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**Real Work in a Virtual World:
the human impact of organisational
transformation in a digital global
economy**

Vienna, May 12th, 2003

**Work beyond the boundaries of time
and space**

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Introduction

- Restructuring of employment in space and time needs to be understood in a broader context of industrial reorganisation
- A dual process of decomposition and recomposition of sectors, organisations, labour processes and skills
- The idea of commodification as an explanatory model



The commodification process

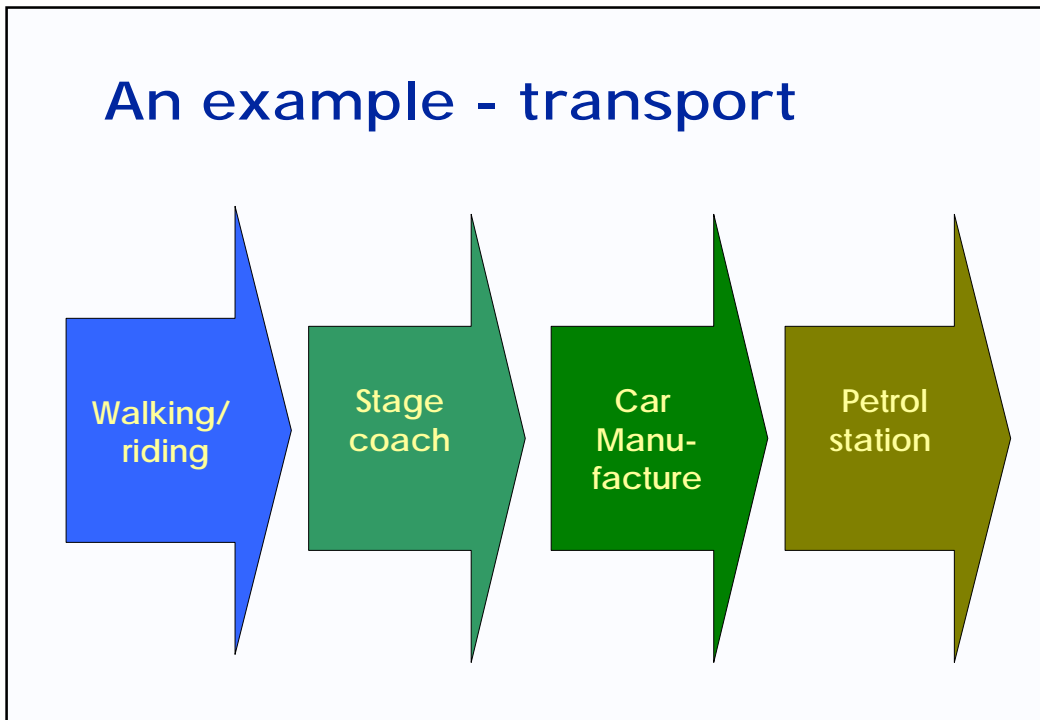
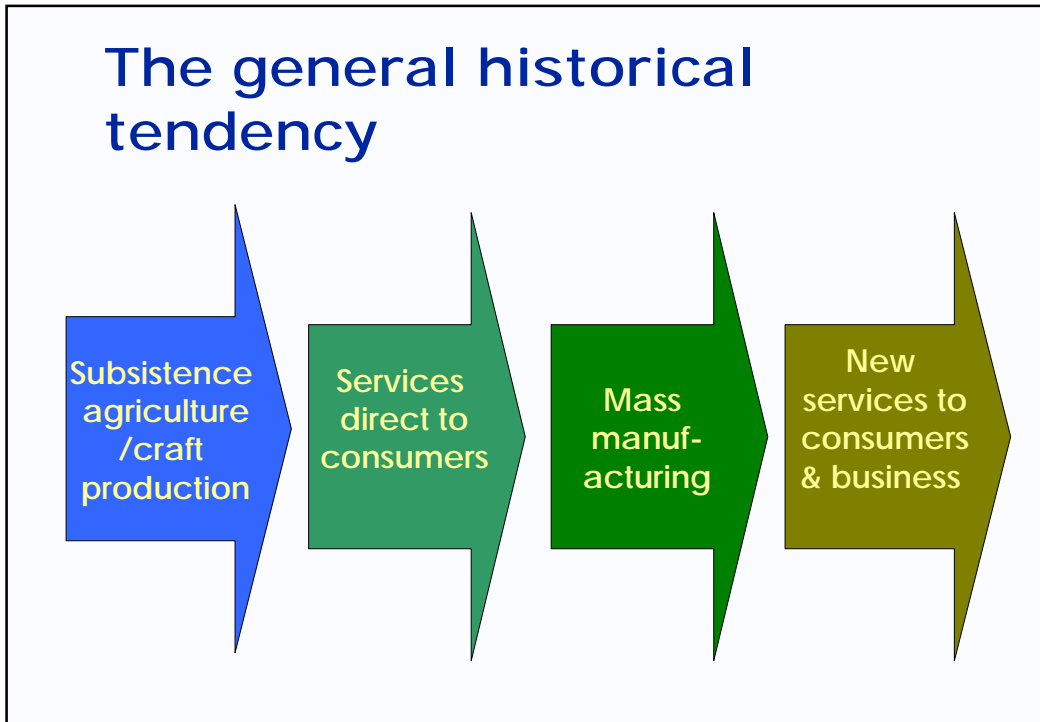
The tendency of capitalist economies to generate new and increasingly standardised products whose sale will generate profits which increase relatively in proportion to the scale of production

