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Capability and public employment  
services

■ HDCA, TG Work and Employment  
Webinar: Capability as informational basis for  
work and employment politics  
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- **CAPRIGHT: »Integrated Project« – but really quite diverse**
  
  - **WP 3 – a laboratory of thought on capability in working lives**
    - Intervention of public employment service (PES) in situations of unemployment
    - Bring in life course research
  
  - **Period publications**
    - »Individual working lives and the capability approach«, »Transfer«, Vol. 18 (1) (2012)
    - »Sen-sitising life course research?« Actes du Séminaire CAPRIGHT, Goettingen 2008
  
  - **Later work**
    - Socio-economic reporting (quantitative)
    - Program Monitoring and Evaluation

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## ■ Two thoughts on framing the capability perspective

### ■ Capability was a dissenting view

- Activation paradigm was in its prime, prescribing outcomes
- In program evaluation, concern with individual agency was often not shared by contracting agencies

### ■ Being a paradigm, capability is incompletely theorized

- Application to situations of unemployment is in need of complementing theories
- Particularly helpful:
  - Sociology of the life course
  - Sociology of interactive (co-productive) service work
  - Labour market theory, e.g. job search and segmentation theory
  - Account of employment and care work in households
  - Account of firm-based employment systems

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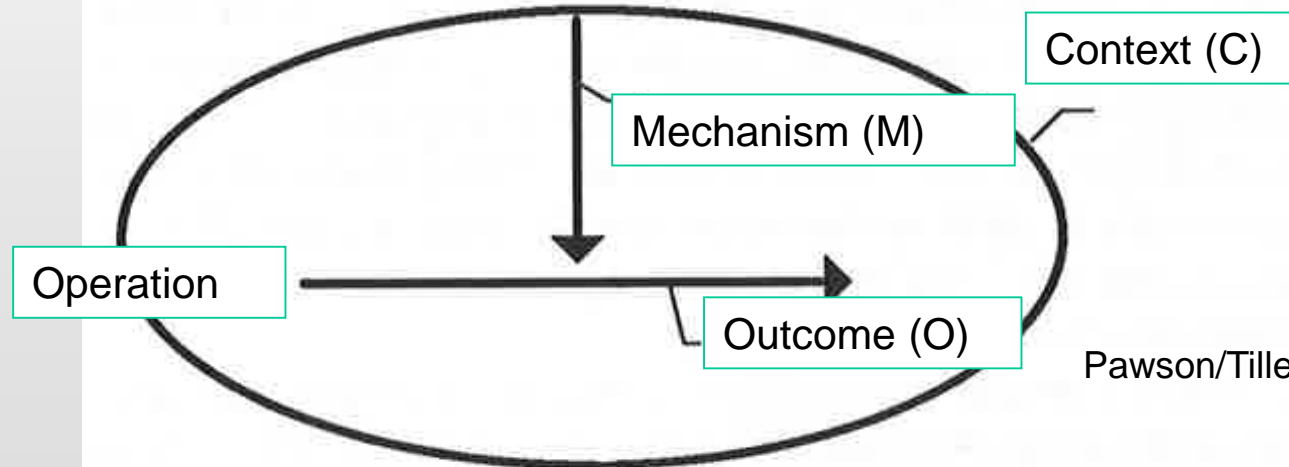
## ■ Two points on method

