practices (n=5241)**

| Dimensions of HRM practices | Degree of influence | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Increased | Unchanged | Decreased | Unclear | No answer | Total |
| *I. Employment Relations* | | | | | | |
| Employment stability | 26.1 | 24.9 | 24.1 | 15.5 | 9.4 | 100 |
| Wages | 29.9 | 30.6 | 15.0 | 15.3 | 9.2 | 100 |
| Training and promotion | 32.5 | 28.9 | 8.7 | 19.6 | 10.2 | 100 |
| *II. Work Organisation* | | | | | | |
| Discipline in Work | 44.9 | 24.6 | 5.8 | 15.4 | 9.4 | 100 |
| Managerial competence | 37.9 | 26.3 | 7.8 | 17.9 | 10.1 | 100 |
| *III. Firm –level Labour Relations* | | | | | | |
| Employees' interest representation | 16.9 | 27.1 | 18.6 | 22.0 | 15.3 | 100 |
| Co-operation between trade union and management | 12.0 | 30.4 | 21.0 | 25.7 | 10.9 | 100 |

Note: The data covers the 14 countries participating in the 1999-2000 survey.

Distinguishing the three main dimensions of HRM on the basis of the aggregated data in Table 5, employees suggested that the strongest influence of foreign- owned firms occurs in work organisation (especially in 'discipline in work' and 'managerial competence') and in employment relations (particularly in the case of 'training and promotion', 'wages' and 'employment stability'). The weakest influence was registered in labour relations, such as 'employees' interest representation' and 'co-operation between trade union and management'. In these fields, unchanged opinions are dominant. Comparing the data by countries or by group of countries, it can be stated that foreign-owned firms exerted a strong influence on components of work organisation, for example higher than average answers (44.9%) on the increase of 'discipline in work' was found in the Czech Republic (70.1%), Slovakia (78.0%), Hungary (68.9%), Poland (62.9%) and Slovenia (51.9%). Besides this group of former European state socialist countries, highest scores were registered in China (74.2%). A higher than average (37.9%) rate of employees indicated an increase in 'managerial competence' in China (76.2%), Japan (51.8%), Taiwan (50.6%), Hungary (49.1%), the Czech Republic (45.8 %) and Slovakia (41.6%). Minimum changes were found in the work organisation of Finland (increase in 'discipline in work' at 4.1%, increase in the 'competence of management' at 2.9%) and France (increase in the 'competence of management' at 6.0%). Among the former state socialist countries, the smallest influence in improving 'managerial competence' was experienced in the Slovenian (13.9%) and Polish (25.0%) plants surveyed.

With employment relations, there were significant changes in the fields of 'training and promotion', except in Finland and France where positive opinions on the impact of foreign-owned companies dominated. On the question of 'employment stability', unfavourable opinions dominated. Only the Chinese, Czech, Hungarian, Taiwanese, Slovakian and American employees expressed more positive than unfavourable opinions.

Except for Finland, France and Slovenia, positive opinions dominated in relation to 'wages', especially in the 'low wage' ex-state socialist countries. In the case of 'labour relations', contrary to generally held opinion about the negative impact of foreign-owned companies, the

