

The role of work and organizational psychology in socio-ecological transformations: A bricolage of positions from a recent panel discussion

Edina Dóci¹, Severin Hornung², Franziska Köbler³, Luca P. Vecchio⁴, Matthijs Bal⁵,

Mara Gorli⁶, Francesco Tommasi⁷ & Zoe Sanderson⁸

¹ Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain School of Management, Belgium

² Universität Innsbruck, Institut für Psychologie, Austria

³ Leuphana Universität Lüneburg, Institut für Management und Organisation, Germany

⁴ Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca, Dipartimento di Psicologia, Italy

⁵ University of Lincoln, Lincoln International Business School, United Kingdom

⁶ Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano, Dipartimento di Psicologia, Italy

⁷ Università degli Studi di Verona, Dipartimento di Scienze Umane, Italy

⁸ University of Bristol, Business School, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This article presents a bricolage of eight position statements, made by the participants of a panel discussion at a recent small group meeting¹. The objective of the event was to critically explore potential contributions of work and organizational (W-O) psychology in addressing the most pressing and interconnected global problems of our time, namely, social inequalities and environmental unsustainability. The contents of this article reflect the aims of the panel discussion as a collective reflection on the current and future role of W-O psychology in the necessary socio-ecological transformations. A case for a politically-infused reorganization of work and its representation in psychology is followed by warnings against tendencies of whitewashing and greenwashing and the insufficiency of conventional approaches in W-O psychology. Calls are made for more localized and situated research, collaboration with social movements and alternative organizations, and other forms of academic activism with a focus on democratic practices and benefits to society. Recommended for the reorientation of the field is more critical and reflexive engagement with positionalities and power, transformative public actions, as well as the development of scholarly collectives based on inclusivity, care, and uncompromising commitment to making a positive impact for the common good.

Keywords

Work and organizational psychology – socio-ecological transformation – social inequalities – environmental sustainability – bricolage

Reorganizing work and psychology (Edina Dóci)

We need to talk about politics. We must politicize work and organizational (W-O) psychology if we are to engage meaningfully with the climate and ecological crisis. Climate change is a profoundly human-made problem, rooted in socio-political structures, and any attempt to address it within the social sciences that fails to engage with politics risks being hypocritical or, worse, irrelevant. Ignoring the

political dimensions of the crisis renders any proposed solutions both naïve and ineffective. Far-right movements are on the rise across Europe – in Hungary, Italy, Poland, Sweden, Austria, Finland, Germany and France, where more than 13 million people voted for the far-right in the last elections. It was a huge relief that eventually „Rassemblement National“ [in France] lost the elections, but this relief didn't feel like victory. It felt more like, „phew, we have a few more years before the fascists take over.“ The consistently rising popularity of the far right raises ques-

¹ The small group meeting was entitled „Work and Organizational Psychology in the Era of Grand Challenges: Integrating Theories and Practices for Addressing Social Inequalities and Environmental Sustainability“. The event was held at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano, from 8th to 10th of July, 2024, and was organized by members of the „Future of Work and Organizational Psychology“ (FoWOP) initiative. The panel discussion, convened towards the end of the first conference day, was moderated by Thomas Höge, who also compiled and edited this bricolage. The order of authors does not reflect their relative contributions to this article, but the sequence of position statements. To learn more about FoWOP, please visit: <https://fowop.eu>. A detailed conference report is available at: www.uibk.ac.at/de/psychologie/tagung/fowop2024.

tions about the left's ability to offer compelling, alternative visions that resonate with people's lived experiences and struggles, including in the context of the climate crisis.

What does this have to do with W-O psychology and the climate crisis? Traditional W-O psychology tends to avoid serious engagement with the climate crisis, and when it does address the issue, it adopts an ostensibly apolitical stance. It focuses narrowly on individual employee behaviors as solutions, placing climate responsibility on the individual rather than on systemic issues. In contrast, critical W-O psychology provides a framework that critically examines the political and social contexts in which organizations operate, offering a more profound and socially responsible way to address the climate crisis. Critical W-O psychology challenges the assumptions of Traditional Theory – in which W-O psychology is embedded – that seeks to understand people, society, and nature for the purpose of control, efficiency and value extraction, thereby aligning with the interests of existing power structures that benefit from this. This approach inevitably suppresses human freedom and stifles meaningful social change. Critical W-O psychology, rooted in Critical Theory, has a radically different mission: it aims to expose and dismantle the structures of repression, promoting emancipation, social justice, and societal transformation (Röllmann et al., 2023). It engages explicitly with political issues, investigating how broader social and political systems influence workers' psychological experiences, well-being, and behavior. By contextualizing psychological phenomena within these socio-political structures, critical W-O psychology challenges the status quo and lays the groundwork for transformative social change. It does more than critique. It imagines alternative ways of organizing work and society, fostering the creativity necessary to reimagine social and economic systems.

