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Editorial

Flexibility at Work – Implications for Individuals, Organizations, and Society

Severin Hornung & Pierre Sachse

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Confronted with the erratic dynamics and compounding pressures of hypercompetitive markets, organizations efforts to increase their structural flexibility continue to reshape basic categories of work and employment. The interdisciplinary research on workplace flexibility fills bookshelves, yet, overall, is hardly conclusive. In the field of applied psychology, a growing stream of studies are dedicated to investigating cognitive, motivational, behavioral, affective, and health-related effects of increased flexibility at work – feeding into a rising tide of journal articles, books, and special issues on „new“ forms of work organization and human resource practices. Testimony to the recognized importance of the underlying trends, critical discussions of the principles of flexible organizing and their implications for the psychological regulation of work activities have long found their way into the standard textbooks of work psychology. For instance, Hacker and Sachse (2014) explicitly call attention to potential downsides of high-involvement work practices, offering high autonomy and challenging tasks within the framework of a functional flexibility strategy – in terms of negative health implications of self-endangering or „self-exploitative“ work behavior. This is particularly notable, as it stands in stark contrast to the initial paradigm of action regulation theory, aimed at integrating and enriching partialized and incomplete work tasks resulting from excessive division of labor (Ulich, 2008). What is foreshadowed by these earlier experiences with programs aimed at improving the quality of working life, however, is the Janus-face of structural changes in contemporary organizations. Indeed, the deceitful double-faced ancient Roman god of dualities, time, and transitions provides a suitable „patron deity“ for flexibility – ruling over the tension-field between a „new wave“ in the humanization of work through employee-oriented (individual) flexibility versus new form of economic (self-)rationalization for the

sake of capacity-oriented (organizational) flexibility. Although work intensification and extensification are a hallmark of the latter, paradoxically, highly stimulating tasks and involving work environments may be even more efficient in prompting employees to work harder and longer towards attaining group or individual goals – thus possibly engaging in self-enacted or self-exploitative forms of „subjectified“ work intensification and extensification. Thus, it has been argued that workplace flexibility is most suitably analyzed as a contradictory paradox or even an inherent dialect, characterized by antagonistic tendencies that contain the seed of their own negation, transformation, and re-emergence in a qualitatively different configuration.

One example for the „blind spots“ and unresolved challenges faced by psychological research into work and organizations is the often implicitly made assumption that employees comply with certain organizational flexibility requirements voluntarily, out of their genuine own free will, or predominantly based on intrinsic motivation – this view, however, collides with the a basic psychological insight, telling us that this interpretation almost inevitably falls prey to the fundamental attribution error. Behavior in contemporary work contexts cannot be understood without taking into account the „atmospheric“ background pressure of external and internal labor market competitiveness. Market forces „spill“ into workplaces as turnover and selection effects, resulting in escalating performance demands, job insecurity, and social tensions – as symptoms of increasingly volatile conditional and competitive employment. The tendency of workers to comply with aggravated flexibility requirements is partly rooted in the more or less existential threat of losing their main source of living. Historically the driving force of employment, this underlying power-dependence relationship provides the psychological basis and leverage for more sophisticated labor utilization

strategies through job insecurity, such as temporary employment, internal competition, artificial tournament situations, and threat of systematic exclusion – phenomena inexorably linked to the „dark sides“ of the often vague and ambiguously used term of workplace flexibility. Mainstream research in work and organizational frequently tends to downplay these tensions and antagonisms in favor of more convenient unitarist assumptions of converging employee and employer in interests. The topic of flexibility demonstrates the necessity to question, challenge, and qualify such widely-held counterfactual assumptions, the roots of which can often be traced back to system-justifying ideological belief systems, serving particular interests, rather than the scientific quest for truth or social responsibility for the common good.

Faced with the task of writing an editorial for this special issue, it appears both tempting and worthwhile to take a look back at previous contributions made towards a better understanding of workplace flexibility in the *Journal Psychologie des Alltagshandelns / Psychology of Everyday Activity*. In fact, a considerable number of studies published in this journal over the years has dealt with topics related to workplace flexibility, reflecting both the multi-faceted character of flexibility as well as the range of approaches to studying it. Notably, in the inaugural issue of this journal, Hornung, Herbig and Glaser (2008) initially introduced the concept of employee-oriented flexibility, based on a project evaluating the implementation of telecommuting in the public administration. Roughly a decade later, this research cycle had come to a closure with the publication of a summary of programmatic research on workplace flexibility – based on individual negotiation of idiosyncratic deals – in the anniversary issue of the journal (Hornung, Glaser & Rousseau, 2018). In addition to this positive interpretation of workplace flexibility, significant contributions towards the development of the more critical stream, focusing on new forms of indirect organizational control, coping with flexibility demands, and self-endangering work behavior, were made by Bredehöft, Dettmers, Hoppe and Janneck (2015), Deci, Dettmers, Krause and Berset (2016), and, most recently, Schulthess (2017). A particularly important and influential early article was authored by Höge (2011), who developed theory and psychometrically sophisticated measures on organizational flexibility requirements and the employee-orientation – the former representing new forms of job demands and the latter reflecting psychological implications of changing occupational identities. A noteworthy feature of this contribution is that it builds interdisciplinary bridges, conceptually and methodologically transferring and thus making accessible the sociological employee-proposition and the broader paradigm of the „subjectivation of work“ for

research in the field of applied psychology. A number of other high-quality studies have dealt directly with implications of numerical and temporal organizational flexibility, manifesting in temporary work arrangements (Rigotti, de Cuyper, de Witte, Korek & Mohr, 2009), increased job insecurity (Otto & Beck, 2012), as well as associated consequences, such as conflicts and negative spillover from work into private and family life (Amstad & Semmer, 2011), impaired personal well-being and health (Sora & Höge, 2014), and the related phenomenon of presenteeism, that is, continuing to work while actually being sick (Strasser & Varesco Kager, 2018; Ulich & Strasser, 2010). Further, relevant to workplace flexibility in a broader sense, are studies on employee readiness to change occupations (Otto, Dette-Hagenmeyer & Dalbert, 2014), work intensification in human services (Schulz-Dadaczynski & Jungmanns, 2014) and the working customer (Rieder & Voss, 2010), that is, the new ways in which companies take advantage of people not only of their roles as employees, but also as consumers. Taken together, these important previous contributions complement each other to provide a strong background framework and foundation for the research compiled in this special issue. Thus, calling attention to the history of flexibility research in this journal not only is a matter of good reflexive practice, but, indeed, strengthens our case for the present project.

The insights gained from these and other studies notwithstanding, formulating a comprehensive, coherent, and integrated theory of the heterogeneous – negative and positive – manifestations, interdependencies, implications, and trajectories of organizational flexibility is a Herculean and, so far, outstanding challenge. Given its amorphous, perpetually transforming nature, it seems debatable whether it is even possible to provide such a „grand theory“ of workplace flexibility. Humbled by the vastness, pervasiveness, and multidimensionality of the topic, we set our aim on the more realistic goal of contributing to a more complete, differentiated, and „complexified“ view on workplace flexibility. Our aspirations focus on examining the meaning of flexibility from the employee and employer perspective as well as across multiple levels of analysis, specifically, individuals, organizations, and society. That is, we are considering implications of flexibility on a micro-, meso-, and macro-level. The manifestations and consequences of flexibility on these three levels share characteristic features – parallels that we are tempted to interpret as properties of „self-similarity“ across scales, reminding us of the repeating kaleidoscopic patterns found in ecological systems and mathematical fractals. For instance, socioeconomic developments on the societal level parallel organizational HR strategies of workforce segmentation and differentiation, demanding that flexibility

requirements and potentials are allocated increasingly unevenly, resulting in privileged functional core workforces versus more or less precarious numerically and temporally decoupled or „flexibilized“ peripheral employee groups. Aggravating competition along the fault lines of differently attractive labor market segments, numerical organizational flexibility to reduce under- and overcapacities manifests on the individual level as discontinuities in occupational biographies, phases of under- or unemployment, undesired work arrangements, economic uncertainty, and marginalization. At this point, at the latest, flexibility transcends conventional confines of research into work and organizations, raising implications for socio-economic stratification, social inequality and societal structure. These dialectic, bi-directional, and cross-level influences between individual, organizational, and societal implications render research on workplace flexibility, albeit from a psychological perspective, a political, ideologically charged, and contested undertaking.

The articles compiled for this special issue illustrate the broad spectrum of intellectual traditions, theoretical perspectives, concepts, constructs, empirical results, and methods, that humanistic and critical research on workplace flexibility in applied psychology can draw on, including sociology, organizational behavior, management, and related fields. The five main contributions are authored by researchers at the University of Innsbruck's Institute of Psychology. Discussed topics range from work intensification and extensification to erosion of the private sphere, psychosocial strains of uncertainty, role conflicts and precariousness, but also potentials for a „new quality“ of work supporting self-determination, time autonomy, learning and growth-promising opportunities for self-actualization at work and through work activity. Underlying rifts, ambivalences, and tensions, as well as potentials and opportunities, are illuminated from multiple angles with reference to different manifestations, conceptualizations, and operationalizations of flexibility. In the opening article, Höge develops a Marxist perspective to integrate psychological and sociological theory in laying out a domain-integrating life-conduct perspective for studying subjectified flexible work in post-Tayloristic societies, populating the proposed framework with exemplary results of his own research. The following contribution by Glaser and associates conceptually analyzes tensions, conflicts, and contradictory demands confronting employees and supervisors in flexible work systems, suggesting, negotiation of idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) as one way to align diverging employee and employer interests. In the third article, Seubert and colleagues report the theory-guided development and validation of a survey instrument assessing subjective experiences of work-related precariousness. Subsequently, Palm and

coauthors offers a review of her research on issues of boundaryless work, including individual and organizational antecedents and dynamics as well as implications for employee health and wellbeing. Lastly, elaborating on the degrees of freedom that contemporary transitions open up for self-determination, personality development, and individuation at work, Hornung and coauthors adopt an employee-oriented perspective on functional flexibility to develop and test a tripartite interaction model of proactive work self-redesign and individual quality of working life. With task autonomy, job crafting, and task-related i-deals, this contribution integrates constructs widely associated with positive implications for both individuals and organizations, yet which also have a controversial connotation in the context of flexibility. The closing article by Hornung and Höge offers some preliminary reflections and an outlook for critical future research on flexibility, presently caught between the antagonistic poles of humanistic ideals and organizational realities shaped by the omnipresence of neoliberal ideology. For all six articles of the special issue, expert scholars will be invited to provide short commentaries, which will be published in the next regular issue of the journal.

Overall, we believe that the articles assembled here complement each other towards a fresh perspective on the paradox, complex, and multifaceted phenomenon and implications of workplace flexibility. Moreover, our aim was to transcend ideological rhetoric in stimulating academic and practice-oriented discourses on the broader implications of workplace flexibility by synthesizing different streams of literature, integrating disciplinary approaches, and developing and testing theories, models, and instruments for subsequent research. Likely attributable to the complex, dynamic, and systemic nature of flexibility as well as its „self-obscuring“ ideological properties, this objective turned out to be an extremely ambitious, and, at times, disorienting – bewitching, bothering, and bewildering, so to speak – but also educational and personally transformative project. Thanks, appreciation, and gratitude are due to many who have directly and indirectly contributed – as authors, reviewers, and editors, administrators and technicians, research participants, supportive colleagues and friends. It will be left up to the reader to decide on the extent to which our collective efforts to transmit our sparks of insight here have been successful.

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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

Since the 1990s the diagnosis of fundamental transformations in the world of work proliferated within the sociological and psychological literature. Buzzwords for this change are, for example, *flexibility* (Hudson, 2002), *flexible capitalism* (Sennett, 1999), *flexible labor* (Felstead & Jewson, 1999), *new / changing world of work* (Beck, 2000; Cascio, 1995) or *new working life* (Allvin, Aronsson, Hagström, Johannsson & Lundberg, 2011). Although it is mostly not explained what these terms mean exactly, there is a broad consensus that aggravated competition in globalized capitalism and technological progress are central causes of the stated profound transformations (Allvin et al., 2011). Moreover, some scholars stress that these transformations impose new demands and requirements, and that these demands and requirements do not only affect the domain of labor itself, but increasingly the entire

life of workers (Pongratz & Voß, 2003). The objective of this paper is to review the literature on workplace flexibility, health and well-being, and to propose a specific research perspective on this issue, which might be helpful for further research. First, based on the interdisciplinary literature and a series of own studies, causes, and characteristics of *flexibilization*¹ in the world of work will be presented. Second, flexibilization will be conceptualized as *subjectified* forms of *work intensification*, *work extensification*, and the transfer of *insecurity* from management and owners to workers. Third, a *life conduct perspective* in research will be proposed. It will be argued that psychological research of flexible labor, focusing solely on variables within the work domain, neglects important psychological aspects.

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.

Flexibilization in the world of work: Causes and characteristics

The term *flexibilization* subsumes interrelated developments at different levels: (1) the political-economic level, (2) the organizational level, and (3) the individual level. Flexibilization can be understood as a top-down process in which the logics and developments of globalized capitalism at the economic and societal level cause processes of flexibilization first at the organizational and then at the individual level (e.g., Sennett, 1999). However, it can also be assumed that changes at the individual level triggered by flexibilization, such as individualization, value change, changed needs and employment orientations (Beck, 1997; Bröckling, 2016; Pongratz & Voß, 2003), can have backward effects that, in turn, accelerate or „dynamize“ flexibilization processes at the organizational and social levels through individual and collective action. Such a reciprocal relationship between social and organizational structures and individual and collective action is, for example, theoretically described in the *morphogenetic* approach of social theory (Archer, 1995) and integrates the more one-sided approaches of structural-materialistic (e.g., orthodox Marxism) and action-focused social theory (e.g., orthodox Weberianism).

At the economic and societal level, the fundamental cause of flexibilization is commonly detected in the increased competition in globalized capitalism characterized by an international division of labor (Allvin et al., 2011; Beck, 2000). In Western economies, highly standardized mass production is increasingly being replaced by knowledge- and technology-intensive forms of production and services that are more customized (Rousseau, 1997). These in turn require more flexible organizational structures in order to increase efficiency, for example by a better adaptability to order fluctuations. As a reaction to increasing unemployment figures, already in the 1980s a higher flexibility of company structures, employment relationships and a deregulation of labor politics were formulated as possible solutions. Examples are the concept of the „Flexible Firm“ by Atkinson (1984) with its separation into core and peripheral workforces, concepts such as „Lean Production“ and „Lean Management“ (Womack, Jones & Roos, 1990) as well as a deregulation of the labor markets, e.g. by a de-evaluation of collective bargaining agreements, dismissal protection and other labor laws.

Atypical employment often plays a crucial role in increasing corporate flexibility in this new world of work. Atypical employment is usually defined as employment that deviate from „standard“ employment in the sense of full-time employment for an indefinite period that is fully integrated into the social security system. In many European countries, an increase in

atypical employment (e.g., fixed-term employment, temporary agency work, marginal employment) can be observed since the 1990s, even if developments vary considerably between countries (Allmendinger, Hipp & Stuth, 2013). However, terms such as „flexibilization“ or „new world of work“ usually include further developments that go beyond an increase in atypical employment and their utilization to increase the flexibility of organizations. German industrial sociologists Kern and Schumann (1985) argued that labor process theory (Braverman, 1974), proposing that a reduction in autonomy and a de-qualification of employees are inevitable developments in capitalism, must be modified. In classical industrial production productivity gains and a more efficient utilization of capital could indeed be achieved through a stronger division of labor, rigid external worker control and the de-skilling of parts of the workforce. However, according to Kern and Schumann (1985) this Tayloristic strategy for a more efficient utilization of capital reaches its limits in highly developed economies with its requirements for knowledge intensive innovations and more flexible, customized production modes. Thus, it is replaced by other forms of increasing efficiency heading in the opposite direction. The focus here is not on aggravation but on a reduction of the division of labor, an increase of qualification, and the design of more holistic and self-organized work task.

Contemporaneously, the Tayloristic paradigm was also challenged by arguments in work and organizational psychology calling for a human-oriented, healthy and personality developing work design. More complete work tasks through reduced division of labor as well as increased worker autonomy are central elements of all psychological human-oriented work design approaches. Prominent approaches are, the *action regulation theory* and the concept of complete vs. partialized work tasks (Frese & Zapf, 1994; Hacker, 2003; Volpert, 1987), the *job characteristics model* (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and the *demand-control model* (Karasek & Theorell, 1992). However, in the current context of increased organizational flexibility as described above, the aspect of designing more humane and healthy work seems to have receded into background when challenging the Tayloristic production paradigm, especially in companies' everyday practice. Here, reducing rigid external worker control and division of labor as well as increasing autonomy are primarily regarded as operational strategies to increase efficiency and not health, which often even counteract humanization efforts (Littek & Charles, 1995; Moldaschl, 2001).

Pongratz and Voß (2003) further developed the argumentation of Kern and Schumann (1985) and proposed their so-called *entreployee* concept. In line with Kern and Schumann (1985) they argued that rigid con-

trol strategies in the exploitation of labor are at least insufficient, sometimes even counterproductive in an economic context that strongly requires organizational flexibility and innovation. In Taylorism rationalization and productivity increases were to be achieved primarily through *organizing*, *controlling*, and *standardizing*, thus following a logic of *objectification* while suppressing all individual needs and differences. In contrast, post-Tayloristic management strategies are increasingly aim at the *subjectification* of labor (Kleemann, Matuschek & Voß, 2002). In this context, „subjectification“ denotes that workers' individuality and subjectivity are no longer evaluated as potential disruptive factors in labor, but become a resource for rationalization and profit. Accordingly, companies implement structures and HRM practices (e.g., „High Performance Work Systems“, cf. Boxall & Macky, 2009) that aim to exploit the subjective potentials which should lead to more individual involvement and commitment of workers for the benefit of management and owners (cf. also Allvin et al., 2011). According to Voß and Pongratz (2003) the core of this strategy consists in transferring the *fundamental transformation problem* (Braverman, 1974) of converting potential labor power into actual work performance from management to workers themselves. This is essentially achieved through intra-organizational de-regulation (Allvin et al., 2011) and the implementation of *indirect* forms of control. This means that employees are given more autonomy at work. Management is here less concerned with controlling the *execution* of work, but rather with controlling its *outcomes*. For example, performance or outcome objectives are regularly agreed between worker and management and systematically evaluated („management by objectives“). Furthermore, a trend towards more individualized industrial relations can be observed, which may result in a decline of collective and common interests of workers, reducing their solidarity and power. In such new approaches in work design and human resource management the normative role model propagated to workers is the self-employed or *entrepreneur* as far as the concrete execution of work and the acceptance of risks are concerned. Of course, this does not apply to decisions with a wider scope that go beyond the specific workplace and address tactical or strategic decisions of the company or even company ownership and resulting property rights. In other words: the worker should think, act and cope with risks like self-employed entrepreneurs, but in fact remains the same dependent employee as before.

Similar mechanisms as analyzed above are also described by scholars from the field of post-structuralist *governmentality studies* (e.g., Bröckling, 2016; Knights & Willmott, 2002; Rose, 1992). Referring to the French philosopher Foucault (2009, orig. 1978), this

stream of theorizing adopts a perspective of *power* and *(self-)discipline* rather than a perspective of rationalization. The main focus is less on a description of the structural changes in the world of work than on the analysis of the social, organizational and individual processes that lead to an internalization of external demands and shape the so-called *entrepreneurial self* (Bröckling, 2016). Particular importance is attached to post-Tayloristic management and controlling strategies, which – according to this governmentalist interpretation – aim above all at the continuous self-optimization and self-discipline of individuals for the benefit of those institutions and social groups in society having the power. Because of the internalization of external power and interest individual failure in this new world of work is prevalently attributed not to external factors (e.g., lack of given resources) but own inadequacy and a lack of individual effort. This can elicit feelings of guilt and subsequent self-exploiting behaviors, which can ultimately lead to a depressed, *exhausted self* (Ehrenberg, 2008). However, such a clearly negative view on flexibilization is by no means consensual in the literature. For example, other authors also emphasize opportunities such as better possibilities for self-determination, unconventional life plans and career paths, an easier integration of work and private life, and individual learning and personal growth (Giddens, 1991; Reilly, 1998). This hypothetical *ambivalence* of flexibilization processes will be elaborated in the next two sections.

Flexibilization as subjectified work intensification and work extensification

Against the background of the approaches described above, it can be argued that flexibilization can be interpreted as a new (i.e., subjectified) form of work intensification and work extensification. According to Marx (1967, orig. published 1894), in capitalism, work intensification and extensification are, besides technological innovation and progress, the most important means to achieve a constant increase in the surplus value rate that is economically necessary because of the law of the profit rate tending to fall. Building on his observations in the English textile industry during early capitalism, Marx argued that the increase in the surplus value rate was initially achieved primarily through an *extensification* of work, i.e. the extension of working hours at the same wage. After the enactment of the first working time laws, however, the increase in the surplus value rate was particularly achieved by faster-running, technologically more developed machines, shorter task cycles and shorter time targets, and a more standardized and more strictly monitoring of workers. According to Marx, work was thus

intensified by a „filling-up the pores of working times more densely“ (orig: „dichtere Ausfüllung der Poren der Arbeitszeit“; Marx, 1967, p. 418) while total working hours remained the same or were even shortened. This development culminated in the Tayloristic production method (Braverman, 1974). However, Marx already pointed out the limits of this strategy: He argued that on the long run this development can lead to an excessive exhaustion of the working power reducing the economic efficiency of this strategy (Marx, 1974, orig. published 1910).

Certainly, in the „new“ world of work the phenotypes of work intensification and -extensification are more complex and often more „hidden“. As pointed out before, the strategies to increase the surplus value rate described by Marx (i.e., technological innovation and progress, work intensification and -extensification) are supplemented by increasing the flexibility of organizations for the purpose of faster adaptation to changing market requirements. The postulated paradigm shift from objectifying to subjectifying rationalization suggests a kind of *metamorphosis* of the forms of work intensification and -extensification. Work intensification here is no longer primarily the result of shorter task cycles, time targets, and a more standardized and more strictly monitoring of worker. In contrast, a central characteristic of many flexibility-oriented management strategies is the transfer of classic management tasks to the employees themselves (Pongratz & Voß, 2003). On the one hand, this should result in an increase of personal job control which can be an important work-related resource. On the other hand, increased requirements for self-organization can lead to an expansion of work tasks without an increase of time resources, which is able to intensify everyday work.

Flexible, subjectifying HRM strategies including higher self-organization are a central component of so-called High Performance or High Involvement Work Systems (HPWS or HIWS; cf. Boxall & Macky, 2009; Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999). Empirical findings show that increased work performance in such systems is partly mediated by extra role behavior, i.e. walking the “extra mile”, and an overall higher work engagement (Messersmith, Patel, Lepak & Gould-Williams, 2011; Sun, Aryee & Law, 2007). When wages remain constant, which is usually the case, such mediating mechanisms of extra-role behavior and higher work engagement can – from an economic perspective – be interpreted as a special form of work intensification for the purpose of increasing the surplus value rate. In contrast to the classical forms of work intensification, this subjectified form of work intensification in terms of extra-role behavior and increased engagement is usually accompanied by positive psychological states such as general job satisfaction and affective commitment to the organization (Organ & Ryan, 1995). How-

ever, there is also empirical evidence that extra-role behavior and increased work engagement can be associated with the experience of stress, role overload and conflict between work and private life (Halbesleben, Harvey & Bolino, 2009; Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Moreover, empirical results show that participatory management practices typical for HPWS / HIWS can have ambivalent effects on employees. On the one hand, they are able to increase satisfaction and motivation but on the other hand impair health and workability through an intensification of work (Hornung, Höge, Glaser & Weigl 2017). Results of Höge and Hornung (2015) also confirm the ambivalent character of subjectified work intensification in terms of increased self-organization. They empirically confirmed a simultaneous positive and negative effect of the perceived requirement for self-organization at work (PFR-task) on well-being. PFR-task were positively related to the stress reaction *cognitive irritation*. As expected, this effect was mediated by *time pressure* („intensification path“). However, also a negative relation of PFR-task to the stress reaction *emotional irritation* was observed. This effect was mediated by the experience of more personal initiative at work („subjectification path“).

A further approach with relevance for the hypothesis of increased work intensification in the current world of work is the sociological concept of *acceleration* (Rosa, 2013). The core of this approach is the postulation of a continuous social acceleration circle in modern society including three mutually reinforcing dimensions: (1) *technological acceleration*, (2) *acceleration of social change*, and (3) *acceleration of the pace of life*. Furthermore, it is argued that acceleration is not only a descriptive phenomenon but acceleration becomes a general social norm. Referring to Marx', famous dictum that in capitalism all economy becomes *time economy* (Marx, 1983; first published 1939), Rosa (2013) postulates that the capitalist economy (besides cultural and socio-structural factors) is an important driver for starting and sustaining the acceleration circle. Alike the classical (Marxist) concept of work intensification also the theory of social acceleration is essentially based on the economic imperative of a compulsion to grow in capitalism (Rosa, 2009). Korunka and Kubicek (2013) described how the social acceleration circle expresses itself specifically within the world of work and – mediated by technological and organizational changes – impacts workers in the form of work intensification and increased requirements for an individualized uncertainty management.

However, the question arises, whether there is empirical evidence for work intensification and acceleration in the post-Tayloristic world of work. Indeed, data from panel and longitudinal studies confirm the hypothesis of work intensification in terms of an increase in time pressure at work over time, even if

there are considerable differences between countries (Kubicek, Korunka, Paškván, Prem & Gerdenitsch, 2014). Additionally, findings with validated scales that directly capture the acceleration experience show that employees indeed actually experience social acceleration in the three dimensions postulated by Rosa (2013), (Ulferts, Korunka & Kubicek, 2013). Moreover, there are findings that perceived work intensification – in the sense of a retrospective assessed *increase* in work-related demands – explains variance in burnout symptoms, even if the currently experienced time pressure and other work characteristics are statistically controlled (Kubicek, Paškván & Korunka, 2015).

As Marx already mentioned, a more efficient exploitation of labor cannot only be achieved by work intensification, but also work extensification. The classic and simplest form of work extensification is the extension of regular working hours with equal pay. This *objectified* form of work extensification was limited early in the history of capitalism by the enactment of work time laws. However, *subjectified* forms of work extensification in the flexible, more individually self-organized „new“ world of work may unfold beyond the scope of this legislative regulation. For example, this should be the case, when employees working in highly flexible working time systems such as trust-based or zero-hour working time schedules work more hours per week than employees with a fixed hours contract (Wingen, 2004). The same applies to the „outsourcing“ of standard employment into flexible, atypical employment such as „self-employment“, for which statutory, collective working time regulations no longer apply. This often also results in working hours that are significantly longer than those of permanent employees with similar task profiles (Jamal, 1997).

Further forms of subjectified work extensification are addressed in psychological and sociological discourses on the character and effects of *blurred boundaries* between work and private life (e.g., Nippert-Eng, 1996; Kossek & Lambert, 2005; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). These include a wide variety of phenomena in which work-related activities, cognitions or emotions intendedly or unintendedly cross the border into private life (Höge & Hornung, 2015). This can range from taking work at home and work outside official working hours, work-related communication in private life via modern information and communication technologies (ICT), over ruminating about work related problems in leisure time, to the regulation of work-related emotions outside working hours. Blurred boundaries between work and private life, require new efforts from employees in the sense of an active *boundary management* (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012), which, however, can also fail.