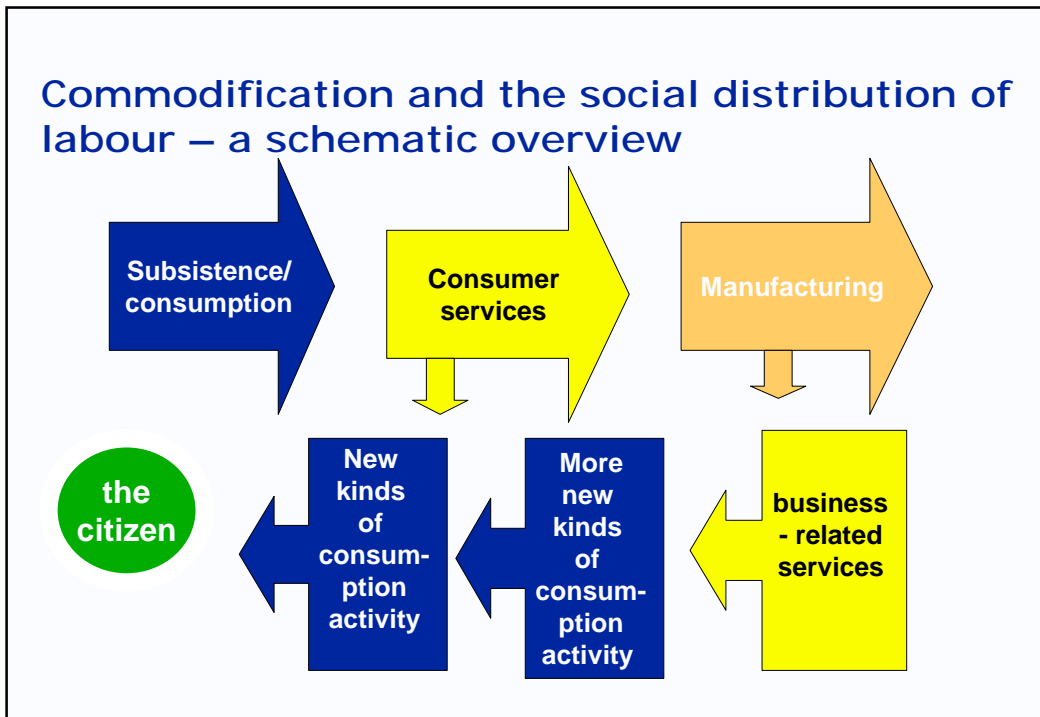
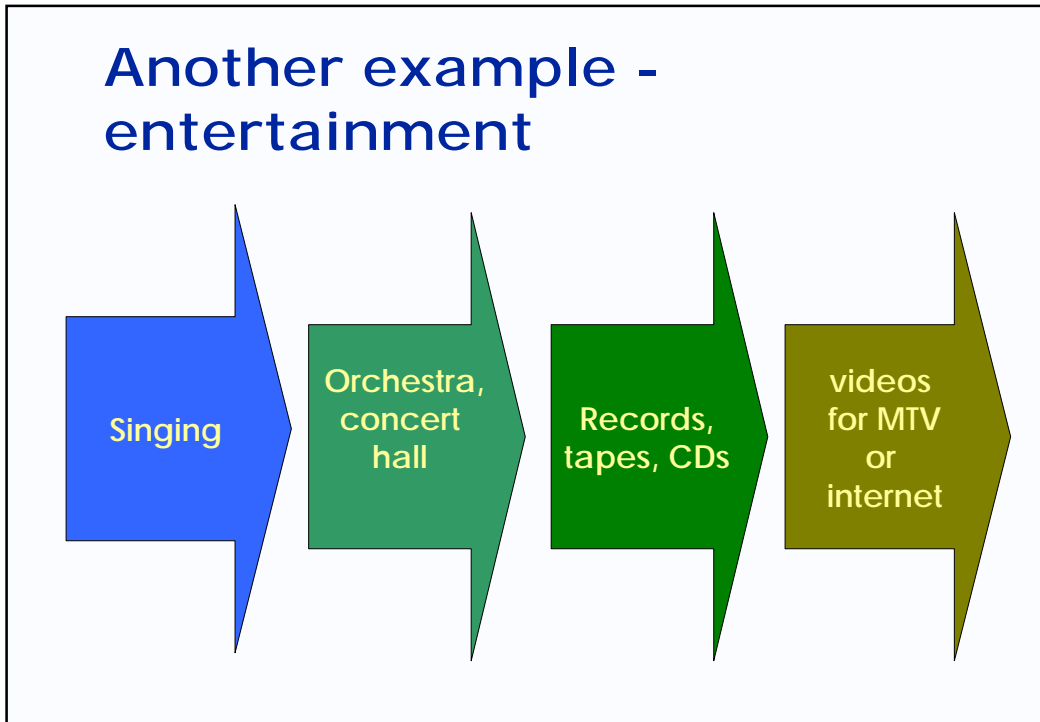


