

Individual working lives and collective action. An introduction to capability for work and capability for voice

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Summary

This article presents the capability approach as an alternative conceptual and normative framework to assess the impact and relevance of existing labour market regulations. In this perspective, what matters is not GDP growth or the overall employment rate, but the development of people's real freedom to choose a job or an activity they have reason to value. The two key notions of 'capability for work' and 'capability for voice' are presented in detail, as well as the way to use them as a framework for scientific analysis and empirical research. The article strongly emphasizes the significant difference that the use of such tools makes when it comes to assessing the impact and relevance of collective regulations in the field of work.

Résumé

Cet article présente l'approche par les capacités comme un cadre conceptuel et normatif alternatif pour évaluer l'impact et la pertinence des réglementations existantes du marché du travail. Dans cette perspective, ce qui importe, ce n'est pas la croissance du PIB ou le taux global d'emploi, mais le développement de la liberté effective des individus de choisir un emploi ou une activité qu'ils ont des raisons d'apprécier. Les deux notions essentielles de « capacité à exercer un travail » et de « capacité à faire entendre sa voix » sont présentées en détail, de même que la manière d'utiliser ces notions comme cadre d'analyse scientifique et de recherche empirique. L'article souligne fortement la différence considérable qu'entraîne l'utilisation de tels outils quand il s'agit d'évaluer l'impact et la pertinence des réglementations collectives dans le domaine du travail.

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Beitrag wird der Ansatz der Verwirklichungschancen als alternativer konzeptueller und normativer Rahmen vorgeschlagen, um die Auswirkungen und die Relevanz der bestehenden Arbeitsmarktvorschriften zu bewerten. Unter diesem Gesichtspunkt ist nicht das BIP-Wachstum oder die Gesamtbeschäftigungsrate von Bedeutung, sondern die Entwicklung der realen Freiheit

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der Menschen, eine Arbeit oder Tätigkeit zu wählen, die sie wertschätzen. Die beiden zentralen Konzepte der “capability for work” (Verwirklichungschance im Arbeitsleben) und der “capability for voice” (Chance, für Arbeitnehmerbelange einzutreten) werden ausführlich beschrieben, und es wird erklärt, wie diese als Rahmen für die wissenschaftliche Analyse und empirische Forschungsarbeiten dienen. Der Beitrag unterstreicht den bedeutenden Vorteil, der sich aus der Verwendung derartiger Konzepte bei der Bewertung der Auswirkungen und der Relevanz kollektiver Regelungen im Arbeitsbereich ergibt.

Keywords

Capability approach, quality of work, labour market regulation, collective bargaining, political and cognitive resources, legal entitlements

The capability approach, developed among others by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, suggests an alternative yardstick to assess national and European labour market policies, but also labour relations and the modalities of labour force management at company level. In this perspective, what matters is not GDP growth or increase in turnover, but the development of people’s real freedom to choose the way of life they have reason to value (according to Sen’s recurrent formula). With respect to the labour market, this implies that the yardstick against which the impact of public policies, collective bargaining and corporate human resource strategies should be assessed is what we suggest to label as the individuals’ ‘capability for work’ or their real freedom to choose the job or activity they have reason to value. Such a change in perspective makes a huge difference and the objective of this article is to emphasize the scope of this change.

The article has four sections. Section 1 introduces the capability approach along its two complementary dimensions: on the one hand *opportunity freedom* (i.e. the set of available opportunities among which people are really free to make their choice); and on the other hand *process freedom* that captures the extent to which people are allowed to have their say and make it count when it comes to designing and implementing collective decisions and regulations (what we suggest to designate as ‘capability for voice’). Sections 2 and 3 outline how this approach can be implemented with regard to work: what resources and commodities should be available to workers? What personal, social and environmental circumstances (the so-called conversion factors) allow or impede people to use these resources with a view to enhancing their opportunity freedom or their capabilities? To what extent are collectives of workers (workers’ councils at firm level, trade unions at branch level or at a more encompassing level) and individual workers able to express their wishes and expectations and to push them efficiently on the agenda of collective bargaining? In other words, under what conditions can both ‘capability for work’ (section 2) and ‘capability for voice’ (section 3) be promoted with regard to the labour market and to the development of capabilities at large? Section 4 briefly synthesizes the main contributions of the capability approach and emphasizes its added value.