Höge (2009) addressed aspects of work intensification and -extensification simultaneously in an em-

pirical study. He identified that in the highly flexible sector of home care the impact of the intensification-related stressor *time pressure on somatic complaints* was partially mediated by the spill-over or „boundary transcending“ of strain from work into private life in terms of emotional irritation and cognitive irritation in leisure time, which can be interpreted as one of the described „new“ forms of extensification, that in turn were positively related to strain-based work-family conflict. In contrast to classical objectified work extensification, the described new forms of subjectified work extensification are probably not always to be appraised negatively per se, but ambivalently. On the one hand, for various phenomena, e.g., taking work at home or the work-related ICT-use outside regular working hours, research established effects on experiencing higher work-home conflicts, impaired recovery and higher stress reactions (e.g., Derks & Bakker, 2014; Voydanoff, 2005). For *on-call work*, recovery-reducing effects could be identified that did not only result from additional work but from the mere expectation of a possible call (Bamberg, Dettmers, Funck, Krähe & Vahle-Hinz, 2012).

On the other hand, there are findings that suggest that with regard to work related ICT-use outside regular working hours it must be distinguished between passive, *externally initiated*, and active, *self-initiated* ICT use. Höge, Palm and Strecker (2016) showed that requirements for self-organization at work are positively related to both forms of ICT-use. However, while the passive, externally initiated ICT-use was in turn positively related to more *conflict* between work and private life, the active, *self-initiated* ICT-use was positively related to more work-private life *enrichment*. The ambivalence of work related smartphone use outside the official working time was also confirmed in an earlier study that showed that an *autonomous motivation* (Deci & Ryan, 2000) for smartphone use was positively related to positive outcomes, whereas *controlled motivation* was significantly related to negative outcomes (Ohly & Latour, 2014).

Flexibilization and insecurity

Intensified global competition, labor market de-regulation, economic crises, as well as organizational flexibilization processes have led to an increased significance of job and biographical insecurity in the workforce (e.g., Burchell, Ladipo & Wilkinson, 2002; Kalleberg, 2009). Indeed, survey data from various nations confirm an increase in job and career insecurity (Kubicek et al., 2014). Fixed-term employment and other forms of atypical employment such as temporary agency work seems to be of particular importance. For example, empirical findings show that atypical work-

ers often experience more job insecurity than workers in standard employment (de Cuyper & de Witte, 2006; Sora, Höge, Caballer & Peiró, 2018). Faster circles of company re-structuring (e.g., downsizing, outsourcing, mergers & acquisitions), are also often associated with increased job insecurity (Greenglass & Burke, 2001). Increased insecurity in a flexible world of work influence employees not only in their employee role as employees (e.g., reduced performance, job satisfaction and commitment; Sverke, Hellgren & Näswall, 2002), but also have impacts beyond. Negative effects on health are empirically well proven (Cheng & Chan, 2008; de Witte, Pienaar & de Cuyper, 2016). Cross-domain effects, i.e. negative effects of job insecurity on variables outside the work domain, such as family satisfaction or partnership quality, are also evident (Larson, Wilson & Beley, 1994; Sora & Höge, 2014).

The negative effects of job insecurity on health and well-being unfold partially via a so-called *anticipated deprivation mechanism* (Höge, Sora, Weber, Peiró & Caballer, 2015) which also includes cognitions and emotions concerning the private life. Höge et al. (2015) confirmed in a Spanish and an Austrian sample that worries about material (financial) deprivation and especially worries about a decline of social relationships in the future mediate the relationship between job insecurity and somatic complaints in both country samples but with different strength. This study illustrated the role of biographical cognitions and emotions about the anticipated personal future for actual job insecurity and actual perceived impaired health. In addition, the results demonstrate the importance of considering the economic and cultural context. A future oriented, biographical approach for explaining the detrimental effects of job insecurity was also taken in the study by Höge, Brucculeri and Iwanowa (2012) on young scientists at universities in Austria, Germany and the UK. The results illustrated that the impact of job insecurity in the current (mostly temporary) employment relationship on well-being develops via the more long-term and future oriented *career* insecurity and experiencing conflicts between occupational and private life goals. Career insecurity and conflicts between occupational and private life goals were higher among female young scientists than male, and in Germany and Austria than in the UK, caused by the much higher proportion of temporary employment in Germany and Austria. Again, these results illustrate the potential role of future orientations and societal aspects. However, the findings on the consequences of temporary employment in general are less clear compared to the consequence of job insecurity, even if, as already mentioned, temporary employment is usually associated with higher job insecurity (de Cuyper, de Jong, de Witte, Isaksson, Rigotti & Schalk, 2008). Contextual conditions such as the *voluntariness* of working

in a temporary employment relationship (Marler, Barringer & Milkovitch, 2002) or changed psychological contracts seem to play a crucial role and can buffer detrimental effects (Bernhard-Oettel, Rigotti, Clinton & de Jong, 2013).

A life conduct perspective in work and organizational psychology

Against the described background, in this section it will be argued that for analyzing the flexible „new“ world of work a specific perspective is particularly appropriate: A *life conduct perspective*. It is by no means claimed that this is a completely new perspective in work and organizational psychology. It can be found, for example, in the extensive literature on concepts like work-family conflict, work-home conflict, work-home enrichment or boundary management. In particular, a life conduct perspective was already taken in research that deals with aspects of an *active* and *intentional* coordination of potentially conflicting goals from various life domains (e.g., Wiese, Freund & Baltes, 2000; Wiese & Salmela-Aro, 2008). However, the term „life conduct perspective“ requires an explanation, since „life conduct“ is not a common concept in psychology. The term „life conduct“ became popular in the 19th century through a small volume of essays entitled „The Conduct of Life“ by the American philosopher and writer Ralph W. Emerson (Emerson, 1860). Written in a literary language Emerson described general principles of a coherent „good life“ in different life domains. Inspired by his colleague and friend Henry D. Thoreau (1817 - 1862), the author of famous „Walden; or, Life in the Woods“ (Thoreau, 1854) Emerson emphasized the role of self-reliance, self-direction and a deep connection with nature for accomplishing a conscious, meaningful, satisfying conduct of life.

In modern sociology, the term „life conduct“ („Lebensführung“) prominently appears in Max Weber's seminal work „Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft“ (Weber, 1922). In contrast to Emerson's use of the term, in Weber's work „life conduct“ has a less individualistic and normative connotation. Weber's „life conduct“ denotes also the influences of social factors such as belonging to a class, religion, culture, and the specific *rationality* and *restrictions* associated with these social groups. Furthermore, Weber stressed that life conduct in turn has retroactive effects on these social groups and the entire society. Weber (1922) also introduced the concepts of „lifestyle“ („Lebensstil“) and „life opportunities“ („Lebenschancen“), which represent the collective, social point of reference: „*Lebensführung*“ means life conduct, which refers to self-direction and choice in behavior. Used in connection with lifestyles, *Lebensführung* means lifestyle choices (...), but these

choices are dependent upon the individual's potential (Lebenschancen) for realizing them." (Abel & Cockermham, 1993, p. 553f.). Explicitly referring to Weber (1922), in more recent times „life conduct“ appeared within German industrial sociology in form of the „everyday life conduct“ approach („alltägliche Lebensführung“; e.g., Kudera & Voß, 2000). However, the term „everyday life conduct“ is much narrower here. It describes the daily active coordination of the different life domains and roles in an overall arrangement of a coherent life. The focus here is not so much on a biographical or life course perspective but on the micro-structures of such everyday coordination processes. Similar to Weber (1922), the concrete „everyday life conduct“ is understood as a reciprocal mediating factor between social structures and individual subjects.

However, in this paper the term „life conduct“ is much broader than the sociological, micro-analytical concept of „everyday life conduct“. A life conduct perspective in work and organizational psychology – as it is suggested here – contains perspectives in which it is taken into account that all behavior and experiences of individuals at work are always the behavior and experience of *subjects* who *actively* strive to realize their ideas and desires of a good, self-directed meaningful life. This includes an everyday coordination of goals and activities of life domains as well as biographical cognitions, emotions, orientations and actions directed towards the future. It is assumed that behavior and experience at work can be best understood if the social environment in different domains at different levels (e.g., organizations, economy, society), in which the employee tries to shape his or her life is reflected. This implies that specific criteria or dependent variables are of particular interest in a work and organizational psychology committed to a life conduct perspective: Variables that go beyond behavior and experience that only refer to the work domain and can serve as indicators of the extent to which specific conditions of work contribute to or restrict a self-directed, self-determined conduct of a „good“ life. These are, for example, mental and physical health, (eudaimonic) well-being, personality development and especially the experience of meaning (cf. Schnell, Höge & Pollet, 2013). Such a perspective should provide a more „holistic“ picture of our research *objects* which are – somewhat paradoxically – *subjects* at work. In contrast, work and organizational psychological studies not seldom focus exclusively on effects of characteristics of the *work* domain (e.g., task characteristics, leadership) on workers' behaviors and experiences also exclusively related to the work domain (e.g., job satisfaction, work performance, work engagement, organizational commitment). Such a research analyzes dependent employees only in their role as dependent employees. However, all employees are always and at every time more than

dependent employees but human actors striving for a self-determined good life within different domains and environments fostering or hindering their endeavor.

Conclusion and outlook

Answering the fundamental question whether the described developments in the „new“ world of work should be evaluated as positive or negative in general is difficult or even impossible. This is even true if only consequences for health and well-being of workers are chosen as the relevant criteria. While in the non-empirical sociological and philosophical literature a critical to pessimistic conclusion dominates, quantitative-empirical data from work and organizational psychology or organizational behavior research speak more for an ambivalent, Janus-faced character of contemporary flexibilization processes. (cf. Dettmers, Kaiser & Fietze, 2013; Höge & Hornung, 2015). The proposal to conceptualize processes of flexibilization on the level of political economy as new *subjectified* forms of a systemic work intensification and -extensification and a shift of insecurity from management and company owners to workers may help to understand this ambivalence and the ambiguous empirical results: The risks for well-being and health may arise primarily from the *intensification* and *extensification* aspects and the increased experience of insecurity, while the *subjectification* aspect offers opportunities such as improved conditions for individual self-determination and self-actualization in realizing the good life (see Figure 1). Moreover, a theoretical perspective including an idea concerning the causes of contemporary workplace flexibility on the level of political economy reduces the danger of falling into an uncritical individualism that either ignores or naturalizes social and economic causes and constraints.

However, a final answer may also be difficult or even impossible because it would negate the principal *dialectics* of social processes. For example, Adler (2007) formulated the provocative thesis, that Taylorism – with all its evident and undisputed negative effects on workers – has historically also represented a field of *socialization* with positive implications for workers. He argues, for example, that Taylorism promoted the experience of workers as collectives with common interests. This was an important prerequisite for the emergence of influential, powerful trade unions. The „scientification“ of large-scale industrial production has brought the collective of workers into contact with a special form of *rationality* and the associated objective knowledge, which may have broadened the mental horizon of working class and thus also made their collective actions to assert their interests more effective. Even though this theoretical approach

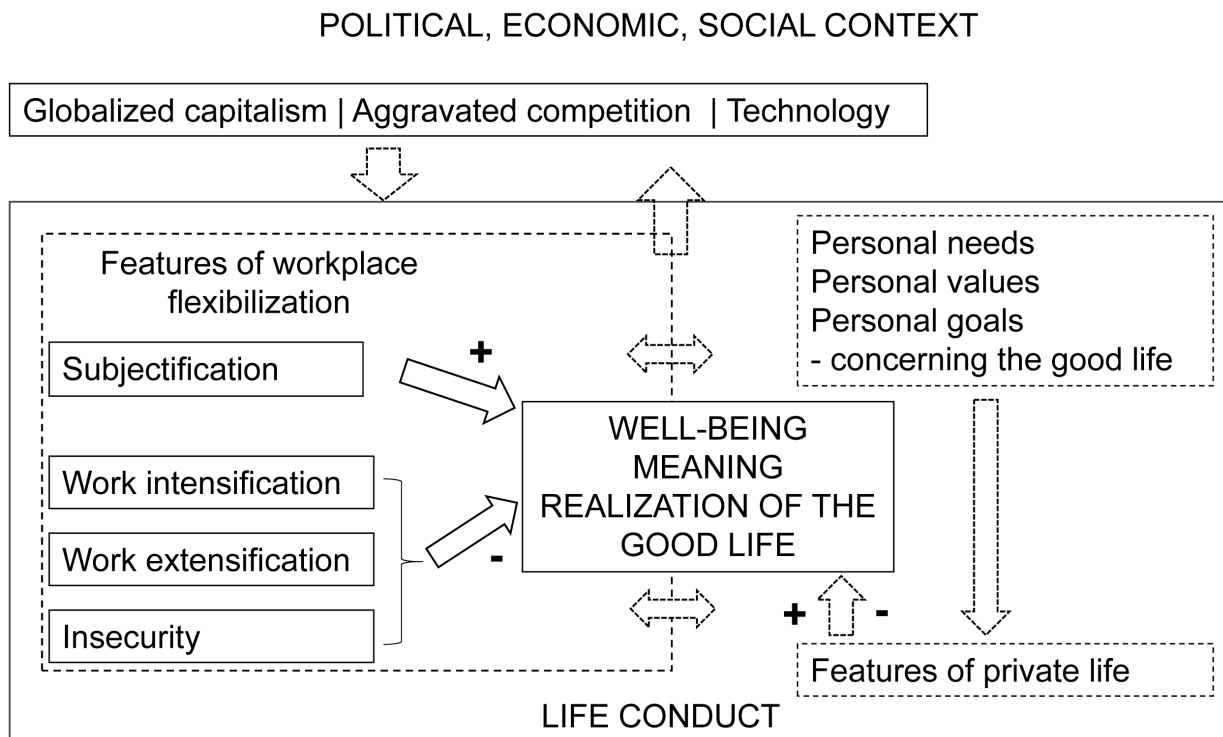


Figure 1: A life conduct perspective on flexible, subjectified work.

is for sure not unproblematic and was heavily criticized (Thompson, 2007), this dialectical approach is worth discussing and may inspire future research. It directs the focus of future research on flexibilization more strongly towards the potential positive effects such as stronger self-determination, self-actualization and creating a meaningful life by the realization of individual and collective life plans, and the question of how these in turn re-affect the world of work and society. This includes, above all, the analysis of individual, organizational and societal framework conditions that promote, hinder or even reverse potentially positive effects and lead to self-exploitation, burnout, alienation and loss of meaning. In any case, a dialectical view as presented by Adler (2007) gives hope that the „new“, post-Tayloristic, flexible world of work will also create new spaces and forms of collective socialization in which something can emerge that counteracts a „colonialization“ of the „Lebenswelt“ through the „system“ (Habermas, 1984) or even contributes to the transformation of the system itself.

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Organizational tensions, paradoxes, and contradictory demands in flexible work systems

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ABSTRACT

The spread of flexible work systems, epitomized by continuously changing structures and work anytime / anywhere, intensifies goal conflicts in organizations. In particular, increasing work performance and maintaining employee health are incompatible, if delegated to supervisors and employees without required resources and empowerment to determine situationally adequate ways to define, balance, and pursue associated objectives. Drawing on different theoretical approaches – paradox theory, role theory, action regulation theory, leadership theory – we try to integrate concepts of organizational tensions, role conflicts, contradictory work demands, and ambivalences in leadership and employee behavior with a focus on performance and health. We argue that top-down work design or ambidextrous leadership are insufficient to reconcile contradictory objectives, whereas idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) offer a promising approach to align diverging interest. Traditional divisions of authority, responsibilities, and resources between top-management and supervisors/employees are bound to catalyze role conflicts and contradictory demands. These manifest in tensions and paradoxes at different organizational levels, contribute to widespread detrimental phenomena like self-exploitative work behavior and psycho-mental disease. I-deals between supervisors and employees offer secondary elasticities in HR systems to buffer or alleviate tensions. Integrating theoretical approaches from a multilevel perspective on organizations, work design, leadership, and work behavior, we shed light on tensions, role conflicts, and contradictory demands imposed on supervisors and employees in contemporary flexible work systems. Ways to align and balance individual health and organizational performance through idiosyncratic deals are proposed.

Keywords

Organizational tensions – paradoxes – role conflicts – contradictory demands – idiosyncratic deals – work design

During the last decades, aggravated global competition and structural transformation from mass-production to customized modes of production and services have been observed in numerous industrialized economies (e.g., Felstead & Jewson, 1999; Oeij & Wiezer, 2002). Accordingly, organizations and employees face increasing requirements for flexibility. Organizations make more and more use of non-traditional work arrangements beyond conventional full-time and permanent contracts, flanked by flexible work scheduling to enhance numerical and temporal flexibility (e.g., Allvin, Aronsson, Hagström, Johansson & Lundberg, 2011). New forms of work organization and managerial practices deemphasize direct control, centralization, and formalization in favor of capitalizing on employee self-organization and self-control as prerequisites for functional flexibility (e.g., Mills, 1983; Pongratz & Voß,

2003). These developments have changed the nature of work, employment relationships, and career paths substantially. Empirical results on the impact of flexible work on employees, however, draw an ambiguous picture (e.g., Höge & Hornung, 2013). Some aspects may offer opportunities for personal initiative and self-actualization, thus contributing to employee well-being. Overall, however, benefits seem outweighed by negative consequences, such as work-intensification, job insecurity, and blurred boundaries between work and private life. Hence, the paradigm of flexibility opens up a Pandora's Box of tensions and paradoxes for employees in contemporary organizations (Gouliquer, 2000).

The main objective of this paper is to draw attention to psychological consequences of tensions and paradoxes of flexible work in terms of work design and

employee health at work. From the perspective of work design, grounded in action regulation theory (Hacker, 2005), we will argue, that organizational tensions and paradoxes – if not resolved at the top management level – will translate into role conflicts and contradictory work demands for employees and supervisors. Such contradictory working conditions at the organizational level will manifest at the individual level in terms of impaired action-regulation, self-hazardous work behavior and adverse health effects, associated with outcomes like absenteeism and performance reduction in the longer term. We will shed light on the „paradox role“ of supervisors, responsible to manage employee performance and health in an „ambidextrous“ way. We will argue that supervisors need organizational support to manage such tensions successfully. To be specific, idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) are proposed as suitable instruments to improve fit between individual needs and aspirations (e.g., family, recovery, development) and organizational demands and conditions (e.g., work load, work organization, social relationships). Thus, the present study seeks to advance the stream of research on organizational tensions and paradoxes as potential sources of work stress from a psychological point of view.

Tensions and paradoxes in organizations

The emerging perspective on tensions and paradoxes in human resource management (Aust, Brandl & Keegan, 2015) signifies growing awareness of the contradictory demands and ambiguities organizations are confronted with, and in turn, impose on their members. The work of Putnam, Myers and Gailliard (2014) has examined tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes in the workplace. Accordingly, organizational *tensions* result from opposite concepts or behaviors (e.g., integration vs. differentiation; stability vs. change; Seo, Putnam & Bartunek, 2004). *Contradictions* occur when these opposites are mutually exclusive or each negates the other (Tracy, 2004). Recurring contradictions lead to *paradoxes*, when (inter-)actions to manage tensions result in the opposite of what was intended (Putnam et al., 2014), e.g., flextime arrangements to enhance life domain balance make employees work longer and harder. From the employee (and supervisor) perspective, paradoxes thus are experienced as being trapped in a double-bind situation, where action regulation is impaired due to high role conflict and ambiguity (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek & Rosenthal, 1964; Hornung, Lampert & Glaser, 2016). In their synthesis of the literature, Smith and Lewis (2011, p. 387) define *paradox* as „contradictory yet interrelated elements (dualities) that exist simultaneously and persist over time“. Research on organizational paradoxes acknowl-

edges that competing goals and interests, trade-offs between desirable (or undesirable) outcomes, and inconsistencies or ambiguity in organizational practices are inherent features of organizing in complex and dynamic environments – rather than regrettable shortcomings, isolated cases of malpractice, or symptoms of mismanagement (e.g., Jarzabkowski, Lê & van de Ven, 2015). Accordingly, a core task of management is responding to „inevitable“ tensions and dualities in ways that embrace and reconcile underlying contradictory tendencies. Research on paradoxes and tensions has focused on challenges for organizations and those in charge of organizing. However, contradictory messages conveyed by inconsistent or incongruous organizational practices may turn employees and supervisors into victims of ambiguity (e.g., Tracy, 2004).

Subsuming organizational tensions and contradictions, Smith and Lewis (2011) have suggested a system of organizational paradoxes within and between the four domains of *performing*, *organizing*, *belonging*, and *learning* to integrate previous categorizations of tensions and contradictions in contemporary organizations. Accordingly, *performing paradoxes* at the organizational level arise from tensions between multiple and partly incompatible institutional goals. A prime example for this type of paradox is the conflict between objectives of short-term economic profitability and longer-term social and environmental responsibility. *Organizing paradoxes* refer to the processes implemented to achieve organizational goals. Competing ways of organizing complex work systems give rise to conflicts or problems of misalignment among management practices fostering collaboration or competition, empowerment or control, flexibility or standardization, etc. *Belonging paradoxes* stem from tensions of identity, emanating from the tendency of individuals and groups to seek both social cohesion and distinction, resulting in conflicting work roles, values, and goals within and among different groups of employees, such as rank-and-file workers, management, and board members. *Learning paradoxes* are attributed to the need for organizations to continuously adapt, improve, and innovate their structures, processes and products. The imperative of change necessitates not only continuous assimilation of new knowledge and competencies for the development of future organizational capabilities, but also overcoming the status quo, and abandoning the ways in which the organization has operated in the past. In addition to these four main categories, paradoxes can also manifest in contradictory tendencies *across* the distinguished domains. For example, *Performing/belonging paradoxes* might result from the different evaluation and prioritization of organizational goals by various groups of stakeholders (e.g., shareholder value and worker health). Overall, the importance of this conceptual contribution for

Table 1: Translation of organizational paradoxes (Smith & Lewis, 2011) to the individual level.

Organizational Level	Performing	Organizing	Belonging	Learning
	Competing organizational time horizons (e.g., economic performance vs. employee health)	Contradictory effects of management and HR practices (e.g., corrosion effect of flexibility)	Competing values, identities and roles of stakeholders (e.g., labor-management conflict)	Stabilizing past achievements and innovating for future (e.g., incremental vs. radical change)
Individual Level	Performing	Organizing	Belonging	Learning
	Autonomy-control paradox (e.g., self-hazardous work behavior vs. recovery)	Experience of role conflicts at work (e.g., contradictory work demands)	Conflicts between life domains and work vs. non-work roles (e.g., work-family conflict)	Conflicts between demands for learning and consolidation (e.g., resistance to change)

a more systematic study of organizational paradoxes notwithstanding, the suggested categorization of paradoxes is at a rather high level of abstraction, leaving considerable room for interpretation. Table 1 shows examples of our attempts to „translate“ abstract notions of organizational paradoxes to the more concrete level of the work experience of individual employees. Against this backdrop of a preliminary allocation of individual-level topics to the major organizational paradoxes described by Smith and Lewis (2011), we will next review some suggested approaches and strategies to manage organizational tensions and paradoxes, particularly directing our attention to the ambivalent roles of lower-level management and line-supervisors.

Organizational attempts to manage tensions and paradoxes

The most comprehensive review of approaches and strategies to manage organizational tensions, so far, has been presented by Putnam et al. (2014). According to these authors, the first and typically preferred (although not necessarily functional) approach is *selection*, where one pole is favored, while the opposite (the other „side“ of the problem) is ignored. In contrast, *separation* (vacillation) means shifting back and forth between the poles at different times, in different locations or situations (Poole & van de Ven, 1989). Going further, *integration* forces a trade-off between the two poles through a middle-of-the-road approach. Putnam et al. (2014) argue that these common „problem-solving“ approaches actually increase the likelihood that the burden of the respective paradoxes is reallocated (externalized or internalized, depending on the perspective) from the organization to its employees, putting them in ambiguous double-bind situations without viable choices. Instead, it has been suggested that new relationships between opposites can be found to transcend dualities by analyzing a reformulated whole

(*reframing*) or holding opposites against each other, attributing them equal legitimacy (*continual connection*) and seeking energy from the ensuing dynamic tensions. Specifically, these approaches have been proposed as two additional, more fruitful paths to manage organizational tensions without reinforcing contradictions (Seo et al., 2004). However, while reframing and continual connection may help to avoid increasing organizational tensions and/or to make it easier for employees to endure the associated contradictions, these strategies hardly resolve the underlying problems.

Most recently, *paradox mindset* was suggested as a „key to unlock the potential of organizational tensions“ and defined as „the extent to which one is accepting of and energized by tensions“ (Miron-Spektor, Ingram, Keller, Smith & Lewis, 2018, p. 26). Indeed newer studies show that resource scarcity predicts experienced tensions, which decrease in-role performance. Higher paradox mindset values (embracing, accepting, and feeling comfortable with contradictions) were shown to buffer the negative relationships between resource scarcity and performance. Thus, a pronounced paradox mindset may be helpful to cope with resource scarcities. However, from our condition-oriented view, such a subjective mindset is unlikely to resolve objective underlying contradictions between goals and resources.

Similarly, drawing upon paradox theory, Bledow, Frese, Anderson, Erez and Farr (2009) provided the concept of *ambidextrous leadership* as a new approach to manage conflicting demands and to support innovation in organizations. Ambidextrous leadership refers to the challenge to be aware of the dynamic nature of task demands and to switch between different mind and action sets (Bledow et al., 2009). The flexible switching between modes of exploration and exploitation, i.e. „opening and closing leader behaviors“ as the situation requires, is „not organized sequentially, but rather complex and unpredictably“ (Rosing, Frese & Bausch, 2011, p. 968). However, continuous

monitoring of relevant information indicating the need to switch between different (opposing) leadership behaviors, might be overtaxing for supervisors – leaving plenty of room for gut decisions. Such spontaneous, seemingly contradictory leadership behavior, in turn, can also be a source of role ambiguities and conflicts for employees.

Ambidextrous leadership is an example for a separation approach (Poole & van de Ven, 1989) in the context of leadership and innovation. As already mentioned, this approach to managing organizational tensions holds a high risk to make paradoxes more pronounced or manifest (Putnam et al., 2014) by creating additional behavioral double binds for employees. With respect to flexible work systems, such double binds might imply taking responsibility for one's own life-domain balance but also meeting performance expectations under conditions of resource scarcity and unrealistic goals. The underlying „autonomy-control paradox“ (Evans, Kunda & Barley, 2004; Putnam et al., 2014) may lead employees to „voluntarily“ work longer and harder, eventually, orienting their whole life and identity according to job requirements – a phenomenon described as a psychologically corrosive effect of flexible work (Sennett, 1998). Such new forms of „self-exploitative“ flexible work are characterized by partly self-imposed work intensification and extensification (Allvin et al., 2011; Höge & Hornung, 2013; Michel, 2011). Increasing prevalence and incidence of psycho-mental disorders, like burnout and depression (Eurofound, 2010; Wittchen et al., 2011), are indicators for the transformation of the „autonomy-control paradox“ into a „performance-health paradox“ within the logic of flexible work systems.