When it comes to climate change, the role of critical W-O psychology could be essential. Instead of focusing on surface-level individual behaviors, we must examine how political ideologies and economic structures – particularly those that prioritize continuous growth and productivity – drive climate degradation. At the core of this issue is the contradiction inherent in growth-based economies, which demand perpetual expansion in a world with finite resources. This contradiction drives us toward ecological collapse, and workplaces are central to this dynamic. They are the sites where the extraction and processing of natural resources for the production of goods – with the goal of maximizing profit – are facilitated, involving a large portion of humanity integrated into the labor market as the productive workforce. Therefore, understanding the psychology of productive work and the productive workplace is critical to developing meaningful contributions to climate mitigation and adaptation. The omnipresence of growth and productivism – widely perceived as the foundations of success, stability, and well-being – makes it difficult to imagine alternatives. This is where critical W-O psychology can contribute: by revealing and unpacking the psychological

mechanisms that sustain these destructive systems. However, this is just the starting point. Critical W-O psychology also has the potential to offer a vision of alternative social arrangements – how society, work, and the economy could be reorganized. It may propose not just a critique of the current system but also a compelling vision of how work could be different, envisioning an alternative psychology of work and organizations.

This leads us back to the political context – the rise of the far-right and the failures of the left. The left's message is one of restraint: reduce consumption, limit travel, and accept a lower standard of living to avert climate disaster. This vision is inherently pessimistic, asking people to make personal sacrifices in the present to mitigate a future that is portrayed as bleak and uncertain. While rooted in the urgency of the crisis, it lacks an appealing, hopeful vision for what life could be beyond these sacrifices, often leaving people with a sense of impending doom rather than a positive alternative to work towards. This pessimistic vision – however realistic and morally justified – fails to resonate with the public, who understandably resist policies that offer only hardship and sacrifice. People are primarily concerned with their immediate quality of life and desire a future filled with hope and opportunity, not one overshadowed by fear and austerity. The left's failure, and that of movements like degrowth, lies in their inability to present an inspiring, hopeful alternative. While degrowth offers a theoretically sound critique of the current economic system, it fails to capture the imagination or address the psychological needs of people. It presents a vision of loss and sacrifice, challenging deeply ingrained associations between growth, progress, and personal well-being. This is a profoundly unappealing message, especially when contrasted with the right's seductive promises of security, stability, and a return to traditional values, which offer a comforting sense of order and prosperity in uncertain times.

This is where critical W-O psychology can make an important contribution. By researching existing alternative economic, social, and organizational arrangements; envisioning and articulating alternative futures; and creating positive, grounded visions of how society and work could be reorganized, critical W-O psychology can help shape societal discourse and inspire social movements. It can contribute to crafting an alternative vision of work and society in service of the socio-ecological transition, grounded in both new conceptual frameworks and psychological insights that promote positive social change. However, it's crucial to remain mindful of the limitations and potential blind spots within our own critical scholarship. While critical W-O psychology can be a powerful tool for transformation, a critical, self-reflective stance is essential to ensure that our research remains grounded and avoids falling into idealistic or messianistic narratives.

Don't believe the hype – beware of whitewashing and greenwashing work and organizational psychology (Severin Hornung)

The title of this position statement cautions against whitewashing and greenwashing W-O psychology (Williams, 2024). At present, the discipline largely seems to ignore the disastrous global situation. Termed multi-, poly-, omni- or meta-crisis, is the compounding of ecological and social disasters, such as environmental destruction, climate change, refugee crises, and socio-economic polarization, that is, growing inequality, precarity, and poverty, wars and armed conflicts over resources, and so on (Boukalas, 2023; Brand, 2016). My prediction is that in the future, we will witness an explosion in research related to social and ecological issues, such as precarious employment, career prospects of migrants, employee green behavior, and perceptions of corporate sustainability. Already this trend can be observed in special issues and small group meetings. With growing public awareness, W-O psychology will jump on the bandwagon, creating a hype in research on social inequality and ecological sustainability. Rather than a good thing, however, this is a problem. Mainstream research will assimilate these topics into its own logic, rendering them uncritical and meaningless, and worse, use them as a justification, alibi or fig leaf (Ahmed, 2020). To describe the approach and style of mainstream research, I suggest ten adjectives – euphemistic, individualistic, functionalistic, reformistic, unitaristic, economistic, positivistic, optimistic, formalistic, and autistic. Most of these are not new and some are overlapping, but nonetheless might be helpful.

