Preface: Conference vision and call for participation

Wolfgang G. Weber, Thomas Höge, Severin Hornung & Christine Unterrainer

University of Innsbruck, Department of Psychology, Innsbruck Group on Critical Research in Work and Organizational Psychology (I-CROP)

A core component of our collective vision as the organizers of this conference was to propose, inspire, and convene an event that lives up to our humanistic ideals in terms of theoretical and practical relevance and importance for the future of work and organizational (W-O) psychology in democratic societies (Weber, 2019; Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2020). The backdrop of this ambitious objective was the observation that scientific mainstream[1] W-O psychology is currently characterized by remarkable contradictions and incongruities. Specifically, research has provided many practical insights into how working conditions, work activities, leadership, and organizational characteristics are related to various psychological constructs that are of interests for the effective and efficient functioning of work organizations. The latter include, for example, the „classics" of job satisfaction, intrinsic work motivation, and task performance, organizational commitment and identification with the employer, additional extra role efforts, or so-called organizational citizenship behavior, and, its opposite, counterproductive work behavior, and also the more recent hype around proactive or self-starting work behavior and self-controlled performance – as well as more indirect concerns with psycho-social wellbeing and health and compatibility of work with family and other spheres of life. However, it is obvious that the prevailing perspective of W-O psychology, as well as of related fields of applied, social, and business psychology, primarily aims to instrumentalize and manipulate „human resources" in order to increase productivity, optimize profits, and, occasionally, appease workers (e.g., Bal, 2020; McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012, 2017). The humanist ideals of personality development through work, however, is typically regarded as unrealistic or dispensable. At best, it is seen as a means for the purposes of capital utilization, profit maximization, and cost reduction, but typically tends to be distrusted and constrained by employers to avoid its „problematic" social side effects. Indeed, both historical studies (e.g., Baritz, 1960; Braverman, 1974; in the German context see: Groskurth & Volpert, 1975; Jäger & Staeuble, 1981) as well as more recent analyses (e.g., Bal & Dóci, 2018; Gerard, 2017; Lefkowitz, 2008, 2017) broadly support this conclusion, underscoring the need for a different approach that puts the human at the center.

Background: Problems and goals

To reiterate, promoting personal wellbeing and growth of workers not as a means to increase profitable performance and monetary gains, but as an end in itself, as devised by humanist philosophers and educators, and a few dedicated work and organizational psychologists, still leads a rather marginal „fringe" existence, compared to the rarely questioned and predominantly instrumental „managerialistic" agenda of mainstream W-O psychology (e.g., Islam & Sanderson, 2022). The same applies to research on established possibilities for strengthening the social and cultural common good and the democratic system by supporting employees in developing prosocial, civic, and moral competencies in their daily work, specifically, through structurally anchored organizational democracy and democratic approaches to leadership (e.g. Weber, 2019; Weber, Unterrainer &

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[1] In our view, the term „mainstream w-o psychology" does not denote a polemical buzzword, but rather certain scientific-theoretical, ethical, and substantive positions and concepts that are currently shared by a majority of scientific w-o psychologists. Not all representatives of mainstream positions agree on all of these concepts and in some cases concepts from mainstream and critical w-o psychology even overlap. Thus, this is not a dichotomous, absolute contradiction, but a polar, dimensional delineation of tendency. Some core positions (for example, methodological individualism, psychologization of societal contradictions, instrumental rationality, economism) and core concepts of the mainstream are presented and critiqued in this preface and in other contributions to this Special Issue. For those who find the term „mainstream" too superficial, it can be replaced by terms like „traditional science" (Horkheimer, 2002) or „scientism" (Habermas, 1970; cf. the conceptual review by Islam & Sanderson, 2022).

Höge, 2020). Numerous social scientists as well as some alternative economists have identified current economic developments as a radical globalization of the markets for goods, services, labor and, most of all, capital (e.g., Crouch, 2004; Kotz, 2002; Wright, 2010). These neoliberal trends of „marketization" and „financialization" are accompanied by a shift towards an increasingly one-sided managerialistic system, predominantly oriented towards advancing the economic interests of big corporations and their main shareholders. Simultaneously, the erosion of legal regulations and social welfare systems as well as the explosive growth and dominance of the „virtual" speculative capital of the financial industry over the actually value-creating productive capital, largely suppress attempts to experiment with alternative and more resource-conserving economic systems beyond the capitalist logic of profits and growth. Especially for employees in global supply chains and economically weak countries, extremely unhealthy and inhumane working conditions below the subsistence level are less a reminiscence, but rather a seamless continuation, if not a revival, of the anti-humanist and predatory type of „Manchester capitalism". The political background is a progressive neoliberal transformation of economies in terms of worldwide de-regulation and erosion of labor laws, permanent employment contracts, employee rights of co-determination, healthy working conditions, social security systems, and mechanisms for environmental protection (e.g., Bettache, Chiu & Beattie, 2020; Kentikelenis & Babb 2019; Wacquant, 2009). Notably the trends towards increasing de-civilization and de-democratization are orchestrated by powerful international investors, transnational corporations, lobbying groups, and colluding political bodies and decision-makers – as well as their minions and mouthpieces in the public relations and media landscape (e.g., Bakan, 2004).

