



– International Conference –  
**Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology**  
2<sup>nd</sup> –3<sup>rd</sup> October 2020, University of Innsbruck, Austria

**Organizing Committee**

Applied Psychology Unit of the Institute of Psychology, University of Innsbruck

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In cooperation with the Erich Fromm Study Center at the International Psychoanalytic University Berlin (Prof. Dr. Thomas Kühn, Dr. Rainer Funk). Supported by the Institute of Psychology at the University of Innsbruck (Head: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Jürgen Glaser)

**Call for Participation**

**Why is this conference important for future work and organizational psychology (WOP) in democratic societies? Problems and goals**

Mainstream scientific WOP is characterized by a remarkable *contradiction*: Associated research has provided many practical insights on how working conditions, work activities, leadership, and organizational characteristics are related to, for example, personal development, attitudes toward economy and society, work motivation, job satisfaction, psycho-social health, organizational commitment, and identification, extra role behavior (e.g., OCB), and compatibility of work and other spheres of life. However, the *prevailing* perspective of WOP as well as economic psychology aims primarily to instrumentalize and manipulate “human resources” in order to increase productivity, optimize profits, and, occasionally, appease workers. Personality promotion through work is often regarded as unrealistic or dispensable – at best, a *means* for the purposes of capital utilization, profit maximization, and cost reduction, but typically distrusted and constrained by employers to avoid its “problematic” social side effects. Both historical analyses (e.g. Groskurth & Volpert, 1975; Jäger & Staeuble, 1981) and more recent studies (e.g. Bal & Dóci, 2018; Lefkowitz, 2008) support this conclusion.

Promoting personality growth among workers as an *end in itself*, as represented by humanist philosophers and educators, and several work and organizational psychologists, leads a rather shadowy (“fringe”) existence compared to the instrumental agenda of WOP. The same applies to possibilities for strengthening the social and cultural common good and democratic system by supporting employees in developing prosocial, civic, and moral competencies within their daily work, for example, through

organizational democracy and democratic leadership. Numerous social scientists and economists (e.g., E. O. Wright, 2010; Crouch, 2004) have described current developments as a radical globalization of goods, services, and labor markets, accompanied by a shift towards an increasingly one-sided system, predominantly oriented towards advancing the economic interests of big corporations and major shareholders. Furthermore, the explosive growth and dominance of the “virtual” speculative capital of the financial industry over the actually value-creating productive capital, largely suppresses any attempts to experiment with alternative and more resource-conserving economic methods beyond the capitalist logic.

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 anti-humanist 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 – orchestrated by powerful international investors, transitional corporations, lobbying groups, and colluding political bodies and decision-makers as well as their mouthpieces in the public relations and media landscape.

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 our discipline, which accommodates the needs and interests of all employees, instead of serving the economic elites of investors, management, and privileged “knowledge workers”. Therefore, an important objective of the conference relates 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 reporting theoretical or empirical research from critical and radical humanist perspectives, as well as building networks and planning activities for better research, teaching, and practical interventions are all projected activities for this upcoming conference. This conference aims to establish, integrate, and advance different lines of research that are explicitly dedicated to critical and radical humanist approaches and perspectives in contemporary WOP.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

*Critical theoretical* and *radical humanist* approaches within WOP are inspired, for example, by contributions of the Frankfurt School of Social Philosophy, by Analytical Social Psychology in the tradition of Erich Fromm, by approaches of dialectical materialist psychology (e.g. Activity Theory, German Critical Psychology). These approaches span a range of theoretical and methodological pluralism without falling into eclecticism, arbitrariness, and relativism (e.g., Teo, 2015). For strengthening a scientific-humanist WOP, these approaches have in common that they take up (or at least are open to) political-economic, social-scientific, and social-philosophical criticism of the described detrimental developments of radicalizing (“neoliberal”) capitalist economic systems that endanger the foundations of civil society, like compassion, social cohesion, and democracy.