The „performance health paradox“

We have argued that a central paradox of flexible work systems concerns tensions between performance-oriented vs. health-oriented management practices (e.g., Kashefi, 2009). As psychosocial job characteristics are important predictors of illness, employee health has to be seen as partly a function of work and organizational design (e.g., Lawson, Noblet & Rodwell, 2009). Adverse working conditions in terms of high job demands (e.g., work overload) and low resources (e.g., lack of job control), high effort (e.g., excessive work hours) and low rewards (e.g., low recognition), or organizational mistreatment and injustice have been established in prospective studies as risk factors for developing cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and depression (Kivimäki et al., 2012; Lang, Ochsmann, Kraus & Lang, 2012; Nieuwenhuijsen, Bruinvels & Frings-Dresen, 2010). Health-oriented management systems recognize employee well-being

as a legitimate independent goal in its own right, as well as a way to ensure sustainable organizational performance, for example, by providing sufficient buffers, latitudes, and resources to employees to ensure stress-free action regulation and adequate recovery from work (e.g., Chu et al., 2000). The paradox of workplace health-promotion is the aspiration to design human-centered organizations in a profit-centered environment. Trade-offs between economic performance and employee health most commonly manifest in work intensification, that is, constantly increasing quantitative workload, implemented through various forms of performance-driven rationalization (e.g., increasing performance standards or extending tasks and responsibilities; Allan, O'Donnell & Peetz, 1999; Burchell, Lapido & Wilkinson, 2002). More radical displays of rationalization are observable in events or phases of organizational downsizing, mergers and acquisitions, outsourcing, and related forms of corporate restructuring (e.g., Burke & Cooper, 2000).

In contrast to economic performance goals, which often are treated as self-evident and beyond questioning, health-oriented objectives of work system design typically require more justification (e.g., Chu et al., 2000). Driven by demographic changes in developed economies, the design of work systems that support (or at least do not impair) the health and work ability of ageing workforces has become a pressing problem. The tried-and-tested strategy of organizations to externalize the costs of work-related illnesses to social welfare systems by hiring young and healthy workers to replace those with weaker performance dispositions, is bound to prove unsustainable for an increasing range of qualified professions (e.g., Allan et al., 1999). Health and work-life-balance issues are increasingly important factors for the ability of organizations to attract and retain a qualified workforce. In particular, younger and well-qualified job applicants from the generation of the so-called „digital natives“ are looking for a good, if not a great place to work (e.g., Ng, Schweitzer & Lyons, 2010). Occupational health-promotion thus becomes an integral aspect of „employer branding“ and corporate social responsibility. Organizations are not only morally, but legally obligated to maintain health and work ability of employees (e.g., Chu et al., 2000). Despite broad-based tendencies towards deregulation of labor and employment laws, legislation passed in German-speaking countries has strengthened employer responsibilities for employee health by requiring a mandatory assessment of hazards and risks arising from physical and psychosocial working conditions.

The performance health paradox manifests at an individual level in contradictory goals related to performance and goal achievement versus need for recovery to protect personal health and opportunities

to pursue non-work interests. Conflicts between work and family roles, reduced psychological detachment from work, and recovery problems are widely discussed in current psychological research (e.g., Byron, 2005; Sonnentag, 2003). For example, the positive relationship between work-home interference and burn-out is stronger for intensive smartphone users (Derks & Bakker, 2012). Off-the-job recovery is precondition for recuperation of energy and relief of negative strain reactions. Excessive job demands may inhibit recovery experiences in the longer-term (Kinnunen & Feldt, 2013). Employee-oriented forms of flexible HRM practices have been advocated as self-determined employee control over work activities, working hours, and work location in order to create supportive conditions for work performance, to facilitate balance between life domains, and to reduce psychologically stressful work-family conflicts (e.g., Shockley & Allen, 2007). The beneficial effects of increased self-determination and autonomous regulation of work activities notwithstanding (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1987), these advantages run a risk of being compromised or outpaced by the emerging „boundarylessness“ of work, including requirements to work at any time and any place (e.g., Allvin et al., 2011). Little attention in organizational behavior research is given to the fact that not only demanding job characteristics, but likewise self-initiated performance-related behavior of employees can be a source of conflicts and job stress (Bergeron, 2007). For instance, organizationally desirable forms of contextual performance or organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., supporting the organization through extra work or helping coworkers) have been shown to relate positively to experienced strain and work-family conflict (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Proactive performance concepts, such as personal initiative and taking charge, require psychological resources and efforts and thus imply risks and costs for the focal employee (Grant & Ashford, 2008; McAllister, Kamdar, Wolfe Morrison & Turban, 2007). Thus, broader job demands and normative influences may result in self-hazardous work behavior by employees in response to organizational flexibility requirements (Höge & Hornung, 2013).

Organizational tensions and paradoxes through the lens of work design

So far, we examined organizational tensions and paradoxes at an organizational level and – in terms of a performance-health paradox – discussed negative consequences for both individual performance and health. Further, adopting a multi-level approach to organizational diagnosis (Büssing, 1992), specific working tasks and conditions can be identified, which mediate the translation of organizational characteristics (like

tensions and paradoxes) onto the individual action. Functional action regulation of work tasks is driven by goals, processed in a hierarchical-sequential way, supported by organizational rules and resources (Hacker, 2003). In a *taxonomy of contradictory work demands*, Moldaschl (2005) proposed a differentiated analysis of possible dysfunctions of action regulation in terms of contradictions between *goals*, *rules*, and *resources* at work. Different goals, e.g., divergent performance standards, might lead to the common „quality-quantity dilemma“. Contradictions between goals and resources can manifest in staff shortages, overtime work, or overtaxing tasks (e.g., new technology without adequate qualification). Contradictions between goals and rules might necessitate rule violations or risky behavior in trying to fulfill tasks without the necessary authority to do so. Contradictions between rules and resources are quite common symptoms of resource scarcity and work intensification. Vivid examples for these conjectures can be found in the daily conflicts of nurses in modern profit-driven nursing homes to either fulfill societal rules of adequate human interaction with patients or the predetermined work functions per hour.

The mentioned taxonomy of contradictory work demands (Moldaschl, 2005) was developed against the background of two concepts of action regulation theory – regulation requirements and regulation problems at work (Leitner, Lüders, Greiner, Ducki, Niedermeier & Volpert, 1993). Regulation requirements address alternating work demands as options to enhance personality development. Regulation problems subsume contradictions between work goals and working conditions, e.g., work interruptions, informational or motoric impediments, leading to additional or enhanced effort or risky work behavior (Greiner, Ragland, Krause, Syme & Fisher, 1997). By adding contradictions between goals, rules, and resources, Moldaschl (2005) has extended the approach of regulation problems and inspired work analysis approaches to include contradictory demands at work. For instance, an entire section of the work analysis instrument for hospitals (Büssing & Glaser, 2002) is grounded in this taxonomy, examining contradictory work demands in nursing in terms of work overload, contradictory goals, work interruptions, additional effort, etc. Detrimental effects of contradictory work demands on psycho-mental health of nurses have been widely substantiated (e.g., Büssing & Glaser, 2000; Glaser & Büssing, 1996). In addition to contradictory demands at work, learning demands (e.g., task variety, cognitive demands) and work-related resources (e.g., autonomy, social support) have been established as predictors of intrinsic motivation and creativity at work. Further, work-related resources buffer adverse effects of job stressors on employee health (e.g., Glaser, Seubert, Hornung & Herbig, 2015).

Through this work psychological lens, separation and ambidexterity to manage organizational tensions and paradoxes are bound to impair employee health and performance, manifesting role conflicts and contradictory demands at the task level in the daily work activities of supervisors and employees. As a way to cope with contradictory work demands, paradox theory promotes the approach of *acceptance*. However, reviewing research on paradoxes and tensions in organizations, Hargrave and van de Ven (2017) integrated the approaches to manage tensions advocated by paradox theory with approaches from dialectic theory into a typology and process model. They differentiate between acceptance (paradox theory) and resistance approaches (dialectic theory) and include mutual adjustment and conflict (dialectic theory) as additional and more problem-focused strategies beyond synergy or assimilation (paradox theory). Out of those, mutual adjustment by bargaining for diverging interests offers the most promising approach to avoid or reduce conflict. In contrast, organizational tensions that are managed by strategies preferring one pole of a duality (e.g., performance vs. health), likely lead to contradictory work demands, resource scarcity and health impairment, and, eventually and paradoxically, to performance losses for the organization. Neither a paradoxical mindset and acceptance nor ambidextrous leadership address the underlying contradictory demands and their detrimental consequences. Agreeing with the need for dialectic approaches to manage tensions and paradoxes in organizations, we put forward the suggestion that, in analogy to processes of collective bargaining at the organizational or societal level, idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) can be used to reconcile

or reduce conflicting interests in employment at the individual level.

Figure 1 shows our preliminary integration of the individual mindsets and associated strategies proposed by paradox theory and dialectic theory (see Hargraves & van de Ven, 2017), integrated with the action-regulation-based taxonomy of stressful demands as contradictions between goals, rules, and resources proposed (Moldaschl, 2005). From a multi-level perspective on organizations (Büssing, 1992; Rousseau, 1985; van de Ven & Ferry, 1980) downward cascading processes reproducing and translating organizational tensions and paradoxes from the organizational level via the task level into psychological consequences at the individual level are assumed. We argue that adopting a paradox mindset and related strategies (synergy, assimilation) does not alleviate, but, instead, likely increase performance-health paradoxes, as associated psychological processes of introjection and self-exploitation are detrimental to occupational health and performance in the longer run. Instead, we suggest that interpersonal negotiation can potentially offer a dialectic approach to balance divergent interests at the individual level. As a form of individual bargaining i-deals might be a way to transcend self-exploitation and overcome stagnation or resignation by balancing divergent interests, making the work experience more personally tolerable, enjoyable or rewarding. For instance, the manifestation of organizational tensions and paradoxes at the individual level may be reduced or resolved by agreements to change individual goals, rules, and/or resources. Ideally, i-deals are amendments supplementing a protective general framework of labor laws, institutions, and collective agreements, historically

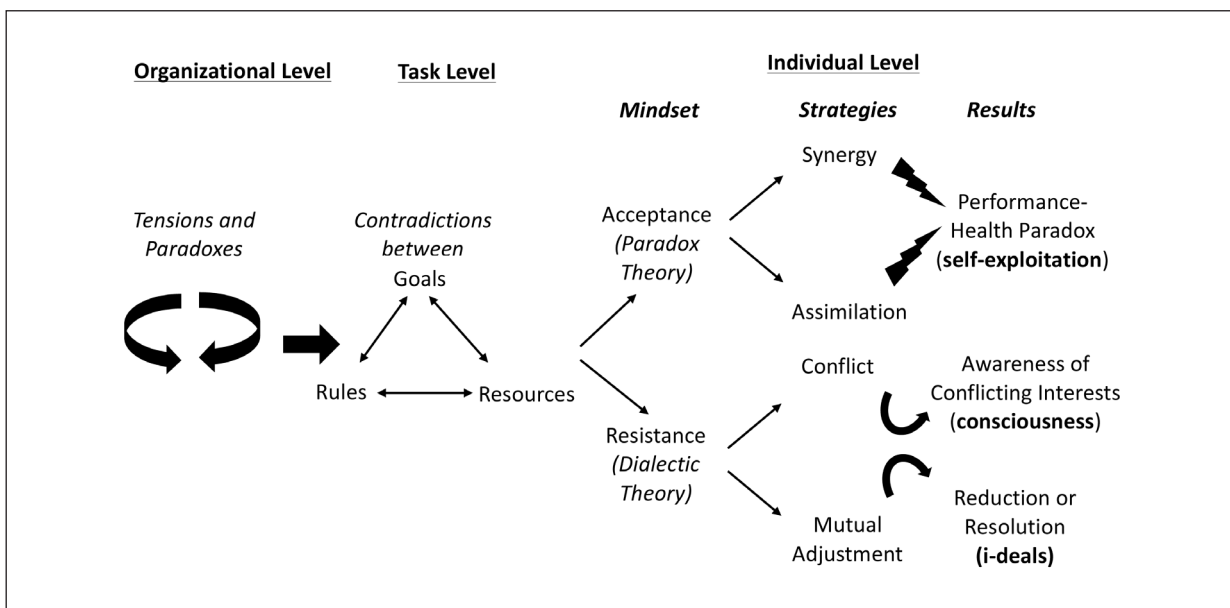


Figure 1: Suggested role of idiosyncratic deals in managing organizational tensions and paradoxes (adapted from Hargrave & van de Ven, 2017).

established in a dialectic process through strategies of conflict escalation and resolution through solidarity and collective action. However, we call critical attention to new paradoxes arising from the contemporary „Subjectification“ of industrial relations, whereby processes on the collective level are not complemented or reflected but rather ideologically redefined and projected or displaced at the individual level. A further advantage of the perspective of dialectic theory is that it raises awareness among employees for underlying conflicts of interests in employment and consciousness regarding new mechanisms of rationalization und HR utilization.

Idiosyncratic deals to reconcile or reduce conflicting interests

Idiosyncratic deals (i-deals), established by Rousseau (2005), are voluntary, personalized agreements negotiated between individual employees and their employers regarding terms that benefit each party. To operationalize the definitional feature voluntariness and mutual consent, research has focused on personalized arrangements where the initiative to seek out special terms is taken by individual employees and authorization is granted by supervisors or HR managers acting as legitimate representatives (or agents) of the employing organization (Hornung, Rousseau & Glaser, 2009). I-deals are instruments of employee-oriented management, suitable to accommodate both organizational and worker interests in flexible HRM (Rousseau, Ho & Greenberg, 2006). As employees place a different value on certain conditions of their work (e.g., work schedule, location, job content, and career paths), i-deals involve not fixed-pie transactions, but rather a more need-efficient allocation of resources, based on the customization of job features according to diverse personal dispositions and preferences. Empirical research (e.g., Hornung, Rousseau & Glaser, 2008) has focused on two forms of personalized work arrangements: *Developmental i-deals* refer to customized opportunities to develop skills and learning as well as career opportunities (e.g., special work tasks and responsibilities); *flexibility i-deals* allow for a customized scheduling of work (e.g., start and ending of the workday). I-deals are dialectical in the sense that these arrangements highlight central tensions between organizational and employee interests and goals (Rousseau, 2005). Individual negotiation of personalized features in work and employment conditions create a synthesis or reconciliation of these tensions and can be analyzed on different levels, depending on the focus on the overall organization as a socio-technical system, the workforce as a collective entity, the level of supervisors or management, or the level of individual workers (Rousseau, 2005).

I-deals offer a way for employees to obtain work-related resources not available to them through standard HR practices (e.g., support to develop specialized skills or opportunities to do work from home). Successfully negotiated developmental i-deals, such as learning support and customized work tasks have been shown to be associated with higher work motivation, affective commitment, and increased job performance, whereas successful negotiation of flexibility i-deals improve work-life balance of employees (Hornung et al., 2008, 2009). However, paradoxical tensions might exist between associated goals of development vs. balancing life domains: Development arrangements typically imply higher investments on the side of the individual employee, such as additional time, effort, and engagement; flexibility i-deals, on the other hand, reduce the dependence on temporal organizational working patterns and resulting working time-related demands. Thus, through the combination of development and flexibility i-deals, workers may be able to balance their level of involvement in the work domain according to their personal needs and preferences (Hornung et al., 2008). Such a personal equilibrium strategy, however, may be disrupted when employee requests for special arrangements are turned down by employers, resulting in negative affective responses and impaired well-being (Hornung, Glaser & Rousseau, 2010). Although research has shown that successful negotiation of i-deals is associated with positive employee responses, personalized work arrangements also imply the risk of increasing interpersonal tensions among employees, in particular if organizational settings emphasize competition for limited resources, rather than cooperation and solidarity among employees (Hornung, et al., 2010; Lai, Rousseau & Chang, 2009).

Supervisors and HR managers play a central role in the negotiation of i-deals, as they typically act as bargaining partners for other employees seeking out customized work and employment conditions (Hornung et al., 2009; Rosen, Slater, Chang & Johnson, 2013). Managers are assumed to act as honest agents of the employer to ensure that personalized arrangements are functional and beneficial for all involved parties (Rousseau et al., 2006). In authorizing i-deals they have to balance organizational interests (e.g., developing skills or retaining valued employees) and requests of employees (e.g., special tasks or working time arrangements). Simultaneously, they have to ensure that negotiated deals are manageable and do not disadvantage or relatively deprive other colleagues (Greenberg, Roberge, Ho & Rousseau, 2004; Lai et al., 2009). The construct of i-deals highlights a positional role conflict of supervisors and lower level managers as agents and brokers of both organizational and employee interests. Considerations regarding procedural and distributive justice as well as interactional justice are among the

demands that the negotiation of i-deals imposes on supervisors and managers. Authorizing deviations from normally applicable practices, policies, or regulations in the broader interest of the organization puts supervisors into a paradox position. Uncertainty regarding authority to negotiate and approve non-standard conditions and/or ambiguity concerning organizational endorsement or sanctioning of such arrangements are likely to make individual negotiations with employees a stressful experience for supervisors (Rousseau, 2005). Offloading associated responsibilities to supervisors without matching supportive resources is bound to yield undesirable results, depending on leadership abilities of managers and work relationships within respective organizational units. Thus, implementing i-deals as a management practice may also lead to work intensification and increased role conflict at the supervisor level. Organizational initiatives to promote health-oriented leadership (e.g., Wegge, Shemla & Haslam, 2014) need support by supervisors, who are confronted with the somewhat paradox task of taking responsibility not only for work performance, but also the health of employees. Meeting expectations of higher-level management in terms of attaining performance goals thus can undermine the designated function of supervisors to protect team members against insufficient detachment and recovery from work, job stress, burnout, and other forms of work-related illness.

Discussion

A main objective of this paper was to outline research on flexibility-related psychological tensions against the backdrop of paradox theory (Smith & Lewis, 2011). We have expanded the perspective of paradox theory by focusing at the level of individual workers and supervisors. Against the background of tensions between performance and health, we have argued that high-performance work systems and occupational health management represent partly diverging organizational goals, focusing either on maximization of economic returns or development of the workforce including employee well-being (e.g., Chu et al., 2000). The decisive duality involves a performance-health paradox, which can be framed as tensions between short-term economic gains (e.g., cost-cutting and rationalization) and longer-term returns of investments into a sustainable HRM system (e.g., capacity building and health-promotion). At the individual level, this paradox is reflected in contradictory work demands (e.g., goal achievement vs. recovery from work strain). Supervisors, in particular, have to behave as agents of shareholder interests, and simultaneously act as representatives of their team and as advocates of employee concerns.

They play a vital role in „managing“ paradoxes based on own positional role, decision-authority, available resources, but also in accordance with own personal values, aspirations, and abilities. Tensions arising from conflicting demands to represent both organizational and employee goals and interests, however, hold the risk of turning supervisors and HRM managers into victims of structural ambiguity and conflicts, who can satisfy neither one nor the other side (Harding, Lee & Ford, 2014).

Expected to act as role models for healthy and effective work behavior, supervisors are important agents in the design of psychosocial work characteristics (e.g., learning demands, task and social resources, lack of job stressors). They have to manage tensions between imposing additional demands and providing support to employees (e.g., Renwick, 2003). This includes attentiveness to motivational states, protection from work overload and health impairment, and reintegration of team members returning from sickness absence. Supervisors may be able to resolve this paradox through stimulating work engagement and sustainable performance of employees by contributing to physically and psychologically healthy working conditions, including suitable learning demands (e.g., task variety and complexity) and work-related resources like job autonomy and social support (Glaser et al., 2015). However, the complexity of people management tasks is aggravated by contextual influences, such as ageing workforces, generational change of work-related attitudes and values (e.g., Protestant work ethic vs. leisure-orientation), and increasing importance of psychosocial factors for employee health and productivity (e.g., absenteeism and turnover). Considering this truly Herculean task, supervisors need all the support they can get from management and HR departments to be able to cope with such role conflicts and ubiquitous contradictory demands. Specifically, lower subordinate-to-manager ratios, additional time and opportunity to communicate with team members, more systematic qualification and training (e.g., knowledge on psychosocial work characteristics and employee health), or less ambitious performance goals may allow balancing organizational and employee-centered concerns.

Fundamental tensions in personalized work arrangements relate to questions regarding scope, range, and scale of employment features that are (or should be) subject to individual negotiation. The construct of idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) relies on the optimistic assumption that tensions can be reconciled or at least better aligned through processes of individual negotiation (Greenberg et al., 2004; Rousseau et al., 2006). Prerequisites for realizing positive potentials of more customized jobs and human-centered organizations, however, are high standards regarding the over-

all quality of working conditions and employment relationships. Research on i-deals suggests that beneficial effects of personalized work arrangements are most pronounced when negotiations are embedded in a network of high quality relationships among workers, between employees and their supervisors, as well as between individuals and the organization as a whole (Lai, Rousseau & Chang, 2009; Rosen et al., 2013).

Central themes of Marxist critiques of capitalism and its institutions have identified inner contradictions and antagonisms (e.g., the tendency of the profit rate to decline with rising capital investments) as drivers of the development and periodic destruction of productive forces in recurring phases of accumulation and crisis (e.g., Adler, 1990). Pointing out this parallel directs attention to effects of organizational paradoxes on workers, which has been the main theme of this paper. Anchoring an explicitly employee-oriented perspective in the paradox literature seems particularly important as, according to the social critique of the political economy, workers as stakeholders are disadvantaged and most negatively affected by contradictions characterizing profit-oriented work organizations in competitive markets (e.g., Gouliquer, 2000; Kalleberg, 2003). Drawing on similar assumptions, critical streams in organizational research have long maintained that employers deliberately subject workers to uncertainty and conflicting demands (e.g., job insecurity and unrealistic performance goals) as a form of labor utilization to increase economic profitability (e.g., Allan et al., 1999). The criticism formulated in these more radical conceptions of organizational paradoxes is, to some extent, echoed by mainstream research on work stress, which has identified conflicting demands as important sources of job strain (e.g., Jackson & Schuler, 1985). Approaches of acceptance to manage such tensions and contradictions, which have been suggested by paradox theory in terms of synergy and assimilation (Smith & Lewis, 2011), ambidextrous leadership (Rosing et al., 2011) or paradox mindset (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) are bound to fall short in the longer term. Further dialectic approaches like bargaining and conflict (Hargrave & van de Ven, 2017) are needed to reduce or resolve underlying conflicts of interests, instead of obscuring or „normalizing“ the underlying contradictions through logics of neoliberal ideology (Bal & Doci, 2018).

I-deals bargained between supervisors and employees offer promising approaches to balance diverging interests and resolve contradictory demands due to underlying tensions and paradoxes. Nonetheless, it would be overly simplistic to advocate i-deals as a universal solution to the tensions and contradictions employees are exposed to in contemporary organizations. In particular, it should not be forgotten that individual negotiation of work and employment features involves

a number of paradoxes, which require close attention if the potentially beneficial effects of i-deals as a management practice are not to be undermined by negative side-effects (e.g., relative deprivation and social tensions among colleagues). What remains decisive is the spirit in which such arrangements are made. Few if any positive stimuli may be expected from deals that are based predominantly on a market-logic. Arrangements that are made in good-faith to accommodate the specific needs and situation of individual employees, however, may provide an impetus towards more human-oriented organizations.

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Beyond job insecurity – Concept, dimensions, and measurement of precarious employment

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ABSTRACT

Although precarious employment is a salient topic in both the societal and the scientific discourse, it has received limited consideration in the field of psychology. This study aimed at developing a psychological perspective on the topic rooted in sociological theory by classifying subjective experiences of precarious employment and developing a suitable measure. Following a thorough literature search, we chose the multidimensional concept by Klaus Dörre and colleagues as a comprehensive definition. We operationalized their five dimensions (reproductive-material, social-communicative, legal-institutional, status and recognition, meaningful-subject-related) and tested the „Subjective Experience of Work-related Precariousness (SEWP)“ scale in two preliminary validation studies ($n_1 = 268$, $n_2 = 216$). Results on the psychometric properties of the SEWP scale and its associations with both health-related outcomes and work-related behavior suggest a comprehensive, reliable, valid, and economic measurement of precarious employment. Finally, we discuss current strengths and weaknesses of this new measure under development and line out avenues for future research.

Keywords

Precarious employment flexibility – atypical employment – precarity – measurement – health – work behavior

Changes in the labor market have increasingly led to the disappearance of structured and secure employment contracts (standard employment) and given rise to more flexible and unstructured forms of employment (atypical employment) instead (Eurofound, 2018). This transformation of the character of paid work since the mid-1990s was driven by globalization, the opening up of markets, and associated political deregulation. As a consequence, continuous restructuring processes are taking place in companies in order to react flexibly to market developments. However, restructuring is accompanied by negative impacts on the health of employees, organizations, and communities (Kieselbach et al., 2009). The development and widespread use of new information and communication technologies (ICT) at the end of the 20th century also enabled work to be carried out with greater flexibility. Ubiquitous permanence of ICT now allows work tasks to be fulfilled any time and any place, i.e., detached from the workplace and working hours (Rosa, 2005).

This socio-political development from structured to flexible working environments open up opportunities and benefits for employees on the one hand (such as increased autonomy, improved well-being and life-domain balance within telework or flexible working time arrangements; Joyce, Pabayo, Critchley & Bambra, 2010). On the other hand, flexible working environments introduce new risks in terms of work-related precariousness (Benach, Vives, Tarafa, Delclos & Muntaner, 2016; Vives et al., 2010), especially when flexibility requirements are high (Höge & Hornung, 2015) and individual control (autonomy) over flexible arrangements is low (Glaser & Palm, 2016).

Standard or „normal“ employment relationships (Benach & Muntaner, 2007; Mückenberger, 1985) are characterized by permanent full-time employment with secure income, full integration into social systems, identity of work and employment relationships, as well as employees being bound by instructions. A shift towards atypical employment relationships is

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currently taking place, which differ from standard employment in at least one characteristic, e.g., flexible working hours and locations, a reduction in full-time and increased part-time work, fixed-term work, labor leasing, dependent self-employment (Eurofound, 2018). In addition, new forms of employment emerge continuously, such as employee sharing, job sharing, casual work, ICT-based mobile work, crowd employment, collaborative employment (Eurofound, 2015). The shift from standard to atypical employment is often associated with work-related precariousness or precarious employment (Benach & Muntaner, 2007). Although precarious employment is a salient topic in both the societal and the sociological scientific discourse, there is no generally accepted definition hitherto. Furthermore, contributions from the field of psychology to the topic remain scarce. This study aimed at the development of a psychological perspective on precarious employment by classifying subjective experiences of precarious employment and developing a suitable measurement instrument. First, we provide a review of the (predominantly sociological) scientific literature focusing on precarious employment. Following Brinkmann, Dörre, Röbenack, Kraemer and Speidel (2006) and Dörre (2005), we defined precarious employment as deficiencies that arise from the conditions of employment on five dimensions. Second, we constructed a self-report survey instrument for all five dimensions that measures subjective experiences of work-related precariousness. In this paper, we report results of two preliminary validation studies of this new instrument under development.

