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Self-management as neoliberal governmentality: The case of Turkish knowledge workers[2]

Since the concept of *knowledge work* was first used by the business guru Peter Drucker, researchers have argued that new organizations depend on knowledge as their main production factor, and knowledge workers are the most important "assets" of these organizations. Drucker argued that knowledge workers themselves are responsible for their contribution to their companies; they must be "their own chief executive officers" and "manage themselves". This paper aims to critically assess arguments of Drucker and other management scholars on knowledge workers using the concept of neoliberal governmentality. Debates on neoliberal governmentality suggest that individuals are now controlled through responsible self-management. This paper argues that when we read management scholars' suggestions to knowledge workers accordingly, calls for self-management suggest more intense control of knowledge workers. Also, depending on in-depth interviews with twenty Turkish knowledge workers, this paper explains to what extent they practice self-management, and how they live through that kind of experience.

Key words: knowledge worker, self-management, neoliberal governmentality, subjectivity, Turkey

Introduction

During the last fifty years, we often hear the argument that economies of the world increasingly depend on knowledge. We often see concepts like knowledge industry, knowledge economy, post-industrial society, and post-capitalist society being used in research which argues that knowledge has become the main production factor after 1950s (Machlup 1962; Toffler 1970). For instance, Daniel Bell, the first

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theorist who used the concept of post-industrial society, claimed that while capital and labour were the main structural elements of the industrial society, the basic factor of the post-industrial society has become knowledge (1973: xiii). Professional specialists and managers with degrees from reputable universities are the knowledge workers that this new economy depends on.

Knowledge work is a subject that has been continually studied by management scholars, since it was first used as a concept by the famous business guru Peter Drucker (1959) at the end of 1950s. Drucker and other researchers of the subject argued that starting from the middle of the twentieth century, business organizations depend on knowledge as their main factor of production. For these new organizations, they claimed, knowledge workers, who could perform complex tasks thanks to their professional skills and knowledge, would constitute the most important "assets", so managing knowledge workers and increasing their productivity are important business challenges of this new period. While it is possible to find many articles written on knowledge worker management and productivity in management journals because of this instrumental interest (Blackler 1995; Davenport *et al.* 1996; Pearce 2004; Lindkvist 2005; Newell *et al.* 2009), sociologists' use of the concept has been rather limited. In other words, as opposed to the material consequences of knowledge work that have been studied by business scholars, human consequences of it have not received sufficient attention of sociologists. There are some major studies that discuss the new organization of work, management discourse, and the personal consequences of work or white-collar work under contemporary capitalism (Sennett 2007, 1998; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Chiapello and Fairclough 2002; Gaulejac 2009; Pongratz and Voss 2003), as well as critical studies on corporate culture (Kunda 1992; Ogbor 2001). While the current study benefits a lot from the kind of critique they bring to the analysis of work under new capitalism, it aims to contribute to the literature by discussing the personal consequences of specifically knowledge work under contemporary capitalism, and by presenting empirical findings about the case of Turkish knowledge workers. It looks at the implications for Turkish knowledge workers of especially self-management, which is proposed by management scholars for this group of workers. Here, "knowledge worker" as a concept will refer to those white-collar workers whose work requires them to think for a living, and who works autonomously to guarantee the quality of the work that they are doing.

This paper will start with a critical discussion of management scholars' arguments on knowledge work, focusing especially on the writings of Peter Drucker as an influential writer on the subject and those of Hunter & Scherer, as scholars who followed Drucker's ideas. There will be a discussion of the central place of self-management for knowledge work according to their conceptualizations.

Secondly, there will be a critique of this managerial perspective on knowledge work and self-management, in terms of human consequences of this type of work. After a review of the debates on neoliberal governmentality, it will be argued that contrary to management scholars' suggestions, self-management and autonomy that are attributed to knowledge workers are not empowering for those workers; under neoliberalism, individual autonomy becomes a central element of social control. In the fourth section, depending on in-depth interviews with twenty knowledge workers who are currently working in İstanbul, the article will explain what kind of work experiences they have, to what extent they practice self-management, and how they live through that kind of experience. It will be argued that although those knowledge workers who give priority to career do not hesitate to transform their lives and selves by translating the targets of their companies into their own aims as scholars of neoliberal governmentality argue, there are also others who reject it. Knowledge workers who are in this second group don't try to reach self-actualization at work and they refuse to practice self-management for career purposes. Focusing on the experiences of those respondents who refuse to practice self-management, there will be a discussion on the limits of governmental reason for knowledge workers.

Knowledge work and self-management

The term knowledge work was first used by Peter Drucker (1959) in his early work, *Landmarks of Tomorrow*. In this work, Drucker compared the organizations of the past with organizations in his day; in large-scale organizations of the past, only simple and repetitive work could be performed, whereas it became possible to organize men of high skill and knowledge for joint performance in the later organizations. While old-style military organizations that depended on "total subordination to iron routine" provided the major organizational model in the past, the new business enterprise and its managerial structure now stands for the new capacity to organize. The earlier organizations depended on breaking down work into simple, repetitive, routine tasks which were organized purposefully, and according to Drucker, what the earlier model did was "(…) to reduce work to drill, skill to obedience, knowledge to training, and cooperation to the assembly line" (1959: 66). He describes the new organizational model as "joint effort of men of high skill and knowledge exercising responsible decision making, individual judgment in a common effort and for a joint end" (1959: 67). For him, in the new organization, organizational knowledge and professional knowledge have become the real factors of production, more important than land, labor, and capital, which were the major factors of production according to traditional economics. Here, he

provided a justification for the need for a new field of knowledge and a new discipline, which is *management*. Moreover, he was also pointing out the emergence and gaining importance of a new group of employees:

> The new organizing capacity creates a middle-class society of men who are professionals in their work but rank as employees, managerial in their responsibility but middle class in their outlook, expectations, rewards, opportunities and values. This professional middle class is becoming the characteristic, if not the dominant, group in every developed society (Drucker 1959: 62).