Furthermore, critical theoretical and radical humanist work and organizational psychologists advocate that human rights, human dignity, the social and psychological well-being and care for all human beings, and the protection of the natural foundations of life, should represent the guiding principles for economic

activity and work. This means opposition and resistance to the economic exploitation and oppression, deprivation or deterioration of people, other living beings, and the natural foundations of life, in the name of a self-reproducing and, eventually, self-destructive system, defending, perpetuating, and advancing the particular interests of a small wealthy minority and its minions. 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.

Critical theoretical and radical humanist approaches in WOP 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. To extend the explanatory power of theoretical frameworks of WOP, critical theoretical and radical humanist approaches strive for considering the psychological processes, effects, and implications of political-economic and organizational power structures and their related ideologies. 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 and power mechanisms based on political, economic, and organizational resources of external and internal actors (e.g., financial shareholders, political-economical agents, purchasers, entrepreneurs, top managers, union actors). This conceptual work is very important, yet largely neglected in mainstream WOP. 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, researchers, and practitioners of WOP (e.g., Bal & Dóci, 2018).

Critical and radical humanist WOP implies an emancipatory epistemological interest (according to Horkheimer, Habermas or Holzkamp). Specifically, empirical studies are guided by the aim to identify deficiencies concerning humane criteria of work and the actual conditions people are facing in contemporary organizations. Moreover, research activities of critical and radical humanist WOP researchers, in cooperation with corresponding researchers from other disciplines, also endeavor to develop methods, concepts, and procedures that are useful for challenging, reducing, or removing work-, organization-, and management-related factors, as well as technological aspects that *impede* human dignity, self-actualization, solidarity, freedom, and health. This transformational research perspective requires to investigate the existing, albeit rare and dispersed, “fractals” of alternative economies. These are represented, for example, by enterprises practicing structurally anchored organizational democracy, the so-called solidarity economy, economy for the common good, and integrated living and work communities (e. g., kibbutzim, communes, food coops). Such research, which is still severely neglected within WOP, 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.

At the conference, contributions from the following theoretical approaches, their variations and extensions will be discussed and ideas for their application, further development and integration in research, practice and academic teaching in WOP will be developed and exchanged:

- Critical Psychology based on the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (including Critical Theory of the Subject)
- Radical Humanism and Analytical Social Psychology (according to Erich Fromm)
- Critical Management Studies
- Critical Psychology / Psychology from the Perspective of the Subject
- Activity Theory and Cultural Historical Psychology
- Critical traditions in Action Regulation Theory
- Self Determination Theory and criticisms of corporate capitalism

The above are approaches, which we consider important for a critical and radically humanistic re-orientation and development of WOP. However, this is certainly not a complete list. Contributions from other perspectives that are normatively compatible with the above theoretical traditions are also welcome. This normative focus, however, is essential because this conference is *explicitly not* intended as a *general* work and organizational psychological event. Rather, it will be a *specialized* conference that aims to provide a forum to critically examine prevailing and influential theories, research, and practices in WOP. Such undertakings can 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, for example, value relativistic, economic, “neutral” non-humanist (scientific) approaches, typically presented at mainstream WOP conferences.

### **Exemplary Topics**

At our conference, we would like to address fundamental and applied, classic, and current topics, theories, concepts, problems, and research results of a critical theoretical and radical humanist WOP. The following examples illustrate the type of topics and research that we are particularly interested in. Of course contributions on other topics of a critical and radical humanistic WOP are also welcome.

- Conceptual analyses and critiques of current and influential theories, models, concepts, or constructs in work and organizational and economic psychology from a critical-theoretical and radical humanist perspective.
- In particular, this involves “de-naturalizing” the underlying phenomena and deconstructing the “darksides” of research that contributes to downplay, obscure or distract from the fundamentally diverging interests of economic and human actors; some examples for constructs that warrant critical reflection are individualization, health competence, workability, employability, flexibility at work, proactivity, autonomy, self-leadership, -management, work engagement, compliance, commitment, extra-role behavior (e.g., “OCB”), job crafting, customer satisfaction, etc.
- Conceptions of man, potentials for human development and meaning at work beyond the ideology of the “homo oeconomicus”; furthermore, conceptions of altruism, prosocial, and proactive behavior beyond the instrumentality of extra-role behavior and similar constructs of the individualized “self-enterprising employee”
- Theories and models of organizational behavior (including management, leadership, communication, cooperation) beyond employee instrumentalization, manipulation, and competitive exploitation
- Theoretical concepts of moral competence and behavior anchored in philosophical humanism beyond relativistic or “neutral” conceptualizations of ethical organizational culture, climate, or leadership