Euphemistic refers to embellishing language, trying not to offend anyone and downplaying the severity of issues. For instance, not calling out systemic failures of politics, the crypto-fascist core of the economic system, not discussing how bad the situation really is for the planet, basically being destroyed with all major ecosystems in decline, or the majority of the global workforce, suffering from forced labor, poverty wages, and threats to life and health. (To be self-reflexive, „grand challenges“, is a euphemism for multiple compounding catastrophes.) Previous contributions have criticized the individualistic approach of W-O psychology, focusing on personal attitudes and behavior, thus psychologizing and subjectivizing social and ecological problems. Bound to remain insignificant, this individualistic approach offloads responsibility to the weakest link. The excuse that this reflects the perspective of psychology and everything else is the domain of other disciplines, such as sociology and politics, is both incorrect and infuriating.

Functionalistic means not questioning the contradictions and dysfunctions of the system, and the ideologies used to obscure these, but accepting the status quo as a given and trying to improve its functioning. Closely related, reformistic refers to the assumption that the system can be incrementally improved. The current system may not be

perfect, the argument goes, but there is no alternative, so we need to work with what we have, to improve the situation. As convincing as this may sound, the reform-oriented approach justifies and stabilizes the status quo and inhibits necessary fundamental transformations. Unitaristic means assuming convergence of interest, not acknowledging the fundamental inherent conflicts between workers and owners or investors, represented by management. This includes not discussing how political-economic elites are profiting from the destruction of nature, from wars, and social crises, and have vested interest to continue these crises.

The economistic character typically manifests in a „business case“ for social and ecological responsibility, instead of denouncing the fetishization of efficiency, productivity and performance, acknowledging that instrumental rationality is core to the destructiveness driving the global omnicrisis. Positivistic refers to the fetishization of methods and statistics. Inflated methodological requirements make it almost impossible to examine anything but the most trivial and meaningless relationships among predefined acceptable constructs. Striking is the optimistic tone of mainstream research. There always seems to be a positive, hopeful outlook, a tribute to the idea that current crises can be efficiently managed and overcome, instead of the more realistic admission that the situation is essentially hopeless. Moreover, mainstream research tends to be highly formalistic, reproducing the same structure, language, methods, and arguments. Interchangeable are merely the constructs. Autistic science describes a self-referential and self-contained field, disconnected from the real-life experience of people, engaging in meaningless obsessive-compulsive repetition for its own sake (Mohn, 2010). A prime example would be research on work engagement.

Mind the so-called duck-test: If something looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck. No matter if W-O psychology discovers social justice and sustainability as fancy topics, as long as this does not change the internal logic of the discipline, the result is whitewashing and greenwashing (Williams, 2024). Adapting the duck-test, if it looks, proceeds, and argues like conventional W-O psychology, it still is neoliberal ideology and managerialism in a thinly veiled disguise of humanism and socio-ecological concern. In other words: Don't believe the hype – it is still a duck.

Inevitably, this raises the question, how research should change. Although this is difficult if not impossible to say, a starting point is to reverse those adjectives: Not euphemistic, but brutally straightforward, even polemic, not afraid of spelling out the ugly truths and speaking truth to power. Not individualistic, but focusing on collective action and systemic change. Not functionalistic, but subversive, disruptive, emphasizing resistance and refusal. Not unitaristic, but radically pluralist, emphasizing inherent conflicts of interests and power imbalances. Not economistic, but humanist and ecocentric, unapologetically normative and openly reject performance and efficiency

as primary objectives. Not reformistic, pleading for incremental changes, but revolutionary and utopian demanding fundamental transformations. Not positivistic and focused on methods, but critical and engaged, focusing on content, critique, and actions. Not optimistic, but uncomfortably realistic or even pessimistic, because there is little basis for a positive outlook. Not formalistic, but unconventional, unorthodox, and experiential. Not autistic, but open and interdisciplinary, interconnected with social movements, engaged and interventionistic.

