

# Denmark, Durkheim, and Decentralisation: A Sociological Explanation of Work and Psychological Well-being

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# Content

**Purpose:** Sociological explanation for the various - and consistent - positive psychological well-being outcomes of workers in Denmark over the last decade.

## **Content:**

- Empirical Trends in Working Conditions & Psych Well-Being
- Why Denmark?
- Explanations (& Gap )
- Why Durkheim?
- How Durkheim might help us explain positive psychological outcomes in Denmark through a focus on institutional structure

## **Research Context:**

- New Deals in the New Economy Project:  
[maynoothuniversity.ie/newdeals](http://maynoothuniversity.ie/newdeals)
- PhD Research: Working Lives & Psychological Well-being: High Autonomy Workers in Ireland and Denmark

# EMPIRICAL CONTEXT & TRENDS

# Changing Work – Changing Affects

‘Workers across the OECD have been exposed to changes in working conditions as a result of structural adjustments in the past decades, raising the question whether these developments might worsen the mental health of workers’ (OECD 2012 *Sick on the Job? Myths and Realities about Mental Health and Work*)

Potentially harmful levels of psychological demands, work intensity, and job insecurity (Eurofound 2010).

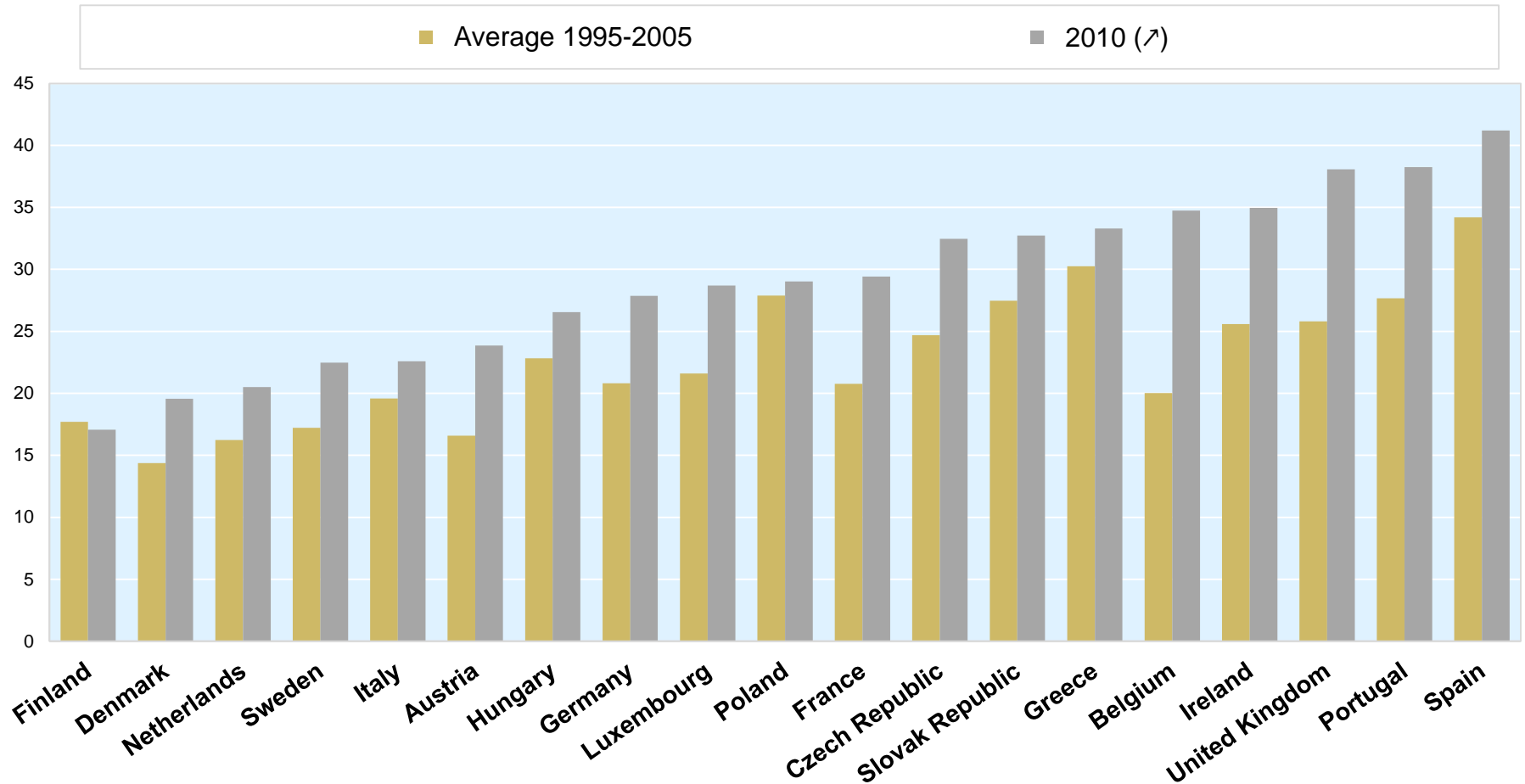
Increasing pervasiveness and significance of psychosocial risks at work across Europe (WHO 2010).

Approximately 25% of European workers experience stress at work always or most of the time (EU-OSHA 2014).

‘For those who fail in the regulation of boundaries, work is likely to invade life. The result may be work-life conflicts, a constant lack of recovery, and the accompanying stress and health consequences’ (Allvin 2011:238 )

Disconnected Capitalism (Thompson 2003)

# OECD 2012 Figures on Job Strain



Trends in the proportion of workers in the job-strain quadrant, by country, based on the 2010 threshold

Source: OECD calculations based on European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) 1990-2010.