New organizations need people who have expert knowledge and professional standing. Because of this need, the professional has become the center of authority and responsibility in the new organization, and the symbol of success in society. Drucker talks about two kinds of employed professionals, professional specialists and professional managers. Both professional specialists and managers depend on each other, and both groups' authority is based on their knowledge.

Also in his later work, Drucker followed the same themes while expanding the definition of knowledge worker; he pointed out the key importance of knowledge work today and argued that increasing the knowledge worker productivity is the biggest challenge of the 21st century (1999a). For him, the most valuable asset of a company, during the 20th century, was production equipment, whereas it is the knowledge worker during the 21st century. As knowledge workers are becoming the largest group in every developed and many developing countries, the economies of these countries, to a large extent, depend on the productivity of the knowledge workers. Drucker argues that knowledge worker productivity depends on six main factors:

- It demands that we impose the responsibility for their productivity on the individual workers themselves.
- Knowledge workers have to manage themselves. They have to have autonomy.
- Continuing innovation has to be part of the work, the task, and the responsibility of knowledge workers.
- Knowledge work requires continuous learning on the part of the knowledge worker, but equally continuous teaching on the part of the knowledge worker.
- Productivity of the knowledge worker is not- at least not primarily a matter of the quantity of output. Quality is at least as important.
- Finally, knowledge worker productivity requires that the knowledge worker is both seen and treated as an "asset" rather than a "cost". It requires that knowledge workers *want* to work for the organization in preference to all other opportunities (1999a: 83–84).

In a different way from manual work, knowledge work does not "program" the worker, but "knowledge workers themselves define what the task is or should be" (1999a: 85) because only they, themselves, can do that. They are responsible for their own contribution. Therefore, knowledge workers need to have autonomy, but autonomy also means increased responsibility. For Drucker, as a special type of worker who have a lot to contribute to their companies, knowledge workers must be thought of as a capital asset, contrary to the manual workers who are seen as a cost. Companies aim to reduce costs, but "assets need to be made to grow" (1999a: 87). As the knowledge of the knowledge worker has become the main asset of the companies, attracting and holding the knowledge workers, and providing the kind of conditions that will increase their productivity are the biggest questions for management in this century.

> Knowledge workers… own the means of production. That knowledge between their ears is a totally portable and enormous capital asset. Because knowledge workers own their means of production, they are mobile… Management's job is to preserve the assets of the institution in its care (1999a: 87–88).

Increasing the productivity of the knowledge workers calls for changes in attitudes on the part of both companies and workers. Accordingly, Drucker offers suggestions not only to employers to create the conditions for increased knowledge worker productivity but also to knowledge workers to help them manage their careers and rise to the top of their professions. For him, knowledge workers, today, must be *their own chief executive officers*; they need to learn to *manage themselves*. "We will have to learn to develop ourselves. We will have to place ourselves where we can make the greatest contribution. And we will have to stay mentally alert and engaged during a 50-year working life, which means knowing how and when to change the work we do" (2005: 19).

Drucker was the first management scholar who called attention to the importance of knowledge work and increasing the productivity of the knowledge worker. There are many other scholars who have later written on the key role of knowledge work and knowledge worker performance for the productivity of contemporary organizations (Kidd 1994; Amar 2001; Davenport *et al.* 2002; O'Driscoll 2003; Wright 2005; Davenport 2008). In many of these later studies, it is easy to see the influence of Drucker's arguments and the general framework that he provided. As scholars who depend on the arguments of Drucker, Hunter and Scherer (2009) argue that if the most important asset of a knowledge economy lies between the ears of the knowledge workers as the above quote suggests, the key to increasing productivity is within the knowledge workers themselves. Therefore, there should be an internally-based exploration of productivity that will focus on

how knowledge workers manage their internal experiences because their productivity is largely influenced by their inner states. To increase their productivity and to generate more capital for their companies, knowledge workers need to learn how to manage themselves, their inner states. But what do Hunter and Scherer mean by self-management?

> Self-management begins with the human nervous system, including (and especially) the brain. The brain lies at the center of knowledge work. Knowledge workers use their brain to focus, to decide, and to act… Self-management examines how the brain and the nervous system function, explores their limits and demonstrates how these limits can be effectively managed and transformed. Making knowledge workers more productive means helping them to use their brains better (p. 178).

Therefore, according to Hunter and Scherer (2009), knowledge workers need to understand the functioning of their nervous system and brain to increase their productivity, which will contribute to the productivity and profitability of their companies. Losses in productivity can many times be traced to damaging outward performances, which are caused by invisible internal processes inside a person. For that reason, they argue, today's productivity challenge is about showing the knowledge workers how to manage their internal states effectively and improve those states. Knowledge workers need to transform "nonperforming mindsets" and manage "emotional reactivity" which, for Hunter and Scherer, are the two elements that can profoundly affect professional performance. About the first element, they talk about the importance of focused attention for a knowledge worker for creating a performing mindset (a mindset for growth and productivity) and they suggest using meditation techniques for developing focused attention and concentration. Benefiting from the recent advances in neuroscience, medicine, and psychology, they offer suggestions to knowledge workers on how to "rewire their brains" for greater productivity. In their discussion of the second element, emotional reactivity, they refer to emotions like anger, fear, anxiety, lust, and desire as reactive emotions and argue that these strong reactive emotions negatively influence productivity, as they inhibit brain's ability to be rational, objective, and adaptive. Thus, controlling these reactive emotions is an important part of self-management for a knowledge worker.