Precarious employment: Definitions and concepts

In everyday language, the term „*precarious*“ is often used synonymously to indicate uncertain, revocable, or tricky matters. The origin of the word can be traced back to Roman law, in which the *precarium* denoted an object or a right transferred with the possibility of restitution at any time (Buckland & Stein, 1963). Scientific research on precarity in Europe was stimulated by French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Castel. Bourdieu (1998), a representative of neo-Marxism, describes precarization as a process of social change that leads to general social insecurity and is triggered by the economic and the labor system. This social change not only has a disciplining effect on those directly affected, but also leads to subjective insecurity among those who are not (yet) precariously employed (Dörre, 2011). Precarity in Bourdieu's sense refers to a very broad, political construct considered too vague for scientific analysis (Brinkmann et al., 2006). Castel (2000), a scholar of work and industrial sociology, describes precarization as a profound transformation of working

societies, marked by the return of unfavorable forms of wage labor previously assumed to have been overcome. A much-renowned approach by Castel (2000) divides the working society into different „zones“: (1) zone of integration, (2) zone of precariousness, (3) zone of disaffiliation. For German sociologist Dörre and colleagues (e.g., Brinkmann et al., 2006; Dörre, 2005; Kraemer, 2008), this zone model served as a heuristic basis for the scientific analysis of precarious employment. Rodgers (1989) defined precarious employment on the basis of four dimensions: (1) degree of certainty of continuing work; (2) control over work (e.g., working conditions, wage, pace of work); (3) legal and social protection (e.g., against discrimination, unfair working conditions as well as unemployment, health and pension insurance); (4) adequacy of income. This approach was elaborated by various researchers, leading to a multitude of definitions and studies on precarious employment in Europe (for an overview see Betti, 2018). While Rodgers (1989) relies largely on objective or structural aspects of the employment relationship to define precarious employment, Castel's (2000) definition mainly includes subjective aspects of social integration through work. Therefore, existing concepts of precarious employment may be classified by their primary focus on objective aspects, subjective aspects, or a combination of both. For a detailed discussion of these concepts in Europe and their relationships see Hopfgartner (2019).

Five dimensions of precarious employment

As a result of a comprehensive review of the above concepts, we chose to draw upon the work by Dörre (2005) and Brinkmann et al. (2006) for three reasons. First, these authors have grounded their approach in subjective aspects associated with precarious employment. Since we aim at developing a psychological perspective on this topic, our primary focus is on investigating subjective experiences that characterize work-related precarity. Second, within this domain of the subjective, these authors offer the most differentiated of the theoretical approaches investigated. To conceptualize precarious employment as comprehensively as possible, we opted for the most fine-grained approach. Third, the model of these authors strongly relates to the other concepts, providing a suitable synopsis (Hopfgartner, 2019). Dörre (2005, p. 252) suggests the following definition of precarious employment:

An employment contract can be labeled precarious if employees' levels of income, protection, and integration clearly fall below a standard defined and agreed upon by the current society. Job insecurity and wages below the subsistence level are (...) central indicators of precarity. Loss of

meaning, social isolation, status insecurity, lack of recognition, and planning deficits represent precarization tendencies that primarily reflect a perspective of [impeded] self-realization in specific work activities.²

In accordance with the living wage concept (e.g., Carr, Parker, Arrowsmith & Watters, 2016; Shelburne, 1999), this definition includes economic subsistence as a central indicator and considers other factors necessary to capture the multifaceted nature of precarious employment, including meaningful participation at the workplace and in society. Based on this definition, Brinkmann et al. (2006) proposed five dimensions of precarious employment.

1. Reproductive-material dimension. The first dimension relates primarily to income from work employment and aspects of job insecurity. Both constituents directly relate to (financial and material) uncertainty about the future. An income is regarded as precarious if it does not secure one's livelihood and falls below a culturally defined minimum. In terms of economic subsistence, an objective criterion often used is the relative poverty threshold, i.e., an income below a certain reference income level. In the EU, this threshold is defined as income below 60 % of the national median for full-time employment (Eurostat, 2018). In Austria, for example, the at-risk-of-poverty threshold was about 14851 € (net) for a one-person household in 2017, which is a monthly income of 1238 € (Statistik Austria, 2018). Both a low income and job insecurity may impede long-term life planning due to an unstable financial situation. Regarding the subjective component of job insecurity, research shows that mere concerns about job continuance can have a negative impact (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995) on health and well-being (de Witte, Pienaar & de Cuyper, 2016) and on work-related behavior, especially behaviors related to organizations (Sverke, Hellgren & Näswall, 2002). It is therefore assumed that precarious employment, in the sense of an insecure reproductive-material situation, is negatively related to health and work-related behavior.

2. Social-communicative dimension. The second dimension covers both integration into social networks at the workplace and work-related aspects of communication. An employment relationship can be described as precarious if equal integration in the workplace is denied and work-related communication is impeded. Social support by colleagues and supervisor has been confirmed as a protective factor in numerous studies (e.g., Kurtessis et al., 2017). Further, a connection between social inclusion and health has long been established (House, Landis & Umberson, 1988)

and, conversely, a recent study found social isolation to be associated with poorer health among teleworkers (Bentley et al., 2016). Following social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), lack of social support leads to counterproductive work behavior due to the reciprocity between organizational-social conditions and work-related behavior (Biron, 2010). Greenhalgh (1979) describes the so-called „disinvolvement syndrome“ as a behavior-based strategy to deal with uncertainty by reducing engagement. It is therefore assumed that the social-communicative dimension of precarious employment is negatively associated with health, well-being, and voluntary, extraproductive work behavior, and positively associated with counterproductive work behavior.

3. Legal-institutional (participation) dimension. The third dimension relates to legal aspects of labor and social security (e.g., health and pension insurance, company agreements) as well as health and safety at work. In addition, this dimension includes aspects of employee participation and co-determination as well as opportunities for vocational training and career promotion. An employment relationship is precarious in this respect if labor and social security legislation applies to a limited extent only, therefore excluding a person from protection by means of his or her employment contract. Legal protective regulations apply without restriction only to standard employment. With increasing distance to the standard employment relationship, protective regulations are decreasing (Eurofound, 2015, 2018). So far, scientific studies on the connection between (dis)integration into social security systems and subjective experience of work-related precariousness are lacking. Debus, Probst, König and Kleinmann (2012) found a buffering effect of different social security systems (characterized by extent of unemployment insurance and access to further training) on the negative relationship between job insecurity and both job satisfaction and commitment. Studies on temporary agency work have shown a lack of opportunities for employee participation, in addition to disadvantages in labor protection and social security (Mitlacher, 2008). Furthermore, there is some evidence that temporary employment is negatively related to health and organizational commitment (de Cuyper et al., 2007). It is therefore expected that, under conditions of precarious employment, there will be a negative correlation between disadvantages in labor protection or social security and employee health. It is also assumed that a lack of opportunities for participation will have a negative impact on work behavior (Weber, Unterrainer & Schmid, 2009).

4. Status and recognition dimension. The fourth dimension refers to recognition and appreciation gained

² Translation by the authors; square brackets indicate omissions or insertions by the authors.

in and from work. An employment relationship can be described as precarious in relation to this dimension if one's work is less recognized and valued by personally relevant people and groups. A stable employment is an important basis for the formation of social relationships with colleagues and clients, which in turn provide sources for status, recognition, and personality development (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld & Zeisel, 1975). Recognition is an important basis for the development of self-esteem (Honneth, 2001) and the formation of identity (Sennett, 2001). Because precarious work is generally seen as an undesirable form of employment, it is associated with less recognition or appreciation by others and therefore contributes little to the formation of an individual (vocational) identity. This often results in compensating behavior, such as seeking need satisfaction in substitutional sources of identity and status (e.g., consumption; Bauman, 2005). Additionally, it is known that an imbalance between effort at work and received rewards (Siegrist, 1996) leads to negative consequences for health and well-being (e.g., Rugulies, Aust & Madsen, 2017). According to equity theory (Adams, 1965), people compare their work input and the appreciation and recognition received for it (output) with the input and output of their colleagues. If inequality is perceived in this comparison, people adapt their input (e.g., by reducing their commitment) in order to restore balance. It is therefore expected that a lack of recognition and appreciation in precarious employment is associated with impaired health and well-being and with reduced extraproductive and increased counterproductive work behavior.

*5. Meaningful-subject-related dimension.*³ The fifth dimension refers to experienced meaningfulness and fulfilment at and through work, as well as the degree of identification with a particular employment or work activity. An employment relationship can therefore be described as precarious if it is accompanied by a permanent perception of loss of meaning and lack of identification with one's work. Experiencing the presence of meaning includes dimensions of comprehension, purpose, and significance, which can be fed by various sources, of which the most important might be family and work (Steger, 2018). Meaning in work can be understood as the subjective experience of meaningfulness (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Schnell, Höge & Pollet, 2013), which is positively related to work engagement (Fairlie, 2011) and well-being (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway & McKee, 2007). A lack of meaning and identification with work is therefore assumed to be negatively related to well-being and health. A relation between the meaningful-subject-

related dimension and work-related behavior is also expected (Allan, Batz-Barbarich, Sterling & Tay, 2019).

The five dimensions should not be viewed in isolation but as mutually interacting with each other. Therefore, empirical investigations should consider all five dimensions. However, a certain order of precedence is suggested by Dörre's (2005) definition of precarious employment (see above). Accordingly, the reproductive-material dimension with the elements of low wages and job insecurity is at the core of precarious employment, whereas the other four refer to meaningful organizational participation and social integration.

Measurement of precarious employment

The considerations set out above form the theoretical basis of a new self-report measure for the assessment of *subjective experiences of work-related precariousness* (SEWP). We aimed at developing a questionnaire instrument suitable for quantitative research based on the comprehensive five-dimensional concept of precarious employment outlined above. The employment precariousness scale (EPRES, Vives et al., 2010) seems to be one of the first quantitative, multidimensional instruments to measure precarious employment. However, the EPRES applies a different theoretical approach (Rodgers, 1989) where subjective experiences are not a main focus. In addition, the scale blends different sets of frequency response scales as well as interval, ordinal and categorical response formats and uses different item numbers per subscale. As a consequence, a first precondition in constructing the SEWP scale was to employ a balanced number of items per dimension and use uniform response formats across all dimensions. So far, most studies on precarious employment focus on the instability of employment and therefore fail to cover the phenomenon of precarious employment and its associated risks in a comprehensive way (Puig-Barrachina et al., 2014). Schaufeli (2016) also argues that future research on job insecurity should include psychological mechanisms, the impact of new forms of work, country-specific differences in social security systems, and organization-specific influences. By constructing the SEWP scale, we thus answer the call for a more comprehensive approach in measuring subjective experiences associated with precarious employment.

³ While Brinkmann et al. (2006) refer to the fifth dimension as „work content-related“, other publications use the more tangible label „meaningful-subject-related“ for the same dimension (Dörre, Kraemer & Speidel, 2004; Kraemer, 2008; Kraemer & Speidel, 2004). We opted to use the latter term throughout this paper.

Method

Development of the SEWP scale

The SEWP scale was developed in a three-step process: First, based on a content analysis of the defining elements of each of the five dimensions, an initial set of 32 items was generated. We then subjected these items to a qualitative preliminary study with five participants of diverse forms of employment, using the cognitive survey method (Collins, 2003) to optimize items in terms of clarity, comprehensibility, and redundancy. Second, the resulting 25 items were tested in validation study 1 together with related measures. In this study, we invited students of the University of Innsbruck who were in employment to fill in an online questionnaire. Third, after taking into account the results of the first validation study, we generated two additional items and tested the 27-item instrument in validation study 2. In this study, we targeted the general working population by snowballing. We subjected the item pools of both studies to quantitative analysis and optimized each dimension of the scale, considering reliability of measurement, content validity, and factorial validity. In this paper, we report findings that draw upon the resulting 15-item scale.

Participants

In study 1, we recruited $n_1 = 268$ participants (74.6 % female, mean age: 26.0 ± 6.7 years, working hours: 19.0 ± 10.7 hours per week, median net income: 700 € per month, mean job tenure: 3.1 ± 1.1 years, level of education: 85.5 % qualified for university, extent of employment: 15.5 % full-time, 54.1 % part-time, 30.2 % marginal). In study 2, we recruited $n_2 = 213$ participants (54.9 % female, mean age: 32.7 ± 8.2 years; working hours: 35.0 ± 9.3 hours per week, median net income: 2000 € per month, mean job tenure: 3.9 ± 4.8 years, level of education: 94.8 % qualified for university, extent of employment: 77.9 % full-time, 16.0 % part-time, 6.1 % marginal). Across both studies, we therefore included $N = 481$ participants.

Measures

Subjective experience of work-related precariousness was measured with 5 dimensions of the newly developed SEWP instrument. All 15 items (3 per dimension), used the introduction „Due to my employment situation ...“ as a cognitive anchor. Each item was assessed on two different 5-point response scales: (1) perceived *applicability* of the respective aspect to one's situation („To what extent does this apply?“, 1 = *not at all*

to 5 = *completely*), (2) *strain* experienced as a result of the respective aspect („Do you feel burdened by this?“, 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*). Drawing on the „Belastungs-Beanspruchungskonzept“ (concept of work load and strain; Rohmert & Rutenfranz, 1975), we aimed at focusing on both the aspect of perceived applicability („Belastung“) and the associated perceived burden („Beanspruchung“). Mean scores were calculated for each dimension and for a global scale comprising all items (cf. Table 1 for summary descriptive statistics; item wordings of the current version of the measure are available from the authors upon request). To examine how the SEWP scale relates to important consequences of precarious employment, we included measures of psychological and physical health as well as work-related behavior.

Subjective well-being was measured with the WHO-5 Index (WHO, 1998). The WHO-5 comprises 5 items (sample item: „In the last two weeks I have been happy and in a good mood“) and is answered on a 6-point response scale ranging from 1 = *at no time* to 6 = *all the time* (cf. Table 1 for summary descriptive statistics).

Somatic complaints were measured with a shortened German version of the Occupational Stress Indicator (Cooper & Williams, 1991), translated by Höge, Sora, Weber, Peiró and Caballa (2015). Twelve items measure the frequency of somatic complaints such as sleep problems, digestive disorders, exhaustion, or loss of appetite (example item: „Please state how often you have the following complaints: sleep and sleep-through disorders“, 6-point response scale from 1 = *hardly or never* to 6 = *very often*, cf. Table 1).

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) was selected as a form of extraproductive work behavior and was measured with a 16-item instrument by Lee and Allen (2002). Eight items each relate to behaviors concerning the organization (OCBO, example item: „Show pride when representing the organization in public“) and to behaviors concerning individuals (OCBI, example item: „Willingly give your time to help others who have work-related problems.“). All items were answered on a 7-point response scale (1 = *never* to 7 = *always*, cf. Table 1). German items were generated following recommended standards of translation, back-translation, and comparison (McKay et al., 1996).

Workplace deviance (DEV) was chosen as a form of counterproductive work behavior and was measured with a 19-item instrument by Bennett and Robinson (2000); 12 items measured organizational deviant work behavior (organizational deviance, DEVO, example item: „Taken property from work without permission“) and 7 items measured interpersonal deviant work behavior (interpersonal deviance, DEVI, example item: „Made fun of someone at work“). Items used a 7-point response scale (1 = *never* to 7 = *daily*)

Table 1: Descriptive statistics, Pearson zero-order correlations and internal consistencies.

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	ω	1	2	3
1	SEWP Dimension 1 (reproductive-material)	2.59 2.27	1.10 1.15	.81 .88	.84**	.30** .37**	.37** .32**
2	SEWP Dimension 2 (social-communicative)	1.88 1.56	0.90 0.78	.73 .73		.76**	.44** .54**
3	SEWP Dimension 3 (legal-institutional)	1.99 1.42	0.95 0.63	.63 .63			.61**
4	SEWP Dimension 4 (status and recognition)	1.60 1.36	0.81 0.69	.81 .83			
5	SEWP Dimension 5 (meaningful-subject-related)	2.05 1.66	1.09 0.95	.89 .88			
6	SEWP Global Scale	2.02 1.65	0.67 0.61	.84 .87			
7	Subjective Well-being	3.46	1.05	.87			
8	Somatic Complaints	2.39	0.83	.85			
9	OCB Organization	4.91	1.42	.91			
10	OCB Individual	5.57	1.01	.84			
11	DEV Organization	1.59	0.61	.78			
12	DEV Individual	1.52	0.68	.78			

Note: $N = 477-481$; ω = McDonald's Omega Total; OCB = Organizational Citizenship Behavior; DEV = Workplace Deviance; for SEWP scales, values for the 2 response scales for applicability and strain are reported in lines 1 and 2 of each cell; correlations between response scales of the same dimension are provided in the matrix diagonal; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

and were translated following established procedures as described for OCB.

Data analysis

To analyze the factor structure of the SEWP scale, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) using full maximum likelihood estimation and established indicators of absolute and relative model fit. We assessed the reliability of the SEWP scale by using McDonald's Omega Total (McNeish, 2018) as an indicator of internal consistency. To establish criterion validity, we examined patterns of Pearson zero-order correlations. We performed all calculations with SPSS 24, AMOS, and R.

Results

Factorial validity

The factorial structure was examined with a series of CFA by analyzing participants' answers on both response scales separately for both studies. For each of these four independent analyses, we found an identical SEWP version of 15 items (3 items loading on 5 dimensions) to be the most suitable in terms of reliability as well as content and factorial validity. Testing both studies for measurement invariance revealed full (*applicability* response scale) or partial (*strain* response scale) tau-equivalent measurement, a necessary prerequisite for combined variance-covariance analyses

4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
.26**	.30**	.68**	-.28**	.37**	-.19**	-.02	.10*	-.06
.31**	.38**	.73**	-.36**	.46**	-.15**	.02	.17**	.00
.25**	.42**	.69**	-.29**	.32**	-.25**	-.15**	.15**	.01
.32**	.50**	.74**	-.34**	.38**	-.19**	-.05	.15**	.04
.34**	.40**	.73**	-.23**	.31**	-.29**	-.10*	.16**	.06
.40**	.43**	.68**	-.25**	.40**	-.16**	-.02	.19**	.09
.76**	.33**	.60**	-.16**	.29**	-.10*	-.07	.12**	.06
	.38**	.63**	-.23**	.35**	-.09	-.08	.11*	.09
	.77**	.73**	-.34**	.37**	-.48**	-.10*	.28**	.02
		.77**	-.41**	.43**	-.32**	-.02	.30**	.04
		.79**	-.39**	.49**	-.39**	-.12**	.24**	.02
			-.46**	.57**	-.26**	-.04	.27**	.06
				-.58**	.20**	.08	-.15**	-.06
					-.14**	.01	.21**	.13**
						.45**	-.24**	.01
							-.16**	-.15**
								.37**

(Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Because of the comparable findings, we report combined results for study 1 and study 2 in this paper. The measurement models for both response scales fit the data well (*applicability*: $\chi^2(80) = 138.88$, $p < .01$; $\chi^2/df = 1.74$; CFI = .98; TLI = .97; RMSEA = .04; $CI_{RMSEA} = [.03; .05]$, $p_{RMSEA} = .95$; *strain*: $\chi^2(80) = 145.84$, $p < .01$; $\chi^2/df = 1.80$; CFI = .98; TLI = .97; RMSEA = .04; $CI_{RMSEA} = [.03; .05]$, $p_{RMSEA} = .92$). As expected, correlations among the five dimensions were moderate to strong (Figure 1). Notably, latent correlations between dimensions 2 and 3 were particularly large (*applicability*: $r = .67$, $p < .01$; *strain*: $r = .84$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, variance explained in items 9, 12, and 14 by their respective dimensions (2 and 3) was considerably low (in the 18 % - 37 %

range; Figure 1). We consequently examined whether an alternative model with items of dimensions 2 and 3 loading on one single factor would fit the data better. We found that both fit parameters and item loadings of this four-factor model worsened when compared to the five-factor model (*applicability*: $\chi^2(84) = 211.01$, $p < .01$; $\chi^2/df = 2.51$; CFI = .95; TLI = .95; RMSEA = .06; $CI_{RMSEA} = [.05; .07]$, $p_{RMSEA} = .14$; *strain*: $\chi^2(84) = 172.56$, $p < .01$; $\chi^2/df = 2.05$; CFI = .97; TLI = .96; RMSEA = .05; $CI_{RMSEA} = [.04; .06]$, $p_{RMSEA} = .69$).

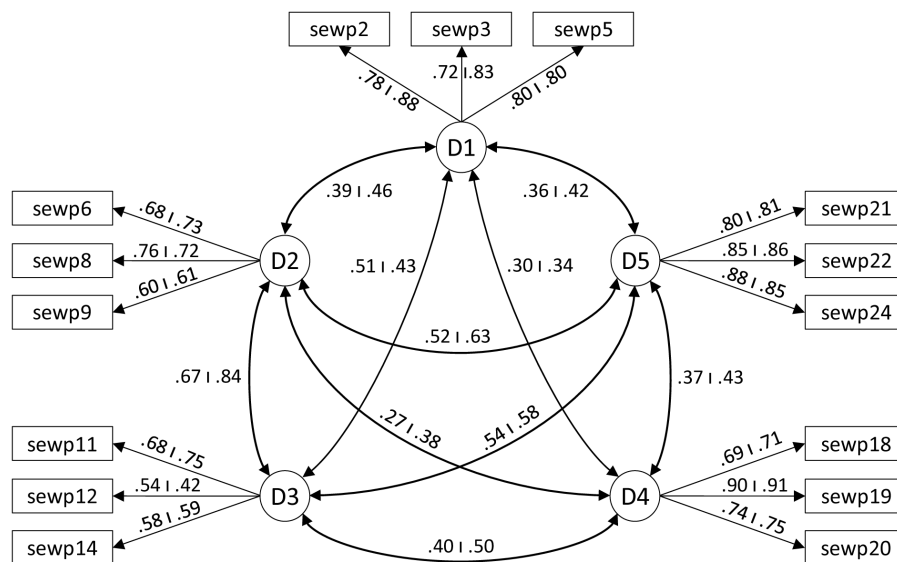


Figure: SEWP measurement model ($N = 481$; values separated by „|“ indicate standardized coefficients for the 2 SEWP response scales applicability and strain; all $p < .01$).

Descriptive statistics, reliability, and criterion validity

The SEWP mean scores (Table 1) show that participants consistently affirmed the applicability of each dimension more strongly than associated strain perceptions (all paired t-tests $p < .01$). The partially low item loadings found in the measurement models also manifested in lower internal consistencies of dimensions 2 and 3 when compared to the other dimensions, where consistencies were good. Albeit *applicability* and *strain* response scales of the same dimensions were highly correlated ($r = .61$ to $r = .84$, all $p < .01$), some differential correlation patterns were observed. *Applicability* of precarious employment (global scale) related to female compared to male gender ($r_{pb} = .15$, $p < .01$), lower levels of education ($r_s = .15$, $p < .01$), lower weekly working hours ($r = .28$, $p < .01$), lower monthly income ($r = .34$, $p < .01$) but not to age ($r = .08$, $p = .07$), or job tenure ($r = .01$, $p = .71$). Perceptions of *strain* due to precarious employment (global scale) related to female compared to male gender ($r_{pb} = .14$, $p < .01$), lower monthly income ($r = .19$, $p < .01$) but not to education levels ($r_s = .07$, $p = .15$), weekly working hours ($r = .08$, $p = .07$), age ($r = .05$, $p = .30$), or job tenure ($r = .02$, $p = .62$). Regarding criterion validity, we examined how the SEWP scale related to indicators of mental and physical health as well as extraproductive and deviant work behaviors. Table 1 shows that all SEWP dimensions consistently related to less subjective well-being and more somatic complaints, with small to medium effect sizes for the *applicability* response scale and medium to large effect sizes for the *strain* response scale. Similarly and with only one exception (status and recognition di-

mension), perceptions of precarious employment and corresponding strain were associated with less OCB and more workplace deviance, both pertaining to the organization, but hardly (OCBI) or not at all (DEVI) concerning individuals. Effect sizes were generally in the low to medium range. Compared to the five dimensions, the global scale exhibited the strongest associations with subjective well-being, somatic complaints, OCB, and workplace deviance.

Discussion

Summary of preliminary findings

In this study, we analyzed a new self-report instrument intended to measure subjective experience of work-related precariousness (SEWP). We found promising results for this measure currently under development: First, in line with the five-dimensional model of precarious employment, our analyses confirmed a stable five-factor structure of the instrument across both response scales and two independent studies. Second, internal consistencies of four dimensions suggested reliable measurement, while the legal-institutional dimension showed questionable reliabilities. Third, we found expected associations of all SEWP dimensions with personal and employment information, subjective well-being, somatic complaints, OCB, and workplace deviance. To summarize these preliminary findings, the SEWP scale in its current form already offers a reliable, valid, and economic way to quantitatively capture the multidimensional phenomenon of precarious employment. Despite these encouraging findings, however, the

SEWP scale is still under development, with a number of key points to be considered.

Further development of the SEWP

First, the third dimension exhibited some psychometric weaknesses, i.e., factor loadings of two items were comparatively low, resulting in moderate reliabilities. This mirrors difficulties in the item generation phase to find descriptors for the legal-institutional dimension that are salient to employees. For example, it is unclear to what extent employees are aware of their organizational participation rights, workplace health and safety regulations, and development opportunities. In this context, another issue that requires clarification concerns the distinctness of the social-communicative and the legal-institutional dimension. The strong latent correlations and the fact that a four-factor model still showed acceptable fit may suggest that participants perceived „equal participation“ (in social networks and concerning legal-institutional rights) as a salient commonality among both dimensions. Therefore, we aim to revise the legal-institutional dimension by tapping into a larger pool of items to strengthen both internal cohesion as well as distinctness of this dimension.

Second, while both response scales showed similar psychometric characteristics, there were subtle differences. Compared to the applicability scale, the strain scale tended to show stronger correlations with subjective well-being and somatic complaints, and weaker correlations with OCB. Further, mean values of the strain scale tended to be lower than those of the applicability scale (i.e., higher item difficulties). These findings align well with the conceptual differentiation of applicability and strain (Rohmert & Rutenfranz, 1975) and, therefore, add to the validity of our measurement approach. We currently recommend to use one or both response scales, depending on the purpose of the research (i.e., whether the applicability of aspects of precarious employment and / or the strain experienced due to these aspects are of primary interest) and the target population under study (e.g., the applicability scale may suffice as a screening for aspects of precarious employment, whereas the strain scale may be more appropriate in samples with high risk of precarious employment). Further research is needed to explore similarities and differences, as well as the (e.g., multiplicative) combination of both response scales.

The third point concerns the question under which conditions an employment situation may be labelled „precarious“. We suggest that objective features (e.g., employment relationship, amount of salary, integration in social security systems) form the core of precarious employment, whereas subjective evaluations of precariousness form an additional source of

information, allowing for a differentiated analysis of precarious employment. All SEWP dimensions were not designed to capture *descriptive* (objective) facts (e.g., monthly net income) but to ask for an *evaluation* of a possible precariousness aspect relative to the employment situation (e.g., „Due to my employment situation, nothing is usually left of my income by the end of the month“). Thus, we suggest that priority be given to objective (descriptive) facts to determine the possible degree of precarious employment, followed by a differentiated evaluation of precariousness aspects with the SEWP scale. Similarly, because the first and third dimension refer more to structural features than the second, fourth, and fifth dimension, it seems plausible to assume a hierarchical structure of dimensions within the SEWP scale. However, the correlation patterns show that it was not the first and third dimensions, but the fifth dimension and the global scale that exhibited the strongest correlation patterns across all criterion variables. We therefore currently recommend to either consider all SEWP dimensions equally or to prioritize dimensions depending on the research question. Furthermore, while the high correlation of the meaningful-subject-related dimension with subjective well-being may be explained in part by conceptual overlap, the findings highlight the greatest explanatory power results from the combined impact of all dimensions. To summarize, subjective experiences of precarious employment as measured by the SEWP scale must be interpreted in relation to objective features of the employment situation. On the one hand, this approach prevents subjective experiences (e.g., of impaired meaning in work) to be interpreted in terms of precarious employment when, in fact, objective features do not indicate precarious employment. On the other hand, the SEWP scale may help to reveal precariousness risks in situations when objective features do not clearly (but to some extent) indicate precarious employment. For example, different types of atypical employment may be characterized more clearly by establishing distinct precariousness profiles with the SEWP scale.