# Stressors of Working Life

- Intensified Working Patterns
  - Increased complexity and skill
  - Increased cognitive & emotional demands
  - Tech & Task delivery
  - Shorter average hours (but increased time pressure)
  - Increased autonomy & responsibility
- Less Job Security
- Increased Responsibility for Employability (Less Employment Security)
- Boundary Management (Work-Life Balance)

**WHY DENMARK?**

# Danish Exceptionalism

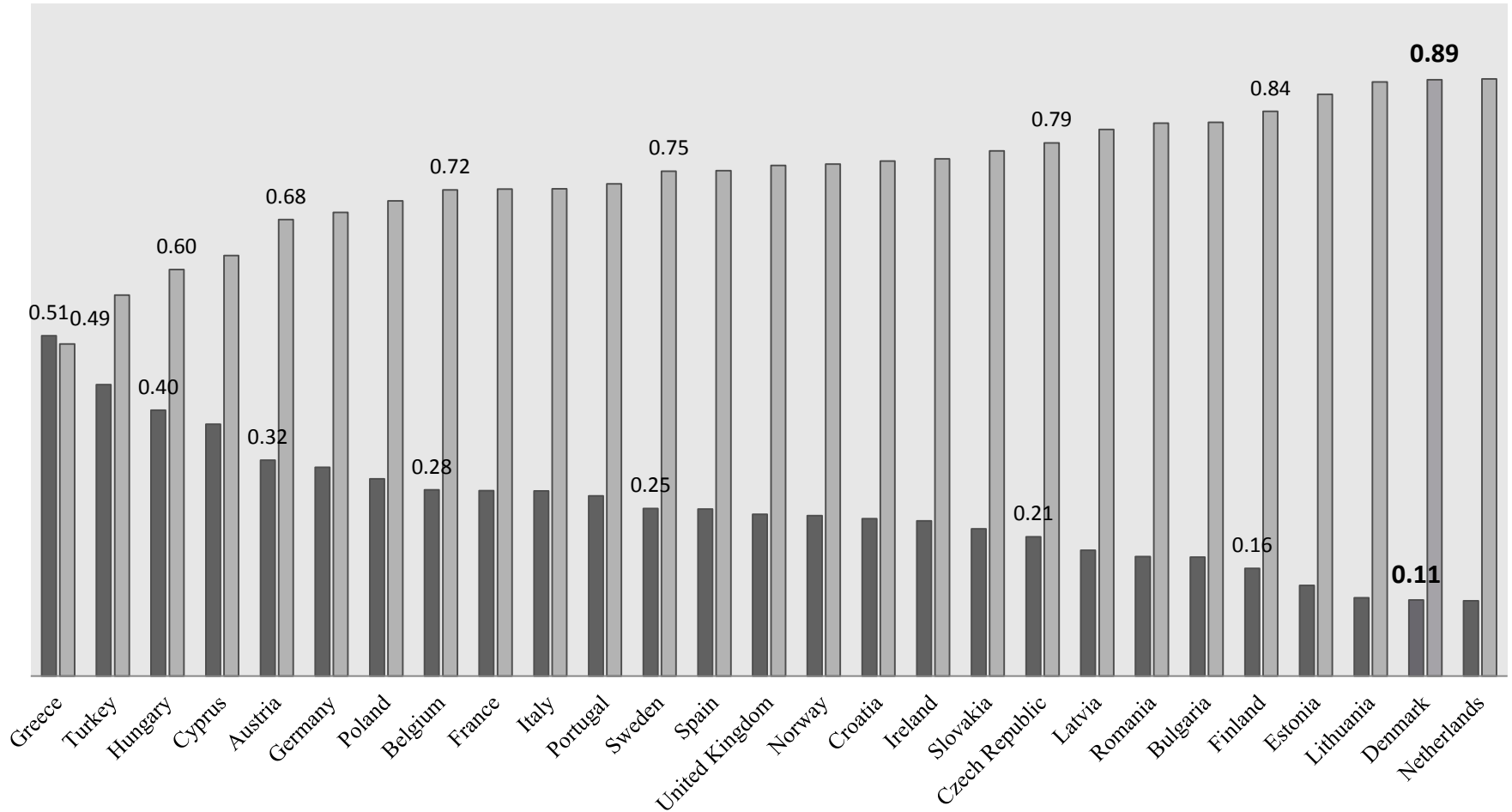
- Low levels of inequality (OECD 2014).
- Highest rates for trust in public institutions across Europe (Eurofound 2012) .
- First in an index measuring social cohesion over the period 2003-2008 (Bertelsmann Stiftung and Eurofound 2014).
- Highest in terms of 'intrinsic job quality and prospects', third for 'earnings', and second for 'working time quality' (Eurofound 2012).
- Top of the OECD's Better Life Index for work-life balance.
- Danes score very well in individual level dimensions such as positive affect (Bertelsmann Stiftung and Eurofound 2014), subjective well-being (OECD 2014), happiness and life satisfaction (Eurofound 2012).
- Third highest subjective well-being score, highest average job satisfaction based (Eurofound 2012).