Self-management as neoliberal governmentality

Drucker's portrayal of knowledge work on the one hand and Hunter and Scherer's interpretation of Drucker's arguments and their further elaboration on his notion of self-management on the other hand provide us important material for

understanding and critiquing the managerial perspective on this type of work. Accordingly, knowledge workers are characterized by autonomy, self-responsibility for their own productivity and contribution, continuous innovation, continuous learning and teaching, focus on quality more than quantity, and self-management. In his classical distinction between formal and substantive rationality, Weber uses the term *formal rationality* to refer to a consideration of means to reach certain aims; there are certain goals and it is necessary to take rational steps using the technically most adequate methods to reach those goals (1921/1961). From the formally rational perspective of the discipline of management, increasing knowledge worker productivity is a major operational concern for long-term organizational success and growth. The factors that have an impact on productivity are considered and solutions are suggested according to that instrumental purpose. These solutions can go as far as suggesting "to rewire" the brain and control the internal state of the knowledge worker for productivity. Weber's second category, *substantive rationality*, does not restrict itself to whether an action is based on goal-oriented rational calculation, but it also applies certain criteria of ultimate ends; it also takes into consideration ethical, political, and egalitarian values (1921/1961: 85–86).

How can we interpret the suggestions of these management scholars according to the perspective of *substantive rationality*? In terms of ethical, political, and egalitarian values, what are the implications of their arguments? What kind of social experiences does it imply for knowledge workers when knowledge work is defined as such? The fact that knowledge workers work autonomously is emphasized in many works (Drucker 1996; Davenport *et al.* 2002; Horwitz *et al.* 2003; Ramirez and Rembhard 2004; Wright 2005). Moreover, creating a work culture that permits autonomy is regarded as important for motivating and retaining knowledge workers (Horwitz *et al.* 2003: 28). However, if more autonomy also means more responsibility and if knowledge workers are responsible for their own productivity and contribution, then what may be the consequences of having more autonomy for knowledge workers? What are the implications of self-management for knowledge workers?

In a series of lectures published under the title, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault (2008) studies the establishment of governmental reason in neoliberal thought. In this work, Foucault suggests that the central principle of neoliberal governmental control is the reorganization of social relations around a notion of enterprise. Although neoliberal rationality puts the market at the center, it does not only focus on the economy but it also involves "extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player" (Foucault 2005). Accordingly, market forms were extended to non-economic realms and all social relations are reorganized around a notion of

enterprise. Moreover, as McNay argues, the application of the enterprise form to social relations also includes a reconstruction of subjectivity. "Individuals would be encouraged to view their lives and identities as a type of enterprise, understood as a relation to the self, based ultimately on a notion of incontestable economic interest" (McNay 2009: 56). This notion of self as enterprise depends on a principle of active self-regulation; individuals are not controlled through obedience under neoliberal regimes, but through individual autonomy and responsible self-management. Individual becomes an entrepreneur of her own life and perceives her own being as a form of human capital. Being an entrepreneur means being ready "(…) to self-responsibly bring one's own abilities and emotional resources to bear in the service of the individualized projects" (Hartmann and Honneth 2006: 45). Therefore, under neoliberalism, individual autonomy becomes a central element of social control rather than a limit to it. Individuals now take responsibility for matters for which they are not responsible (McNay 2009: 65). In this regime of the "actively responsible self", individuals strive to enterprise themselves or to fulfill themselves in several domains through acts of choice. In fact, individuals are governed through their regulated and accountable choices; the aims of political, social, and economic authorities are translated into the choices and commitments of individuals (Rose 1996). Everyone becomes an expert on herself, responsible for managing her own human capital to get the maximum results (Fraser 2003: 168). The new modality of government under neoliberalism works by the "responsibilization" of individuals who are empowered to discipline themselves (Ferguson and Gupta 2002).

There is currently a broad body of literature that looks generally at the transformation of work under conditions of contemporary capitalism and its consequences for human lives, subjectivities, and psyches (Gill 2010; Casey 1995; Kuhn *et al.* 2008; Sennett 2007, 1998; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Chiapello and Fairclough 2002; Gaulejac 2009; Pongratz and Voss 2003). While benefiting from the insights in these studies, here we are using especially the conceptual critique on self-management offered by scholars who write on neoliberal governmentality, and applying it to evaluate the suggestions of management scholars to knowledge workers. If we read the above-mentioned management scholars' suggestions to knowledge workers in this light, it is easy to see that their calls for more autonomy, self-management, continuous learning and teaching lead to a more intense control of knowledge workers, rather than pointing out improvements in management techniques for the benefit of those workers. More autonomy is not liberating, but puts more burden on the shoulders of knowledge workers. They are empowered to better discipline themselves and to take more responsibility for the work they do. As McNay (2009) argues, they are even called to take responsibility for matters over which they don't really have control. The objectives of companies

are translated into their individual choices. They are invited to behave in ways which will maximize their 'human capital' and that human capital will be put in the service of their companies. Individual knowledge workers' relationships with themselves will depend on economic interest and they will consider their identities as an enterprise. Pongratz and Voss (2003) describe this development as the emergence of a self-entrepreneurial type of labor power or the emergence of the 'entreployee'. This becomes most obvious in Drucker's statement that knowledge workers must be their own chief executive officers (CEOs); their own selves are defined as enterprises that they will manage. They are required to regulate their behaviors and even individual psyches to increase their productivity, which will in turn contribute to corporate productivity. They are expected to restructure their brains and mindsets in such a way that they will get rid of those emotions, which have a negative influence on productivity. Having those emotions is indeed part of being a human, and they will be stripped of their humanity to become better-performing workers.