Limitations

One limitation concerns the composition of samples. In both samples, participants scored rather low on all SEWP scales, possibly explicable by high education levels. On the other hand, the first sample was dominated by atypically employed participants who, on average, reported higher SEWP than the second sample. Nevertheless, generalizability to samples with lower education (and presumably higher precarization risks) may be limited. Second, we solely relied on self-report data, which may be susceptible to various biases (e.g., social desirability, common method bias). While we

found meaningful correlations between SEWP scales and self-reported personal and employment information, confirming these associations with objective data could validate our findings. Third, our cross-sectional data do not permit causal inferences or analyses of prognostic validity. Fourth, the SEWP scale remains to be integrated into a nomological network to test its incremental and discriminant validity with regard to other constructs, as exemplified by Hopfgartner (2019).

Conclusion

This study presents a comprehensive, multidimensional concept of precarious employment and reports preliminary results of a self-report instrument for its measurement. As an analogy to our multidimensional approach, we refer to the broader concept of decent work (ILO, 2014) and specifically to research on minimum wages, where some authors have argued that pure economic subsistence is a too narrow concept to allow for cultural participation (e.g., Carr et al., 2016). Instead, they suggest the more comprehensive concept of the living wage that extends to meaningful participation at the workplace and in society (Shelburne, 1999), a notion that is also central to the multidimensional concept of precarious employment (Brinkman et al., 2006) utilized here. Nonetheless, in practice, the living wage is often derived by economic indicators (Carr et al., 2016). In contrast, a broader humanitarian perspective could be adopted by considering the five dimensions of precarious employment as factors that need to be addressed (and eliminated) to ensure decent work. By proposing precarious employment as an inverted but complementary perspective to some fundamental aspects of the decent work concept, we hope to inform and stimulate research on living wages that provides a foundation for decent working and living conditions.

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Individual and organizational dynamics of boundaryless work and employee wellbeing

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ABSTRACT

Societal and technological dynamics constantly change the interface between work and nonwork domains. Currently, developments in information and communication technologies are drivers of increased integration of work into private life. The notion of „boundaryless work“ implies both new opportunities for reconciliation of work and nonwork responsibilities as well as risks for employee wellbeing due to lack of detachment and recovery. The aim here was to gain a better understanding of how individuals and organizations can successfully manage the interfaces between work and private lives. This overarching theme was approached in seven study projects, five of which document original empirical research.¹ Taken together, these investigate the influence of individual, organizational, and cultural factors on the nature of boundaryless work, including their potential interplay and implications for employee wellbeing. Results largely confirm the relevance of examined factors. Limitations with regard to causal inferences and generalizability due to reliance on cross-sectional self-report data and convenience sampling apply. Practical implications include deliberate and open communication between employer and employees to ensure that individual and organizational needs and interests in workplace flexibility are balanced, supporting both worker wellbeing and organizational effectiveness. Considering individual, organizational, and cultural factors in the complex dynamics between work and private life elucidates important psychological processes at the intersection of work and non-work domains as well as determinants of employee wellbeing in an increasingly flexible and boundaryless world of work.

Keywords

Work and private life domains – boundaryless work behavior – segmentation and integration – organizational norms – personal preferences – conflict and enrichment – worker health

Over the past decades, sustained change in working conditions, particularly, working times and locations, has led to a „boundarylessness“ of employed work compared to preceding phases (Allvin, Aronsson, Hagström, Johansson & Lundberg, 2011; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Widespread non-standard, temporary, and often precarious work arrangements are byproducts of internationalization and compounding dynamics of accelerated sectoral, demographic, technological, and organizational change. The notion of „boundaryless work“ promises emergence of new opportunities for reconciliation of work and nonwork responsibilities as well as risks for employee wellbeing due to lack of detachment and recovery (Matusik & Mickel, 2011; Park,

Fritz & Jex, 2011). Information and communication technologies (ICT), including global internet connectivity, remotely accessible computer systems, and personal devices, such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones, facilitate working anytime and anywhere (Towers, Duxbury, Higgins & Thomas, 2006). Increasingly pertinent in this new digitalized, virtualized, and flexibilized workplace, are issues of extended availability outside working hours and growing overlap and integration of work and private domains (Dettmers, Vahle-Hinz, Bamberg, Friedrich & Keller, 2016; Korunka & Hoonakker, 2014). Official statistics and representative surveys illustrate this (sources in Palm, 2018). In Austria, the percentage of employees

¹ This article is based on the first author's cumulative PhD thesis at the Institute of Psychology of the University of Innsbruck, supervised by Prof. Dr. Jürgen Glaser; the present English-language summary was prepared jointly by the second and third author.

equipped by their company with portable internet devices rose from 15 % in 2012 to 28 % in 2017. In 2015, around 34 % worked during off-hours, 17 % worked on holidays, and 14 % reported daily varying working time patterns. In 2016, 22 % were „often“ or „very often“ expected to be available outside regular hours – corresponding with other European countries (e.g., 23 % in Germany). Qualitative changes in the nature of work are less readily captured in workplace statistics. An observed acceleration and intensification of work is partly triggered by new ICT, but certainly enabled and reinforced by it (Golden & Geisler, 2007; Korunka & Hoonakker, 2014). The observed progressing dynamization and dissolution of boundaries between gainful work and other life domains (family, hobbies, leisure) has given rise to intensive research in multiple fields, such as psychology, sociology, management, and computer science. From a psychological perspective, particularly relevant are implications of changing working and living conditions for individuals, organizations, and society, respectively the complex interdependencies between these (Kreiner, 2006). The perspective of this article is narrower, focused on psychological processes, behavior, and implications for personal wellbeing and health on the individual level. Our working concept of boundaryless work converges with the integration of work into the private domain (Bulger, Matthews & Hoffman, 2007; Ohly & Latour, 2014). This is one meaning of the more encompassing sociological concept of boundaryless work, which assumes that gainful employment has inherent expan-

sive tendencies, manifesting in multiple ways of work intensification and extensification (temporal, psychological, social; Allvin et al., 2011; Höge & Hornung, 2015). Our aim here was to gain a better understanding of how individuals can successfully manage the interfaces between their work and private lives (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). This topic was approached in seven study projects, investigating, from the perspective of the working subjects, the influence of individual, organizational, and cultural factors in boundaryless work, including their potential interplay and implications for personal wellbeing. Considering complex dynamics between work and private life, our research seeks to shed light on psychological processes at the intersection of work and non-work domains as well as determinants of employee wellbeing in an increasingly flexible and boundaryless world of work.

Boundaryless work: A research framework

Our framework model to study boundaryless work is shown in Figure 1. Individual preferences, organizational requirements, and perceived opportunity are included as influencing factors. Outcomes integrate the perspective of enrichment and conflict between work and private life, including mental health as a second-order consequence. Prior to discussing model components in more detail, some core assumptions on work boundaries are outlined.

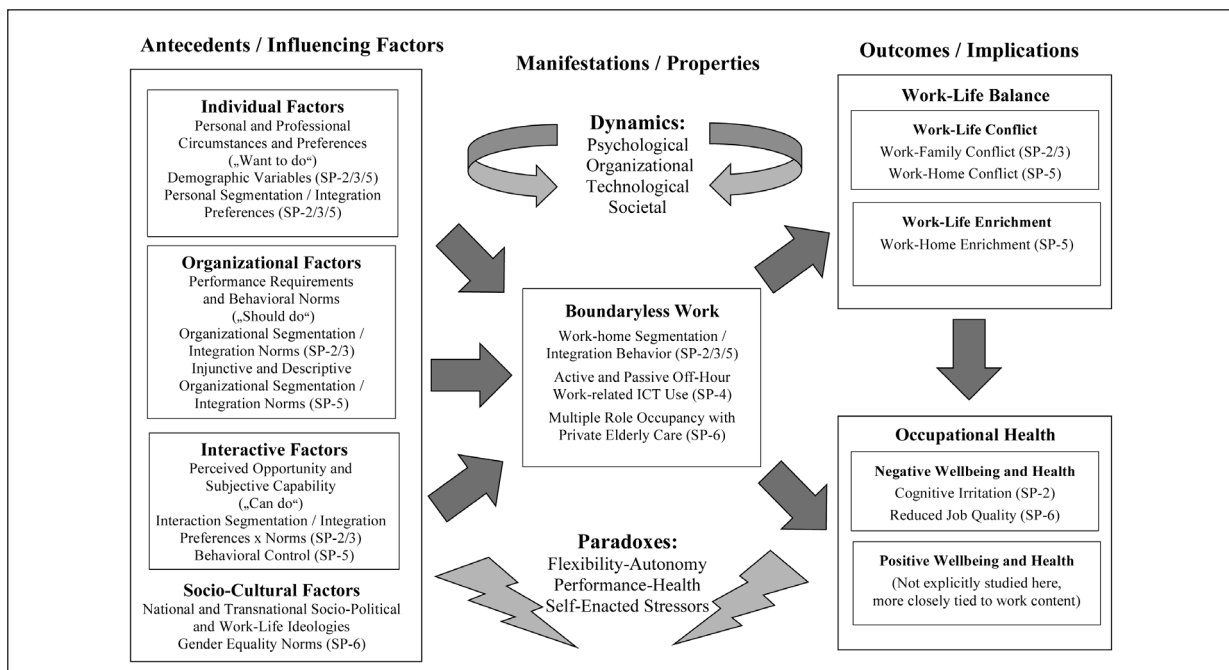


Figure 1: Research model of boundaryless work and allocation of constructs investigated in SP-2 to SP-6.

Work boundaries: Flexibility, permeability, dissolution

Building on earlier work in ecology and sociology, „boundary theory“ and „border theory“ conceptualize the interfaces between work and private life as idiosyncratically constructed demarcation lines enclosing and separating these two life domains (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Work boundaries are understood as „mental fences“, created and maintained by individuals to structure and simplify their environment, making it more controllable and less stressful. Work-life boundaries are socially constructed, that is, people share a general understanding of these interfaces and perceive them similarly. According to widely held assumptions, boundaries between work and private spheres are currently weakening – becoming more flexible and permeable. In this context, flexibility means the extent to which temporal and spatial work-home boundaries are „elastic“ or changeable, supporting variabilities in work schedule and location. Permeability describes the ease with which information, energy or objects can „pass through“ or „cross“ the boundary, allowing a person to physically reside in one domain, while being mentally and / or behaviorally engaged in the other; e.g., replying to work-related phone calls or email at home (psychological occupation with work while remaining in a nonwork environment; Clark, 2000). Switching between work and private activities requires „micro role transitions“ (Ashforth et al., 2000), suggesting that such „border crossings“ incur specific psychological efforts and costs (exiting one domain and entering the other). Technological progress has led to a weakening of boundaries, such that flexibility and permeability compound each other towards the „dissolution“ or „deconstruction“ of the respective demarcation lines (Duxbury, Higgins, Smart & Stevenson, 2014; Golden & Geisler, 2007). This „disintegration“, in turn, necessitates strategies for a „re-integration“ of the work and private sphere. The extent of cross-domain integration reflects a continuum, in which strict separation marks one end and complete congruence of life spheres the other. Work boundary properties of flexibility and permeability are direction-specific, such that the extent to which work spills over into private life and the opposite tendency of integrating personal matters into one's professional life, tend to be asymmetric. Cases in point, employees typically face less resistance to working longer hours than to leaving early, to take work home, rather than pursue private activities at work. While the exact configuration of directional boundary properties tends to be idiosyncratic, research has identified prototypical boundary management styles and profiles, partly depending on the experienced degree of controllability of boundary dynamics (Kossek,

Ruderman, Braddy & Hannum, 2012). The present study focuses on integration of work into private life. This narrower unidirectional perspective corresponds with our focus on the work domain and the objective to analyze, evaluate, and design working conditions to support occupational health, wellbeing and productivity. Use of ICT is often portrayed as instrumental to reconcile professional and private activities and obligations. However, research suggests that ICT use by itself does not necessarily lead to successful (positively experienced) integration, but that the resulting permeability between work and private domains can be experienced as negative and burdensome (Fenner & Renn, 2010; Matusik & Mickel, 2011; Ohly & Latour, 2014). Paradoxically, ICT use appears to be both a potential resource and a challenge or stressor in shaping the boundaries of work, making the conditions for an employee-oriented use of ICT a particularly relevant topic of current academic and practitioner interest.

Influencing factors: Preferences, requirements, capability

Stated objective of the reported research was to investigate factors that facilitate or constrain the successful integration of work and private life. Such influences can emanate on the individual level (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010), the work activity, the organizational structure, policies, and processes (Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006), as well as the broader work environment, such as the institutional, societal, and socio-cultural context (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017; Shockley, Douek, Smith, Yu, Dumani & French, 2017). Drawing on theories of planned behavior and reasoned action from social psychology (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010; McEachan, Taylor, Harrison, Lawton, Gardner & Conner, 2016), in conjunction with interactionist conceptions of person-environment interdependence (reciprocal determination or mutual adaptation; Kreiner, 2006; Semmer & Schallberger, 1996), we suggest a tripartite taxonomy of individual, organizational, and interactive factors to explain behavioral manifestations of boundaryless work. In popular terms, these reflect the motivational dimensions of „Want to do“, „Should do“, and „Can do“. Below they are more precisely described as: a) Individual (personal and professional circumstances and preferences); b) Organizational (performance requirements and behavioral norms; and c) Interactive factors (perceived opportunity and subjective capability). Additionally, ideological influences on the national and transnational socio-cultural level are taken into account (Nordenmark, 2004; Shockley et al., 2017).

Personal and professional circumstances and preferences. The first dimension refers to the needs, aspirations, and predispositions of the focal individual with

regard to shaping and customizing work boundaries to support the fulfillment of private and professional responsibilities, depending on personal and occupational circumstances, orientations, and goals (Methot & LePine, 2016). This includes the relative importance attributed to work and private life (e.g., work and family centrality), responsibilities and involvement in these two domains, as well as structural conditions, such as marital status, number of children, and living arrangements (Bulger et al., 2007; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Put differently, this dimension describes properties of the work-home boundary that the focal person „wants“ or „desires“ to support his or her personal circumstances, wellbeing, and ability to perform. Individual segmentation or integration preferences pertain to questions such as: „Do I want my work and private life to mix with each other? Is it acceptable for me to tend to work issues during leisure time? Am I willing to constantly switch between work and private roles?“ Personal preferences may be characterized as emphasizing segregation or integration of work and personal life domains – or some more complex configuration of these approaches, constituting a person’s individual boundary management style (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012).

Performance requirements and behavioral norms. The second dimension refers to the prescribed standards and normative pressures conveyed by the organization and the broader work environment regarding the type of work boundary behavior required, expected or desirable in a given context and position. Such work role requirements can be explicit or implied, mandatory or discretionary (at least to a certain extent), conveyed directly or indirectly, through persons or (organizational members) or rules and regulations, policies and practices, etc. (Koch & Binnewies, 2015; Piszczek & Berg, 2014). Decoding and integrating these environmental cues gives employees a blueprint of how they „should“ or „ought to“ behave to perform respective aspects of their work role in a socially acceptable manner. Associated key questions are: „To what extent is it expected in my company that I integrate work into my private life? To what extent do my colleagues or managers take work home with them? What expectations does my professional environment have towards me with regard to accessibility and availability for work matters during my personal time?“ One of the most important sources for interpreting social norms are observations of the behavior of other members (colleagues, supervisors, management), which, on aggregate conveys the working culture in an organization. Standards inferred from visible behaviors of other members are referred to as descriptive norms, whereas expectations conveyed directly by the employing organization are referred to as injunctive norms (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010; Barber

& Santuzzi, 2015; Derks, van Duin, Tims & Bakker, 2015). Although social norms regarding work behavior are to some extent specific to the respective organizational culture, they are strongly influenced by broader cultural, societal, and professional norms, such as the national and occupational work ethic (e.g., long hour work culture in Japan; time pressure as a „status symbol“ in managerial and medical professions; Hornung, Weigl, Glaser & Angerer, 2016; Nordenmark, 2004; Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017). Another source of normative beliefs regarding appropriate work-home boundary behavior are the individual standards and aspirations of the focal individual. However, these do not reflect genuinely personal predispositions but rather internalized norms of the environment, adopted through processes of occupational and organizational socialization. Accordingly, Leslie, King and Clair (2019) argue that individual beliefs and values regarding the relationship between work and private sphere are influenced by work-life ideologies on different levels. Following their arguments, individual and organizational segmentation or integration preferences are not independent but mutually influence each other.

Perceived opportunity and subjective capability. Closely related to notions of self-efficacy and locus of control, another central set of determinants of behavior relate to the extent to which a person experiences self-determination, as a combination of subjective autonomy and competence to perform the respective actions in a given situation (Kossek et al., 2006; Nijp, Beckers, Geurts, Tucker & Kompier, 2012). Here, this dimension of „can do“ refers to perceived opportunity and ability to influence, shape or manage the work-home boundary with regard to personal and/or organizational requirements and goals. Applied to our purpose, this pertains to questions such as: „To what extent can I decide for myself whether to integrate work into my private life? Do I have the necessary personal and structural resources to integrate work into my private life? Will I be able to successfully integrate my work and private life?“ Positive appraisals of these questions imply a combination of perceived control over one’s own behavior and the ability to affect change in the work environment. As such, it can be conceived as an interaction between individual and organizational antecedents, such that subjective abilities (e.g., self-management competencies, self-efficacy in ICT use) are met with matching situational opportunity or „degrees of freedom“ to engage in the respective behavior (e.g., autonomy-oriented work organization, working time systems). Another way to describe this complex of self-determination (discretion, authority, or latitude) is the concept of boundary control. Aspects of autonomy or control at work show consistent positive effects for personal wellbeing and occupational health (Nijp et al., 2012). Based on long-standing theorizing and re-

sults on the importance of personal agency, expected controllability is central to behavioral attempts to regulate work-nonwork interactions through flexible, reciprocal (case-by-case; bi-directional) integration of work and personal activities.

Outcomes: Conflict, enrichment, wellbeing

An applied objective of this research is to help employees to better manage the boundaries between work and private life (Bulger et al., 2007; Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Kreiner, 2006). Success can be evaluated from three perspectives, emphasizing different outcomes, namely, conflict, enrichment, and balance. From the traditional focus on conflict, minimizing or reducing stressful interferences between professional and private obligations is the main criterion for successful coordination (Kasearu, 2009). Enrichment additionally evaluates the self-management of work borders at the basis of fit and synergies, that is, positive interactions and „gain spirals“ between life domains (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Going beyond negative or positive exchanges, the third and „latest“ perspective emphasizes balance between work and private life, a dynamic state of optimal functioning, effectiveness, and experienced fulfillment in both areas of life, evaluated in a comprehensive or holistic fashion (Casper, Vaziri, Wayne, DeHauw & Greenhaus, 2018). While these related perspectives share the goal of a successful design of work boundaries, meta-analytic results confirm their conceptual differences. Work-life balance reflects an integrated and dynamic higher-level configuration arising from a fluid positive state of low conflict and high enrichment. Balance most closely corresponds with the salutogenic „meta-goals“ of protecting, restoring, and improving work-related psycho-social wellbeing (Casper et al., 2018; Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007). Included here are the perspectives of work-nonwork conflict and enrichment as well as work-related impairment of psychological health.

Compilation of study projects: Summary of results

Presented are seven collaborative study projects, conducted under the umbrella of a larger research program on flexibility at work. Each is linked to a conceptual or empirical contribution output (journal article, conference proceedings, working paper), documenting core research activities of the first author's PhD studies (Palm, 2018). Table 1 provides an overview. Short summaries are reported below, prior to an integrated discussion of findings, limitations, and implications. The first study project (SP-1) offers a review and integration of the literature, documenting initial efforts to gain an overview of the current state of research on

flexible work and the erosion of boundaries between private and professional life domains. Of special interest were influencing factors in successfully managing the work-nonwork interface and implications for occupational health. The second study project (SP-2) empirically tests a model of organizational (social norms) and individual (personal preferences) factors and their joint (interactive) influences on boundaryless work behavior (work-to-nonwork integration), including stressful and health-impairing consequences of work-life conflict and psychological irritation. The third (SP-3) is a replication, affirming core parts of the model in SP-2. The fourth (SP-4) uses an alternative conceptualization of boundaryless work in terms of work-related ICT use during nonwork hours, differentiating between active and passive use and work-life conflict and enrichment. Revisiting organizational and individual antecedents of boundaryless work, the fifth (SP-5) presents an extended model of motivating factors, based on theories of planned behavior and reasoned action. The sixth (SP-6) adopts a broader view of boundaryless working by investigating cross-cultural influences (gender equality norms) on negative work-related consequences (reduced job scope) associated with multiple role occupancy (private elderly care responsibilities). The last study project (SP-7) closes the feedback loop to the field by developing practitioner guidelines for the health-promoting design of boundaryless work.

Study Project 1: Review of research on boundaryless work and its implications for occupational health.

The aim of this first study project was to gain an overview on the current state of research regarding the forms and trends of the flexibilization of work and its effects on the mental health of employees. The main focus here was on temporal (work schedule) and spatial (location of work) variabilities, rather than numerical (contractual work arrangement) or functional (work tasks) aspects. Theoretically, these were approached from the perspective of „boundarylessness“ (Allvin et al., 2011), that is, the progressing erosion or dissolution of the boundaries between work and private life, attributable to structurally inherent expansive tendencies in employed work, simultaneously driving and being driven by technological and social change. Overall, there seems to be a wide consensus in the literature that the prototypical standard employment relationship of the industrial era is increasingly replaced by new forms of employment that are more variable and changeable, particularly, with regard to aspects of space and time. Changes in work organization are associated with positive effects for occupational health only if the employees are provided

Table 1: Overview of study projects on boundaryless work.

	Description	Authors	Original Title	Documentation	Date	Type
SP-1	Review of research on boundaryless work and its implications for occupational health.	Glaser J., Palm E.	Flexible und entgrenzte Arbeit – Segen oder Fluch für die psychische Gesundheit?	Wirtschaftspsychologie 18 (3), 82-99.	2016	Narrative literature review (journal article)
SP-2	Organizational, individual, and interactive antecedents and negative occupational health outcomes of boundaryless work.	Palm E., Hornung S., Heiden B., Herbig B., Kolb S., Nowak D., Herr C., Glaser J.	Entgrenzung von Arbeit: Auswirkungen organisationaler Segmentierungsnormen auf Entgrenzungsverhalten, Rollenkonflikt und Irritation.	In S. Hildenbrand & M. A. Rieger (Hrsg.), Dok. 55. DGAUM Jahrestagung (pp. 464-467).	2015	Survey research (conference proceedings)
SP-3	Additional evidence on the antecedents and negative occupational health outcomes of boundaryless work.	Palm E., Glaser J., Heiden B., Herbig B., Kolb S., Nowak D., Herr, C.	Zusammenspiel von organisationalen Normen, individuellen Präferenzen und arbeitsbezogenem Entgrenzungsverhalten mit Konflikten zwischen Arbeits- und Privatleben.	Wirtschaftspsychologie 18 (2), 44-54.	2016	Survey research (journal article)
SP-4	Conflict and enrichment as negative and positive pathways for ICT use in boundaryless work.	Höge T., Palm E., Strecker C.	Anforderungen an selbstorganisierte Arbeit und das Verhältnis von Arbeit und Privatleben. Zur Rolle von passiver und aktiver IuK-Technologie-Nutzung in der Freizeit.	Wirtschaftspsychologie 18 (2), 35-45.	2016	Survey research (journal article)
SP-5	Testing a theory-based extended model on the psychological antecedents of boundaryless work.	Palm E., Seubert C., Glaser, J.	Understanding employee motivation for work-to-nonwork integration behavior: A reasoned action approach.	Journal of Business and Psychology (online first, 16.08.2019).	2019	Survey research (journal article)
SP-6	Cultural influences on the downsides of boundaryless work for women with multiple role occupancy.	Bainbridge H.T.J., Palm E.	A cross-cultural study of employee non-work eldercare responsibilities and changes in job scope.	Working Paper, UNSW Business School, Sydney Australia.	2018	Secondary data analysis (unpublished manuscript)
SP-7	Developing practitioner guidelines for cultivating health-promoting boundaryless work in SMEs.	Weilnhammer V., Heinze S., Heiden B., Palm E., Herbig B., Lücke G., Nowak D., Glaser J., Herr C.	Erstellung eines Handlungsleitfadens für einen gesundheitsförderlichen Umgang mit Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien, Flexibilisierung und Erreichbarkeit in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen.	Gesundheitswesen 81 (2), 115-119	2019	Practitioner guidelines (journal article)

with authority, autonomy, and opportunity to use resulting flexibility potentials to align their work with personal and professional needs, preferences, and goals (Kossek et al., 2006; Nijp et al., 2012). In contrast, the external determination of time and place of work typically manifests in additional flexibility demands, respectively, stressors and strain (Joyce, Pabayo, Critchley & Bambra, 2010). The reality of workplace flexibility resides between these poles and involves multiple dimensions, resulting in complex trade-offs and emergent processes that defy generalized predictions. While some findings are relatively robust (e.g., working time autonomy, self-scheduling, and locational choices vs. shift work, standby, external determination and limited predictability of work hours and sites), how ICT use affects the underlying trade-offs and dynamics is less clear (Mazmanian, Orlikowski & Yates, 2013). Boundary theory is useful to analyze and explain dynamic interactions between work and private life. A broad spectrum of constructs has been suggested to operationalize properties of the work home interface, e.g., time-, energy-, and behavior-based conflict and enrichment, levels and episodes, spill-over and cross-over, directed effects and interactions, boundary strength, boundary management styles, etc. (Bulger et al., 2007; Höge, 2009; Kossek et al., 2012). These are reviewed and integrated into a multi-level model of determinants and implications of flexibility for individuals, organizations, and societal institutions. Based on this conceptual work, central constructs for subsequent empirical studies are identified.

Study Project 2: Organizational, individual, and interactive antecedents and negative occupational health outcomes of boundaryless work.

The second study project examines independent and joint effects of identified organizational and individual antecedents on boundaryless work, operationalized as integrating work into the private sphere (taking work home, being available during nonwork hours, working on holidays). Hypotheses specified a „chain of effects“ from organizational segmentation-integration norms to work-to-nonwork integration behavior, conflict between work and family roles, and work-related psychological health, operationalized as cognitive irritation (Mohr, Müller, Rigotti, Aycan & Tschan, 2006). Personal segmentation-integration preferences were suggested to moderate the relationships between organizational norms and boundaryless work behavior as well as between the latter and the extent of work-family role conflict. Hypotheses are tested in a sample of $N = 319$ employees from 10 small or medium sized enterprises (SMEs) from different branches of the German industry (e.g., manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, technology), participating in an intervention study on

flexibility at work („FlexA“ project; for an overview see Herr et al., 2016 a). Analyses were conducted using hierarchical regression and the PROCESS macro in SPSS 20.0. Results confirm a chain of mediated relationships from organizational segmentation standards to boundaryless work behavior to resulting role conflict and cognitive irritation as first- and second-order outcomes. High preference for segmentation (integration) strengthens (weakens) the negative implications of boundaryless work-to-home integration behavior for role conflict and subsequent irritation. However, no moderating role (interaction) of organizational norms and personal preferences was found.

Study Project 3: Additional evidence on the antecedents and negative occupational health outcomes of boundaryless work.