### ■ Service work needs to be observed

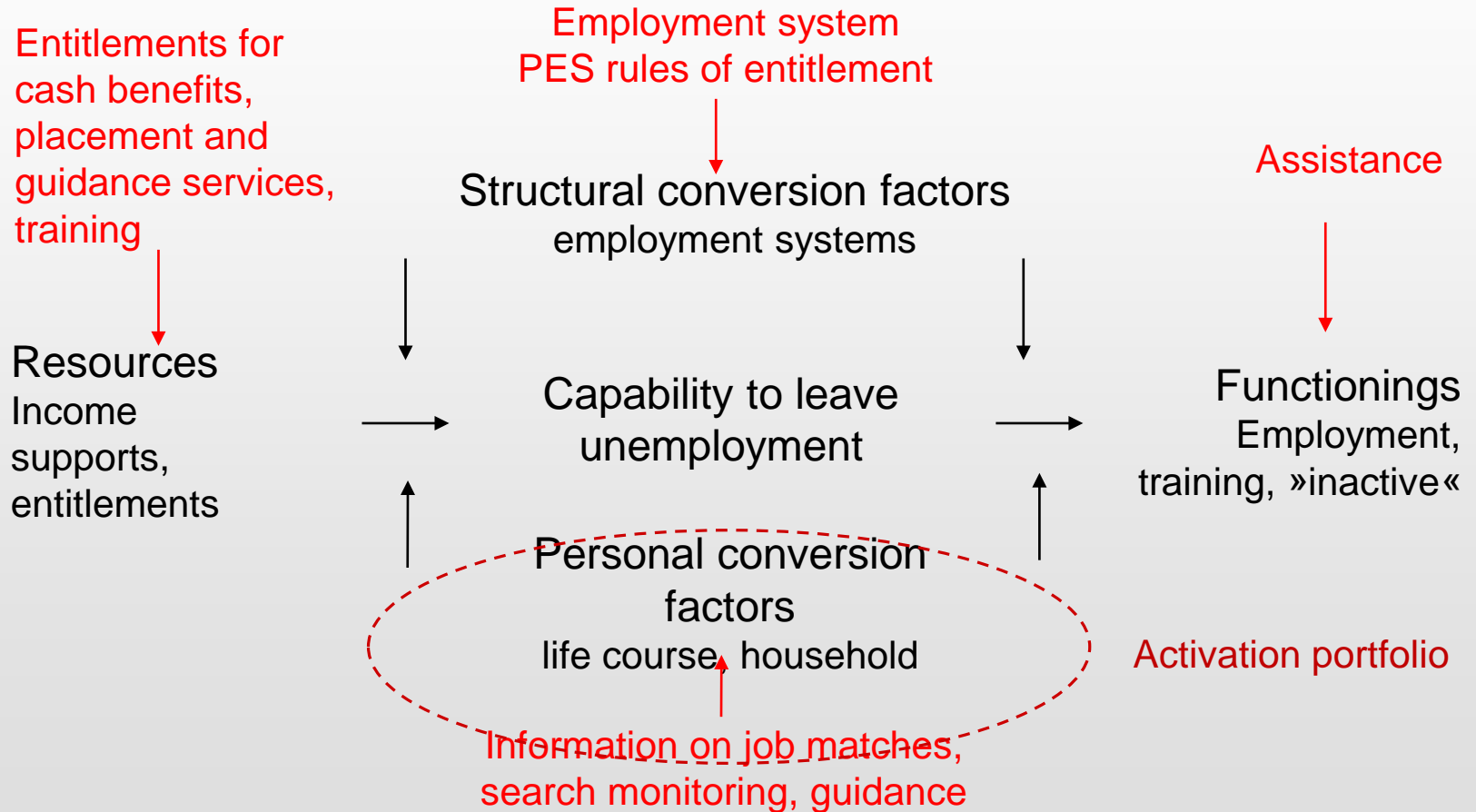
- Non-participant observation (~ 250 jobseeker interviews in ~50 agencies)
- Techniques to invite reflection of interactions

### ■ An alternative to randomized control-group designs: realistic evaluation

- Operations trigger mechanisms, effects contingent on context



# ■ Standard model of institutional intervention on employment capabilities



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## ■ Comments on standard model (1)

### ■ Capability space

- »capability to leave unemployment« - an intentionally slim concept?
- Two contested accounts:
  - Unemployment is involuntary (mobility / turbulence is imposed)
  - Situations of unemployment are biographically critical key points
- »Employability« is a contested concept
- Individually valuable exits are intrinsically valuable and instrumental for other capabilities (cap. for work, professional development)

### ■ Resources

- In activation, income supports are disincentives (moral hazards, lock-in)
- In capability perspective, they are basic necessity and search subsidy
- Comparison Germany / Spain – compared to strong activation regimes, transfers are »capability friendly« by default

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## ■ Comments on standard model (2)

### ■ Personal conversion factors

- Labour force is life course sensitive (cumulative functionings reflecting a set of capabilities, evolving over time)
- Households enter into exchange between workers and employers
- Activation locates the »damaged good« exclusively here

### ■ Structural conversion factors

- Conversion is co-production
- Business process of guidance and placement services and »operation models« of case workers can be »fertile« or »corrosive« on conversion
- PES intervention in matching, labour market regulation needed

### ■ Outcomes

- Individually valuable outcomes vary
- Three outcomes are institutionally defined

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## ■ Comments on standard model (3)

### ■ A template for reflexion on intervention models

- PES operations are managed interactions of case workers and unemployed (underemployed) workers
- All factors of the »conversion function« can be points of intervention
- To be efficient, intervention portfolio needs to be tailored (person centered)
- Selection of objects of intervention can be normatively biased