Drucker's and Hunter & Scherer's works, as well as several other works of management scholars (Davenport *et al.* 2002; Ramirez and Nembhard 2004; for an earlier review of the research on knowledge worker productivity see Sumanth *et al.* 1990), provide examples for the kind of management discourse that aims to govern knowledge workers and guarantee that they will make the most contribution to their companies by giving them more autonomy and increasing their responsibilities. However, one question that is worth asking is to what extent responsibilization or disciplining of knowledge workers really takes place in the lived reality of these workers themselves. Do they experience a management structure or company culture that expects them to do self-management in the ways that have been described here? Are they expected to work autonomously so that they can contribute the highest value to their companies? If that is the case, how do they live through that kind of work experience?

In the next section, there will be a discussion of these questions depending on twenty interviews with knowledge workers who are currently working in Istanbul, Turkey. These are in-depth, semi-structured interviews which were conducted between February and August 2013, with men and women who graduated from top universities of Turkey in the major cities of Ankara and İstanbul (Middle East Technical University, Bosphorus University, Bilkent University, İstanbul Technical University, İstanbul University) and who were trained to become knowledge workers. Our interviewees were between 32 and 40 years old at the time of the interviews. Twelve of them were working at international companies. Four of them were in the banking sector, and six of them were in consultancy. The rest were in a variety of sectors, like research, finance, energy, food, automotive, pharmaceuticals, and bio-technology. Four of them had the

title of director, seven were managers/ senior managers, three were coordina-tors, three were consultants, and one was an analyst. None of our interviewees were self-employed, and were working at big corporations. We had twelve male and eight female interviewees. We discussed the gender dimension of knowl-edge work in a different article (Yilmaz Sener 2015).

Interviews were conducted by the author at the places where the respondents chose: in their offices, houses, cafes or restaurants. We introduced our research as a study that aims to understand the work and life experiences of knowledge work-ers. After getting consent, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. We used grounded theory as our general research methodology, and also an interpretative approach. While using grounded theory, our main aim was to understand how our respondents make sense of their experiences at the work place and the impact of work on their lives in general. After completing the interviews, the author read all the transcribed interviews to recall all the interviewees' stories in their entirety. During the second reading of the interviews, interviews have been examined in detail and coded, so the data were categorized into concepts. Next, the concepts that had the same content were grouped together, organized according to recur-ring themes. At the final step, we tried to come up with a theoretical explanation that can both link these concepts and help us to make sense of the stories narrated during the interviews.

Turkish knowledge workers doing self-management

Drucker provides a list of the factors that contribute to knowledge worker pro-ductivity, as explained previously. Although he names it as one of the six factors, self-management in fact gives the gist of his argument. The other factors that es-pecially he and Hunter & Scherer emphasize (autonomy, being responsible for one's own productivity, continuous innovation, continuous teaching and learning, emphasis on quality, managing the brain and the nervous system to become more productive) are all closely tied to self-management, or we can argue that they are aspects of self-management. In this section, there will be a discussion of the inter-views in relation to these aspects of self-management that both Drucker and later management scholars described and prescribed to knowledge workers. However, in this paper, the emphasis will be on the human consequences of self-manage-ment for knowledge workers.

Among men and women who have been interviewed for this study, there was a striking difference between the opinions of those who consider themselves suc-cessful in their jobs and the others who think that they could not advance in their

careers very much. The first group of people had more positive attitudes toward their work, did not complain about working for extended hours, and seemed to find satisfaction in work, whereas the ones in the second group were more critical about not only their work conditions, colleagues, or companies but also the notion of work and in some cases, even the capitalist system. This difference may attest to the fact that success brings more motivation and dedication. But it also suggests that those who are ready to dedicate themselves to work and who do self-management by translating the aims of their companies into their own commitments are more likely to be successful. Those knowledge workers who think that they have successful careers seem to be better examples to observe neoliberal governmentality.

It is important to state that all the interviewees stressed that they prefer to work in a foreign or a multinational company, rather than a local one. They believe that foreign/multinational companies are significantly better in terms of professionalism, standardization, operating on generally accepted rules, and being merit-based. In the accounts of many of them, there was an emphasis on the importance of taking initiative. They emphasized it as a crucial skill that they acquired during their university years and they also named the opportunity to take initiative as a major criterion to evaluate the appeal of a job. What goes together with taking initiative for them is having autonomy at work. They express their dislike of strict hierarchies or company cultures that don't leave much room for autonomy. An implication of this emphasis on autonomy is that when they talk about their ideal job, many of them talk about their dream of having their own company. Being able to manage their own business schedule and their own time, and being flexible is emphasized as the major reason why they want to have their own business. At this point, it is important to stress that what Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001) call the "Neoliberal Newspeak" is noticeable in their statements. Flexibility, taking risks, sustainability are the positive words in this Newspeak and rigidity, monotonous, immobile, stasis are the negative ones. When they talk about their job and responsibilities, they state that these are defined in a very flexible and general way, and are always open to change.