# Danish Exceptionalism

Figure 1: Experience of Stress in Work, EWCS 2010

■ High Stress    ■ Little to No Stress



# EXPLANATIONS

# Macro - Micro Accounts

## **Macro:**

- Low level of inequality and subsequent status anxiety (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009)
- Egalitarian social policies and (Esping-Andersen 1990)
- Role of welfare state and distribution of security (Standing 2011)
- Extent of economic regulation (Pontusson 2009).
- High rates of trust and cohesion in others (Larsen 2013) and state institutions (Sønderskov and Dinesen 2014)

## **Micro:**

- High levels of workplace autonomy (Karasek 1979)
- Work organisation and Learning Opportunities (Arundel et al 2007)
- Job quality (Gallie & Zhou 2013)
- Work-life balance (Eurofound 2012)
- Low expectations (Christensen 2006)

**BUT** Extrapolating from macro to micro (or vice versa) not enough.

# Changing Work – Changing Analytical Frame

Allvin (2008; 2011) on boundariness of work (self-regulation, boundary management etc) and increasing role of institutional context (de-regulation of working conditions).

Budd and Spencer's (2014) warning of the reductionism of equating work *only* with job quality.

Can't compartmentalize influences on, and impact of, work (Warr 2007).

## **Three Significant Implications:**

1. Institutional context of working life is becoming increasingly significant.
2. Holistic analytical frame to identify the potential impact of work on workers' psychological well-being.
3. Linking the institutional context of individual worker to psychological well-being – focus of much of Durkheim's theoretical approach.

# Methods

- Onsite semi-structured interviews (N=40 ) with 'experts' in the welfare state, industrial relations, work organisation, psychosocial work environment and mental health.
- Purposive Sampling; ensure range of informed perspectives
- Interviews (from 1 – 2 hours) conducted across 3 separate periods of week-long fieldwork in Denmark in Nov 2013, March 2014, Oct 2014.
- Topics; regulation (health and safety, union representation, works councils etc), collective bargaining, flexicurity, the welfare state, working time, work-life balance, psychosocial work environment, psychological well-being, and tensions within system.
- Analysis and coding of transcriptions for emerging themes

# REANIMATING DURKHEIM

# Durkheim's Theories

## 1. Theme of balance:

- Within individual lives
- Bonds (harmoniously or otherwise) between individuals and their society.
- Between social integration and regulation at societal and individual levels.
- Collective Conscience (societal civic morality and individual personality)

## 2. Institutions - important mechanism shaping bonds;

‘...the state is too remote from individuals, its connections with them too superficial and irregular, to be able to penetrate the depths of their consciousness ...A nation cannot be maintained unless, between the state and individuals, a whole range of secondary groups are interposed’ (Durkheim 1984:liv).

Division of Labour in Society (1984): Shifting balance between individual autonomy in increasingly diverse work roles and social solidarity (Mechanical to Organic Solidarity).

Suicide (1966): Social circumstances influence suicide via types of malfunctioning bonds between individuals and their society - through extremes of integration and regulation (i.e. Anomie)

# Durkheim's Theories

**MACRO**



Organic Solidarity

Specialised Division of Labour

Institutional Context

Levels of Regulation & Integration

Bonds between Individual & Society

Psychological Well-being

**MICRO**



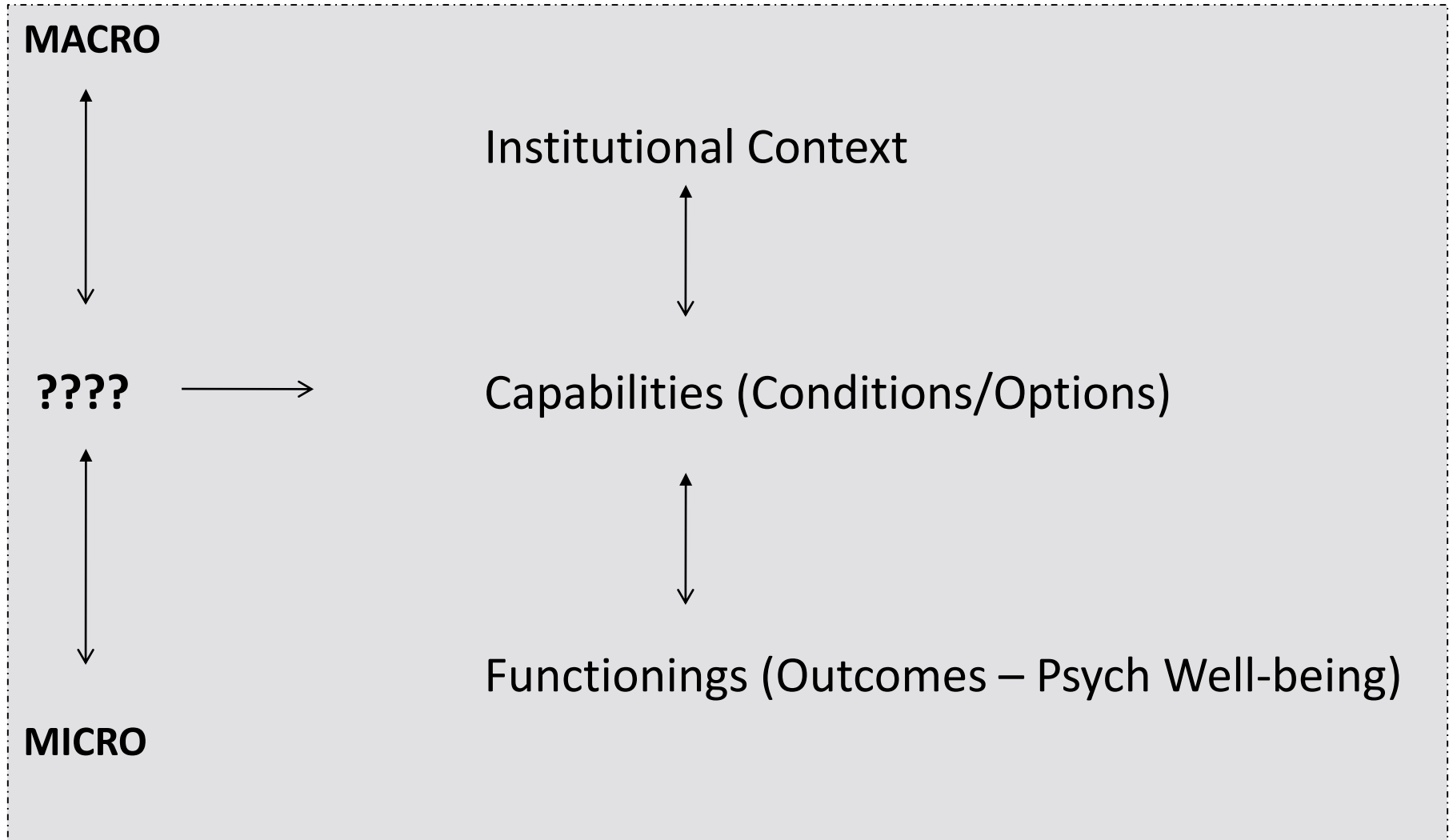
# De-functionalising Durkheim: Institutional Capabilities (i)