**Table 6: The Influence of Foreign-owned Firms on Employment Relations***

| Country | Degree of influence (%) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Employment stability | | Wages | | Training and promotion | |
| | Increase | Decrease | Increase | Decrease | Increase | Decrease |
| *China* | 51.9 | 15.5 | 59.4 | 6.6 | 48.1 | 4.0 |
| *Czech Republic* | 33.8 | 26.0 | 30.8 | 17.2 | 32.5 | 8.4 |
| *Finland* | 5.0 | 7.6 | 0.9 | 26.5 | 5.3 | 22.4 |
| *France* | 5.2 | 40.5 | 6.0 | 38.8 | 13.8 | 13.8 |
| *Hungary* | 51.6 | 16.8 | 36.9 | 13.9 | 38.7 | 7.2 |
| *Italy* | 10.6 | 30.5 | 17.1 | 11.0 | 35.8 | 10.2 |
| *Japan* | 15.4 | 32.8 | 24.3 | 14.5 | 34.7 | 6.7 |
| *Korea* | 12.8 | 18.0 | 27.8 | 8.6 | 19.9 | 6.5 |
| *Poland* | 12.7 | 45.5 | 26.3 | 22.5 | 36.9 | 12.0 |
| *ROC* | 54.2 | 12.6 | 44.3 | 9.1 | 44.7 | 10.0 |
| *Slovakia* | 75.7 | 1.4 | 76.6 | 2.8 | 43.9 | 1.9 |
| *Slovenia* | 18.9 | 30.7 | 15.6 | 22.7 | 28.6 | 9.7 |
| *Spain* | 0.0 | 5.4 | 5.4 | 0.0 | 5.4 | 0.8 |
| *USA* | 24.1 | 22.5 | 20.6 | 21.3 | 41.1 | 9.5 |
| Average | 26.1 | 24.1 | 29.9 | 15.0 | 32.5 | 8.7 |

Note: * Influence was measured using a simple 3-point scale (increase, unchanged, decreased) and having two other categories of answers (unclear, no answer).
Source: Shiraishi (2000:181).

Denki Rengo data revealed a more complex picture. The 'unchanged' or 'no influence' opinions were dominant for both 'employees' interest representation' and 'cooperation between trade unions and management'. In both cases, critical opinions were registered in Finland, France, Poland and the Czech Republic (See Tables 6, 7 and 8 below).

**Table 7: The Influence of Foreign-owned Firms on Work Organisation**

| Country | Degree of influence (%) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Discipline in work | | Managerial competence | |
| | Increase | Decrease | Increase | Decrease |
| *China* | 74.2 | 1.8 | 76.2 | 2.2 |
| *Czech Republic* | 70.1 | 2.3 | 45.8 | 7.1 |
| *Finland* | 4.1 | 22.6 | 2.9 | 22.4 |
| *France* | 22.4 | 8.6 | 6.0 | 12.9 |
| *Hungary* | 68.9 | 3.1 | 49.1 | 4.8 |
| *Italy* | 39.4 | 3.2 | 15.0 | 12.2 |
| *Japan* | 32.2 | 8.9 | 51.8 | 4.4 |
| *Korea* | 14.3 | 4.4 | 25.0 | 2.4 |
| *Poland* | 62.9 | 2.9 | 40.6 | 5.5 |
| *ROC* | 47.0 | 7.1 | 50.6 | 9.1 |
| *Slovakia* | 78.0 | 0.0 | 41.6 | 1.9 |
| *Slovenia* | 51.9 | 4.7 | 13.9 | 26.0 |
| *Spain* | 2.3 | 2.3 | 3.1 | 0.0 |
| *USA* | 32.8 | 8.7 | 29.6 | 11.1 |
| Average | 42.8 | 5.8 | 32.2 | 8.7 |

Source: Shiraishi (2000:181-2).

**Table 8: The Influence of Foreign-owned Firms on Labour Relations**

| Country | Degree of influence (%) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Employees' interest representation | | Co-operation between trade unions and management | |
| | Increase | Decrease | Increase | Decrease |
| *China* | 35.1 | 18.8 | 24.3 | 15.5 |
| *Czech Republic* | 9.4 | 22.4 | 6.2 | 31.8 |
| *Finland* | 0.3 | 15.9 | 0.9 | 19.4 |
| *France* | 5.2 | 37.9 | 6.9 | 31.9 5 |
| *Hungary* | 22.6 | 24.8 | 17.2 | 20.1 |
| *Italy* | 22.8 | 14.2 | 6.5 | 18.7 |
| *Japan* | 17.5 | 19.9 | 9.3 | 27.1 |
| *Korea* | 16.6 | 5.6 | 9.4 | 12.1 |
| *Poland* | 6.0 | 39.1 | 4.8 | 31.2 |
| *ROC* | 46.6 | 14.6 | 39.1 | 8.7 |
| *Slovakia* | 17.3 | 12.1 | 18.2 | 13.1 |
| *Slovenia* | 0.0 | 0.0 | 7.7 | 26.8 |
| *Spain* | 3.1 | 3.1 | 2.3 | 2.3 |
| *USA* | 30.0 | 15.8 | 20.2 | 14.2 |
| Average | 16.9 | 18.6 | 12.0 | 21.0 |

Source: Shiraishi (2000:183).