The third study project consists of a recalculation of core parts of the model presented in SP-2, using refined statistical methods and data. Analyses were conducted with PROCESS in SPSS 20.0, based on $N = 299$ employees from 10 SMEs participating in the previously mentioned flexibility project. Note that this study uses an alternative configuration of data overlapping with the sample in SP-2 and, thus, is not an independent validation. As reported above, organizational norms predict unbounded work behavior, which, in turn, is associated with increased role conflict between work and private life. The negative relationship between organizational segmentation norms and role conflict is completely mediated by work-related dissolution of boundaries. Depending on the direction of their coding, individual preferences strengthen / boost / accentuate (segmentation) or weaken / buffer / attenuate (integration) the positive relationship between work-boundary behavior and role conflict. Overall, additional analyses confirmed results from SP-2, which proved stable and plausible.

Study Project 4: Conflict and enrichment as negative and positive pathways for ICT use in boundaryless work.

Contributing to research on organizational flexibility requirements (Höge & Hornung, 2015), this study examines a specific aspect of boundaryless work, the work-related use of ICT technology outside working hours (Ohly & Latour, 2014; Park et al., 2011). Off-hour ICT use is represented as a consequence of increased requirements for self-organization and an antecedent to both negative and positive interactions between work and personal life (work-family conflict and enrichment). A distinction is made between passive, other-initiated or received, and active, self-initiated or outgoing ICT use. These two forms were assumed to

play opposite mediating roles between requirement for self-organization and the experience of conflict and enrichment between work and private life (Matusik & Mickel, 2011). Analyses are based on an occupationally heterogeneous convenience sample of $N = 252$ working individuals, employed in different sectors and industries in Germany and Austria (e.g., administration, production, services), gathered by students in the course of a research seminar in work psychology. Study constructs were measured with multi-item scales, psychometrically assessed in preliminary analyses. Hypotheses were tested in an integrated structural equation model (AMOS 21.0). Results corroborated a positive relationship between requirements for self-organization at work and both types of ICT use in leisure time. As hypothesized, passive (other-initiated) ICT use was associated with elevated work-life conflict, whereas active (self-initiated) ICT use related to experienced enrichment of private life through the work activity.

Study Project 5: Testing a theory-based extended model on the psychological antecedents of boundaryless work.

This study project (SP-6) revisits the topic of the psychological drivers of boundaryless work behavior, testing an extended set of predictors based on the theory of reasoned action and the (conceptually close) reasoned action approach (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010; McEachan et al., 2016). Drawing on a rich theoretical and empirical basis in social and health psychology, this refined conceptualization also lends itself to the broader categories of our research framework. In addition to personal segmentation–integration preferences, two types of organizational segmentation–integration norms were included – namely, injunctive (directly conveyed organizational requirements or expectations) and descriptive (indirectly inferred from the observed behavior of other members; Barber & Santuzzi, 2015; Derks et al., 2015; Fenner & Renn, 2010). Further, the level of experienced personal control over work boundary behavior as an indicator at the intersection of individual and organizational processes (subjective and objective autonomy and authority over segmentation, respectively, integration; Nijp et al., 2012; Kossek et al., 2006; Kreiner, 2006). This refined model of antecedents was tested using data gathered in a collaborative project, involving recruitment of respondents through personal contacts and networks of students participating in several research seminars in applied psychology (purposive sampling, snowball method). To increase methodological rigor, a temporal separation of one month between the measurement of antecedents and self-reported work boundary behavior was part of the improved study

design. Altogether, $N = 748$ employees from different organizations and sectors of the economy in Austria and Germany filled out online questionnaires. Hypotheses were tested in AMOS 23.0 using structural equation modeling (SEM) with full maximum likelihood estimation. Results confirm that all factors contribute independently to explaining variance in self-reported work-to-nonwork integration behavior. The largest effect size was obtained for personal preferences, followed by injunctive (directly communicated) organizational norms. Descriptive norms (observed behavior) and behavioral control showed weaker, yet statistically significant time-lagged relationships with work boundary behavior; notably, the effect of behavioral control was negative, suggesting a tendency among respondents to avoid integrating work into one's private life, if possible.

Study Project 6: Cultural influences on the downsides of boundaryless work for women with multiple role occupancy.

The objective of SP-6 was to examine the extent to which private care obligations for elderly family members have an impact on the quality of work assigned to female workers (job breadth, scope of responsibilities), thus possibly disadvantaging this group and constraining their integration into the labor market (Bainbridge & Broady, 2017; Zacher & Winter, 2011). Notably, this study uses a broader conceptualization of boundaryless work in terms of multiple role occupancy. Further included are influences emanating from beyond the organization in the broader societal environment, in terms of cultural norms or social values regarding gender equality on a national level. It was assumed that national gender equality norms would affect both the job scope itself as well as the strength of the relationship between private elderly care activities and the breadth of involvement at work. The study is based on a secondary data analysis of a subsample of the sixth European Survey on Working Conditions by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, freely available for scientific research, using the national cultural dimensions identified in the GLOBE project. A suitable data set was extracted, comprising 1,046 female employees with private care obligations aged 50–64 from 19 European countries. Hypotheses were tested in multiple moderated regression analyses (SPSS 23.0). The frequency of care responsibilities for elderly relatives (daily, weekly, monthly) relates negatively to the scope of assigned tasks and professional responsibilities. National social values on gender equality had a positive direct main effect and moderated the relationship between private responsibilities and reduced job scope, such that this detrimental, punitive or discriminatory

effect was weaker (stronger), respectively disappeared altogether, when cultural beliefs emphasized equality (disparity) between sexes. Results affirm the importance of higher-level normative influences in boundaryless work and its consequences.

Study Project 7: Developing practitioner guidelines for cultivating health-promoting boundaryless work in SMEs.

The final study project consisted of involvement in developing guidelines for practitioners, offering concrete and actionable recommendations regarding the design of health-promoting conditions for ICT use and flexible work practices. This undertaking was positioned to meet widespread needs for extended accessibility, specifically in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Basis of the guidelines were the results and experiences obtained in the FlexA project. These were supplemented by an additional literature review on relevant intervention and implementation studies as well as practitioner-oriented publications. Applying systematic literature search procedures in major databases (MEDLINE, PsycINFO, etc.) revealed that there currently are no scientifically sound intervention studies on the effects of ICT use on employee wellbeing and health. Additional relevant material was retrieved and integrated with reference to recommended procedures (McDonald, Brown & Bradley, 2005; Sheeran & Silverman, 2003). Subsequently, own research findings and supplementary materials were synthesized into practical recommendations for the design of flexible work, paying special attention to generalizability across companies and industries, practical relevance and applicability, and the particular conditions in SMEs (Herr et al., 2016 b).

Discussion: Implications, limitations, outlook

Reported study projects have yielded results that are relevant to identifying factors in the successful integration of work and private life and associated effects on well-being. Examined were influences of organizational norms and personal preferences regarding segmentation or integration of work and private life on self-reported boundaryless work behavior as well as the impact of the latter on experienced work-nonwork conflict, enrichment, and psychological strain. The conceptual basis was laid in a literature review in SP-1. In terms of methods, this subproject included the application and evaluation of systematic literature review and meta-analysis procedures. Based on a-priori specified protocols, systematic searches were carried out in major databases (MEDLINE, PsycINFO, SocINDEX, EconLit, Business Source Complete) and results

retrieved, evaluated, and documented. Overall, systematic review methods were found limitedly useful to synthesize the heterogeneous, fragmentary, and interdisciplinary literature with regard to a rather broad and open research question such as ours. Moreover, studies that satisfy the rigorous criteria of systematic reviews (random trial-control studies) are extremely rare (Joyce et al., 2010; Nijp et al., 2012). Therefore, a narrative review and qualitative model-building approach was used. In Figure 1, constructs in the empirical studies are allocated to components of our research framework. Notably, for constructs in SP-6, this allocation is approximate only; for instance, multiple role occupancy through private care responsibilities does not fully align with our focus on work-nonwork integration but corresponds with broader notions of boundaryless work (Bainbridge & Broady, 2017; Nordenmark, 2004). Similarly, as job breadth is established as a core determinant of occupational health (e.g., Karasek's job demand-control model; Häusser, Mojzisch, Niesel & Schulz-Hardt, 2010), reduced job scope was included here as a health-relevant outcome of quality of work (see figure 1). A more direct indicator of job strain was found in the concept of irritation at work.

Based on our framework model, results on the influences on boundaryless work can be summarized with reference to the tripartite taxonomy of individual, organizational, and interactive factors. Successful integration of life spheres, achieved by designing, shaping, and negotiating boundaries between work and private life, is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, in which inter- and intra-individual differences play important roles (Hornung, Weigl, Glaser & Angerer, 2016; Piszczek & Berg, 2014; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). In addition to directly predicting behavior, individual attitudes regarding the separation or fusion of work and private domains (segmentation-integration preferences) influenced the connection between work-related dissolution of boundaries and experienced role conflict between work and private life (Kreiner, 2006; Methot & LePine, 2016). Results largely corresponded with our conjectures, yet, a moderating role of segmentation preferences on the relationship between organizational segmentation norms and boundaryless work behavior was not supported (a finding discussed below). However, the more segmentation (integration) is personally desired, the more (less) stressful conflict arises from work-to-nonwork integration behavior mandated by the environment. Therefore, employees are well advised to pay attention to and heed their personal preferences in managing work boundaries – or be mindful of aggravated stress and strain when this is not possible.

Results of SP-2, SP-3, and SP-5 confirm a central role of organizational norms in either stimulating and reinforcing or discouraging and containing personally

harmful or „self-endangering“ boundaryless work behavior (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015; Dettmers, Deci, Baeriswyl, Berset & Krause, 2016). Employers can directly and indirectly contribute to or prevent work-family conflict and facilitate enrichment via the demands and expectations they direct at their employees and the type of working culture they cultivate. SP-5 confirmed that each of these aspects, injunctive (conveyed) and descriptive (observed) norms, contribute independently to explaining variance in boundaryless work behavior and, thus, complementary pathways for occupational health management. Based on person-environment fit theory, personal preferences for integration (segmentation) were assumed to strengthen the effects of organizational integration (segmentation) norms on boundaryless work behavior through processes of activation, reinforcement, and mutual adaptation (Kreiner, 2006; Semmer & Schallberger, 1996). The absence of such an interaction (SP-2, SP-3) could be attributable to this very interdependence, such that personal preferences already account for requirements and expectations conveyed in organizational norms. However, this finding may also suggest that work-home integration behavior is more strongly socially sanctioned and only limitedly discretionary. The relatively small negative effect of behavioral control on work-home integration in SP-5 underscores that when employees feel that such behavior is discretionary, they tend not to engage in it. This converges with the perspective of organizational flexibility requirements in SP-4. Drawing on critical concepts from industrial sociology, flexibility requirements are interpreted as consequences of efficiency-oriented rationalization strategies associated with subjectified forms of work intensification and work extensification (Höge & Hornung, 2015). This concept introduces a critical dimension according to which work-home integration behavior reflects self-enacted (subjectified) work extensification, a „colonialization“ of the private sphere by an inherently expansive work domain (Allvin et al., 2011). Thus, the recommendation to maximize employee authority over their work boundary behavior may collide with organizational flexibility interests. Described in the flexibility discourse in terms of flexibility-autonomy and performance-health paradoxes, these are recurring manifestations of the structurally antagonistic interests in employment (Putnam, Fairhurst & Banghart, 2016). Paradoxically, research from a work boundary perspective, which tends to downplay (or has abandoned) structural factors and the „cold“ realities of industrial relations, rediscovers these enduring themes under changing conditions in new phenomena, concepts, and terminology.

In terms of outcomes, results largely confirmed our a-priori assumptions. A manifestation of the classic „performance-health paradox“, the „default mode“

of boundaryless work behavior are negative implications for personal life and impaired occupational well-being and health (Dettmers, Vahle-Hinz et al., 2016; Höge, 2009). These negative effects can be partly compensated (buffered or reduced) by being responsive to employee segmentation-integration preferences and increasing controllability. This, however, may result in the organizationally desired behavior being withheld or limited, illustrating what can be framed as the flexibility-autonomy paradox (Mazmanian et al., 2013). Further, boundaryless work embodies a recurring paradox of „new“ work design, in terms of the amalgamation of self-directed behavior and work stressors as self-endangering work behavior, resulting from indirect control and subjectification of performance requirements (Hornung, Höge, Glaser & Weigl, 2017; Dettmers, Deci et al., 2016). Our focus here was on negative occupational health implications, exemplified by the construct of cognitive irritation – a psychological extensification of work through increased (and suspended) need for recovery (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015; Mohr et al., 2006). Positive occupational well-being and health was explicitly not included here, partly because the satisfaction of „higher-order needs“ more strongly depends on the (intrinsic) content rather than the temporal and spatial (extrinsic) dimensions of work (Glaser, Hornung, Höge & Seubert, 2018). Future research should seek to further reconcile positive and negative perspectives on occupational health, in particular, with reference to theories of personality development, meaning, and self-actualization under the transformed and constantly changing conditions in the „new“ flexible world of work.

In making research results usable for practitioners, SP-7 closes the feedback loop, completing a full cycle of the applied research process. Employers are reminded of their legal responsibilities and the importance of normative social influences at the organizational level. Consciousness is raised for the demands and strains that increased flexibility and accessibility requirements impose on employees. Direct and open two-way communication and responsiveness to employee requests are recommended to clarify, align, and respond to changing organizational and individual flexibility interests (Herr et al., 2016 b). Specific recommendations include ways to monitor, control, and contain health-impairing tendencies of boundarylessness, take into account individual circumstances and needs of employees regarding the integration or segmentation of work and private life, and increasing personal autonomy and authority of employees to modify and self-design their work-nonwork boundaries to restore, maintain or improve balance between life domains (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Kossek et al., 2006). Corresponding with sociotechnical systems design, recommendations are discussed with regard to

their human (e.g., self-management and interpersonal skills), organizational (e.g., working time systems and policies), and technological (e.g., devices, functionalities, and support) implications.

As with most research, this work has its limitations. With some exceptions (SP-5), empirical investigations were based on cross-sectional, single-source, self-report data. Issues raised by this design include common method variance, lacking causal inferences, perceptive biases, and response tendencies. Further, our convenience samples are not representative, limiting generalizability. Analyses reported in SP-2 and SP-3 use overlapping samples; SP-3, thus, does not provide an independent validation, only additional arguments for the robustness of SP-2 results. Minor constraints arise from the use of adapted, abbreviated or not previously validated translations of survey instruments. A desideratum for future studies would be to include objective data (e.g., logfiles of ICT use), multiple measurement points (panel design, diary studies), external assessments by additional respondents (e.g., managers, colleagues, spouses), and systematic triangulation of results through qualitative data.

The present research set out to study inherently complex and dynamic phenomena, raising the bar for theoretical arguments and empirical methods. The very idea of work-life balance can be conceived as improved dynamic allocation of time and mental resources between coexisting work and personal life domains. Due to the mostly cross-sectional design, our investigations do not allow inferences on feedback processes and reciprocal determination (mutual causality), but suggest research opportunities in this regard. Personal preferences for and subjective evaluations of the extent of work-life integration as well as their effects on one's private life and well-being likely are related and interdependent. Persons with strong preferences for segregating domains may assess cross-border transgressions of work into the private sphere more negatively than those with highly integrated professional and personal lives – and vice versa. To reduce complexity, we focused on integration of work into private life. However, including the opposite direction of integrating private life into work is vital to understanding the complex interactions between work and nonwork domains in their entirety. Conflicts between professional and private obligations can possibly be avoided or reduced, depending on the possibility to pursue private matters during working hours (e.g., visits to authorities) using organizational infrastructure, services, or other resources (e.g., ICT, sports facilities, childcare). The analysis of the interplay of professional and private obligations over time and the inclusion of other professional or private stakeholders would be valuable to extend our findings. Particularly, changing needs and preferences across stages of life (e.g., early

career development, parenthood, care for elderly relatives) should be investigated to find out more about age-related and generational dynamics.

As shown in SP-6, the integration of life domains does not happen in a „social vacuum“, but is influenced by organizational norms and policies as well as broader factors in the organizational and socio-cultural environment. Future research should extend the perspective of cross-cultural context-dependence by including additional cultural norms and values (collectivism, uncertainty avoidance), national regulations (labor laws), and demographic developments (ageing societies). The recently suggested perspective of work-life ideologies (Leslie et al., 2019) offers a promising approach to study the contextual basis and consequences of individual and collective beliefs about the relationships between life domains. The reconciliation of work and private life remains a current topic at the intersection of social and psychological processes affecting individuals, organizations, and society, presenting researchers, employers and employees with new – and some still unknown – challenges.

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Task flexibility through individualized work redesign – Probing a three-pronged approach

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates three individual-level aspects of work flexibility, a) active use of task autonomy, b) self-initiated job crafting, and c) negotiation of task-related idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) authorized by superiors. It tests their interaction in predicting individual self-reported quality of working life and occupational health using a survey of 279 German-speaking workers. Psychometrically robust 4-item scales operationalized task-focused autonomy, crafting, and i-deals. Moderated linear regressions, controlling for gender, age, and additional work characteristics, assessed the main and interaction effects of these three aspects of work flexibility on indicators of the quality of working life, including positive work-related states, work-home interactions, and health-impairment. Task autonomy was consistently associated with beneficial effects, while i-deals related to some but not all positive indicators. Effects of task crafting were mostly spurious, except from an unexpected adverse relationship with work-home conflict. In contrast, 2-way interactions of i-deals and crafting indicated positive effects on four outcomes while 3-way interactions were found for three outcomes – affective commitment, meaning of work, and work-home enrichment. Results suggest synergy between task i-deals and crafting, especially under conditions of high autonomy, with positive interaction effects on favorable work-related experiences and states.

Keywords

Work design – job crafting – idiosyncratic deals – control at work – quality of working life – stress and health – interaction effects

The exercise of individual control and influence is core to the psychological effects of work and organizational design (Langfred & Moye, 2004; Sauter, Hurrell & Cooper, 1989; Spector, 1986). The present study conceptualizes task-related („functional“) workplace flexibility (hence „task flexibility“) in terms of its potential role in personal agency and self-determination. It identifies three ways in which individuals exercise control over their work tasks: top-down, bottom-up, and hybrid processes (Parker, van den Broeck & Holman, 2017). Top-down processes create task flexibility by designing jobs that provide individuals with opportunities to exercise autonomy in their daily work activities (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; cf. Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Task flexibility also can be realized through bottom-up or emergent job crafting, where individuals proactively alter their work to make it more personally rewarding, meaningful, or less stressful (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; cf. Tims & Bakker, 2010). Lastly, individuals can

attain task flexibility by negotiating with their employer or its agents to alter their tasks and other working conditions, a hybrid or mixed-level process that combines personal agency with employer approval (Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer & Weigl, 2010; Rousseau, 2005). The present study investigates the main and interaction effects of these three modes of task flexibility on employee outcomes. Thus our research contributes to the body of work that Grant and Parker (2009) termed „proactive and relational“ perspectives in work design. It does so by examining job autonomy, i-deals and job crafting concurrently. Despite integrative theoretical reviews, empirical studies have treated these modes of influence separately (for meta-analytic reviews see Rudolph, Katz, Lavigne & Zacher, 2017 and Liao, Wayne & Rousseau, 2016). Seeking to integrate research on task flexibility, we first test whether task crafting and task i-deals are empirically distinct both from each other and from the task autonomy in-

herent in the job. Second, we examine the simultaneous and joint effects of these modes of attaining task flexibility. Although main effects have been examined for a range of positive work outcomes (e.g., job performance, positive attitudes) for i-deals (Liao et al., 2016), job crafting (Rudolph et al., 2017), and task autonomy (Langfred & Moya, 2004), their simultaneous or joint effects are rarely examined. A notable exception, Rofcanin, Berber, Koch, and Sevinc (2016) have compared the effects of i-deals and job crafting on self-reported performance and job attitudes, concluding that i-deals were more relevant for eliciting positive employee responses than job crafting. Our study extends this line of research by being the first to examine not only the simultaneous (additive), but also joint (interactive) effects of task i-deals and crafting—in conjunction with the level of autonomy afforded by the job itself. Our study builds on Hornung et al. (2010), who introduced i-deals to the work design literature. It goes beyond this earlier work by a) including an empirical measure of job crafting; b) focusing on interactive effects; and c) investigating a broader range of outcomes related to both positive and negative work experiences. This approach reconnects this study with earlier research investigating i-deals in the context of organizational efforts to increase the quality of working life through employee-oriented forms of workplace flexibility, such as home-based teleworking (Hornung, Rousseau & Glaser, 2008). Thus, we extend research on individualized work redesign by investigating interactions among job autonomy and employee-initiated (negotiated and unauthorized) task changes.

A three-pronged approach to work redesign

Top-down processes: Task autonomy

Organizational human resource management practices, programs, and interventions can enhance the freedom employees have to personalize their work tasks, a change often introduced „top-down“ by the employer (Nielsen, Nielsen, Ogbonnaya, Käsälä, Saari & Isaksson, 2017; Parker, 2014; Parker et al., 2017). A key and widely studied aspect of top-down work design is job (or sometimes „task“) autonomy, the degree of freedom or discretion in making task-related decisions (e.g., setting work goals, determining and scheduling work processes; Langfred & Moya, 2004; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Autonomy as an attribute of an individual's job has been the target of numerous planned change interventions (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Consistently, autonomy is positively related to employee job satisfaction, retention and quality of performance (Nielsen et al., 2017; Ng & Feldman, 2015; Parker, 2014). To become psychologically acti-

vated, the autonomy a job provides must be experienced and actively used by workers (Langfred & Moya, 2004). The potential for autonomy in a job thus can be constrained by both personal predispositions such as low self-efficacy (Ng & Feldman, 2015) and external hindrances such as work overload (Jimmieson, 2000; Laurence, Fried & Raub, 2016). As such, this top-down mode of attaining task flexibility both presumes and requires active use of the opportunities the employer provides employees for exercising autonomy within (more or less) specified boundaries.

Bottom-up processes: Task crafting

At the other end of the spectrum are „bottom-up“ job changes that employees make on their own. Job crafting refers to as „the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work“ (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 179). Three domains of job crafting have been identified: Self-initiated changes in a job's tasks (e.g., number, scope, and type), cognitive adjustments in worker responses to the job (e.g., work-related attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions), and shifts in relational boundaries (e.g., quality or quantity of social interactions at work). The construct of job crafting builds on and integrates earlier research on work roles, proactive behavior, and organizational socialization (Black & Ashford, 1995; Fried, Grant, Levi, Hadani & Slowik, 2007; Ilgen & Hollenbeck 1991). Its premise is that workers are active co-creators of their work situation and not passive job recipients. Job crafting refers to actions individuals engage in on their own initiative without formal authorization in order to modify their jobs in personally meaningful ways (Demerouti, 2014). The task flexibility that results from job crafting creates individual variability in job features due to differences in job duties and role-related understandings. Some scholars have taken an alternative view of job crafting, developing theory regarding the ways in which employees influence their own work characteristics. Tims, Bakker and Derks (2012, p. 174) interpret crafting from the perspective of the job demands-resources model of work design as changes employees enact to „balance their job demands and job resources with their personal abilities and needs“. This alternative view explicitly focuses on actions workers take to increase structural resources such as autonomy and social support, to seek out personally interesting or challenging assignments, or to avoid stressful tasks or interactions. Although job crafting may involve all of these, the reinterpretation of the construct according to the job demands-resources model considerably narrows its more open initial conceptualization (Demerouti, 2014; Hornung, 2017). Job crafting has become accepted in work design because of the positive benefits of worker

self-expression for both worker and employer. However, in practice, unauthorized changes in tasks are only legitimate within the limits of the employer's „zone of indifference“ (e.g., performance standards, compensation levels). For instance, task crafting may be triggered by circumstances that necessitate self-initiated reductions in workload, performance or quality – overall, or in a certain domain of the job. Eventually, this may put workers into a situation of deviance outside the conventional „zone of indifference“, where the individual's exercise of task-related job crafting is tacitly accepted by the employer. In such instances, employees may protect themselves from sanctions by seeking out i-deals for reduced hours or job duties to legitimize self-work redesign.

Hybrid processes: Task i-deals

Idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) are non-standard work and employment conditions negotiated between individual employees and agents of the employer, such as managers or HR representatives (Rousseau 2005; Rousseau, Tomprou & Simosi, 2016). The content of these personalized arrangements is diverse and can include flexible scheduling, special duties and development opportunities among others (Hornung et al., 2018). As authorized differential treatment among workers in the same job, i-deals are both approved by the employer and intended to benefit the individual and the organization (Rousseau et al., 2016). I-deals can be differentiated from dysfunctional arrangements, such as favoritism, cronyism, or preferential treatment, assuming those i-deals are negotiated in a fashion consistent with principles of procedural and distributive justice (Hornung, Doenz & Glaser, 2016; Rousseau, 2005; Rousseau, Ho & Greenberg, 2006). Illegitimate sources of task flexibility such as rule-breaking or favoritism undermine procedural and distributive justice to the detriment of broader organizational interests (e.g., employee satisfaction and trust). In general, task-related i-deals have positive effects on both work motivation and occupational wellbeing. The initial study by Hornung et al. (2010) showed in two samples that task i-deals negotiated under conditions of high leader-member exchange were associated with positive evaluations of work characteristics, specifically, job control, complexity, and stressors. These work characteristics, in turn, mediated the relationship of task i-deals with both performance and well-being. Another study found cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence that job autonomy mediated the relationship of (general) i-deals with job satisfaction; a third study found autonomy to mediate the relationship of task i-deals with job performance (for an overview, see Hornung et al., 2018). I-deals thus appear to play an important role in individualized work design.

Hypotheses

These three modes for attaining flexibility differ in important ways from other forms of employee initiative, such as the autonomous actions employees undertake to affect change in the work setting in the form of taking charge or workplace proactivity (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker & Collins, 2010). The latter are forms of active performance aimed at promoting organizational efficiency or effectiveness (e.g., making suggestions or implementing improvements). In contrast the three modes of task flexibility target changes in the individual's job. Our first research question addresses the construct validity of the three distinct forms of task flexibility: Are task-related autonomy, job crafting, and i-deals empirically distinct. Their inter-relationships are undertheorized and seldom studied (e.g., Fried et al., 2007; Hornung, 2017; Rofcanin et al., 2016), raising the possibility of heretofore unrecognized complexity in their connections to each other. Previous research treats autonomy, in the form of job authority, personal discretion, and lack of structural restriction, as a necessary condition for job crafting. For instance, Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001, p. 184) suggest that „autonomy in the job leads to perceived opportunities for job crafting and encourages employees to alter the task and relational boundaries of their jobs“. Autonomy thus can be construed as an antecedent of self-enacted job changes. At the same time, expanded job autonomy can also be a consequence of individual negotiation and job crafting – particularly when they lead to changes in the tasks individuals perform (Liao et al., 2016; Rudolph et al., 2017). A more dynamic view of job crafting frames it as a form of self-empowerment, which gives rise to increased perceptions of autonomy, triggering „gain spirals“ of active wellbeing and performance (Weigl, Hornung, Parker, Petru, Glaser & Angerer, 2010; cf. Hornung, 2017). Job autonomy thus can simultaneously function in several ways in the context of task flexibility: Antecedent, content, outcome, and moderating factor. In line with these results, we posit that reciprocal dynamics exist among our three modes of task flexibility, resulting in complex interactions among them (Frese, Garst & Fay, 2007). Although frequently discussed on a theoretical level, the connections and distinctive features of i-deals and job crafting are rarely empirically investigated in the same study. The present study focuses on the dimension of work tasks, which is a specific and shared core dimension of both job crafting and i-deals. In addition, task autonomy, a core dimension of work design, was included to operationalize top-down, bottom-up and hybrid processes in a parallel form (Hornung et al., 2010). By focusing on the single dimension of work tasks, this study reduces the complexity of jointly considering autonomy, i-deals and job crafting. We identify and em-

ploy three distinct scales to assess these three forms of task flexibility and propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Task autonomy, task crafting, and task i-deals are empirically distinct.