I do not know what is the opposite of a duck, maybe a dolphin or a wild boar, maybe one of those hundreds of species that went extinct within the last decade. What I do know, is that we need a fundamentally and radically different approach than just a whitewashed or greenwashed version of W-O psychology, which – to carry on the metaphor – resembles a lame, domesticated duck that cannot fly, with clipped wings, swimming in its own excrements, in a dirty little pond owned by management, and every year gets sold and eaten by capital.

Believing in upward spirals with tears in your eyes: Can work and organizational psychology craft an omnicrisis? (Franziska Köbler)

The era of grand challenges is characterized by multiple crises. Not just economic crises, but also ecological, political, health, and other life spheres are in crisis, as exemplified by climate change, increasing violence between and within states (e.g., polarization and repression), and rising non-communicable diseases. In the following, I develop a potential scenario on how W-O psychology might deal with these crises. This dystopian tongue-in-cheek scenario continues observations at conferences, trends in mainstream W-O psychology, and the neoliberalization of the field (see Bal and Dóci, 2018).

The scene

When we attend W-O psychology conferences, the outside world, shaken by various crises, feels far away. Here, at the coffee break, conference attendees are laughing, talking, and gossiping: Who won the last grant, who got the best positions, and whose research should not be taken seriously. In the sessions next door, W-O psychology repeats the ritual of presenting ideas within its own circles that are 30 or 50 years old, such as various stress and motivation models. The methods W-O psychology uses are usually younger, and some of the samples W-O psychology studies have novel names like tech worker, prompt engineer, or content creator.

But can W-O psychology use these ideas, methods, and fancy samples to craft the crises I described at the beginning?

According to the novel concept of crisis crafting, W-O psychology should be able to do that, and I will tell you why. Crisis crafting, the younger brother of job crafting (see Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), refers to small self-initiated changes of components of the crisis you face to raise its meaning and thus boost your own motivation. For instance, individuals may redesign and reimagine a crisis in terms of three aspects: physical or task-related aspects, social relationships, and cognitions. As a behavioral science, W-O psychology, of course, knows how to change physical and task-related aspects of crises – by creating a crisis-crafting intervention for individuals. These individuals might learn that the crisis involves various resources and demands they may shape and remove. After this lecture, they also understand that these resources and demands affect their well-being. Knowing that pollution is a demand to the environment, at least the 150 undergraduate students who are necessary for our experiment, according to the power calculation, will recycle their plastic garbage or go to places where they cannot see or smell the garbage and its incineration. Thus, they will at least feel better or think less about the ecological crisis. What they will know for sure is that it is *their* responsibility (see also McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012).

To craft the crisis, W-O psychology has to consider its social relationships with the management world and the military. Of course, W-O psychology needs to intensify these precious relationships because what would W-O psychology do without them? In the creepiest scenarios of anti-work movements or pacifists, for example, there are no workers or soldiers anymore W-O psychology can study. Also, W-O psychology knows that solving a crisis is an all-hands-on-deck situation. So what could W-O psychology even do without their hands? And then, of course, there is cognitive crafting. As everyone knows, W-O psychology outperformed all other disciplines in cognitive crafting, even religion. W-O psychology does what it is best at: It changes its thoughts about the crisis. The crisis becomes a chance. Financial worries become immense resources because they push you to find a new job. Signs of death all around become valuable sources of meaning because they make you realize how important your life is. Yet, W-O psychology also has a solution for the pessimists who cannot see the value of these resources: If they still struggle with climate anxiety, for example, they might just realize that they can address it like all other anxieties, by doing some mindfulness practices.

These crafting approaches, especially the cognitive ones, are remarkable. They are like books for little children. There is always hope or a good ending. And like children, W-O psychology loves hope and good endings. W-O psychology also loves to stick to its rituals and old childhood stories. And so, W-O psychology keeps repeating the idea of upward spirals. These beautiful accumulations of

resources, resources that everybody has, like optimism, may grow into achievements, which in turn may result in even more optimism, support from others, and more achievements and so on. This idea has been around in psychology for a while, sometimes more, sometimes less contextualized, and it certainly has its beauty to believe in this good old story, even in the era of grand challenges. So can W-O psychology craft an omnicrisis? Obviously, it can. It will experience more meaning and feel more motivated for that day because it repeats what it has been doing for years, with some little twists and innovations here and there.

