

Workplace flexibility and employee well-being – Proposing a life conduct perspective on subjectified work¹

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ABSTRACT

A large body of literature has detected fundamental changes in the world of work. In this context, „flexibilization“ functions as an umbrella term for processes and managerial strategies imposing new demands and requirements on employees. Examples are atypical employment arrangements, increased requirements for self-organization, and boundaryless work. Simultaneously, flexibility can be a positive resource for workers, offering increased working time autonomy and task-related control opportunities. This Janus-faced character of flexibility is reflected in ambiguous empirical results concerning its impact on employee health and well-being. Reviewing the interdisciplinary literature including a series of own empirical studies, flexibilization in post-Tayloristic societies is interpreted in terms of subjectified work intensification, work extensification, and shifting uncertainties from management to employees. A domain-integrating life conduct perspective for psychological research in this „new“ flexible, individualized, and subjectified world of work is suggested. The proposed framework may help to understand ambiguous results concerning the impact of diverse aspects of workplace flexibility on employee well-being. It may also be useful to empirically disentangle potentially health-supportive dimensions from negative implications.

Keywords

Workplace flexibility – flexibilization – work intensification – work extensification – insecurity – life conduct

¹ This article is based upon the cumulative habilitation thesis of Thomas Höge (2016).

² In contrast to the term „flexibility“ the term „flexibilization“ should stress the underlying economic and societal intentions as well as the process towards increased workplace flexibility.