



# ‘Digital Taylorism’: What scope for collective bargaining at company level? Evidence from the logistics sector

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## **Abstract**

Much of the current debate about the digital economy is concerned with entirely new forms of work and business models such as crowdwork and the platform economy. By contrast, there is much less debate and even less empirical research on the changes within already existing jobs in ‘old’ industries. The presentation seeks to fill the gap, drawing on findings from a recently finished European project on the interlinkages between innovations and job quality (QuInnE). The presentation focuses on the logistics sector where the adoption of technologies that are framed in the current debate as ‘digitalization’ started more than 15 years ago. Based on company case studies in German and French retail fulfilment centres, a particular emphasis is placed on the scope for collective bargaining to shape the implementation of the new technologies and modify their impact on job quality. The findings shed light on the prerequisites as well as limits to turn warehouses into “choke points” (Jaffee/Bensman 2016) in the global circuit of goods and to exploit the “brokerage position” (Sowers, 2017) occupied by logistics companies in just-in-time supply chains for the benefit of employees.

## **About the Speaker**

Karen Jaehrling took her PhD in political science from the University of Hamburg (2003). She has been working as a senior researcher at the Institute for Work, Skills and Training (IAQ), University of Duisburg-Essen since 2007. Prior to that she worked at several projects within the Institute for Work and Technology (IAT), Gelsenkirchen, and had teaching assignments at the Universities of Bochum and Hamburg. Her research interests are in the area of labour sociology, labour market and social policy and industrial relations, with a particular focus on the low-pay / low-skill segments of the labour market. She gained expertise from various national as well as international comparative projects. Most recently, she coordinated a qualitative study on the interplay of innovations and job quality in seven European countries (Jaehrling 2018, see below). Her current research project deals with the role of public procurement in regulating low wage labour markets. As part of this research she cooperates with WEI researchers involved in the AMBS-funded project ‘The state as a socially responsible customer’.

*Jaehrling, K. (ed.) (2018): Virtuous circles between innovations, job quality and employment in Europe? Case study evidence from the manufacturing sector, private and public service sector. Available at: <http://bryder.nu/quinne1/sites/default/files/WP6-working-paper-virtuous-circles-final.pdf>*