It is our firm conviction that work and organizational psychologists who are engaged in research, teaching, or practice, and who aspire to better live up to their own humanist ethical values and responsibilities, should not tolerate – and thus implicitly condone – these detrimental developments any longer. Instead, we need to stand in for and enact changes towards a socially responsible and sustainable future of the discipline – a transformation that accommodates the needs and interests of all employees and citizens, instead of serving a small minority of powerful economic elites of investors, management, and privileged „knowledge workers". Therefore, an important impetus and objective of our conference was related to finding and discussing ways to strengthen, develop, and better integrate existing critical approaches in our own research. Exposing and critiquing ideological biases in extant research, proposing or reviewing theoretical or empirical research from critical and radical humanist perspectives, as well as building networks and planning activities for critical research, teaching, and practice-oriented interventions, were all projected goals for the conference. Moreover, the conference aimed to establish, integrate, and advance different lines of research that are explicitly dedicated to critical and radical humanist approaches and perspectives in contemporary W-O psychology. In the following, we will try to give some brief indications with regard to the envisioned theoretical approaches to be represented at the conference.

Theoretical foundations

Critical theoretical and radical humanist approaches within W-O psychology are inspired, in particular, by contributions of the Frankfurt School of social philosophy, by Psychoanalytic Social Psychology in the tradition of Erich Fromm, by approaches of Dialectical Materialist Psychology, including Russian Activity Theory and German Critical Psychology, among others. The range of these and related approaches results in substantial theoretical and methodological pluralism without falling into eclecticism, arbitrariness, and relativism (e.g., Teo, 2013, 2015). For strengthening a humanist W-O psychology grounded in social science, these approaches have in common that they incorporate (or at least are open to) political-economic and social-philosophical criticisms of the described developments of radicalizing neoliberal capitalist economic systems that endanger the foundations of civil society, such as compassion, social cohesion, and democracy. Furthermore, critical theoretical and radical humanist work and organizational psychologists advocate that the guiding principles for economic activity and work should be human rights, human dignity, social and psychological well-being and care for all human (and non-human) beings, and the protection of the natural foundations of life on the planet (e.g., Bal, 2020; Bal & Dóci, 2018; Ergene, Banerjee & Hoffman, 2021; Kühn & Bobeth, 2022; Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2020). Notably, this means opposition and resistance to the economic exploitation and oppression, deprivation or degradation of people, other living beings, and the natural foundations of life, in the name of a self-reproducing and, eventually, self-destructive system, aimed at defending, perpetuating, and advancing the particular interests of a small wealthy minority. Additionally, critical and humanist approaches share the effort to explore human development potentials within their social and historical context and to examine forms of self-actualization at and through work and other economic contexts that do not conflict

with the legitimate interests and needs of other stakeholders and social groups. Specifically, critical theoretical and radical humanist approaches in W-O psychology endeavor to integrate social psychological, sociological, and social philosophical constructs to sketch out theoretical frameworks to better understand the closely intertwined developments of the individual psyche, the social subsystems, and the surrounding cultural-societal system, in which the individual acts and behaves (e.g., Islam, 2020; McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012). To extend the explanatory power of theoretical frameworks of W-O psychology, critical theoretical and radical humanist approaches strive to question the effects and implications of political-economic and organizational power structures and their related ideologies with regard to resulting psychological processes (e.g., Bal & Dóci, 2018; Hornung, Höge & Unterrainer, 2021). This requires that radical (neoliberal) capitalist structures of power, domination, competition, and inequality, and their ideological foundations, are identified, exposed, theoretically analyzed, and empirically investigated. This includes, for example, systemic divergence of interest in employment relationships and power mechanisms based on the political, economic, and organizational resources of external and internal actors (e.g., financial shareholders, political-economical agents, purchasers, entrepreneurs, top managers, labor unions). Such conceptual work is very important, yet largely neglected in mainstream W-O psychology. This is the case because opposing structures and system-justifying ideologies potentially pervade the values, interests, attitudes, work motivation, communication, social and moral competencies, and job-related behaviors of employees interacting in business organizations, as well as of researchers and practitioners of W-O psychology (e.g., Dóci & Bal, 2018).