The capability approach

The capability approach developed by Amartya Sen (1992, 1999) focuses on the enhancement of people’s capabilities, i.e. their real freedom to choose a life course they have reason to value. This framework can be used to assess both individual situations, trajectories and potentialities, and the efficiency and fairness of social structures and collective arrangements. Its potential reach is thus very large. In this perspective, human well-being should be assessed with an enlarged

‘informational basis’ not reduced to monetary assets or commodities, nor subjective utility or satisfaction (which is exposed to the well-known issue of adaptive preferences).¹ In other words, capabilities do not necessarily coincide with the possession of commodities or with happiness. Rather, the capability approach proposes that individual assessment should be concerned with what the persons are actually capable of being and doing, i.e. their capability.

The capability approach relies on two key distinctions. First, functionings, i.e. what a person actually is or does, should not be confused with capabilities, i.e. what a person can be or can do. Indeed, two people behaving in the same way are not necessarily endowed with the same capability set as is illustrated by the seminal example of the non-eating person that can be interpreted either as starving (due to famines or food shortage) or as fasting (e.g. for medical or religious reasons). In Amartya Sen’s perspective, public action should not focus on functionings but on capabilities, which puts the concern for real individual freedom of choice at the very centre of collective intervention. What matters then is to make people free to choose their job or activity, not to bring them back to the labour market, whatever the quality of the job, and all policies and collective frameworks related to professional and social integration – be it education, labour market regulation or active labour market policies – should aim at enhancing people’s capabilities in this way.

The second distinction concerns commodities (or resources) and capabilities (Sen, 1985). It claims that providing resources or commodities – be it cash or in-kind resources – does not amount to enhancing the real freedom of choice and of action of their recipients. To this purpose, the issue of conversion factors needs also to be tackled. If the person is not able to convert his or her resources into real freedom, then capabilities which ought to be the very aim of public action are missed. The classical example of the bicycle powerfully demonstrates this: if someone owns a bicycle, but at the same time does not know how to ride it, or is not allowed to (due to socio-cultural, religious, or other contextual parameters) or cannot do so (due to the absence of adequate roads or other infrastructure), then the possession of the bicycle does not translate into real freedom or capability to move. As a matter of fact, Sen claims that what should be equalized in order to promote development as freedom (Sen, 1982a, 1999) is not only cash or in-kind resources, but a whole configuration of parameters comprising resources, and individual and social factors of conversion. Only an intervention on the whole configuration will allow the effective enhancement of the individual’s capability set.

The capability approach requires taking into account the consequences of these two distinctions. First, on what we suggest to call the ‘empowerment’ side of the capability approach, the adequate (re-)distribution of resources is not sufficient to improve people’s capacity to act. It needs to go hand in hand with an intervention on individual and social factors of conversion. In other words, public action or collective regulation will be enabling or empowering, if and only if the equalization of resources is completed by a corresponding intervention on both the individual abilities to use these resources and the social context at large (i.e. the social structures of inequalities, the availability of appropriate social and economic opportunities, the prevailing social norms, as well as any social dimension that may bring about inequalities or discriminations). Second, on what we label the ‘freedom to choose’ side of the capability approach, collective action should not aim at imposing specific behaviours or functionings on its beneficiaries, but at enhancing their capabilities or real freedom to choose a life they have reason to value. Thus, acting extensively on

1 Following Elster (1983) and others, Sen (e.g. 1992) notes that people who live in persistently adverse situations may nevertheless be happy or satisfied with their circumstances, since they adapt their preferences or expectations to these circumstances. Therefore, when assessing someone’s well-being, it might be misleading to focus on his or her declared preferences or satisfaction.

resources and factors of conversion *and* impinging as little as possible on individual freedom of choice, are the two main prerequisites of a capability-friendly collective action. By the same token, these requirements are the yardsticks against which such action and its impact are to be assessed.