- Social structural conditions generate different kinds of mixes of regulation and integration in individuals' lives – connecting macro and micro levels.
- Detach Durkheim from Parsonian functionalism - re-animate Durkheim's strong focus on intermediary organisations and spheres between state and the individual.
- Emphasise institutionally defined levels of integration and regulation and 'capabilities' provided in managing demands of working life

## **Capabilities Framework (Sen 1992, Hobson 2014)**

- 'Capabilities' (means/options) and 'functionings' (ends/valued outcomes)
- Possibilities (capabilities) for choosing alternative ways of living (functionings) – their 'opportunities to be and do'.
- Hobson (2014) uses approach to analyse indicators of worklife balance and quality of life as functionings (outcomes), and the economic, social, and normative (institutional) contexts which enable or constrain these possibilities

# De-functionalising Durkheim: Institutional Capabilities (ii)



INTERDEPENDENT  
DECENTRALISATION: A DURKHEIMIAN  
VIEW OF DENMARK

...the State itself has important functions to fulfil...But we know that its action can be useful only if a whole system of secondary organs exists to diversify the action. It is, above all, these secondary organs that must be encouraged (Durkheim 1966:384).

'The only decentralization which would make possible the multiplication of the centers of communal life without weakening national unity is what might be called *occupational decentralization*. For, as each of these centers would be only the focus of a special, limited activity, they would be inseparable from one another and the individual could thus form attachments there without becoming less solidary with the whole.' (Durkheim 1966:390).

'... around '85 everyone could see that we were becoming more and more part of the global world, global competition and therefore it was decided to bring to an end the very centralised system....it was a realisation that companies...would be in very different market situations, so therefore we simply needed to decentralise our collective bargaining system...instead of having centralised negotiations, negotiations should take place at the sector level. And therefore you needed stronger member federations...' (Business Federation Representative).

DK: Decentralisation of the regulation of employment conditions in sectoral based collective bargains made between employer federations and union cartels

DK: DA (employer confederation) and LO (union collective) meet every 2-3 years to set a general framework. Occupation/sector based bargains frame negotiations at company level

## DECENTRALISATION & COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS AS OCC GROUPS

'The sole groups that have a certain permanence are what today are called unions, either of employers or workers...this represents the beginnings of any organisation by occupation... unless they federate or unite there is nothing about them that expresses the unity of the profession as a whole...there are no regular contacts between them. They lack a common organisation to draw them together...one within which they might work out a common set of rules and which, fixing their relationship to each other, would bear down with equal authority upon both (Durkheim 1984:xxxv-xxxvi).

' ...we have this strong role of collective bargaining. And even if we have this split of having strong sector organisations, everything is coordinated...The government doesn't play any direct role in our collective bargaining round. In the end it is only the mediator... of course what happens at the political level has an importance for collective bargaining. We are not negotiating in isolation. But the system is built so we try to make maximum pressure on both sides to agree (Business Federation Representative).

' ...if you look at system construction, one thing is that if you have, on both sides of the labour market you recognise that it is in your long term interest to stand together as workers and stand together as employers...you have commitments within the confederations, it is extremely important that you have strong confederations and that you have, as we have in Denmark, an agreement between the confederations about the framework (TU Rep).

DK collective bargaining system - rectify weaknesses of unions as organisation by occupation

Connecting Contexts: across employment relationship, occupations, workplaces, societal levels (macro-micro...

## **INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM OF FEDERATION & CONTACT**

' ...if you look at system construction...on both sides of the labour market you recognise that it is in your long term interest to stand together as workers and stand together as employers...because then you have to, as DI [Dansk Industri] have to take into account that their fellow members of the DA [Confederation of Danish Employers], they have legitimate interests. So I think that you have commitments within the confederations. It is extremely important that you have strong confederations and that you have, as we have in Denmark, an agreement between the confederations about the framework....just to have it that all the collective agreements are negotiated simultaneously in the same round and we have a vote altogether, that puts people together so to speak... (Trade Union Representative).

' ... And usually there are a huge amount of similarities but there are also sector specific issues of course...the system has to be flexible enough to say there should be enough common themes so we can put everybody out to vote...We have 500,000 people voting, it would be stupid if 100,000 are voting on something completely different from the other groups. So there has to be a huge amount of common ground but still allowing for sector specific solutions (Trade Union Representative).