- Corporate moral disengagement, exploitative and destructive management and leadership practices in neoliberal organizations and their psychological consequences (e.g., self-endangering work behavior, social and moral alienation, and corrosion)
- Work and precarity, organizational injustice, social inequality, disadvantaged and marginalized employee groups, health-impeding working conditions in the sweat shops of globally distributed supply and production chains, including conceptual and empirical analyses and intervention strategies
- Work and mental health from a critical theoretical perspective reflecting societal structures and developments (e.g., 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”)
- 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 liberation / emancipatory perspectives
- 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, organizational democracy, social enterprises, and communitarian living and work arrangements.

*The time is ripe for change in our own discipline! For an unofficial conference motto, please consult “Eskimo Blue Day” by Jefferson Airplane (“The human name doesn’t mean...”).*

### **Preliminary Schedule**

The conference will take place from Friday October 2nd (around 9:00 am) until Saturday October 3rd 2020 (around 7:00 pm) at the University of Innsbruck, Innrain 52, Innsbruck 6020, Austria. A Pre-conference Workshop on critical foundations in WOP will be held Thursday October 1st; details will be announced later.

### **Program Preview**

Conference highlights include an interactive workshop session on “What can we learn from Critical Management Studies?” with Prof. Dr. Martin Parker (University of Bristol; Professor of Organisation Studies, Lead for the Bristol Inclusive Economy Initiative). A publication workshop for submissions to the Special Issue on Critical Perspectives in Work and Organizational Psychology in Applied Psychology: An International Review ([link SI CFP](#)) will be held by the special issue editors, as part of the Future of Work and Organizational Psychology ([link FOWOP](#)) initiative.

### **Keynote Speakers**

- Dr. Rainer Funk (Founder of the International Erich Fromm Society, Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen)
- Dr. Ruth Yeoman (Fellow Kellogg College, University of Oxford)
- Prof. Dr. Dr. Manfred Moldaschl (Chair of Socio-Economics, Zeppelin University Friedrichshafen)
- Prof. Dr. Thomas Teo (Historical, Theoretical, and Critical Studies of Psychology, Department of Psychology, York University, Toronto)

### **Submission of Abstracts**

Encouraged are contributions with critical and radical humanistic content and reference to the topics and spirit of this call. Abstracts of around 250 words should be submitted for: individual presentations (15-20 minutes, plus 5-10 minutes discussion), themed sessions or symposia (75-90 minutes, 3-4 contributions), panel discussions (75-90 minutes, 3-5 discussants), and workshops (75-90 minutes, free format, moderated by the submitter). For sessions with several speakers (symposia, panels) abstracts should also be provided for each individual contribution. These should be submitted in one document by the session organizer(s). Contributors are welcome to suggest alternative formats (e.g., posters, short presentations).

**Submission deadline is Monday January 20th 2020 (EXTENDED DEADLINE: 20.02.2020).**

Abstract authors will be informed about acceptance of their submission until March 1st 2020.

**Submission to: [christine.unterrainer@uibk.ac.at](mailto:christine.unterrainer@uibk.ac.at)**

### **Conference Registration**

In the spirit of inclusiveness and anti-economism, the event will be free of charge and open to all.

Please contact the organizers to **register your attendance by April 15th 2020.**

**Registration to: [christine.unterrainer@uibk.ac.at](mailto:christine.unterrainer@uibk.ac.at)**

[www.uibk.ac.at/psychologie/mitarbeiter/hoege/critical-wop-conference-innsbruck-2020.html](http://www.uibk.ac.at/psychologie/mitarbeiter/hoege/critical-wop-conference-innsbruck-2020.html)

