

Feeling ‘locked at the job’: A first qualitative view on the phases of this phenomenon

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Abstract

There is a relatively large number of individuals who experience a situation of *‘locked at the job’*. They are not satisfied with their current job and at the same time experience limited job opportunities. This study examines the process that individuals who feel locked at the job go through. In addition, we investigate the actors who play a role in this process and what coping mechanisms individuals use. Thirty in-depth interviews were held, of which 12 participants were locked at the job at the time the interview took place and 18 participants who had a similar experience in the past. We were able to identify the three phases. Regarding the first phase *‘becoming locked at the job’* various personal causes such as lack of challenges and work-environmental causes such as favorable working conditions could be identified. With respect to the impact that the second phase *‘being locked at the job’* had three levels could be categorized; low-, medium and high locked individuals. The results show that despite the large impact on lives, there is a great disparity in the degrees to which the locked at the job situation is experienced. The third phase *‘ending locked at the job’* revealed that a locked at the job situation often comes to an end either by own or external influence. Ways of coping with such a situation were mainly related to a pleasant work atmosphere and, in particular, the bond with colleagues. Especially the role of the manager was decisive during the entire locked at the job process. Future research could provide more insight into depth on how the different phases can be further distinguished. Regarding the practical implications we suggest to discuss locked at the job throughout the entire workplace.

Keywords: Qualitative study, Locked at the job, Process, Job mobility, Coping