'...we have a cooperation with the unions that is quite unique I think in Scandinavia and in Denmark especially where we are cooperating and we are talking to each other. And we can see the advantage of having this cooperation in solving a lot of issues by negotiating agreements instead of by law. That is very important for us...we want, of course, to have a strong counterpart to be able to conclude agreements with them...It is a political challenge to us...we want to keep our opponent alive and kicking...And well functioning...' (Business Federation Representative).

## **DIVIDED & INTERDEPENDENT: ORGANIC SOLIDARITY**

'To them [corporations/occupational groups], therefore, falls the duty of presiding over companies of insurance, benevolent aid and pensions...; theirs it should likewise be to preside over the disputes constantly arising between the branches of the same occupation, to fix conditions - but in different ways according to the different sorts of enterprise - with which contracts must agree in order to be valid, in the name of the common interest to prevent the strong from unduly exploiting the weak, etc. (Durkheim 1966:380).

'...we have, over the last years, taken more and more social issues into our collective agreements starting in fact with pension funds, which was not a success at the start but is a huge success now....we have gone on for example... we made a parental leave fund... this was part of the collective agreements, that you get ten weeks, I think it is, you get full pay. So you get the basic from the state and then the rest you get from your employer' (Business Federation Representative).

'They are where you are attached from the employees' point of view, you are not attached to a particular company. You work for a particular company but when it comes to your social rights you are covered by the collective agreement and that secures your rights' (Business Federation Representative).

Danish collective bargains have incorporated more and more social types of provisions in terms of pensions, maternity leave, sickness leave, holidays and training with health and safety.

Collective agreements as occupationally regulated and integrated groups of employers and employees '...play a social role instead of expressing only various combinations of particular interests' (Durkheim 1966:379).

## **COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS: INTEGRATED & REGULATED SOCIAL GROUPS**

# PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING: FREEDOM, BALANCE & CONTROL



...there was a deal made in, I think it was 1995... called the method committee....refers to how do we deal with psychosocial work environment...divide problems in two groups....problems are related to particularly the job and the job content, or it can be related to social relations, management relations and those kind of issues. And if it is the first kind of problem....that is for the labour inspection or the safety committees...now they are called work environment committees.... But if it is dealing with social relations, including relations between management and workers it is actually not the province of labour inspection or safety committees, it is the province of the traditional trade union employers system which is not legislated, it is negotiated...one is a legally required system, the other is a negotiated system (Senior Academic).

Amendment of Danish Working Environment Act (2010): psychosocial work environment equated with physical environment in terms of importance (Act no. 356 of 9 April 2013).

Danish Working Environment Act (2010) – Work Environment Authority (WEA) – Organisational Work Environment Committees

‘So if any problems are reported within a work place, they [WEA] have to go and check and they will ask for this APV [self-conducted workplace health and safety assessment] to see how the company has been evaluated...they take it very, very seriously. It is like when the police come, it is really serious (Senior Academic)

## **PWE: DUAL SYSTEM OF REGULATION**

... I think it is an ***absence of so large social differences*** between the social classes. I mean I also used to live in the US and the contrast couldn't be bigger...It is a rather ***well balanced society*** I would say...at the same time life is expensive here, you need two incomes...which creates a whole different society with Denmark...They have the highest women employment rate...so everybody works here no matter how many children you have. So ***the country is organised*** with day care and after school programmes and life is totally organised here.....Everybody in the working age actually can work and they do work. ...having children at home, both partners working, ***you also need to organise your working life*** (Senior Researcher).

'I think ***the options*** that you have to improve your life, it is ***a future promise ...*** I think that is part of it as well.' (Senior Academic)

'Individuals who live in more cohesive societies are more optimistic about the future, have a stronger feeling that their lives are purposeful and feel greater freedom to decide how to live their lives...' (Bertelsmann Stiftung and Eurofound 2014:13).

Opportunities for Status Control (self-efficacy & mastery) over social standing/occ role are the key institutional 'capabilities' provided by the Danish institutional context .

Enables workers a regulated balance , autonomy and security which offer workers mastery over, and choice within, their working lives

'...liberty itself is the product of regulation' (Durkheim 1984:320).