For this purpose, two different meanings of ‘real freedom’ are to be taken into account, namely *process freedom* and *opportunity freedom* (Sen, 2002). On the one hand, the people concerned by collective action should be able (and allowed) to participate effectively in all stages of collective decision-making and public policy-making (i.e. design, implementation and assessment). Indeed, they are not to be reduced to the status of passive beneficiaries, but ought to be, as much as possible, co-authors of the collective decisions that concern them. In the capability perspective, the achievement of this processual dimension of real freedom requires the equal availability of three alternatives (Hirschman, 1970) for each and every individual: he or she should be able to choose between either *loyalty* to the collective prescriptions or norms, or *voice* in order to contest or negotiate the content of such prescriptions without being subject to heavy sanctions, or *exit* so as to be able to escape these collective norms at an affordable cost (e.g. by refusing to take up a badly remunerated job without having to abide by excessive financial penalties imposed by the public employment agency). The effective availability of these three options features as a necessary condition for the enhancement of his or her capability set. On the other hand, opportunity freedom is also a prerequisite for the development of individual capabilities. Indeed, the capability approach implies that every member of society should be in a position to choose between valuable alternatives or opportunities. This clearly contrasts with the call for adaptability (that often prevails in the field of welfare-to-work policies), where people are not allowed to choose freely their way of life or their professional insertion, but are called upon to adapt their preferences to the existing opportunities in their social environment. It is then a key mission of collective and public action to enhance opportunity freedom via increasing the set of available opportunities for all persons concerned.

What matters most in the capability perspective is the combination of both dimensions of freedom: the enlargement of the set of valuable opportunities (opportunity freedom) needs to be completed by the possibility to voice one’s preferences, wishes, expectations, etc. and to make them count in the decision-making process (process freedom). Capability-friendly processes, allowing people actively to participate in and have an impact on the various collective decision-making processes, need to result in the extension of real opportunities or possibilities of action (otherwise participation would boil down to a formal right). If such valuable opportunities are not available, then process freedom remains purely formal.

The capability approach also emphasizes the notion of ‘informational basis of judgement in justice’ (IBJJ), i.e. the set of information that will be considered as relevant when assessing a person, be it a worker, a welfare recipient or any other member of society. The IBJJ constitutes the yardstick against which people, their behaviours, wishes, beliefs, etc. are assessed and considered as legitimate or illegitimate. In the capability approach perspective, the selection of the informational basis should not be the prerogative of the government, public administration, experts, managers or shareholders. All the more so in that there are many possible legitimate informational bases of judgement, as well as a variety of principles of justice, as, for example, the French economy of conventions² has aptly demonstrated (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991; Storper and Salais, 1997). In this

2 The French economy of conventions develops a heterodox conception of economic science, whereby issues such as the agent and his or her reasons for acting, the coordination of actions or the role of values and normative conceptions are fully incorporated in economic thinking. In this paper, we refer mainly to the issue of values and their inescapable plurality.

connection, Sen claims that it is impossible to demonstrate the absolute superiority (i.e. in all circumstances or all social environments and for all people) of one principle or order of justice, or of one informational basis of judgement, over all others. As he puts it, such issues are 'undecidable' a priori (Sen, 2002). There is an inescapable plurality in the normative field, and what matters then is that all concerned people are able to participate in the selection of the IBBJ that will then be used to assess the goodness or the legitimacy of the people concerned. This of course does not imply that the central level of government or public administration or managers or shareholders, etc. should have no say whatsoever when it comes to selecting the informational basis, but it does certainly entail the abandonment of top-down modes of collective decision-making striving to impose specific functionings or behaviours on individuals, in favour of more reflexive ways of governance.

This first section has reinterpreted the capability approach in the light of both Hirschman's distinction between exit, voice and loyalty, and the teachings of the French economy of conventions. In our view, this perspective provides us with an adequate tool to analyse the contemporary forms of collective action in the field of work, and to suggest more capability-friendly avenues in this respect. The operationalization of this analytical and normative framework relies on two key concepts, namely capability for work and capability for voice (Bonvin and Farvaque, 2006). The next two sections are devoted to defining these two concepts and their practical implications.

Capability for work

Paraphrasing Sen, capability for work is 'the real freedom to choose the job one has reason to value'. The issue of what is a 'valuable job or activity' is key in this respect. This is a very complex issue that encompasses a plurality of dimensions (or relevant informational bases of judgement). When viewed from the workers' perspective, issues such as wages and benefit entitlements, working conditions (e.g. timetable, work organization, work content, possibilities for self-fulfilment, health, safety, pressure for productivity), availability of jobs (for example, are there enough jobs for all people wishing to work in a specific firm or sector?), job quality (for example, are these jobs of good quality?), and balance between work and family life are all matters of crucial importance. Hence, for workers, the definition of what is a 'valuable job' is not uniform, it varies according to individuals and historical periods: for instance, whereas the Fordist-Taylorian labour contract insisted on the level of material compensation granted to workers in exchange for subordination at work (Supiot, 2001), contemporary forms of work organization focus more on the issue of work content and possibilities for self-fulfilment. Furthermore, the capability approach is not reduced to issues related to work or wages, it also entails other dimensions related to the combination of capability for work and capability for life (Dean et al., 2005). Indeed, even valuable jobs may lead to undesired work intensification, if they prevent other activities linked to leisure, family life, etc. Capability for work needs to be defined in connection with all components of the capability set. Thus a plurality of informational bases is available to define the substance of capability for work and the capability approach does not privilege one option over the others, quite the contrary. It contends that the very process of defining the scope and content of work is a matter of social choice that is to be settled in a context-specific way, and not in absolute or universal terms.