> In fact, there is no job description. Job description can always change. There are certain lines and we work within those lines. My title is director… We do consulting, we have clients, and we provide services to them. It is critical to manage the relationships with them. But there is no clear job description according to which we work, there is no such structure within which we need to stay. In fact, this variation or flexibility is a good thing. But depending on the type of variation, it becomes good or burdensome. It can be enjoyable when I have new responsibilities that can bring positive returns to me.

> My job is to increase the profitability of the department. To do everything for this purpose, to take all initiatives… To bring new businesses to the company… Also, to guarantee that work will be completed in a way that will totally satisfy the clients… To coordinate that process… This is, in general terms, what I do.

They list having control over their work, taking initiatives, and being able to work autonomously as important conditions for doing their work, and stress that when these are restricted, it has a negative impact on the quality of their work.

> I like my job. What we do mostly depends on team work. There are one hundred people in the company but we are more of a closed group. We don't have interaction with those one hundred people. Including upper management, we are like a group of ten people. It makes me feel like this is my own business. We program our schedule, we set the deadlines… There is no heavy bureaucracy, not very much internal reporting… I like it. Competition is really tough but I like the work environment.

> I would like to have more power to make decisions and more control… In some strategic decisions, in the selection of personnel… I would like to work with my own team. I wish I had that chance. Right now, it is not exactly that way. I am not saying that there is no control. But I wish it was more like "you design it, don't worry, you establish and make it work…"

In many cases, autonomy and taking initiatives go together with working for very long hours. They have work hours that extend beyond 9 am to 6 pm. They speak of work days that last on average twelve hours, sometimes reaching midnight, during busy periods. They state that they work for long hours not because their managers make them work, but because it is necessary to complete their work and to guarantee that they will produce high quality output. Laptops, smart phones, and mobile Internet connections are provided by their companies, so that they can work anytime and anywhere. Some of them mention checking their messages in the middle of the night when they wake up. Therefore, these devices are effective in turning all their time into work time.

> In my previous relationship, the biggest problem was my job. Not having enough time to spend with her… When it is the busy period, we, on average, work from 8.30 until 9. There are times when it even extends till 12. I do my best not to bring work home. So, I try to complete everything and then leave the office to go home. For the last two years, I have been spending a lot of effort not to work during the weekend. Whatever comes to me, I try to get it done during the week. I just don't do anything during the weekend. Previously, I used to work also during the weekend. I was working every day, seven days a week. I was feeling hard-pressed. Now I take a two-day break and psychologically, it makes me feel much better.

The people in our company named BlackBerry "slavery". It makes you do consulting and deal with the clients, 24 hours a day. You cannot say, "I don't want it." In Europe, you can say that…You can say "I don't want BlackBerry."

On average, I am at work at 7.30. I am at my desk… Sometimes a little bit earlier, sometimes a little bit later, but on average 7.30… In the evening, I generally leave around 7.30. So, it is around 12 hours. When I leave at 7.30, I am at home at around 8.30. After I rest and have dinner, it is 9.30–10. Then I have around one hour to work. I cannot manage my sleep so I cannot work longer at night. But I try to wake up early in the morning. I wake up at 4.30 or 5 to work. So, I work around 14 hours a day in total. I also work 3–4 hours on Saturdays and Sundays.

How many hours do I work? Around 70 hours a week I guess… I wake up at around 7 and I am at work at around 8.30. I work until 6. Lunch takes about half an hour… So, you make the calculation… But then when I go back home, I start working again at 10 and work for at least two hours… For the kind of work I am doing, it is unthinkable not to have a laptop… When we go to the clients, for instance, we always work on our laptops. Our company also gives BlackBerry… It means that you are always accessible, always in communication… Also during weekends and when you are on a vacation… During the weekend, we don't receive that many e-mails from the clients. We exchange e-mails with the other people in our company. But I don't really regard it as work. The effort it requires is only a couple of minutes. It takes thirty seconds to write it and thirty seconds to read… (Just to make sure: These are four different quotes)

All the respondents think that the amount of money they earn is enough to meet all those things that they consider as their needs and to pursue the kind of life style they want. As long as they get similar salaries with people who work at the same level in different companies, they don't feel concerned about the amount of their earnings. Many of them also have benefit packages including company cars, private pensions, and extensive health care packages. Therefore, in general, they are satisfied with the material rewards of their jobs. However, as many of them are in a position to see their individual economic contribution to their companies, when they compare that amount with their salaries, they feel uncomfortable because their salaries are much below their economic contribution. Moreover, as work spreads to many areas of their lives, some of them think that what they give cannot have a money equivalent:

I can easily see how much I contribute to our company. I know how much money I bring to the company. Thinking of that amount, sometimes I feel like I should be earning more than what I am earning now.

Thinking of what I am doing, I think I am making a good amount of money. I can also see the benchmarks as my job gives me access to data about many people's

salaries. So I have a chance to compare my salary with them… But when I look at it from a different point of view, we are selling our time, our life. It requires a lot of dedication. When I look at it that way, what is the value of your life? Both for me and for everybody, it should be something that is of high value. According to that criterion, No, I am not really earning that much thinking of the required dedication and time devotion.

Although they think that they are earning enough to support their expected lifestyles, it is hard to say that they are feeling secure in the economic sense. Although they have some savings, as people who mainly depend on earnings from their own labor, they are aware that they cannot subsist for a long time in the case of a long-term unemployment. Even though this is not something that they continuously think about, losing their jobs and being unemployed for a long time are worrying possibilities especially for those who are married and have kids. Those who are at managerial levels (I wrote the numbers above, while I was describing the characteristics of the interviewees) state that if they lose their jobs, it will not be easy to find a job at a similar level.

