

Dialectics of workplace flexibility between humanistic ideal and neoliberal ideology – Preliminary considerations

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we present some preliminary thoughts regarding the development of a distinctively critical perspective on research and practice of workplace flexibility. We thus aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of some of the observed tensions, contradictions, and antagonisms, and, described as the „Janus-faced character“, the „double-edged sword“ or the „paradox“ of workplace flexibility. At the core of our perspective is a conceptualization of workplace flexibility as an inherently dialectical societal phenomenon, which simultaneously reflects and promises humanistic ideals regarding individual autonomy, self-actualization and self-determination, but at the same time, is also outgrowth and embodiment of neoliberal ideology, serving particular interest of employers and capital owners to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of human resource utilization. First, we will address the humanistic potential of workplace flexibility in terms of employee-oriented individual flexibility – in contrast to employer-oriented organizational flexibility. Second, we will argue that workplace flexibility, its manifestation in organizational and individual practices, as well as the entirety of academic and public discourses on the topic, are deeply contaminated by neoliberal ideology. Finally, we will integrate these two perspectives into a dialectical conceptualization of workplace flexibility and discuss some implications, usefulness, and prospects of the flexibility concept for the project of a radically humanistic and emancipatory work and organizational psychology.

Keywords

Employee-oriented workplace flexibility – dialectics – paradox – humanistic management – neoliberal ideology – system-justifying ideologies