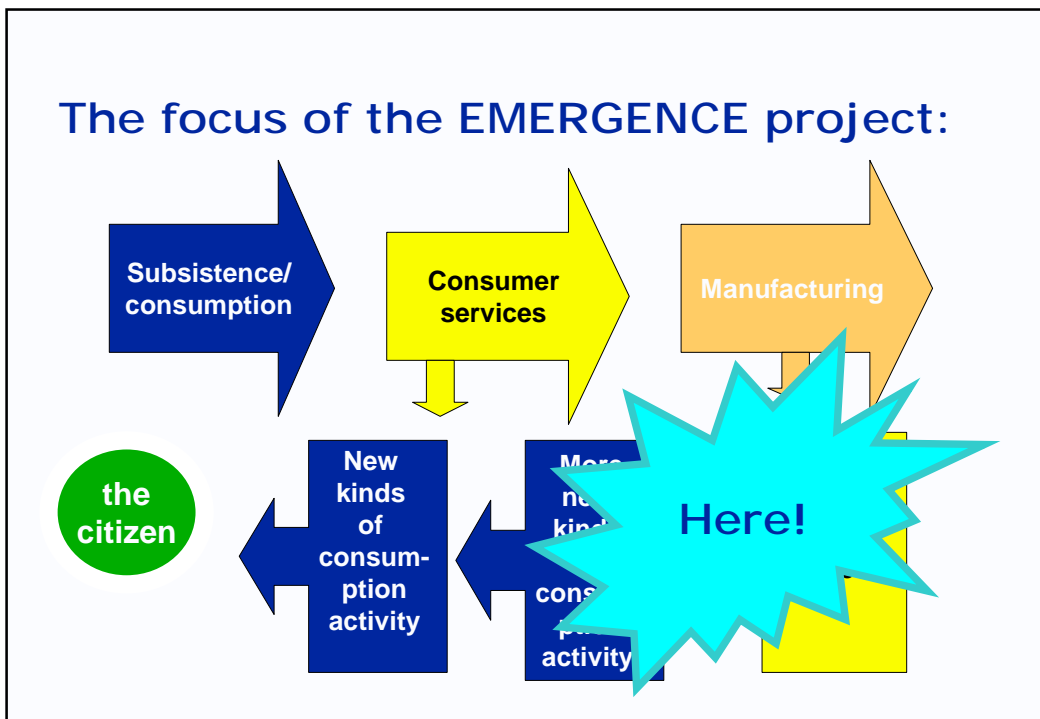
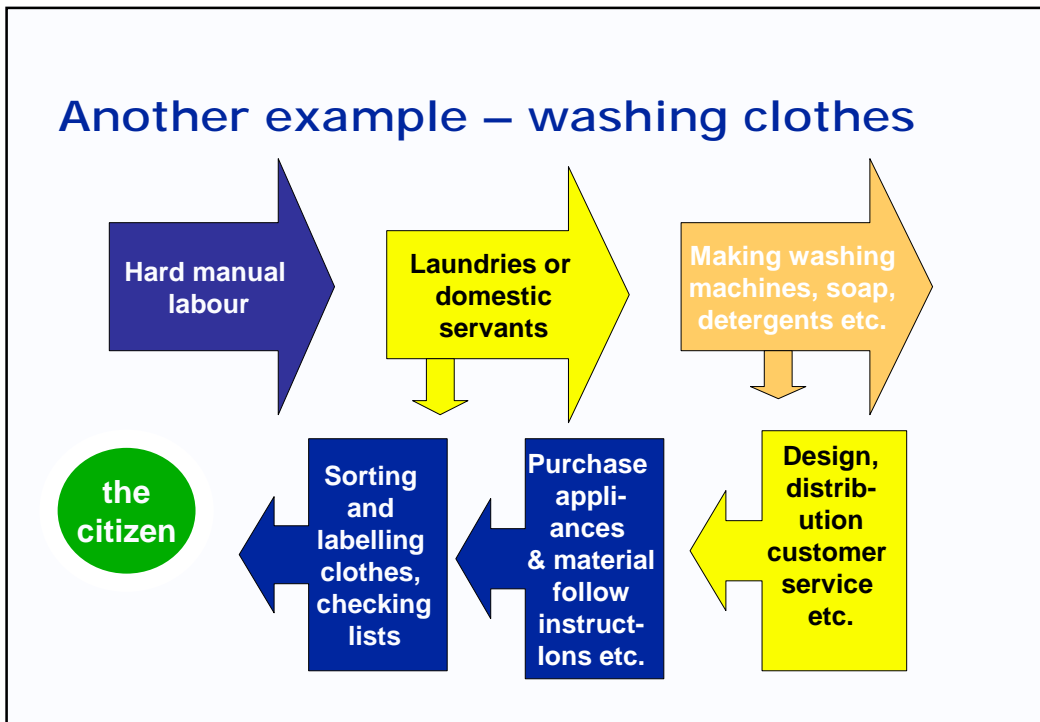
What is a commodity?