When viewed from the employers' perspective, 'job quality' is equally a multi-dimensional issue as is illustrated for instance by Boltanski and Thévenot's 'cities of grandeur': the quality of work or of a product may result from a cost-benefit analysis (along a market logic) or from the quantity of technology and know-how incorporated in the goods or from the degree of innovation, etc. Thus, the issue of capability for work and of what is a 'valuable job or activity' or a 'valuable product' is very complex; many perspectives and views are confronted and the result is constantly

evolving with the state of the power relationships, the transformation of the economic context, the state of technologies, etc. The main challenge here lies in the meaningful combination of all the components of job quality: indeed, it may well be that for a particular individual a very productive job, requiring high skills and providing a satisfactory income, is not adequate in terms of time delimitation insofar as it severely interferes with other life spheres such as family or leisure. All the same, it can be that for another individual a stable and well-paid job with clear boundaries in terms of timetables does not prove satisfactory in terms of self-fulfilment or human flourishing.

Following the capability approach, three main conditions are needed to achieve a high level of capabilities, namely *resources*, *personal* and *social conversion factors*. When investigating job quality, the issue of *resources* mainly relates to wages and transfer incomes provided via cash benefits. Not only should their amount be taken into account, but also the conditions to which they are submitted, as these have a significant impact on job quality and the degree of capability for work enjoyed by workers. For instance, if remunerations depend to a large extent on individual performance (e.g. combining some modest degree of statutory wage with a large extent of performance pay), then this might translate into more work intensification and more subordination at work which would imply a restricted capability for work. Hence, higher wages do not necessarily coincide with a higher degree of capability for work. The ‘quality’ of remuneration matters as much as its ‘quantity’. Also, the capability to refuse a badly remunerated job depends on the level of cash benefits provided by the social security system: if these are very low, then low remunerations can be more easily imposed on workers.

Capability for work also depends on adequate personal and social conversion factors. Among the relevant *personal conversion factors*, there is the issue of skills and competencies (for example diplomas, know-how, technical competencies, but also social competencies such as ability to work in teams, capacity to communicate, or ability to balance demands from private and professional life). When viewed from a capability perspective, this question requires tackling issues such as the following. First, does the development of competencies promoted at firm level contribute mainly to the competitiveness of the company? Or does it serve to enhance the workers’ capabilities or self-fulfilment? Indeed, the promotion of their adaptability to the company requirements does not necessarily equate to the development of their capabilities. Second, to what extent are these competencies transferable from one work environment to another one? What tools are developed to promote such transferability? If no such tools exist, then it means that the employee’s capability for work is strictly linked to the firm employing him or her. In contrast, transferable competencies increase to a large extent the workers’ capability for work. Third, to what extent are all categories of workers (low- and highly-qualified, men and women, etc.) entitled to the development of their competencies?

Social conversion factors also play a key role with regard to capability for work. They comprise such issues as: a) the quantity of available jobs (are there enough jobs for every adult wishing to be employed?); b) the accessibility of these jobs to all potential applicants; c) job quality and the existing collective provisions concerning wages, work duration, stability, impact on health, degree of work intensification, skills, competencies, degree of autonomy and responsibility, hourly productivity, etc. If existing provisions guarantee that minimal conditions are respected in all firms, then looking for another job will not be as risky in terms of working conditions. By contrast, if working conditions depend on corporate actors’ goodwill, such a move might be more penalizing for the workers’ well-being. Hence, the state of the labour market, the scope of the existing regulations in terms of job quality or anti-discrimination practices, as well as the predominant values (e.g. work ethics, gender division of labour) are examples of social conversion factors that strongly impact on the degree of capability for work enjoyed by workers.