Our second research question concerns the nature of the relationship these three forms of task flexibility have with quality of working life. Quality of working life refers an area of positive conceptualizations of the individual work experience, including favorable job attitudes, intrinsic work motivation, fulfilment of work-related needs, and absence of threats to well-being (Grote & Guest, 2017). To comprehensively assess the impact of these forms of flexibility, we use seven scales, reflecting three broader categories of positive work experiences (meaning of work, affective commitment, well-being), work-home interaction (conflict, enrichment), and occupational health (emotional exhaustion, psychosomatic complaints). Our second hypothesis is that task autonomy, task crafting and task i-deals each independently relate to indicators of quality of working life.

Hypothesis 2: Task autonomy (H2a), task crafting (H2b), and task i-deals (H2c) are related to indicators of individual quality of working life.

Beyond these direct effects, aforementioned studies suggest that the dynamics among these modes may be interactive (mutually influencing) rather than parallel (independent) or serial (mediation). Indeed, research on proactive behavior suggests that different forms of task flexibility offer synergistic (i.e., mutually reinforcing) pathways towards improvement in person-environment fit (e.g., Grant & Ashford, 2008; Grant & Parker, 2009; Parker & Collins, 2010). Drawing on insights of interactional psychology, regarding the complex, reciprocal and iterative dynamic processes of mutual influence between individuals and their environment (Terborg, 1981), we hypothesize interactions among the three modes of task flexibility in their relationship with quality of working life.

Hypothesis 3: Synergistic effects are associated with the joint occurrence of task autonomy, task crafting, and task i-deals, such that 3-way interactions of these three constructs explain additional variance in indicators of quality of working life.

Method

Sample

Survey data were gathered by students participating in a university research seminar conducted by the second author. Students recruited participants

through personal contacts and distributed hard-copy questionnaires. The seminar lecturer, the second author, oversaw data input, integration, and quality assessment. Useable questionnaires were obtained from $N = 279$ German-speaking employees. Their work settings ranged from education, healthcare, and customer service; occupations included clerical, technical, managerial, and creative professions. Data quality was found to be satisfactory with plausible and differentiated responses and few missing values ($< 5\%$). Over half of the sample were women (59 %); mean age was $M = 35.7$ years ($SD = 11.6$); more than a third (36 %) reported a college degree; slightly fewer (30 %) held supervisory roles; most (84.2 %) had an open-ended full-time work contract with an average of $M = 35.5$ ($SD = 8.7$) contracted hours per week (reported actual work hours: $M = 39.0$, $SD = 10.0$). With a mean duration of $M = 8.9$ years, employment was long-term though variation was substantial ($SD = 9.3$). In sum, our sample reflects a cross-section of younger more highly qualified workers, suitable to the study's purpose.

Measures

Categorical and numerical items obtained demographic information. Multi-item scales assessed 12 constructs: Three core constructs of work self-redesign, three work characteristics as controls, and seven quality of working life outcomes. Response options ranged from 4-point to 6-point scales (see Table 1 for measurement details and descriptive statistics).

Work self-redesign. The three components of work self-redesign were each measured with four items developed in previous research. Task autonomy (TAU; $\alpha[4] = .81$) used the action latitude scale of the work analysis instrument by Semmer, Zapf and Duncel (1995). Task crafting (TCR; $\alpha[4] = .89$) used a scale developed by Hornung (2017). Task i-deals (TID; $\alpha[4] = .88$) employed measures by Hornung et al. (2010). Items and factor analyses supporting this three-dimensional taxonomy are reported below and in Table 2.

Work characteristics. Three work characteristics were included as control variables. Task complexity (TCO; $\alpha[3] = .78$), task interdependence (TIN; $\alpha[4] = .81$), and task overload (TOV; $\alpha[2] = .79$) were measured with items from established work analysis instruments (cf. Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Exploratory and confirmatory analyses support their dimensionality. Initiated and received task interdependence (2 items each) were combined into a composite measure.

Quality of working life. Quality of working life was assessed using seven indicators reflecting three categories of positive work experiences (affective commitment, meaning of work, wellbeing), work-home interaction (conflict, enrichment), and impaired occu-

Table 1: Study constructs, measurement, and descriptive statistics.

	Label	Items	Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Core constructs: Work self-redesign						
Task autonomy	TAU	4	1-5 ¹	3.62	0.84	.81
Task crafting	TCR	4	1-5 ²	2.93	0.96	.89
Task i-deals	TID	4	1-5 ²	2.81	1.09	.88
Control variables: Work characteristics						
Task complexity	TCO	3	1-5 ³	2.82	0.98	.78
Task interdependence	TIN	4	1-5 ³	4.08	0.81	.81
Task overload	TOV	2	1-5 ³	3.10	0.93	.79
Outcomes: Quality of working life						
<i>Positive work experiences</i>						
- Meaning of work	MOW	6	1-6 ⁴	4.38	1.18	.88
- Affective commitment	COM	5	1-5 ⁵	3.57	1.06	.94
- Wellbeing	WLB	5	1-6 ⁵	3.90	0.95	.87
<i>Work-home interaction</i>						
- Work-home enrichment	WHE	4	1-4 ⁶	1.86	0.67	.78
- Work-home conflict	WHC	6	1-4 ⁶	1.82	0.54	.83
<i>Impaired occupational health</i>						
- Emotional exhaustion	EXH	5	1-6 ⁷	3.06	1.11	.90
- Psychosomatic complaints	PSC	12	1-6 ⁷	2.35	0.81	.86

Note: *N* = 279; *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation; response format: ¹1 = „very little“ to 5 = „very much“; ²1 = „not at all“ to 5 = „to a very great extent“; ³1 = „completely disagree“ to 5 = „completely agree“; ⁴1 = „strongly disagree“ to 6 = „strongly agree“; ⁵1 = „all of the time“ to 6 = „at no time“; ⁶1 = „never“ to 4 = „always“; ⁷1 = „never“ to 6 = „very often“.

pational health (emotional exhaustion, psychosomatic complaints).

Positive work experiences. Understood broadly here, positive work experiences, attitudes, or states included meaning of work, affective commitment, and general wellbeing. A 6-item scale of meaning in work (MOW; $\alpha[6] = .94$) was based on a validated broader meaning and purpose in life measure (Schnell, 2009; Schnell, Höge & Pollet, 2013). Affective commitment (COM; $\alpha[5] = .88$) was measured with Meyer and Allen's (1990) 5-item scale. General psychosocial wellbeing (WLB; $\alpha[5] = .87$) was assessed with the extensively validated 5-item instrument from the World Health Organization (WHO-5, Bech, 2004).

Work-home interaction. Bi-directional spillover between work and private life was measured with scales on positive and negative work-home interaction (Geurts, Taris, Kompier, Dikkers, van Hooff & Kinnunen, 2005). To increase compatibility with previous research, we used the role-theory-based labels of work-home enrichment (WHE; $\alpha[4] = .78$) and conflict

(WHC; $\alpha[6] = .83$). Based on preliminary analyses, the number of items was reduced (from 5 to 4 for WHE and from 8 to 6 for WHC) to obtain a clearer factor structure.

Impaired occupational health. We used indicators of emotional exhaustion, the core component of job burnout, and psychosomatic symptoms, tapping a longer-term outcome of work stress. Emotional exhaustion (EXH; $\alpha[5] = .90$) was based on the 5-item subscale from the „Maslach Burnout Inventory General Survey“ (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996). Psychosomatic complaints (PSC; $\alpha[12] = .86$) were assessed with a 12-item scale drawn from the „Occupational Stress Indicator“ by Cooper and Williams (1991).

Results

Psychometric properties of our three core variables were established in exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (EFA, CFA). Task autonomy, task i-

Table 2: Factor structure of items measuring core constructs.

	1	2	3
1. Task i-deals			
a) Work tasks that suit my personal interests. (Arbeitsaufgaben, die meinen persönlichen Interessen entsprechen.)	.86 (.85)	.13	.18
b) Work tasks that fit my strengths and talents. (Arbeitsaufgaben, die meinen Stärken und Begabungen entsprechen.)	.86 (.86)	.21	.13
c) Work tasks specially customized for me. (Auf mich speziell zugeschnittene Arbeitsaufgaben.)	.82 (.78)	.22	.05
d) Work tasks corresponding with my individual skill sets. (Auf meine individuellen Fähigkeiten abgestimmte Arbeitsaufgaben.)	.80 (.74)	.16	.12
2. Task crafting			
a) Altered the composition of work tasks; e.g., by devoting extra time and effort to tasks you are passionate about. (Die Zusammensetzung von Arbeitsaufgaben abgeändert; z. B. zusätzliche Zeit und Anstrengungen in Aufgaben investiert, die Ihnen persönlich am Herzen liegen.)	.20	.85 (.85)	.17
b) Changed the number of tasks associated with your job; e.g., by taking over additional tasks and / or dropping unproductive or unnecessary ones. (Die Anzahl von Arbeitsaufgaben abgeändert, z. B. zusätzliche Aufgaben übernommen und/oder unproduktive oder unnötige Aufgaben eingestellt.)	.15	.84 (.82)	.17
c) Crafted personally desirable changes to the scope or nature of work tasks associated with your job. (Persönlich wünschenswerte Änderungen an Umfang oder Inhalten von Arbeitsaufgaben vorgenommen.)	.23	.83 (.84)	.17
d) Altered the scope or nature of work tasks to make better use of your personal strengths and skills. (Umfang oder Inhalte von Arbeitsaufgaben abgeändert, damit sie besser Ihren persönlichen Stärken und Fähigkeiten zu entsprechen.)	.18	.77 (.76)	.24
3. Task autonomy			
a) Overall, how much opportunities for making own decisions does your work offer? (Wenn man Ihre Arbeit insgesamt betrachtet, wieviel Möglichkeiten zu eigenen Entscheidungen bietet Ihnen Ihre Arbeit?)	.14	.16	.82 (.80)
b) Are you free to determine for yourself, the ways you go about doing your work? (Können Sie selbst bestimmen, auf welche Art und Weise Sie Ihre Arbeit erledigen?)	.07	.13	.82 (.75)
c) In your daily work activities, to what extent are you free to decide on the sequence of work steps by yourself (Wenn Sie Ihre Tätigkeit insgesamt betrachten, inwieweit können Sie die Reihenfolge der Arbeitsschritte selbst festlegen?)	.12	.16	.77 (.71)
d) How much influence do you have over what type of work you get assigned to? (Wieviel Einfluss haben Sie darauf, welche Arbeit ihnen zugeteilt wird?)	.10	.23	.70 (.65)
Factor statistics			
Initial eigenvalues	5.14	1.94	1.51
Variance explained (%)	42.86	16.19	12.61
Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha)	.88	.89	.81

Note: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), principle components, varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization; 5 iterations, cumulative variance explained: 71.66 %; Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) loadings in parentheses; CFA fit indices: $\chi^2 = 51.26$, $df = 51$, ns ($p = .464$), $\chi^2/df = 1.01$; Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 1.00, Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = 1.00, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 1.00; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .004; 90 % Confidence Interval (CI) = [.000-.039], ns ($p = .995$).

deals, and task crafting were initially measured with 5 items each, the psychometrically weakest of which was dropped. Results are reported in Table 2, along with full item wordings. Fit indices of the final 3-factor CFA model (4 items each) fully supported H1. The chi-square discrepancy was non-significant ($\chi^2 = 51.26$, $df = 51$, ns, $\chi^2/df = 1.01$). Incremental Fit Index [IFI ≈ 1.00], Tucker Lewis Index [TLI ≈ 1.00], and Comparative Fit Index [CFI ≈ 1.00] all converged towards optimal values of 1.00. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation [RMSEA = .004] was close to zero with a narrow 90 % Confidence Interval [CI = .000-.039] and a non-significant likelihood ($p_{close} = .995$) of a population value $< .050$. Further, this measurement model vastly outperformed alternative 2-factor and 1-factor models. Intercorrelations between latent construct factors were: $r = .47$ for autonomy and crafting; $r = .36$ for autonomy and i-deals; and $r = .48$ for i-deals and crafting (all $p < .01$). Overall, these results indicate empirical distinctiveness and substantial unique variance of our core constructs.

Next, zero-order correlations with quality of working life indicators were examined (Table 3). Only task autonomy related to all in the expected direction (from $r = .14$, $p < .05$ for WHE to $r = .41$, $p < .01$ for MOW; from $r = -.13$, $p < .05$ for WHC to $r = -.24$, $p < .01$ for EXH). Task crafting related to positive constructs (from $r = .18$, $p < .01$ for COM and WHE to $r = .23$, $p < .01$ for MOW), but also had a positive association with work-home conflict ($r = .18$, $p < .01$), and was unrelated to occupational health. Task i-deals correlated only with positive indicators (from $r = .18$, $p < .01$ for WLB to $r = .42$, $p < .01$ for MOW), but not with work-home conflict, exhaustion, or psychosomatic complaints. Thus, while some evidence for all parts of H2 was found, preliminary support for H2a was stronger than for H2b and H2c.

In the third step, main and interactive effects of the three modes of task flexibility were tested in seven regression models for the quality of working life outcomes (Table 4). Controls (gender, age, task complexity, interdependence, and overload) were entered first. Next, main effects of task autonomy, crafting, and i-deals were included. Subsequent steps tested the three 2-way and one 3-way interaction terms of our core constructs. All models explained significant ($p < .01$) variance in the respective outcomes (R^2 ranging from 11 % for WHE to 36 % for MOW). Controlled and concurrent testing of main effects of core constructs provides a more rigorous assessment of H2. The highest level of support was again found for task autonomy (H2a) with beneficial effects for the majority (5 out of 7) of outcomes (MOW: $\beta = .15$, $p < .05$; WLB: $\beta = .19$, $p < .01$; WHC: $\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$; EXH: $\beta = -.23$, $p < .01$; PSC: $\beta = -.24$, $p < .01$). Task i-deals (H2b) related only to a subset of positive indicators, specifically, mean-

ing at work ($\beta = .25$, $p < .01$), affective commitment ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$), and work-home enrichment ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$). Most inconsistent was task crafting (H2c), which had no beneficial main effects, but instead was an antecedent to work-home conflict ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$). Positive 3-way interactions (H3) occurred for 3 out of 7 outcomes: Meaning of work ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$), affective commitment ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$), and work-home enrichment ($\beta = .20$, $p < .05$), all suggesting synergistic beneficial consequences of the combination of task autonomy, crafting, and i-deals. This pattern of 3-way interactions provides partial support for Hypothesis 3, providing evidence of the interplay between these three modes of task flexibility in relation to an individual's quality of working life. We plotted the significant interaction effects, which supported our interpretations. Additionally, four 2-way interactions between i-deals and crafting were found, such that these two modes interacted positively, jointly boosting commitment and wellbeing ($\beta = .14/.13$, $p < .05$), and negatively, in buffering emotional exhaustion and psychosomatic complaints ($\beta = -.12/-.16$, $p < .05$). Although we did not develop specific hypotheses regarding two-way interactions, these findings further support synergistic effects, in particular, regarding the complementarity of i-deals and job crafting as two forms of proactive influence. No significant 2-way interactions occurred with task autonomy, suggesting different mechanisms with regard to task-inherent degrees of freedom.

Control variables had a number of effects. Gender and age effects were found in four models: women experienced less work-home enrichment and more psychosomatic complaints ($\beta = -.13/.25$, $p < .05/.01$); older participants reported higher meaning and wellbeing ($\beta = .14/.19$, $p < .01$). Task interdependence had no effect while complexity was associated with higher meaning and affective commitment ($\beta = .19/.13$, $p < .01/.05$). Task overload related negatively to meaning and wellbeing ($\beta = -.15/-.19$, $p < .01$) and positively to work-home conflict, emotional exhaustion, and psychosomatic complaints ($\beta = .50/.48/.17$, all $p < .01$). Notably, this is an inverse pattern compared to task autonomy, affirming that task-related pressure and control function as antipodes. To further probe our findings, regressions were repeated without inclusion of control variables, demonstrating stable results.

Table 3: Zero-order correlation matrix.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Gender (0/1 for ♂/♀)	--													
2. Age (years)	-.10	--												
3. Task complexity	-.17**	-.07	--											
4. Task interdependence	-.18**	.21**	.06	--										
5. Task overload	-.09	.09	.27**	.24**	--									
6. Task autonomy	-.13*	.07	-.07	.27**	-.09	--								
7. Task crafting	-.07	.09	.11	.20**	.15*	.42**	--							
8. Task i-deals	-.01	.01	-.03	.25**	-.03	.31**	.43**	--						
9. Meaning of work	-.11	.21**	-.11	.34**	-.14*	.41**	.23**	.42**	--					
10. Affective commitment	-.07	.10	-.10	.24**	-.11	.31**	.18**	.33**	.68**	--				
11. Wellbeing	-.05	.20**	-.02	.09	-.17**	.27**	.19**	.18**	.47**	.32**	--			
12. Work-home enrichment	-.14*	.10	.00	.08	-.03	.14*	.18**	.24**	.22**	.17**	.14*	--		
13. Work-home conflict	-.03	.08	.17**	.10	.55**	-.13*	.18**	.00	-.20**	-.16**	-.35**	.05	--	
14. Emotional exhaustion	.08	-.05	.11	.04	.48**	-.24**	-.01	-.02	-.34**	-.24**	-.54**	-.06	.63**	--
15. Psychosomatic complaints	.25**	-.01	.08	-.08	.19**	-.23**	-.00	-.08	-.36**	-.24**	-.53**	-.01	.42**	.60**

Note: $N = 279$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; shaded area contains raw correlations between core constructs and outcomes.

Table 4: Summary of regression analyses for quality of working life outcomes.

Regression Models	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7
Outcomes	MOW	COM	WLB	WHE	WHC	EXH	PSC
Step 1: Control variables							
- Gender (0/1 for ♂/♀)	-.05	-.04	-.00	-.13*	.02	.08	.25**
- Age (years)	.14**	.05	.19**	.06	.04	-.06	.05
- Task complexity	.19**	.13*	-.02	-.02	.01	.02	-.04
- Task interdependence	-.06	-.05	.06	-.01	.00	-.04	.05
- Task overload	-.15**	-.10	-.20**	-.04	.50**	.48**	.17**
Step 2: Core constructs							
- Task autonomy (TAU)	.15*	.15	.19**	-.04	-.13*	-.23**	-.24**
- Task crafting (TCR)	-.05	-.01	.10	.05	.18**	-.00	.07
- Task i-deals (TID)	.25**	.14*	.10	.16*	-.05	.01	-.04
Step 3: Interaction effects							
- TAUxTCR	.04	-.04	-.08	.07	.07	.09	-.03
- TAUxTID	-.10	.04	.05	.00	.04	-.07	-.05
- TCRxTID	.09	.14*	.13*	.07	-.06	-.12*	-.16*
- TAUxTCRxTID	.17*	.19*	-.01	.20*	-.00	.05	.02
Summary: Model fit statistics							
Multiple R ² (adjusted R ²)	.36 (.33)	.21 (.18)	.17 (.13)	.11 (.07)	.34 (.31)	.30 (.27)	.18 (.15)
F (12; 260)	11.97**	5.83**	4.51**	2.70**	11.19**	9.24**	4.88**

Note: $N = 279$; ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; standardized regression coefficients (β -weights).

Discussion

Recent advances in our understanding of individual work redesign motivated the present investigation of the three modes of individual-level task flexibility (Grant & Parker, 2009; Parker, 2014; Parker et al., 2017). To the best of our knowledge, ours is the first study to investigate the combined effects of autonomy, job crafting and i-deals. We seek to advance research on work design, proactive work behavior, and related streams of literature by offering insights into the interplay of organizationally implemented, individually crafted, and interpersonally negotiated task flexibility. Our results indicate that task autonomy, task crafting, and task i-deals play distinct but synergistic roles in

self-directed improvement of working life. They also support the importance of task autonomy to quality of working life along with the potential synergy between i-deals and job crafting. Affective commitment, meaning of work, and work-home enrichment are positively influenced by task i-deals as well as by the 3-way interaction between task autonomy, crafting, and i-deals. Thus, improvements in the *positive indicators* of quality of working life appear to be at the core of the synergistic effects of task autonomy, task i-deals, and task crafting.

A second set of findings concerns the relationship between task i-deals and task crafting and their joint effects. We find strong positive correlations between i-deals and crafting, suggesting that engaging in one

can be synergistic with engaging in the other. Results also suggest joint effects of task i-deals and crafting on both positive and negative indicators. First, task i-deals and crafting have positive interaction effects on affective commitment and general wellbeing suggesting that work self-design via these two modes fosters positive psychological states and enables developmental work experiences. In addition, negative 2-way interactions on emotional exhaustion, and psychosomatic complaints, point towards another joint role of task i-deals and crafting, that is, preventing or counteracting the negative outcomes of adverse working conditions. We conclude that depending on its context and configuration, personally initiated work redesign can function in at least two ways. The joint combination of task i-deals and crafting can serve as a form of proactive coping where stressors are concerned, buffering or reducing job strain. Alternatively, they can serve as a proactive opportunity to support positive work experiences, for example, by creating or strengthening job features that enhance meaning, social relatedness, or better allow for developing new professional interests and competencies.

Task crafting is by far the most ambivalent of the three forms of task flexibility and its effects are a mixed bag of a few positive, some negative and several null effects when task crafting is considered on its own. Its positive contributions to quality of working life seem to require the presence of other modes of task flexibility, particularly i-deals, being only weakly related to quality of working life by itself. Moreover, its unexpected positive association with work-home conflict suggests that there are downsides to reworking one's tasks without authorization. This suggests a potential overlap between job crafting and the dysfunctional forms of coping exemplified by the self-endangering work behavior of extremely involved or „overcommitted“ workers, who invest themselves in work at the expense of their health and personal lives (Deci, Dettmers, Krause & Berset, 2016). Additional analyses showed a positive relationship between task crafting and reported overtime hours. Job modifications achieved through crafting thus may require increased time and effort by employees, inducing self-inflicted or self-endangering „subjectivized“ forms of work intensification and extensification – a key phenomenon first established in work sociology and increasingly subject to psychological research (Höge, 2011; Laurence, et al., 2016).

Our findings suggest that job crafting is most functional when it supplements or builds on negotiated agreements and can have negative consequences or limited value on its own. We concur with Rofcanin et al. (2016), that i-deals are more important than job crafting in explaining performance-relevant employee

attitudes and behaviors. The unauthorized nature of job crafting involves risks and costs for workers. In the absence of i-deals, job crafting may resemble coping behavior, deviance, and unauthorized actions involving the risk of being called out and negatively sanctioned (Cangiano, Parker & Yeo, 2019). In the presence of task i-deals, however, job crafting may resemble a form of „drift“, that is, an extension or variation of a negotiated arrangement that evolves over time. In this latter case, employees have a relational basis and an authorized personalized arrangement that can limit potential risks from unauthorized job changes. Without such supporting conditions, employees who craft substantive change to their job content may find themselves in an awkward position if they need to justify their exceptional or non-compliant task behavior. Our results also support the conclusion of Bredehöft, Dettmers, Hoppe and Janneck (2015), who, based on qualitative research, characterize job crafting as a „double-edged sword“ for employees. A promising approach to individualized job redesign may be to negotiate for personally valued tasks that allow for both high levels of autonomy and opportunity for further crafting over time in line with one's goals. Processes of work self-redesign thus can gain legitimacy through the development of occupational self-efficacy, expert knowledge, and mastery.

Implications for practice

Employees seeking more fulfilling working conditions or reduced job stressors can benefit from careful use of both task crafting and i-deals. Our findings suggest that communicating with your boss to explore arrangements that better meet your needs is an important avenue for improving work life quality. Less effective is trying to reshuffle work duties on your own (the task crafting studied here), unless the work arrangement grants broad autonomy – and relations with customers and colleagues are not harmed by such changes. Negotiations for improved work conditions are often easier when you are interested in increasing the responsibilities and skills your job involves, than when trying to reduce them. However, both kinds of task adjustments can work if you maintain good communication with your manager and colleagues. Employers, in turn, should recognize the broad benefits from promoting worker autonomy, flexibility and use of valued skills at work. Jobs higher in autonomy provide better quality of working conditions and allow employees to bring more of their whole selves at work. Because individuals differ in their goals and private lives, being open to negotiation of customized arrangements can help strengthen the employment relationship, retain a valued employee and promote occupational well-

being. Task crafting, where employees seek to create more motivating and meaningful work by adding or changing the mix of activities they engage in, is part of self-expression on the job. Managers should seek information from employees regarding the conditions of work they find valuable and any special conditions that might make their work more interesting. The type of crafting activities workers engage in can provide insights into opportunities to make work more compelling and help recognize the various contributions employees make in their jobs.

Limitations

This study has methodological limitations, specifically cross-sectional self-report data and a purposive (non-representative and non-random) convenience sample. However, single-source one-time measurement (employee survey designs) still provides the basis of large parts of organizational research and methodological concerns may be exaggerated (Conway & Lance, 2010). Nonetheless, follow-up studies incorporating additional data sources and measurement points are desirable to increase external validity and enhance our understanding regarding the dynamics among the three components of work self-redesign over time. In particular, this relates to the different meanings job crafting can take on, depending on whether it is used to supplement or substitute broader negotiated (i.e., authorized) agreements lending legitimacy to additional bottom-up actions to further customize work tasks.

Conclusion

I-deals and job crafting represent proactive forms of behavior in organizations. They can operate synergistically to promote positive work experiences and buffer job strain. At the same time, contrasted with the consistent positive consequences of task i-deals, task crafting is a mixed bag of positive and negative consequences as a function of its context. In work providing high levels autonomy, these two self-initiated forms of work redesign may be part of an optimal work experience promoting personal growth and self-determination.