One of the respondents (here we will call him S) has been working in banking sector for fourteen years and recently got a promotion to become a director in his company. He talks about himself and the other knowledge workers as doing "personal brand management", presenting themselves to the others as brands and trying to gain brand recognition. He gives the example of a couple of biscuit brands that are well-known and talks about his aim as gaining a similar recognition as a person, coming to people's minds when there is a need for the kind of work that he does. He compares himself with an object, or more accurately, sets the state of an object as a target for what he should become. He argues that every senior manager has a brand value and the person at the top identifies these senior managers with their brand values. However, he adds, you also try to be known by the people outside your own company. S tells that the impact of this personal brand management is felt in all areas of one's life; life outside work is shaped according to motivations related to work. For instance, he stresses that when he shares something on social media, he is really concerned about the kind of impression that he creates. According to S, this brand management is an isolating process:

> In the past, the discussion was about whether you had different personalities at work and in your personal life. However, right now, it is at a totally new level. There is a profile that you want to present at work and that motivation spreads to your entire life. How you behave outside work, what you share on social media… These are all parts of this brand management. You think of all dimensions of it. How people see me, how they think of me… You start to internalize it. You start to be the person you present to the others. And this is a lonely journey. You create that brand. And as you go up, the number of people that you can trust decreases.

> Everybody is in competition with each other… 20 people start, 18 of them go to the next level. Then 10 people go up. At one point you see, there is only you and another one. There is only one upper position. You are inevitably in competition for that position… You definitely are lonely in this brand management, impression management.

Therefore, according to what S explains, the question is no more about whether or not one can be himself/herself at the work place. To be considered successful and to constantly rise in the corporate hierarchy, you need to build an image and manage not only your professional profile but also your personal life to be in line with that image. Then the mask molds the face; you become the person that you present in corporate life. Another knowledge worker, C, who works as a senior manager in a multinational professional services firm similarly states that it becomes natural both at work and your personal life that you hide your feelings and act pragmatically to reach your aims. It becomes the main rule for obtaining what you want. They also try to reorganize their personal lives to create the kind of image that is expected from a successful manager. They consider many aspects of their lives as things that contribute to this brand management.

S, C, and those others who consider themselves successful in their careers, do not talk about work as a necessity or as something they must do to earn a living. They do not think of work as an obligation that they would avoid if they had enough economic resources. Work seems to provide them a purpose in life, a way for self-actualization and social recognition.

> Even if I had a lot of money, I would still work. I would still work intensely. I would work intensely because you can remain active and healthy if you keep working. If you slow down your work pace, life also slows down. Thinking gets slower. There is a kind of satisfaction in intense work, in that pace. I would like to have my own business in the future. But I would still work at the same pace if I have my own business.

> At the end of the day, we are all trying to earn money. But to me, work is not a sphere of activity that I sell x hours to earn y amount of money. Life could be easier for me if I could see it that way. Then I would have lower expectations. At work, I want space for self-actualization, for realizing my dreams. But when you demand taking initiatives, more responsibilities, future opportunities for personal development, it is hard to find them all.

> Work is a necessity. It provides you the money that you use for doing many things in life. But besides that, work also provides ways to socialize. It puts you in different environments. Additionally, there is this issue of personal fulfillment. *I don't really know what I would do if I was not working…* I don't have the kind of hobbies, like art or sports, which would keep me occupied all the time. I am not used to that kind of thing…

Many of them emphasize the fact that their job mostly depends on knowledge and they state that knowing how to use knowledge is of critical importance to what they do.

> Everybody can have knowledge, knowledge is everywhere now. However, the most important capability of this century is using knowledge. Knowledge is continuously flowing. You need to be selective, choose those pieces of information that are useful to you and come up with a meaningful explanation. This requires a multi-sided perspective. It is easier to develop the technical capabilities. You get courses, read, or do some research. However, it is crucial to get knowledge from multiple sources to have an open mind. I benefit from sociology, literature, cinema, several different areas to cultivate myself. We are in the service sector and our job is with people… So, we need to have knowledge about all spheres about people.

Although they mostly emphasize that they enjoy doing knowledge work, some of them also mention the discomfort they feel because of "not doing anything tangible":

> I would prefer to produce something tangible, something concrete. Right now, it is hard to motivate myself. Every day, we come to work and observe those numbers going down and up. We do our best to take them up. But we do them without having, holding anything concrete. We see developments that, we claim have concrete consequences. But we don't see anything moving from one point to another one. Just numbers… We don't see money, we just play with numbers… We are not in that cycle of physical, tangible things. We are in the cycle of knowledge and digital money flow… This sometimes makes me feel like I am disconnected from reality. It requires a lot of self-motivation. It is wearing…

> They made a survey with the partners of our company. The results of the survey were later announced. One of the questions was, would you find it more attractive to produce a certain component that would be used in the automotive sector. 95 percent of the partners said, yes. Sometimes, I feel the same. If I could see a tangible thing, know its cost and the sale price, calculate my profit, that would be simpler and satisfying. But what I do… You can find the work that I do if you go to Internet. Therefore, in fact, I am doing nothing. I am just making some information more orderly and more refined. Sometimes I have those depressive moments… At those times, I start to question these.

Their main attachment is not to their companies but to their own careers, and it is crucial for them that they are constantly upwardly mobile. They cannot tolerate feeling stuck at a position for, what they consider, a long period; they shift to another company when they feel that they are stuck. Shifting to a new company, changing one's job is a risk. But according to their vocabulary, risk is something that one should not avoid if s/he wants to advance her/his career fast. Taking risk

at the right time is appreciated and encouraged. In some cases, "up or out" is an informal company policy for knowledge workers. If they are not promoted in a certain period, they are expected to leave their companies. As there are less and less positions as they go up the company hierarchy, some people need to constantly quit the company to create space for those who are moving up. Most of the times, they are not fired but are constantly given indirect messages that tell them that they are not needed and wanted in that company any more.