## CAPABILITIES FOR STATUS CONTROL

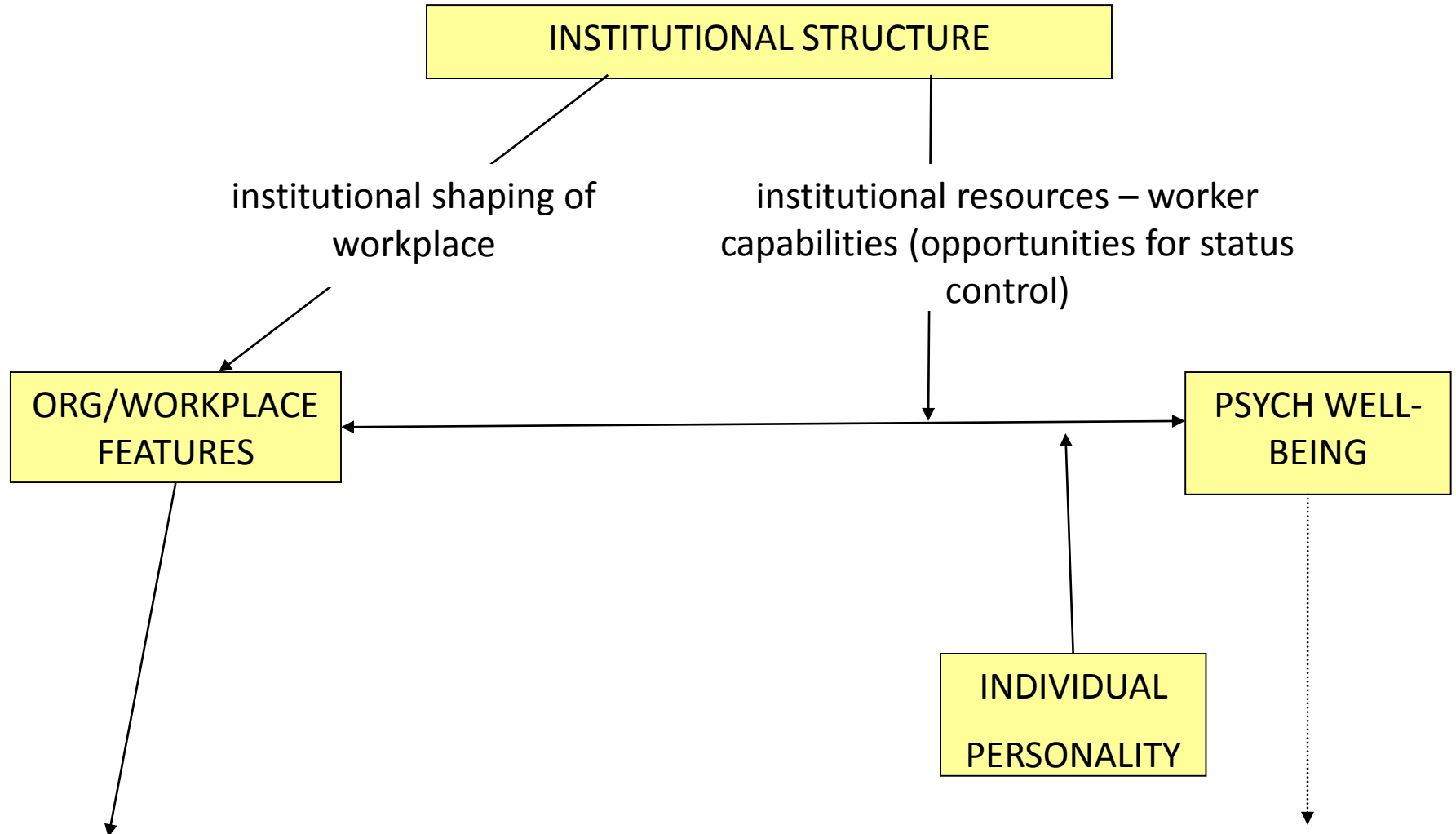
# Siegrist (1996) ERI Model



*Figure 1.* The effort–reward imbalance model at work.

Status Control; '... those aspects of occupational life that threaten a person's...sense of mastery, efficacy, and esteem...threats [to the self and identity] are likely to occur if the continuity of crucial social roles is interrupted or lost'

# Reconceptualised Framework



**Structure****Mechanism****Outcome****MACRO**

Social Democratic Welfare State, Small Open Economy, High Union Density, United Employer Feds, Decentralised Regulatory Framework

Reduced distance between Regulatory aims and working contexts compatibility

Organic Solidarity and Institutional Cohesion

**INTERMEDIARIES**

Collective Agreement System at Sectoral Level - Specialised Network of union & employer federations

Interdependent Regulation & Integration of Sectoral employers and employees. Information Conduit between levels