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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

In economically advanced Western societies, the changing nature of work and organizations confronts individuals with systemic „paradoxes“ – creating ambiguous, ambivalent, contradictory, or overtaxing work situations (Gouliquer, 2000; Kalleberg, 2011; Putnam, Myers & Gailliard, 2014; cf. Glaser, Hornung & Höge, 2019). Driven by economic crises and pressures, escalating and emerging „new“ stressful demands arise from constantly reconfiguring working environments, dissolving job boundaries, employment insecurity, and ever-increasing performance and flexibility requirements of employers (Allan, O'Donnell & Peetz, 1999; Archibald, 2009; Burchell, Ladipo & Wilkinson, 2002; Höge & Hornung, 2015; Pedaci, 2010). Arguably, organizational efforts to increase flexibility via strategies of de-regulation and de-bureaucratization, along with „high-involvement“ human resource (HR) management and autonomy-oriented work practices,

also increase opportunities to individualize and (self-) enrich one's work experience (Boxall & Macky, 2014; Hornung, Höge, Glaser & Weigl, 2017; Kashefi, 2009; Nordbäck, Myers & McPhee, 2017). Pursuing self-determination and actualization tendencies, employees use unspecified „white spaces“ to customize job features, improving fit with personal and professional interests and goals, supporting fulfillment of work-related needs, and pursuing increasingly diversified lifestyles, careers, and occupational identities (Gubler, Arnold & Coombs, 2014; Miscenko & Day, 2016). This dual character of workplace flexibility as source of stressful demands and reduced social cohesion, *and* enhanced possibilities for personal growth and „individuation“, is a recurring dialectic (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Reedy, King & Coupland, 2016; cf. Höge, 2019). In this article, we present preliminary thoughts and suggestions on a distinctively critical perspective

on research and practice of flexibility at work. We share our dialectic understanding of tensions, contradictions, and antagonisms, variously described as the „Janus-face“, „double-edged sword“, „Pandora’s Box“ and „paradox“ of workplace flexibility (Cañibano, 2019; Gouliquer, 2000; Putnam et al., 2014). Flexibility is analyzed as a dialectical societal phenomenon, which promises the realization of humanistic ideals of individual autonomy, self-actualization, and self-determination, but is also outgrowth and embodiment of neoliberal ideology (Bal & Hornung, 2019). As such, it serves particular (socially, ethically, and morally questionable) interest of employers, investors, and management to increase effectiveness and efficiency of HR utilization (e.g., Burchell et al., 2002). First, we focus on potentials for humanistic management to proliferate work practices promoting employee-oriented flexibility – as opposed to the antipode of employer-oriented organizational flexibility as restructuring and rationalization strategy (Hornung, Glaser & Rousseau, 2018). Second, contributing to a current disciplinary debate (Bal & Dóci, 2018), we argue that workplace flexibility, its manifestation in organizational practices and individual behavior, applied research in the workplace, and academic and public discourses, are deeply entrenched in and contaminated by neoliberal ideology. Lastly, we consider ways to dialectically comprehend these two antipodes, provide examples, and discuss the usefulness of the flexibility concept for humanistic, critical, and emancipatory perspectives in psychological scholarship.

Flexibility as humanistic ideal

For disentangling contradicting implications of workplace flexibility it has been suggested to distinguish between employer-oriented *organizational* flexibility and employee-oriented *individual* flexibility (Hornung et al., 2008, 2018). These two forms of flexibility differ in who has the control over flexibility potentials. Organizational flexibility describes institutional control over short-term changes in financial, numerical, temporal, locational, and functional parameters of the workforce, and HR management systems improving the alignment of supplied capacities and capabilities with changing and limitedly predictable requirements of dynamic market environments (Kalleberg, 2003). In contrast, employee-oriented individual flexibility refers to the control individuals possess to vary, adjust, or modify their work and employment conditions to better fit personal needs, preferences, values, and goals – without incurring disproportionate losses, disadvantages or risks (e.g., discrimination due to nonstandard hours; Munsch, 2016). Contrasting organizational and individual flexibility reflects claims that bureaucracy

can take on more or less coercive or enabling forms (Adler & Borys, 1996), that HR management can be oriented towards the common good (Chiva, 2014), that there is a „high-road“ in employment relations (Osterman, 2018), and that, generally, alternative forms of work organization and humanistic management promoting employee health, personality and moral development are possible (Reedy et al., 2016; Weber & Jeppesen, 2017; Weber, Unterrainer & Höge, 2008). The perspective of individual flexibility focuses on the circumstances under which work arrangements are genuinely, and not just in theory or rhetoric, chosen voluntarily and based on mutual advantages for both employees and employers, mindful of diverging economic interests and implications of flexibility raising tensions with a „new quality of work“. Notwithstanding the rich bundle of paradoxes and tensions associated with workplace flexibility, one domain, where employee and employer interest are commonly regarded as closely aligned is the task-related dimension of functional flexibility (van den Berg & van der Velde, 2005). In addition to the temporal or numerical aspects, the concept of employee-oriented flexibility also applies to the functional dimension (Hornung et al., 2008). From the organizational perspective, this refers to employing multi-skilled or „polyvalent“ human resources, which are able to fulfill a broad range of different tasks or jobs, thus generating dynamic capabilities with regard to the scope, quality, and quantity of deliverable products or services. From an employee perspective, functional flexibility can be defined as the ability to exercise influence over their work tasks to better align the fulfillment of job duties with their personal and professional preferences, needs, interests, values, or goals. Based on such an employee-oriented reconceptualization of flexibility, a humanistic approach towards flexibility that serves to provide workers with real control over work tasks and other features and conditions of their jobs, can be grounded in well-established traditions of human-oriented work design, such as action-regulation theory (Hacker & Sachse, 2014). A main proposition of action-regulation theory is that the psychologically most relevant unit of analysis, according to the *primacy of the work task*, is the human work activity, characterized by inherent features of the work and the conditions under which it is carried out (Oesterreich & Volpert, 1986; Ulich, 2011). In this tradition, the work task, rather than the economic or social exchange relationship, is seen as the core psychological link between the individual and the organization. Drawing on Russian activity theory, the notion of *person-task dialectics* describes work as the goal-directed transformation of objects (or information) through which the working subjects are also changed themselves (Weber & Jeppesen, 2017; cf. Frese, Garst & Fay, 2007). Based on the socializing or

personality-forming function of work, this comprises not only work-related knowledge, skills, and abilities, but, in the longer term, also more stable personal orientations and behavior patterns (Frese, Kring, Soose & Zempel, 1996). Dynamic processes of reciprocal determination are assumed to be driven by individuals' innate actualization tendency, for instance, striving towards fulfillment of growth-related psychological needs for autonomy, competence, relatedness, and meaning at work (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2017). Flexibility-oriented, proactive work design constructs like job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) and idiosyncratic deals (Rousseau, 2015) conceptualize workers as active designers of their jobs from bottom-up, rather than passive „recipients“ of „top-down“ implemented job-design and some scholars emphasize the employee-oriented, humanistic potential of these „micro-emancipatory“ approaches (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Hornung et al., 2018; Melé, 2003). Research relating such constructs to worker health and well-being supports the potential of workplace flexibility for humanistic management. However, still too little theoretical and empirical work addresses questions on how employee-oriented conceptions of flexibility can be implemented as elements of procedural justice (Hornung, Doenz & Glaser, 2016), embedded into democratic organizational structures (Weber et al., 2008), and, become building blocks of a new generation of quality of working life initiatives (Grote & Guest, 2017).

Flexibility as neoliberal ideology

Any interpretation of workplace flexibility as a primarily humanistic concept, would have to close its eyes to a large body of interdisciplinary literature identifying detrimental aspects of flexibility-oriented practices, resulting, for example, in work intensification and extensification, job insecurity, alienation, decreased social cohesion, and impaired psychophysical health (Archibald, 2009; Höge, 2019; Höge & Hornung, 2015; Kubicek, Korunka Paškvan, Prem & Gerdenitsch, 2014; Sennett, 1999). Here, we will elaborate on a common argument that workplace flexibility is ambiguous, because it includes both employee-oriented and employer-oriented practices, where the latter demand employee adaptivity and restrict their autonomy (Gouliquer, 2000; Knights & Willmot, 2002; Putnam, 2001). Expanding and accentuating the academic discourse, we offer a perspective on workplace flexibility as a practice and a topic of scientific inquiry that is strongly permeated and biased by *neoliberal ideology*. Skipping over the numerous elaborated (neutral and critical) definitions, we use the term „ideology“ for a body of meanings and practices that encode certain interests

relevant to social power (Eagleton, 1991; Thompson, 1990). Ideologies strive for societal hegemony, legitimating and obscuring the underlying interests by means of universalization and naturalization of the status quo. Denying or suppressing alternative perspectives, assumptions, and interpretations, eventually makes even the possibility of another reality unthinkable (Fiori, 1970; Eagleton, 1991; Jost & van der Toorn, 2012). Attaining hegemony means that ideological beliefs have been disseminated „top-down“ from the powerful social groups whose interests they objectively serve to the subordinated social groups whose interests they objectively contradict (Jost, Federico & Napier, 2009). If the latter internalize those ideologically biased belief-systems, the paradox situation arises that the same disadvantaged groups justify, uphold, and quasi from the „bottom-up“ reproduce the status quo of a social order that runs counter to their individual and collective socio-economic interests. Rewarding and likely unconsciously motivating this „intellectual self-mutilation“ is the „palliative“, health-conserving function of reducing cognitive dissonance, a well-tested core proposition of psychological system-justification-theory (Jost, 2019).

The dominant political-economic ideology today, all around the globe but especially in Western societies, is neoliberalism (e.g., Harvey, 2005; Plehwe, Walpen & Neunhöffer, 2007). Although we agree that „neoliberalism“ is a complex, diverse, and problematic term (Dunn, 2017), we still find it useful, as there is at least some consensus on its usage. Neoliberalism stands for a transnational version of *laissez-faire* (American) corporate and financial capitalism, emphasizing free enterprise, free markets and trade, privatization, deregulation, and, advancing the interests of economic elites, such as businesses, shareholders, and management (LaMothe, 2016). Recently, Bal and Dóci (2018) initiated a debate on the role of neoliberal ideology in today's workplaces and specifically within work and organizational psychology as an academic discipline. We contend that research and practice of workplace flexibility provides an exemplary case for the ways in which neoliberal ideology influences academia and practice by interest-driven conceptualizations, constructs, and conventions. According to Bal and Dóci (2018) neoliberal ideology influences workplace practices and work and organizational psychology via three political logics: *instrumentality* (e.g., employees as means to achieve organizational goals), *individualism* (e.g., stressing employee self-reliance), and *competition* (e.g., increasing individual and organizational competitiveness as the central criterion of all workplace practices). These three logics are argued to proliferate superior-inferior narratives, themes of social Darwinism, and notions of social engineering, tacitly shaping theory and practice, for instance, em-

phasizing personnel assessment and selection, instead of development and worker emancipation, individual behavior instead of collective agency, and job and organizational performance, instead of individual and collective happiness, dignity, social responsibility and contributions to the common good.

Employer-oriented flexibility, in terms of managerial strategies to improve organizational competitiveness and profits by de-regulation and increasing the numerical, temporal and functional adaptability of the workforce evidently are manifestations of neoliberal logic (Bal & Dóci, 2018; LaMothe, 2016). However, even more human-oriented strands of flexibility-related practices and research involve risks of legitimizing, proliferating, and obscuring doctrines of neoliberal ideology. We will discuss this for two exemplary applications: 1) The increasingly dominating belief in employee self-reliance, reflected in individual-level, flexibility-related proactive behavior concepts like job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) and idiosyncratic deals (Rousseau, 2015); and 2) the related discourse on the changing and „new“ psychological contracts between employees and organizations in the flexible world of work (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006; Hornung & Rousseau, 2017). An instructive example for the interest-driven, system-justifying and palliative effects of the neoliberal ideological belief of employee self-reliance is the empirical research on the roles of managerial ideologies in mass layoffs. Ideological foundations of organizational downsizing were initially identified in managerial beliefs in neoliberal principles of de-regulation, de-bureaucratization and employee self-reliance (McKinley, Mone & Barker, 1998). Empirical studies confirmed that adherence to neoliberal ideologies of market competition and shareholder value, displayed in the annual reports of U.S. utility companies, predicted the occurrence and scope of managerial downsizing decisions (Rust & McKinley, 2016). Mixed results were found for an ideology of employee worth, stressing the instrumental „value“ of human assets. This finding can be explained by conceptual overlaps with an ideology of employee self-reliance, prescribing that employees should be fully independent and self-responsible in their employment and careers, including qualification, training, and skill development (McKinley et al., 1998; Rust & McKinley, 2016). This „managerial“ ideology has been shown to be internalized by employees, apparently driven by psychological defense mechanisms against the traumatizing effects of violations of reciprocity. A study from the employee side found that adopting an ideology of self-reliance „inoculated“ employees against experiencing stressful psychological contract violation, even when getting laid off, demonstrating a „palliative“ role of this emerging „new“ system-justifying employment ideology (Edwards, Rust, McKinley & Moon, 2005).

Antipode of the ideology of employee self-reliance is employer reliance. Employer reliance reflects paternalistic notions of organizational responsibility for employee development and welfare, underlying the „classical“ relational psychological contract of long-term stable industrial-era qualified employment (job security, training, and internal promotion against loyalty, reliability and personal sacrifices). The „changing“ and „new“ psychological contract in a flexible world of work demonstrates a transition from relational psychological contracts based on employer reliance to widespread acceptance of work arrangements from which employer obligations for long-term employee security and welfare have mostly disappeared, replaced by more short-term oriented transactional cognitive models stressing employee self-reliance (Blickle & Witzki, 2008; Rousseau, 2006). From a critical perspective, this „new“ form of psychological contracts is nothing but the collective acknowledgement that organizations tend not to live up to their promises. The normative power of the factual demands accepting that extensive employer obligations reflect „unrealistic“ expectations in the new world of work (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006), and declaring as the „new normal“ what used to be perceived by employees as breaches under the „old deal“. In other words, *breach* of psychological contracts in the interest of employers and shareholder is interpreted as a „new type“ of psychological contract, while normative employee expectations based on „old“ contracts are de-legitimized and invalidated (Bal & Hornung, 2019). Cumulative results on the health-impairing effects of contract breach and violation give an impression of the human costs of the sweeping „haircut“ employers have applied to their commitments, revealing inherent ideological bias, elements of wishful thinking, and (self-)deception in the psychological contracts of employees.

The concept of idiosyncratic deals is both a logical and *ideological* successor for the self-deconstructing psychological contract (Hornung & Rousseau, 2017). Focusing on individually negotiated work and employment conditions, idiosyncratic deals more directly acknowledge diverging employee-employer interests and the risk of notoriously unfulfilled organizational obligations. Yet, this also opens up new ways for a performance-based redistribution of formerly broad-based employee benefits and inducement, stripped from the impoverished „no frills“ employment relationships prescribed by neoliberal logics for the more easily replaceable, flexibilized parts of the workforce.

Notably, similar dialectical processes regarding the impact of interest-driven „objective“ structural strains for the emergence and proliferation of new ideological beliefs justifying these constraints and perpetuating inequality, are described on a societal level by Greene (2008). This author analyzes historical de-

velopments and functions of different ideologies of *individualism* in the United States from the post-civil war reconstruction period until the present. He identifies three individualistic ideologies necessary to normalize inequality in their respective historical contexts: 1) Individualism as an ideology of self-willed wealth or success in post-civil war period; 2) individualism as complete self-reliance, since the first half of the 20th century, and 3) individualism as an ideology of high self-esteem, starting from the 1970s. Each relate to structural societal strains in different historical phases, such as lacking advancement opportunities, eroding social support systems, inequality and exclusion (Putnam, 2001; Wacquant, 2009; Moscone, Tosetti & Vitadini, 2016). Dominating different phases of societal development, these ideologies serve to uphold valued individual beliefs, while simultaneously moderating expectations directed at society, normalizing austerity and injustice, and promoting compliance, fulfilling functions of system justification (Jost, 2019). Historically, every new form of individualism complements the last in its ideological purpose. Ultimately, the current ideological version of present-day individualism is an amalgamation of all three. Those who are exploited, marginalized, and excluded under the regime of neoliberal capitalism are indoctrinated to draw self-esteem and pride from unmitigated exposure to socio-economic insecurity and risks of recurring capitalist crises – without posing demands or burdens on the individualized society around them (Greene, 2008). This changing relationship between individual and society complements, contextualizes, and thus helps to better understand transitioning psychological relationships between individuals and organizations – culminating in the emergence of a paradox ideology of employee self-reliance.

Research on individualistic ideologies in different societal subsystems, gives an impression of the cascading, mutually reinforcing structural, social, and psychological processes underlying changes in social attitudes and values, frames of references, and belief systems (Jost et al., 2009). A resulting „new“ disillusionment recognizes work organizations as abstract, amoral, and, essentially, „sociopathic“ systems, creatively executing economic imperatives without regard of the human costs and inherently lacking scruples, conscience or remorse. Indeed, this critical realization increasingly seems to replace previous more naïve and romanticizing conceptions of organizations as anthropomorphized entities acting in coherent and socially responsible or paternalistic ways (Bal & Hornung, 2019). This development has a positive side, as it implies overcoming faulty assumptions and illusionary beliefs and recognizing social realities. We believe that the described trends and trajectories underscore the need for a more thorough under-

standing of contemporary employees in terms of the sociological employee-proposition, that is, as quasi-independent, self-managing „self-entrepreneurs“ of their own labor power (Höge, 2011; Pongratz & Voß, 2003). Compatible with literatures on employability, career self-management, and idiosyncratic deals, this perspective on the „subjectification“ of work (Becke, 2017; Dettmers, Deci, Baeriswyl, Berset & Krause, 2016), includes a critical understanding of flexibility as a new era of ideological coordination through indirect and internalized control and compliance mechanisms (Moldaschl & Voß, 2002). More research is needed on the dialectical processes at the intersection of ideological indoctrination and psychological introjection, identification, and integration (Deci et al., 2017), culminating in formation of occupational and personal identities (Miscenko & Day, 2016).

Flexibility as a dialectical concept

The previous two sections reflect the metaphorical imaginary of the Janus-face of workplace flexibility, its contradictory, paradox, and deceptive double character. Theoretical discourses and practical examples of an employee-oriented implementation of organizational practices, on the one hand, speak for the potential of workplace flexibility to facilitate humanistic ideals of self-determination, autonomy, psychological appropriation or ownership, and personal development. This positive image serves as an optimistic antipode to insecure, erratic, and precarious working conditions promoting psychological strain, alienation, impaired mental health, and, ultimately, exclusion (Burchell et al., 2002; Lengfeld & Kleiner, 2009; Pedaci, 2010). Research and practice of workplace flexibility, on the other hand, is indeed systemically permeated and inherently corrupted by neoliberal ideology, which, first and foremost, serves the interests of employers, shareholders, and management, routinely ignoring, misrepresenting, or counteracting the interests of employees (Gouliquer, 2000). Questions regarding how these two opposing dimensions are theoretically interrelated and manifest in practice, have been attracting academic interests. Cañibano (2019) suggested that the tension field between flexibility for the employer and the employee can be approached as: a) the two ends of a continuum (opposed, incompatible, „either/or“); b) bipolar and dynamic (independent, fluctuating, „not only/but also“); or c) a paradoxical relationship (complex, ambivalent, „both/and“), where flexibility functions as both employer inducement and employee contribution. Drawing on the literature on organizational paradoxes and the Taoist symbol of the Yin and Yang, this author elaborates on the complex properties of the two forms flexibility, such as interdependence,

inherent tensions, and potential complementarities (cf. Putnam et al., 2014). In the following, we build on the thinking of these scholars by emphasizing a dialectical interpretation of flexibility and applying it to the organizational level. Dialectical thinking is an analytic device with explanatory power beyond the concept of paradox. Where paradox emphasizes inherent contradictions and ambiguities, dialectics describe a dynamic process of antagonistic tensions, „amalgamating“ transformations and emergence of qualitatively new phenomena (Farjoun, 2019; Levins, 1998; Putnam, Fairhurst & Banghart, 2016). This is expressed as the dialectic tri-step of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, combined with the motions of negation, transformation (elevation to a higher level), and continuation (preservation of lower-level properties) in the newly emerging configuration.

Without making use of this full potential here, in the following we will sketch out examples for possible forms of underlying dialectical relationships. Three relevant cases are manifestations of workplace flexibility as employee-oriented humanistic ideal and employer-oriented neoliberal ideology in 1) different organizations, 2) for different groups of employees within the same organization, 3) as inseparably intertwined aspects of the same work and organizational practices. The first is the case, when the degree of humanistic and employee-oriented versus ideologically biased and employer-oriented practice of flexibility is investigated as a function of the „ideology“ and culture of a specific organization. For example, workplace flexibility in organizations with high levels of structurally anchored democracy and employee-ownership (e.g., self-governed worker co-operatives) and a highly authentic socio-moral organizational climate (Weber et al., 2008) has another meaning than in conventional hierarchical enterprises, let alone in modern corporations led by a management dedicated to maximize shareholder value. Essentially, this comes down to genuine intention, commitment, and dedication to implementing and practicing employee-oriented workplace flexibility, for instance, in the context of democratic processes and humanistic or socially responsible management models (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Chiva, 2014; Melé, 2003; Weber et al., 2008).

The second form of dialectics is reflected by the core-periphery model of organizational flexibility (Atkinson, 1984). It differentiates employment quality between a skilled, well-paid, comparatively secure *core* workforce segment with standard employment contracts and high levels of job autonomy, from a peripheral workforce consisting of precarious workers with atypical contracts and high insecurity (Kalleberg, 2005). Subject to further differentiation and segmentation, core and the peripheral workforce complement each other as the functionally and numerically „flex-

ible firm“, where privileged core employee groups enjoy the humanistic ideal, whereas peripheral employees bear the costs of the dark side of neoliberal flexibility. Competition for better employment conditions (or avoidance of job degrading) at the fault lines between core and periphery and systematic exclusion of lower performers – widely recommended management practices (Allan et al., 1999; Archibald, 2009) – introduce „dynamizing“ elements, metaphorically turning this internal labor market into a „through-flow reactor“ or „pressure cooker“.

A third dialectic of workplace flexibility is more complex and dynamic. Involving a longer-term perspective, it assumes that neoliberal ideological work practices indirectly advance their own antagonistic „negations“, thus, potentially proliferating emergent solutions and reconciliation of underlying tensions (Farjoun, 2019). The classic example for this dialectic on a macro-level is the social theory of historical materialism regarding the creation and exploitation of the working class by capital, progressing to a point where a revolutionary movement would be inevitable to relieve the structural tensions and energize the transformation of society towards a new configuration in the distribution of power over the productive forces and surplus value (Kolođlugil, 2015). Systems theory has established non-linear emergent processes are limitedly predictable and thus, at best, are subject to theoretical speculation (Levins, 1998; Pratten, 2013). Examples for such intertwined, dialectical processes on a micro-level have been described for flexible work practices, such as telecommunicating and part-time work (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018; Kauhanen & Nätti, 2015). Another rather unlikely example can be found in the current phenomenon of co-working spaces for the self-employed. Indeed, some scholars have argued that co-working spaces are a possibility for precarious freelancers to overcome social isolation and develop collaborative structures, build „new“ social capital and share, bundle, and cooperatively exploit their resources (Butcher, 2016; Gandini, 2015; Gerdenitsch, Scheel, Andorfer & Korunka, 2016). Born from necessity to survive economically under the neoliberal regime, such new forms of work may open niches or „laboratories“ to develop a new „class consciousness“ of professionals sharing similar constraints and interests – a potential movement towards building „flexible“, collaborative, self-managed, resource-saving, and, therefore, socially responsible and productive new organizational structures and practices. These new organizational forms frequently consist of and attract broadly qualified and multi-skilled people, who are used to proactively stand in for their interests, „hardened“ and disillusioned in the daily neoliberal struggles. If coupled with specific political backgrounds and value orientations, this new generation of free associations of „independent labor-

ers“ or social „entreploees“ may be able to strengthen societal tendencies for a social-ecological transformation of society – or at least parts of it – by developing alternatives for collaborative emancipation, individuation, and solidarity in opposition to the economic excesses of neoliberal ideology (Kolođlugil, 2015). Of course, this is a very optimistic and maybe overly hopeful perspective. It is equally plausible (and maybe more likely) that, in reality, co-working spaces become new arenas for increased competition and instrumentality masked by inauthentic and opportunistic quasi-collaboration, cloaked in a rhetoric of solidarity. This unresolved tension illustrates the non-deterministic, ambivalent, and cautionary nature of dialectical thinking that we are advocating here. Future developments and research need to answer this question empirically by analyzing the conditions under which flexibility-oriented practices originally initiated by neoliberal economic interests can indeed be transformed from within to produce counteracting, liberating and emancipatory effects – embodied in dialectical synthesis. Following the „individualistic turn“ in work psychology from the collective to the individual level, which, reflects a manifestation of the ideology of flexibility by itself, this includes potentials for proactive behavior as „micro-emancipatory“ bottom-up actions of individuals taking initiative and using agency in vaguely defined work situations. While worthwhile and important, exploring these possibilities should not lead to assuming that all employees necessarily have access to, can adequately use, or, eventually, can really profit from such personal flexibility resources.

Abandoning or reclaiming flexibility?

Recognizing its conceptual fuzziness and ideological contaminations, the question arises whether „workplace flexibility“ continues to be a useful scientific concept. In our view, research on workplace flexibility can make a relevant contribution, only if it not primarily serves the interests of organizations, but first and foremost, benefits individuals and society. This requires a critical perspective, which includes identifying, calling attention to, analyzing, and challenging observed dysfunctional, psychopathological, or socially corrosive trends – instead of conveniently downplaying or ignoring them. On the societal level, hegemony of neoliberal ideology and associated social inequality, projection of societal risks on individuals, and trends towards de-facto de-democratization and „de-civilization“, warrant loud, clear, and tireless calls for social reform (Harvey, 2005; LaMothe, 2016). Scrutiny on the organizational level deserve, among others, HR and work systems promoting or demanding unsustainably high and/or steadily increasing performance,

competition among coworkers, and pressure to adapt to temporal or functional flexibility requirements (Becke, 2017; Dettmers et al., 2016). Such practices are enabled and reinforced by rising social tolerance for inequality and erosion of institutional protections for employees (Lengfeld & Kleiner, 2009; Wacquant, 2009). Based on the critique of adverse human-made „environmental“ conditions, applied psychological research should strive for insights that are relevant, useful, and beneficial for all its stakeholders. Certainly, this refers not only to those profiting from or in charge of managing organizations, but to all individuals navigating the „brave new world of work“ – faced with pressures and conditions requiring them to be flexible, proactive, adaptive, and self-reliant in managing their own careers and quality of working life (Höge, 2011). Research on employee-oriented aspects of workplace flexibility holds the promise of generating such recommendations. On the one hand, this pertains to principles and practices of socially responsible or humanistic management; on the other hand, to healthy, ethical, and constructive cognitive and behavioral strategies for approaching work, pursuing careers, and developing positive occupational identities in the era of flexibility. Of relevance here, among others, is the literature on proactive organizational behavior, comprising self-initiated and unauthorized acts of job crafting and renegotiation of work and employment conditions through idiosyncratic deals (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Hornung et al., 2008, 2018). Illustrating tensions of interests at the individual level, as well as ideological contamination, however, proactive work behavior is also considered a dimension of job performance. Research on the positive aspects of task or functional flexibility, thus, runs a thin line between employee self-actualization and self-exploitation, and must not underestimate adversity, competition, and pressure in contemporary work situations. Proactive improvements of the work situation may be difficult to distinguish from adaptive coping efforts to counteract alienating or health-impairing conditions, which, in the longer term, possibly converge with dysfunctional or unsustainable self-endangering coping strategies, partly based on pressure-driven over-engagement (Hornung et al., 2017). This corresponds with our argument that behavior is a limitedly useful category of analysis without knowledge of the underlying motivating, constraining, and influencing contextual and psychological processes.

The dialectics of the subjectification of work under regimes of workplace flexibility would be incompletely represented without the opportunities for self-actualization, opened up by changing organizational structures and practices. Shared assumptions regarding inherent human tendencies towards growth, altruism, and self-determination, particularly under conditions of adversity, are found in humanistic, existential,

and critical streams of psychology (Teo, 2015). These traditions provide a basis for evoking, positioning, and promoting humanistic values as a backdrop of employee-oriented forms of flexibility and to counteract socially corrosive neoliberal antipodes of individualism, competition, and instrumentality. On the positive or utopian side, this includes a vision, courage, and commitment to continuing to explore emerging dialectic potentials for *individuation*, *solidarity*, and *emancipation* at work.

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