## Concluding Remarks

Having evaluated the changes in job structure, the changes in the priorities of trade union activity and the influence of globalisation – the latter measured through the influence of foreign-owned firms - on various HRM practices, the following tentative picture can be drawn. Comparing the 'task environment' in the 1994-95 and 1999-2000 surveys, there are signs of a cumulative rather than a radical shift from Fordist-type work organisation to neo-Fordist-type work organisation, in which blue-collar workers' production tasks are complemented by other tasks such as quality control, maintenance, etc. This type of gradual involvement of blue-collar workers in production supporting tasks in the labour process might have served as a basis for 'continuity and change' in required trade union priorities, as expressed by these respondents. That is, traditional, distributive-type trade union demands such as 'job-protection and creation' and 'wage increase' still have importance. However, elements of work such as 'working environment', 'work hazards' and 'education and training' are also slowly growing in importance.

In relation to training and education, the impact of foreign-owned companies on the HRM practices of the firms participating in the Denki Rengo International Survey should be stressed. Their presence in the host country's economy has a more favourable influence on work organisation and employment relations than on labour relations. The opinions of employees on the impact of foreign-owned firms on HRM practices may help re-stimulate employees' interest in trade unions. The importance of 'job security' and 'wage increase' is relatively stable in union policy at the firm level. Unfortunately, the issue of 'training and education' – in spite of so-called 'life-long learning' policy agendas (see Symon 2004) – has relatively 'low importance' within trade union priorities as expressed in the opinions of the employees surveyed. This is especially so in the former state socialist countries.[1] In this respect, it must be remembered that the influence of foreign-owned firms on employment relations was strongest, according to employees, on training activities.

Returning to the priorities of trade unions, the issue of training is the least significant, even in the mature capitalist countries participating in the international project. However the growing importance of skill development amongst employees should feature amongst trade union priorities. In the electric and electronic sector, 'skill security' may replace 'job-security' in the near future as global competition increases. If trade unions do not realise the social and cultural importance of this security shift, their influence may shrink even further in manufacturing generally and in the electric and the electronic sector specifically.

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## Endnotes

[1] The research included the period of mass privatisation of post-socialist firms in the Central European countries, where the attitude of management towards outsiders in general was extremely reserved and in some cases hostile.

[2] The composition of the samples in the various phases of the Denki Rengo International Project are outlined in the introductory chapter

[3] The 'labour process school' coalesced in the 1980s around debates stimulated by Harry Braverman's (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, New York: Monthly Press. British scholars now form the core of this school, though it extends to the rest of Europe, the USA and Australasia, with the organising of an annual international conference and a series of book publications through Palgrave. The author of this chapter relied extensively on the theoretical and methodological debates of the 2000 conference held at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. Key figures of this school include Professors Paul Thompson and Chris Smith.

[4] The Belgian Trend Study group also used other variables to describe changes in the division of labour (for example 'operation', 'flow' and 'product' orientated structures in production. Unfortunately, these variables cannot be tested using the Denki Rengo International Survey.

[5] In this respect, it is worth noting the following Hungarian and Polish examples. In Hungary, the interest representation strategies of the trade unions (at national and sector levels) do not feature adult education and training (and retraining) (Simonyi 1997). In Poland: 'An analysis of documents of two major trade unions in Poland, that is OPZZ ... and NSZZ ... indicates that worker training does not belong to priority tasks of labour unions ... The labour union's program [sic] passed in 1981 allowed for retraining. Unfortunately, the most recent Solidarity (NSZZ) Programmatic Resolution of 1998 does not mention worker education at all. ... Resolutions of the 4$^{th}$ Congress of OPZZ Program for the years 1998-2000 do not mention worker education even once' (Borkowska 2000:10).