- The most obvious example is a mass-produced material product
- But a service may also be a commodity (e.g a wedding on a Caribbean island)
- though not all services are (e.g. public primary level education)
- A commodity may be 'weightless' (e.g. an insurance policy)
- However the general tendency seems to be towards products with some 'weight'
- Nevertheless, the ratio of 'embedded knowledge' to weight is rising







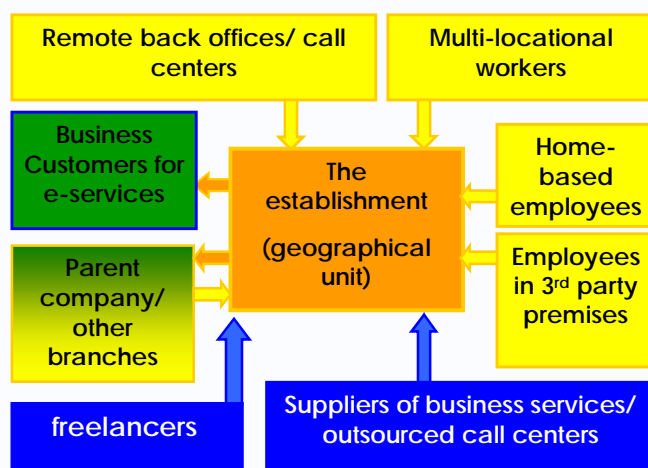


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- To what extent are these service activities *telemediated*?
- To what extent has this possibility of telemediation brought about a *relocation* of work?
- What forms does this relocation take?
- What are the implications for employment?