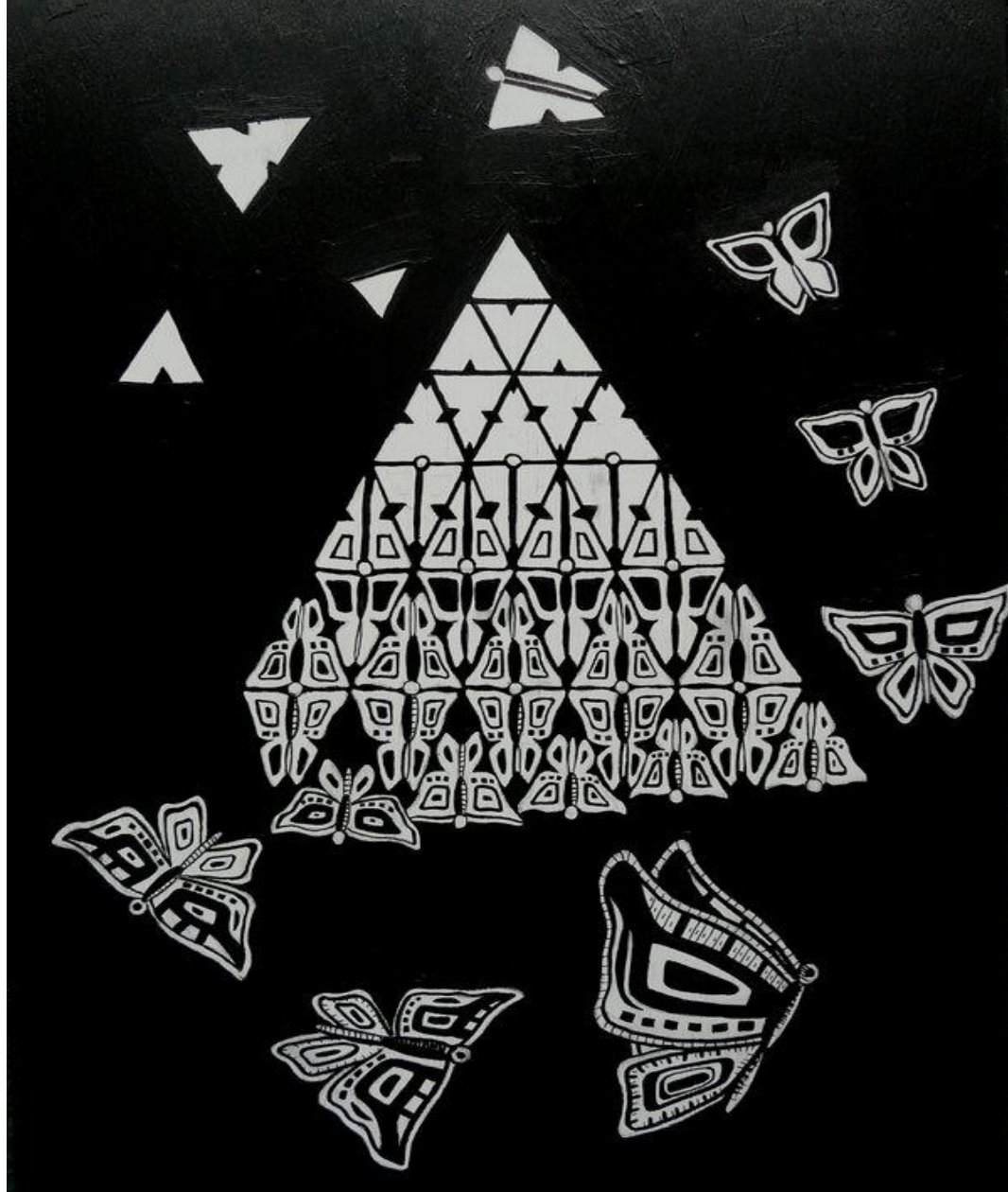
Decentralised Occupational Groups  
  
Compatible Regulation

**MICRO**

Regulations & Rights framed by Collective Agreements  
Various Formats of Workplace Representation  
PWE Regulation (WEA)

Broad range of employment and non-employment based 'capabilities' in managing demands of working life

Autonomy over working lives - status control.  
Balanced levels of Integration & regulation.



<http://www.deviantart.com/tag/tessellations>

# Recap

- The particular social & institutional arrangements of Denmark may explain the consistently positive psychological consequences for workers.
- Institutional context is linked to psychological well-being through capabilities for status control (autonomy and balance in working lives)
- Durkheim & Capabilities Framework can assist an institutional approach to work and well-being and thus provide a sociological explanation of Danish work and well-being scores

# Thank You!

- Email: [johnpaul.byrne.2013@mumail.ie](mailto:johnpaul.byrne.2013@mumail.ie)
- New Deals in the New Economy Project:  
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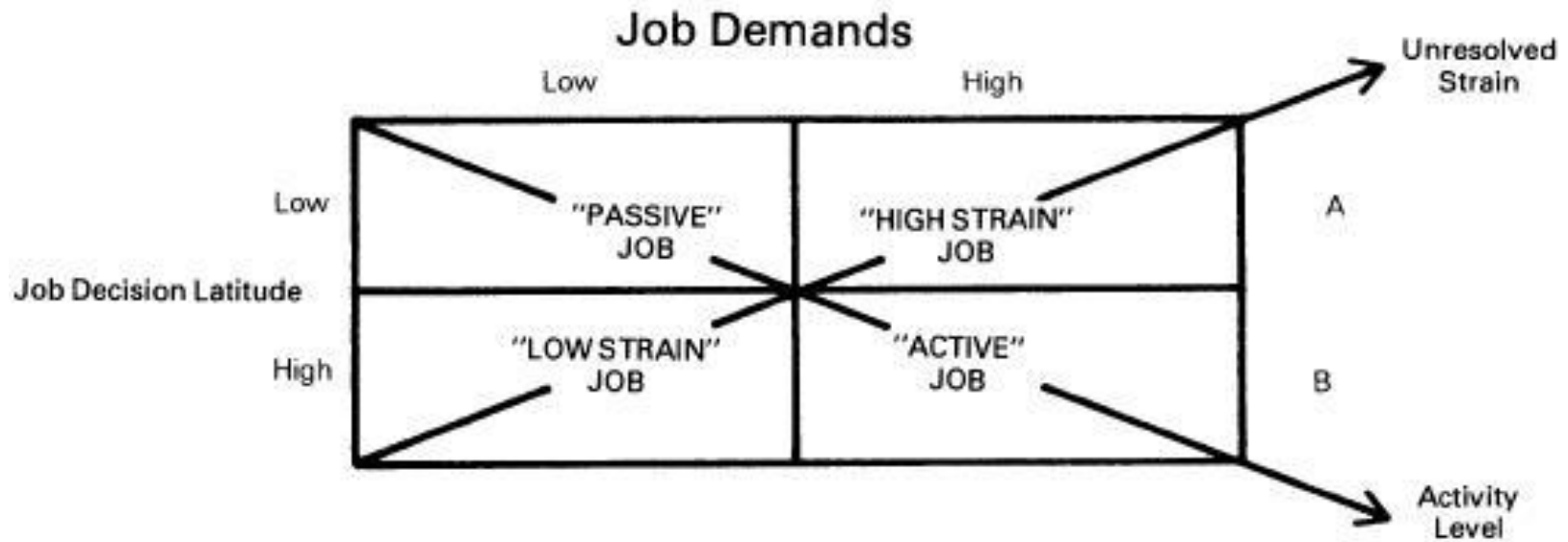