Limits of neoliberal governmentality

As discussed before, among the knowledge workers who were interviewed for this study, those who feel they are successful at work consider work as more than a necessity, as a sphere where they can reach self-actualization. They do not hesitate to do self-management for success at work. The knowledge workers in this group are good examples for what neoliberal governmentality scholars argue. However, there is another group of knowledge workers, corresponding to at least six people in our group of interviewees, who see work only as a means to earn money. These individuals, like the others, are also aware of the fact that to move to upper managerial levels in their companies, they are expected to do self-management. However, they still refuse to transform their selves according to the expectations of their companies. In fact, we can argue that these examples point out the limits of neoliberal governmentality. Two examples will be discussed in detail in this section.

Although E had a business degree from a reputable university and has been working at big companies in Turkey, he does not consider career advancement a priority in life. He was dreaming of working in the advertising sector when he was an undergraduate student, as he was thinking that a career in advertising would leave room for creativity. He could not get his dream job but he does not seem to be upset about it. Working in corporate jobs for more than ten years, his perspective has changed significantly; he now sees advertising as a sector that is "harmful to humanity". Moreover, although he was looking for an opportunity to use his creativity in his job, he now thinks that it is better if you don't put your creativity and your soul into your job, because if you do so, you have nothing left to yourself. He is now against idealizing work as a way to use and develop his creativity and potential. What is more crucial for him now is not spending a big proportion of his time working and having time for other outside activities which are important for him. Although it is hard to say that he is happy at his current job, he is glad about the fact that his current job is a technical one and he can work without surrendering his entire self to his job. He emphasizes this as a positive

aspect of his job because he thinks that the general expectation from employees in his position is that kind of surrendering.

He works from 8 AM to 5 PM during workdays, which he considers a tolerable schedule, but he stresses that there is always pressure to work more. This constant pressure to work longer than the standard work-week is something that he sees as not peculiar to his company, but as the norm for comparable corporate jobs. Although he thinks that corporate jobs all over the world are exploitative, the situation in Turkey is "extra bad" because of constant pressure to work overtime without being paid. Although he resists to those pressures as much as he can, many times, he brings work home when he leaves at 5 PM. Still, he thinks that the total of his working hours is below the average in his company. There are people who go to work on Saturdays. E doesn't. Although he says that he doesn't care, he is about the fact that he may be fired at some point because of not going beyond the regular work hours. He doesn't see any possibility for promotion because he thinks the ones who are promoted are the ones who stay in the office for extended hours every day, the "work maniacs". Although he always gets high scores in regular performance appraisals and his managers are satisfied with the quality of his work, still he feels under threat because he does not dedicate himself to work.

Expectations from them as knowledge workers are high. They are supposed to create high values for their companies on their own without much supervision. This is clear in E's case; he stresses that his manager does not really have much knowledge about the technical work he is doing. He is the one who guarantees the high quality of the work output by feeling personally responsible for quality. However, as E explains, in the local Turkish companies, there is an extra burden on knowledge workers; they are also expected to conform to traditional expectations, like being physically present in the company for extended hours. It is not sufficient to complete the tasks in the best possible way by accepting full responsibility for quality. They are expected to produce a special kind of product but they are not given special conditions for producing it. Therefore, those who are working at local companies in Turkey experience double disadvantages.

E has this idea of preserving his authentic self, without transforming it according to the requirements of his job or for career gains. Although he certainly doesn't name it as such, he refuses to practice self-management. He does not accept to translate the targets of his company into his individual aims and actions. He wants to preserve a space for himself, which is outside of the corporate logic. Moreover, he is regularly meeting with some friends who work at other departments in the same company to critique the kind of work they are doing and to discuss under what conditions work can make people happy.

> I regularly meet with a group of friends. We are going to abolish the system together (he laughs). Depending on what we discussed, I had written something on how people can be happy… Those friends and I think that to be happy, you need to work during the times that you choose. It shouldn't be like a prison. It shouldn't be like you should be here at this time, leave at that time, sit here, do this… You should be working from anywhere you like. Anyway, we know what we are required to do. If you finish this task by the deadline, you will get your money. Otherwise, you won't… No need to be in the office…

Although he disliked the ideas and activities of socialist student groups on campus when he was a student, after working at corporate jobs for more than ten years, he started to see value in their critiques of the capitalist system. He thinks of his individual suffering in his job as an indication of a general, system-level problem. Although he thinks that he is pretty good at what he is doing in the technical sense, he cannot easily say that he deserves the money that he earns, as he questions the rationale of the system, the source of his earnings and the social contribution of what he is doing. However, he is also aware of the high cost that he is paying for earning the money. He is concerned about both the individual and social costs:

> I get my salary from the interests on credit cards that people cannot pay back. From interests on credits… We are making money by putting people into difficult situations. This is what all the banks are doing. So, do I deserve the money that I earn? In one sense, the money that the banks are earning is not money that is deserved. Or seventy percent of it is not… So, people who work for banks are earning money that is not deserved, if we look at it this way. But on the other hand, you can also say, I am giving my whole life, this is not enough for that. Because what you are giving is too much, you are giving everything. **Selling your soul, how much is your soul worth? It should be something valuable, right?** You are selling your time, energy, body, even when you don't put your soul into it. And think of the fact that many people also put their souls. They are giving everything they have.