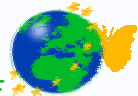
conceptual map of the eOrganisation



Where does technology come in?

- Technological innovations are the enablers of some forms of commodification
- Process innovations enable standardisation of labour processes – from customisation to mass production (and occasionally back again!)
- Product innovations enable the generation of entirely new commodities
- ICTs also enable new forms of distribution – hence delocalisation
- Economic factors tend to be the drivers of uptake

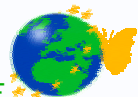
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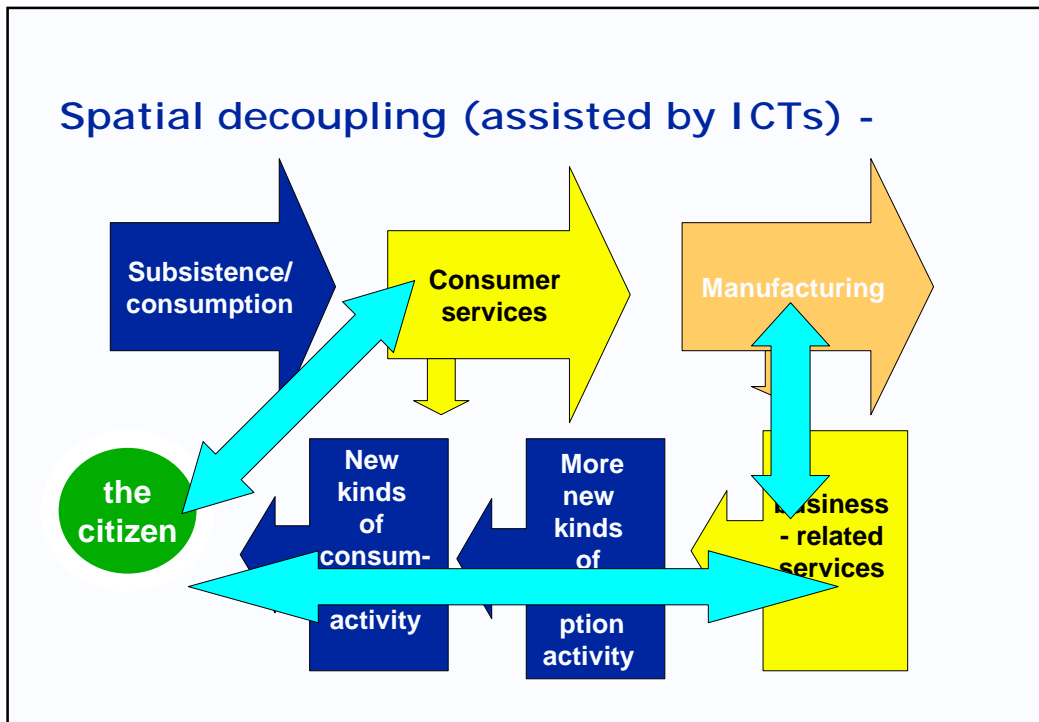


The dynamics of structural change

- A continuous process of decomposition and recomposition at the level of organisations, functions, labour processes and skills
 - Decomposition and recomposition of labour processes
 - Standardisation of existing processes; which in turn makes possible:
 - Management by results (or performance indicators); which in turn makes possible:
 - Remote management – displacement in terms of both time and space
 - Organisational disaggregation (either internally or externally) which in turn leads to:
 - Elaboration of value chains – contractually (proliferation of separate legal entities) and spatially

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New spatial dynamics - what is the importance of 'place'?

- The death of distance vs increasing importance of the local
- The possibility of delocalisation creates new forms of competition between regions
- New regional critical success factors
- Interplay of dynamism and inertia in shaping new geographies
- Tension between centralisation and decentralisation tendencies



dematerialisation or new products?