**EXTRA SLIDES**

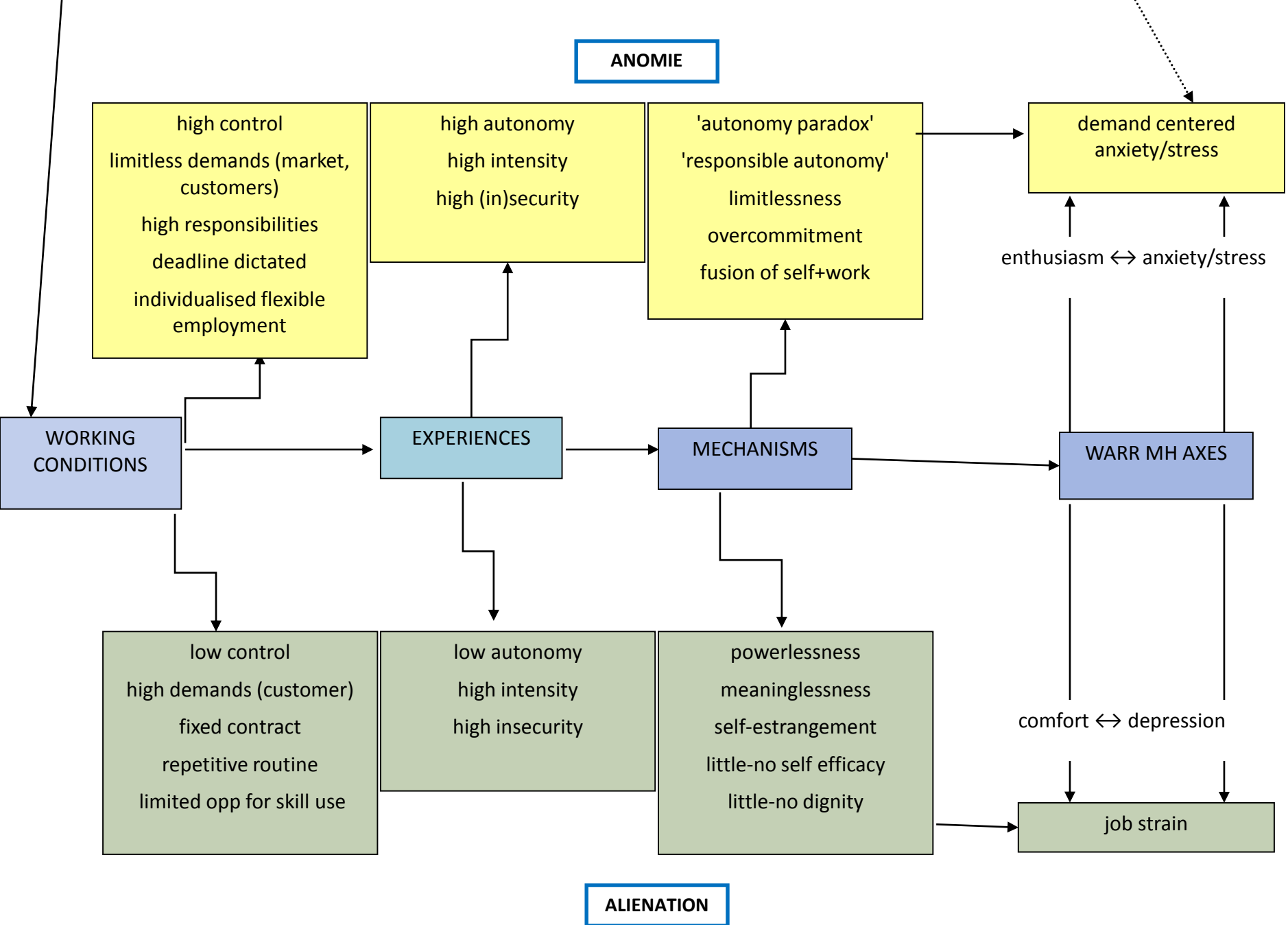
# However...‘the compromise is weakening’

- According to the OECD (2013:30) sickness absence is systematically higher in Denmark than EU average.
- Also according to the OECD, Denmark has the second highest rate of antidepressant consumption (behind Iceland).
- Loosening of regulations e.g. shop opening hours only liberalised in 2012, teaching hours strike re: demands made to be more flexible
- Increasing focus on standardisation, measuring productivity and increasing control, measurement and management of traditionally highly autonomous Danish workers - may erode levels of autonomy; ‘We have seen a development within the last ten years in Denmark towards much more control and elevation of productivity and of some degree also of quality, particularly within the public sector. So in parallel with the more autonomy, then there has been much more focus on control, I mean control from above, meaning how much to produce and how well it is done...’ (Respondent, Work Research Psychologist Nov 2013)
- Polarising of Flexicurity model: strengthening of flexibility alongside weakening of social security; ‘...the compromise is weakening’ (Respondent, Professor, Nov 2013)

# Karasek (1979) D-C Model



**Figure 1. Job strain model.**



# Arundel et al (2007) Work Org Typology

Discretionary Learning	Lean	Traditional	Taylorist
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•High autonomy</li> <li>•High learning opportunities</li> <li>•High responsibility</li> <li>•Complex tasks and problem solving</li> <li>•Low constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Below average autonomy</li> <li>•High teamwork/job rotation</li> <li>•High quality norms</li> <li>•High responsibility</li> <li>•Bureaucratic constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Low autonomy</li> <li>•Least learning opportunities</li> <li>•Least complex problems</li> <li>•Individualistic</li> <li>•Service orientated</li> <li>•Direct/Indirect customer interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Low autonomy</li> <li>•Low learning opportunities</li> <li>•Low wage &amp; educational requirements</li> <li>•Low responsibility</li> <li>•Highly constrained</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Netherlands</li> <li>•Denmark</li> <li>•Sweden</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•UK</li> <li>•Spain</li> <li>•Ireland</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Greece</li> <li>•Portugal</li> <li>•Italy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Greece</li> <li>•Italy</li> <li>•Portugal</li> </ul>