O is another person who has been working at corporate jobs for more than ten years. He thinks that he could not advance in his career because of some unlucky situations, like mobbing experiences. After changing jobs several times, O now thinks that all the companies are like each other; there are only minor differences because of the kind of people who work in each company. He significantly questions the value or benefits of the work that employees like him do in these companies. He thinks that they are not doing something that is beneficial to humanity. For that reason, he sees work as something that he does to earn a living. He emphasizes that he refuses to dedicate himself to work like others do. For him, under current conditions, there is no possibility for self-actualization at work.

> The kind of jobs we do… They do not really create much benefit. They are not beneficial to humanity. If I was, let's say, a doctor, I would still want to work if I already had a lot of money. Or if I was an engineer who developed useful stuff for others… But we had business degrees and we don't really contribute positively to humanity, to the world. If I had a lot of money, I wouldn't work and I would use my time to develop myself.

In a very similar way with E, O also thinks that the problems that he has with his job are, to a large extent, caused by the system. According to O, the constant capitalist endeavor to increase profitability pressures workers to spend more and more effort. All kinds of workers spend increasing amounts of effort, as they are afraid of being left behind in this competition and being completely left out- becoming unemployed.

> These are, in fact, all related to the system. What is imposed by capitalism, you directly experience in your personal life. Increasing levels of profitability, doing more with less people, hiring younger people… Let's fire the elderly and hire younger ones… And, we run like race horses. We run behind the system to catch it so that we will not be fired. Because we all know that we may be fired in one day. This is the corporate world, it is ruthless… This is what people do to other people. It can also happen to them one day. People set up the system, they maintain it to have more profit… In this system, some are the people of the system. Who support it… The workaholics, those who feel identification with their companies… I am not that type. I don't feel any belonging. I don't feel like I am doing something beneficial to humanity. I am selling my time, energy, and labor. I get something in return. I don't know how long it will last. Because *the system always leaves out some people*.

Discussion and conclusion

This article has discussed the personal consequences of knowledge work and especially self-management as a major characteristic of knowledge work for knowledge workers. This notion of self-management has been critiqued especially using the concept of neoliberal governmentality. As scholars who write on neoliberal governmentality argue, the new form of governmentality under neoliberalism works by assigning new responsibilities to individuals who then become authorized to discipline themselves. In the case of knowledge workers, more responsibility, more autonomy, and self-management do not represent developments in work conditions in favor of knowledge workers, but lead to a more intense control of them. More autonomy puts heavy burdens on the shoulders of knowledge workers. Depending on interviews with knowledge workers who are working in Istanbul, we questioned to what extent the characteristics of knowledge workers

that are discussed by business scholars apply to this group of workers, and the personal consequences of this type of work.

During the interviews, the interviewees emphasized that aspects like institutionalization, professionalism, standardization, working according to generally accepted rules and procedures, and merit-based systems only exist in foreign/multinational companies, and for that reason, they prefer to work in those companies rather than the national/local ones. They think of these aspects as the conditions that a knowledge worker needs to do her/his job. Those characteristics of knowledge workers that are described by business scholars, such as taking initiative and working autonomously, are also the ones that are emphasized by the interviewees in this study. However, working autonomously and being the ones who guarantee the quality of the work that they do, they have additional responsibilities and very long work days. The laptops and Blackberries provided by their companies make it possible to work anytime and anywhere. Those who consider work not only as a necessity, but rather as a means to actualize themselves think that it is part of their job to work for extended hours. They also do not hesitate to transform their personal lives according to their career targets. Distinctions between work-time and free time, between work and leisure have been blurred; work spills to other spheres of life. For those others who want to keep these areas separate and limit their work hours to standard business days, there are consequences like not being promoted and always feeling anxious that they may lose their jobs. Although all the interviewees stated that they earn more than enough to sustain the kind of lifestyle they desire, as they need to give a lot of effort and time for that income, some of them mentioned that there is no money to compensate for that. They think that their incomes can meet their needs, but most of them do not feel secure in the financial sense. As employees who need to depend on their own labor and regular income for a living, they know that those savings cannot support them for a long time in case of unemployment.

The respondents frequently mentioned that they work depending on knowledge and they need to constantly gain new knowledge not only in their direct area of work but also related to many other areas. They process the existing knowledge and produce new knowledge according to the areas of operation and the needs of their companies. However, at least for some of them, this has some disadvantages: They feel like they are not doing something that is tangible. They feel uncomfortable about "playing with numbers", watching the numbers go up and down all the time; they need to constantly remind themselves that those numbers correspond to real, concrete things. They need to continuously motivate themselves about the meaning and value of the work that they do. There are also those who think that what they do has no benefit, and is even harmful to humanity.

Although knowledge workers have high levels of income, as workers who are expected to commit themselves to work, and who cannot keep a distinction between work time and free time, they are giving too much in return for that money. They are expected to manage their selves, brains, and emotions in accordance with the targets of profitability, effectiveness, and efficiency. As salaried people, even after long work experiences and reaching managerial levels, they do not feel economically secure. This economic insecurity is accompanied by other insecurities caused by fears of falling behind the others, not performing well enough, losing their jobs, and being unemployed for a long time. Taking these into consideration, we can argue that knowledge workers, as relatively privileged workers who are considered as the main assets of today's companies by business scholars, also experience exploitation, although different from other workers in terms of some aspects. Further research on work experiences and work-life balance of knowledge workers will help us to better understand different dimensions of this exploitation.

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