Importantly, critical and radical humanist W-O psychology implies an emancipatory epistemological interest – according to, for instance, theorists like Horkheimer, Habermas or Holzkamp (e.g., Habermas, 1970; Horkheimer, 2002; Tolman, 2009). Specifically, this means that critically-oriented empirical studies are guided by the aim to identify theoretical deficiencies concerning typically applied criteria of humane work, as well as to critique and strive to change the actual exploitative or oppressive conditions people are facing in contemporary organizations (e.g., Klikauer, 2015, 2018). Moreover, research activities of critical and radical humanist W-O psychology researchers, possibly in cooperation with researchers from other disciplines, also endeavor to develop methods, concepts, and procedures that are useful for challenging, reducing, or removing constraining conditions of work, organization, and

management; as well as technological aspects that impede human dignity, self-actualization, solidarity, freedom, and health (e.g., Chimirri & Pedersen, 2019). This transformational research perspective requires investigating existing, albeit rare and dispersed, „fractals" of alternative organizations and economies (e.g., Temper, Walter, Rodriguez, Kothari & Turhan, 2018; Unterrainer, Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2022; Weber, 2019). These are represented, for example, by enterprises practicing structurally anchored organizational democracy, integrated living and work communities (e. g., kibbutzim, communes, food coops), as well as alternative economic models, such as the Solidarity Economy, Economy for the Common Good, post-growth economy, and radical sustainability transformations. Such research, which is still severely neglected within W-O psychology, represents a future-oriented attempt of studying human development and interaction in socio-economic systems that transcend the instrumental rationality of the prevailing exploitative and oppressive system of work and economy.

We envisioned that at the conference contributions from a number of critical theoretical approaches and their variations and extensions would be discussed and that new ideas for their application, further elaboration and integration in research, practice and academic teaching in W-O psychology would be developed and exchanged. Naturally, we had in mind the tradition of critical psychology based on the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (e.g., Garlitz & Zompetti, 2023; Granter, 2014; Slater, 1977), including Radical Humanism and Analytical Social Psychology according to Erich Fromm (e.g., Durkin, 2014; Funk, 1982), as well as Critical Psychology from the Perspective of the Subject, based on the Holzkamp tradition and others (e.g., Schraube, 2015; Teo, 2015; Tolman, 2009). Further, we encouraged contributions from the perspective of Activity Theory and Cultural Historical Psychology (e.g., Hakkarainen, 2004) from critical traditions in Action Regulation Theory (e.g., Groskurth & Volpert, 1975) and Self-Determination Theory (e.g., Sheldon & Kasser, 2001), including criticisms of corporate capitalism (e.g., Kasser, Cohn, Kanner & Ryan, 2007), as well as from Labor Process Theory (e.g., Braverman, 1974; Klikauer, 2015, 2018) and the growing pluralistic field of Critical Management Studies more broadly (e.g., Adler, 2007; Parker & Parker, 2017; Mumby, 2019). All these are approaches, which we consider particularly important for a critical and radical humanistic reorientation and development of W-O psychology. However, this clearly is not meant as a complete list.

Of course, contributions from other perspectives that are normatively compatible with the above theoretical traditions were also expressively welcome.

The general emancipatory focus of critical approaches, however, was considered as essential because the conference was explicitly not intended as a general work and organizational psychological event. Rather, it was devised as specialized conference aiming to provide a forum to critically and (self-)reflexively examine prevailing and influential theories, research, and practices in W-O psychology (e.g., Islam & Sanderson, 2022). As indicated above, such undertakings can indeed draw on a strong and diverse basis in critical theoretical and radical humanist (and related) approaches, including empirical research that relies explicitly on critical concepts and methods. These approaches provide a contrast to other types of research, such as the allegedly „value-neutral", relativist, economistic, and scientistic approaches that are typically dominating at mainstream W-O psychology conferences (e.g., Bal & Dóci, 2018; McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012). Some exemplary topics we expected to discuss at the conference are outlined next.

Exemplary topics

At the conference, we aimed to address fundamental and applied, classic, and current topics, theories, concepts, problems, and research results of an emerging critical theoretical and radical humanist stream in W-O psychology. The following examples illustrate the type of topics and research that we were particularly interested in.