To sum up, the issue of capability for work requires the situated combination of multiple dimensions. It is therefore necessary to avoid one-size-fits-all definitions of 'job quality' or capability for work, as these need to take into account the viewpoints of all people concerned. Thus, collective regulations, be they enshrined in legislative provisions or in collective labour agreements, ought to be incomplete in order to allow the plurality of informational bases of judgement of justice, or the plurality of views about what is 'valuable work', to flourish at corporate level. However, collective guarantees are to be provided that, along all relevant dimensions, work will be conceived in line with human dignity and the promotion of fundamental human rights and capability for work. Not all working conditions qualify as capability-friendly, and it is the task of the collective bodies to set adequate standards in this respect and see that they are enforced.

Capability for voice

In order to implement the issue of process freedom in empirical research, we use the notion of 'capability for voice' to designate the extent to which people are allowed to express their wishes, expectations and concerns in collective decision-making processes and make them count (Bohman, 1996; Bohman and Rehg, 1998). This does not imply that their points of view will prevail in the end, but that they must be taken into account during the decision-making process. In the field of work, capability for voice is a key component of job quality. Indeed, the very definition of capability for work, i.e. the real freedom to choose the job or activity one has reason to value, implies that jobs may be a disutility in certain cases, i.e. something one has no reason to value. The capability approach requires that all people be adequately equipped to escape from the constraint of valueless work, either through the real possibility to refuse such a job (at an affordable cost, i.e. with a valuable alternative, be it adequate financial compensation or another job), or through the possibility to transform it into something one 'has reason to value'. Capability for work does not however imply the disappearance of all constraints. On the contrary, it recognizes that the opportunity set is necessarily limited and constraining (not all options are available to all people), but it advocates a fair and negotiated distribution of these constraints. Then, capability for work implies either a) capability not to work if one chooses to (via a valuable exit option); or b) capability to participate effectively in the definition of the work content, organization, conditions, modes of remuneration, etc. (i.e. the voice option). Hence, capability for voice is part and parcel of capability for work, and the availability of valuable exit options is a *sine qua non* condition of capability for voice in the field of work.

At the very centre of the capability approach, there are then conditions to be respected for a genuine capability for voice to prevail. The capability approach is not compatible with a top-down or 'command and control' mode of governance, be it in the public policy process or in any kind of institutions connected to the labour market. As Sen repeatedly emphasizes, the people concerned are to participate effectively in all normative and rule-setting processes (at all levels, be it political decision-making, collective bargaining or any other contractual rule-setting process). That implies that the jobseeker be an actor of the activation process and that the worker be an actor of the labour market regulation processes. This does in no way mean that the jobseekers' and workers' claims must determine the end result of the regulation process, but that they must be able to voice effectively their concerns and to be listened to. In our view, such capability for voice relies mainly on four main conditions (Bonvin, 2008):

- 1) the *availability of political resources*: this relates to the workers' ability to constitute a collective body or build strategic alliances able to weigh upon the decision-making processes via the

mobilization of adequate means of action or pressure. Indeed, workers alone are almost powerless in the face of employers and their ability to constitute collectives or alliances is a key prerequisite when it comes to pushing effectively their claims on the collective bargaining agenda. This issue of 'political resources' also encompasses other dimensions such as the recognition of workers' or trade unions' legitimacy during collective decision-making processes. If these groups are excluded from the table of negotiations (or only consulted, or informed after the decision has been made), then their process freedom is at best symbolic, as it is not allowed to flourish when and where collective decisions are actually made. This is often the case in restructuring processes or in decisions about labour force management that are all too often considered as a managerial prerogative.