### ■ Static model is not enough

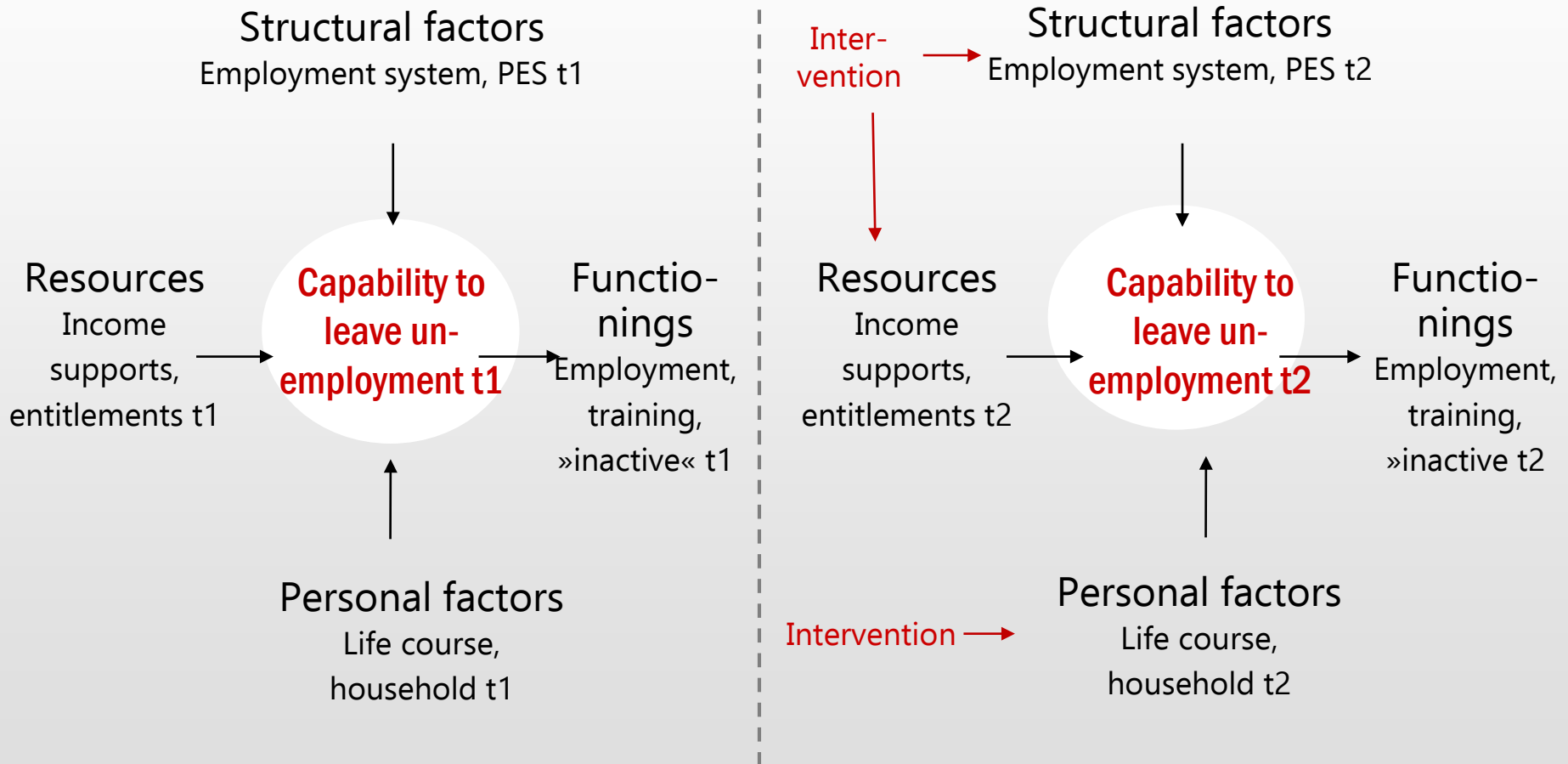
- Unemployment, labour market transitions are sequentially ordered, proceed over time
  - E.g. episodic, recurrent, continuous
- Cumulative evolution of capability is insufficiently theorized in capability approach



# ■ How to bring sequence into the standard model

State / Episode t1

State / Episode t2



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- **Why this may matter (1):  
Has activation passed its prime?**
  
  - **Mass produced monitoring of job search strains PES resources**
    - Persistent long.term unemployment raises doubts about effectiveness
    - A tendency towards more segmented client services
      - More intensive, comprehensive support for target group
      - E-channels («virtual labour market») are used for routine matching
  
  - **Specialisation of recruitment services for employers is less rigid**
    - Financial incentives or special advisory services serve as leverage on recruitment
    - Comprehensive support for disadvantaged jobseekers include intervening with employers in favour of individual jobseekers
  
  - **Growing doubts about the macro-economic effects**
    - Is growing inequality to high a price to pay?

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- **Why this may matter (2): Beyond activation – towards a new paradigm for public employment?**
  - **Offer public career guidance over the course of working life – from rhetoric towards implementation**
    - Revaluation of counseling in context of placement services
  - **Facilitate co-production by clients as a service resource**
    - The new counseling standards of the Federal Employment agency – a strategy for quality management besides performance indicators
  - **Interest to retain and rebuild PES qualification for counseling and comprehensive casework**
  - **Need for a new normative key concept**
    - Increase options for individually valuable exits from unemployment
    - Demand-driven individualized assistance in conversion
    - Use a comprehensive portfolio addressing resources, personal and labour market conversion factors and targeted assistance