For instance, we envisioned conceptual analyses and critiques of currently influential theories, models, concepts, or constructs in mainstream W-O psychology from a critical theoretical and radical humanist perspective. In particular, such analyses involve „de-naturalizing" the underlying phenomena and deconstructing the „dark side" of research that contributes to downplaying, obscuring or distracting from the fundamentally diverging interests of economic and human actors; some examples for constructs that warrant critical reflection are individualization of working conditions, employability, job crafting, flexibility at work, proactivity, autonomy, self-leadership, self-management, work engagement, organizational commitment, extra-role behavior or organizational citizenship behavior, customer satisfaction, individual health competences and behavior, etc. Moreover, we were also interested in exploring alternative humanistic conceptions of human beings and potentials for human development and meaning at work beyond the ideology of the „homo economicus"; this includes theoretical concepts of moral competence and behavior anchored in philosophical humanism beyond relativistic or „neutral" conceptualizations of ethical organizational culture, climate, or leadership, as well as conceptions of altruism, prosocial, and proactive behavior beyond the instrumentality of extra-role and proactive behavior and similar constructs of the individualized „self-enterprising entreployee".

Conversely, we also called for critiques of corporate moral disengagement and exploitative and destructive management and leadership practices in neoliberal organizations as well as their psychological consequences (e.g., self-endangering work behavior, social and moral alienation, and corrosion). More specifically, this refers to topics related to work and precarity, organizational injustice, social inequality, disadvantaged and marginalized employee groups, and the exploitative and health-corroding working conditions in the sweat shops of globally distributed supply and production chains, including conceptual and empirical analyses and potential intervention strategies. Further, we encouraged topics related to work and mental health from a critical theoretical perspective reflecting societal structures and developments. By this we meant, for example, mental health and socially patterned psychic defects due to social character formations; corrosion of character through conditions of flexible work and employment; critical psychoanalytic approaches; effects of the working situation on the formation of psychic and psychosomatic symptoms and disorders; social alienation, and the „pathology of normalcy" (Fromm, 1955). Another area of current interests was the digitalization of the economy between totalitarian capitalism (e.g., shareholder-value extremism in conjunction with transnationally integrated monitoring, profiling, and disciplinary technologies) and radical humanist emancipatory perspectives and potentials of these new technologies (e.g., social activism and collaboration).

Finally, and related to several of the aspects already mentioned above, we called for the exploration and elaboration of alternative theories and models of organizational behavior (including management, leadership, communication, cooperation) beyond employee instrumentalization, manipulation, and competitive exploitation. Explicitly, this includes examining the psychological potentials of alternative forms of work organization, entrepreneurial, and economic activity beyond radical capitalist (neoliberal) doctrine, e.g., Solidarity Economy, Economy for the Common Good, post-growth economy, economic and organizational democracy, social enterprises, and communitarian living and work arrangements. We believe that, taken together, these exemplary topics well reflect the breadth and heterogeneity of approaches of Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology.

Retrospective conclusion

In hindsight, our expectations were more than fulfilled. Numerous presentations based on the above-mentioned theories and topics were given and discussed at the conference. These were allocated to several themed sessions dedicated to: Radical Humanism in the Tradition of Erich Fromm; Positions, Prospects, and Problems of Critical W-O Psychology; Stratification, Marginalization, and Inequality at Work; Psychology and Ideology of the Neoliberal Workplace; Critical Perspectives on Meaning at Work; Alternative and Emancipatory Organizational Practices; Precarious Employment; and The Living Wages Movement. Additionally, keynotes speeches represented the streams of Critical Theory, Critical Psychology, and Critical Management Studies. Abstracts of all presentations are included in the conference proceedings (Hornung, Unterrainer, Höge & Weber, 2022). More details can be found in the conference report and the other contributions in this special issue. Overall, our vision not only manifested but was exceeded by the number and quality of contributions to this conference. The present special issue is a testament to this accomplishment of the conference's participants.

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Correspondence to:
Wolfgang G. Weber
University of Innsbruck
Department of Psychology
Universitätsstraße 15
A-6020 Innsbruck
wolfgang.weber@uibk.ac.at

Thomas Höge
University of Innsbruck
Department of Psychology
Universitätsstraße 15
A-6020 Innsbruck
thomas.hoege@uibk.ac.at

Severin Hornung
University of Innsbruck
Department of Psychology
Universitätsstraße 15
A-6020 Innsbruck
severin.hornung@uibk.ac.at

Christine Unterrainer
University of Innsbruck
Department of Psychology
Universitätsstraße 15
A-6020 Innsbruck
christine.unterrainer@uibk.ac.at