- 2) *the availability of cognitive resources*: negotiating skills, ability to communicate or to argue, access to information, are key in terms of capability for voice. If workers at firm level are not competent enough to push efficiently their views about 'valuable work', then they should resort to representatives. This implies that adequate attention be paid to the issues connected to representation (Sen, 2002). Indeed, if trade unionists defend the ideas of their bureaucracy and do not pay enough attention to the wishes expressed by workers, then the choice of the informational basis of judgement in justice will be biased, and the workers' process freedom, i.e. their effective participation in the collective decision-making process, will be limited. Another key concern with respect to cognitive resources relates to the ability to produce one's own knowledge about a specific situation. As Sen repeatedly contends, the description of a specific situation is not (only) an objective exercise, it is (also) a matter of choice and power insofar as a description always implies the selection of certain pieces of information that are deemed as relevant and the consequent exclusion of all other information (Sen, 1982b). For instance, when describing the situation of a firm, if only financial information is taken into account, this results in a reductionist picture of the company. Therefore the ability of workers and their representatives to produce their own information and descriptions is key in terms of capability for voice.
- 3) *the available entitlements*, i.e. which benefit entitlements and which means of action are made available via legislative provisions and/or collective labour agreements. In all negotiating processes, the ability to leave the negotiating table at a bearable cost is a very important asset: for instance, if generous unemployment benefits are available (with good prospects to find a 'valuable job'), workers are in a better position to push their view of what is a 'valuable job' in terms of wages, working conditions, work content, etc. Along the same lines, the legal guarantee and effective enforcement of mechanisms such as the right to strike may significantly contribute to a more balanced power relationship within a firm or an economic sector. As a rule, legislative provisions and entitlements have a strong impact on the degree of capability for voice workers enjoy.
- 4) *the readiness of interlocutors*, in this case employers and shareholders, to listen to the concerns expressed by workers. This readiness does not depend only on their goodwill or their sensitivity to workers' rights and concerns or on the way they assess the economic situation of the firm, but also, and in many cases more significantly, on the legal framework and the duties it imposes on employers and shareholders. For instance, in case of restructurings, what duties are imposed on employers in terms of information, consultation, co-decision, substantial content (e.g. material guarantees to be given to workers via social plans)? As a matter of fact, capability for voice very much depends on the (voluntary or compelled) readiness of the interlocutor to enter into a genuine negotiation about what is a 'valuable job'. The role of collective regulations in such a perspective should be to enhance the capacity of the weakest part

to the labour contract to express their wishes and make them count. Indeed, if no collective provision is made in this respect, this means that the strongest actors at corporate level, i.e. the managers and the shareholders, will be able to impose the logic of short-term financial profitability on workers and other local stakeholders (e.g. local subcontractors or providers). So-called procedural rights, that do not aim at guaranteeing workers' substantial rights (e.g. in terms of level of wages or other working conditions) but allow them to participate or somehow be involved in decision-making processes, are key in this respect. For instance, the right to be consulted or informed in case of collective dismissals, or the right of co-decision that can be found for example in Germany, certainly extends the process freedom of workers' representatives.

In Sen's perspective, process freedom or capability for voice requires as many stakeholders and informational bases of judgement in justice as possible to be efficiently involved in the collective decision-making process (Sen, 2009). In other words, collective bargaining or any process concerning the definition of 'valuable work' should integrate as many actors and informational bases as possible. Therefore, the rules and procedures that govern collective decision-making processes about 'valuable work' should be assessed against their ability to integrate such a plurality of actors, information and viewpoints.

Beside the collective level (i.e. participatory rights at collective decision-making processes about 'valuable work'), a second level matters with regard to process freedom, namely the individual level. Indeed, the ultimate choice about 'valuable work' lies in the individual's hands: the collective framework determines the general conditions, but this still leaves (or at least should leave) some space for individual decision-making about the definition of 'valuable work'. This in particular matters for all decisions connecting work with other spheres of life, as it would be impossible to determine once and for all the significance of work in one's life; it also relates to the connection between material well-being (wages and cash benefits) and self-fulfilment at work, insofar as one's expectations with regard to work might considerably differ, and legitimately so. Therefore, a key issue in this respect is that the collective framework agreed upon (possibly along the lines identified above) should on the one hand not infringe upon personal preferences, and on the other hand promote as much as possible the individual workers' capability for voice at firm level. Indeed, process freedom in the capability perspective implies an adequate combination between collective rationality (organized along processes of democratic deliberation and bargaining) and individual rationalities.

Conclusion

The enhancement of the individual's capability for work and capability for voice on the labour market, i.e. his or her real freedom to choose the job or activity she or he has reason to value, relies on two essential components: a) developing opportunity freedom via the mobilization of a wide configuration of (supply and demand) factors and actors (market actors, the state and the cooperative sector); b) promoting process freedom, i.e. reflexivity in collective decision-making and its implementation, rather than top-down imposition of institutional or hierarchical views. As such, the capability approach paves the way for new modes of collective action in the field of work (towards a more balanced combination of substantial and procedural rights) and for the design of more appropriate analytical tools to assess the impact and relevance of existing collective frameworks in the field of labour (such as the Laeken indicators of employment quality, the European Employment Strategy, so-called flexicurity policies or other programmes and rules implemented at

national, local or branch level). The articles collected in this issue illustrate this added value of the capability approach.

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