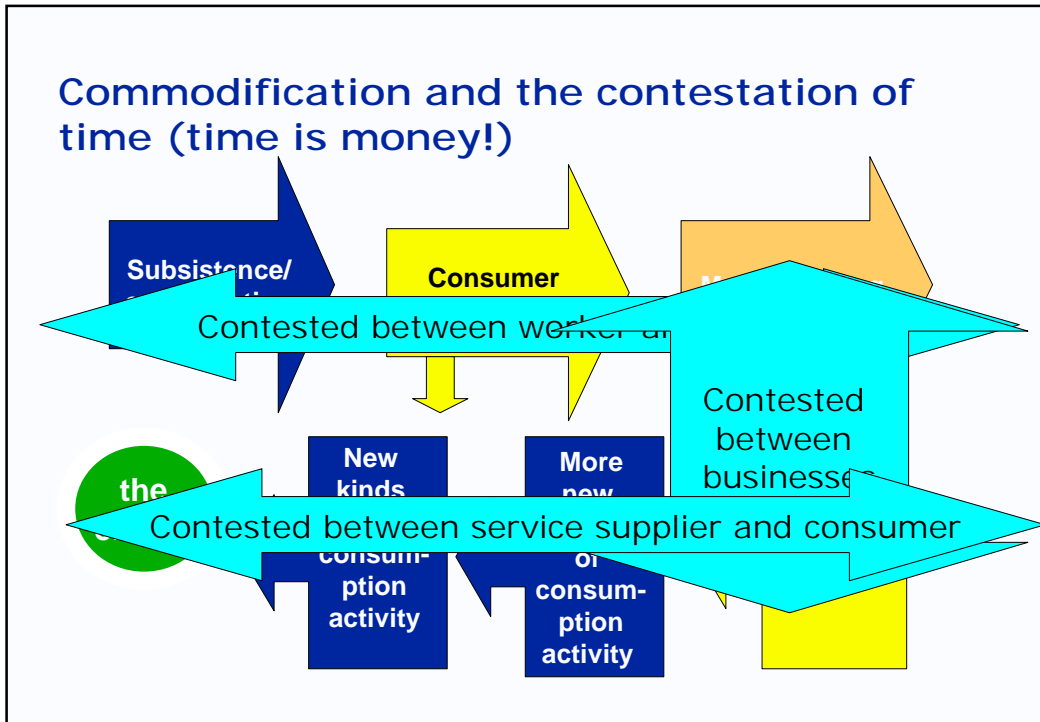
- Growth in importance of value added by 'knowledge'
- Put another way - increasingly elaborate division of labour abstracts and codifies knowledge
- Creation of new knowledge-based commodities
- Simultaneously, growth in production of material goods
- New services beget new products; new products beget new services



The limits of 'virtuality'

- Growth in manufacturing (albeit with more embedded 'knowledge') requires 'real' raw materials, factories and distribution
- Need for 'real' workforce, both in manufacturing and services (who in turn need 'real' housing, food supply, transport, health services, education etc.)
- Importance of infrastructure
- Interdependency of manufacturing and service sectors
- New sectors are born within the old





Dimensions of time

- Quantitative aspects, structured in both their extent and their ordering in time by things like
 - Working hours
 - Household division of labour
 - Opening hours
 - Transportation timetables, etc.
- Qualitative aspects – ‘time sovereignty’ or ‘autonomy’
 - Control of sequence of activities
 - Control of pace
 - Control of content
- Complex inter-relationship between these aspects



Restructuring of time and ICTs

- The current wave of service commodification
- The Taylorisation of service delivery
- The contested control of time
- Taylorised service workers pitted against Taylorised consumers both quantitatively and qualitatively
- Implications for quality of life both inside and outside workplace

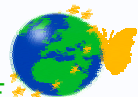
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Some issues for trade unions

- How to organise across new organisational, sectoral and geographical boundaries?
- Are new models of social protection needed?
- Do we also need new models of citizenship?
- How can service workers form alliances with consumers?
- Do we need new 'time models' to cope with 24-hour society in our capacities both as workers and consumers?
- How can we avoid gender inequalities in the workplace and the home?
- How can precarisation be prevented?

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For more information go to

- www.emergence.nu
- www.analytica.org.uk
- www.employment-studies.co.uk