Back to the scene

At the conference, people are still laughing, chatting, and gossiping. They are celebrating the stars of transformation, those who engaged in avoidance crisis crafting on the cognitive dimension. They studied Artificial Intelligence – an important topic that makes W-O psychology look modern somehow. ‘Congratulations!’ is the last W-O psychology hears about the crafted but unchanged crises. Of course, this scenario and the construct of crisis crafting are fiction. However, this fiction is inspired by real-world developments and examples of mainstream W-O psychology. For sure, a single scientific field cannot solve the omnicrisis on its own. Still, looking at the developments of this field, some of which inspired this fiction, it is hard to believe that W-O psychology is interested in addressing this omnicrisis seriously (Bal & Dóci, 2018, McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012). Instead, W-O psychology seems to fly through a nostalgic dream with some sparkling technological twists.

Rethinking change. Some reflections on the possible role of work and organizational psychology in addressing „grand challenges“ (Luca P. Vecchio)

When reflecting on how to address the „grand challenges“ related to such major issues as environmental sustainability and rising global inequalities (the focus of the panel discussion held during the Small Group Meeting organized by FoWOP in Milan in July 2024), we are confronted with paradoxes and clear contradictions. On the one hand, awareness of the dangers posed by an increasingly unsustainable development model has undoubtedly grown. This heightened sensitivity has led to concrete initiatives at multiple levels of society. At the individual level, especially among younger generations, we see an increase in critical attitudes and behaviors towards hyper-consumerist models. In the economic and business sectors, sustainability has become a key issue, even resulting in binding regulations such as sustainability reporting. At the policy level, political and economic agendas at national, regional, and international levels are setting goals, policies, and investments aimed at promoting more environmentally con-

scious and equitable development (e.g., the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the European Union’s Green Deal, and the U.S. Department of State’s 2021 document „The Long-Term Strategy of the United States: Pathways to Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2050“). On the other hand, despite this attention and these growing efforts, the data on ecological degradation and global inequality continue to paint a concerning picture, with little evidence of improvement. For instance, focusing solely on environmental sustainability, recent data show record levels of atmospheric CO₂ concentrations at 426.90 ppm (May 2024), the highest ever recorded.

The reasons for these contradictions are complex and manifold. One possible explanation is that the current initiatives fail to address the underlying structural causes of unsustainability; one could say that they „miss the mark“, targeting surface-level symptoms instead. These structural issues are rooted in the globally dominant capitalist development model, characterized by continuous accumulation, the imperative of limitless growth, fierce competition for resources and market dominance. These features are fundamentally incompatible with the finite nature of the planet’s resources and inherently produce inequality. If we accept this interpretation – admittedly simplified and in need of deeper exploration – it becomes clear that addressing sustainability would require a radical overhaul of the existing system, replacing it with an alternative model. However, given the current historical context, such a transformation seems unattainable and, in fact, appears to be an impossible task. As Mark Fisher wrote: „It is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism“ (Fisher, 2009).

In this context, what role can organizational and work psychology play? Should it limit itself to promoting best practices that slow down or mitigate the effects of a development model that can no longer be fundamentally questioned? Or should it instead focus on enhancing people’s ability to adapt to increasingly challenging living conditions? A more fruitful task, and one that represents a more ethically sound commitment, is to explore new ways and forms to support transformative processes and practices. This approach starts by relinquishing the idea of pursuing and imposing a global alternative model – not because of the difficulty (or even impossibility) of the goal, but because the logic and assumptions underpinning such a project are the very ones that led us to the current situation. What is this logic? What are its underlying assumptions?

This logic is based on the idea that reality – whether natural or social – is something separate from us, the subjects, which we must „appropriate“ by understanding its laws and reshaping it according to principles we deem universally valid and „good“. This worldview emphasizes total control, complete knowledge, and universalism. It assumes that the world is incomplete and imperfect, and that humans, through their knowledge and willpower, have the task of creating a „better world“. Such a perspective fosters

an omnipotent, voluntaristic anthropocentrism: humans place themselves at the center, seeking to impose a predetermined model on reality, overcoming any limitations seen as obstacles to happiness and justice. This approach can be traced back to the legacy of Cartesian dualism, which assumes a separation between the subject (the agent – humankind – and the object – reality, nature, society), which stands in opposition and must be dominated. This notion has a long tradition in Western thought and has been at the core of the modernity project for centuries, including the capitalist paradigm. While this project has been successful for roughly 500 years, it is now showing its limitations; as some have noted, the future has changed its sign: from a promise, it has become a threat (Benasayag & Cany, 2024).

In light of this shift, we might ask whether it is possible to imagine a different project – not one aimed at replacing an „unjust“ model with a „just“ one, or an unsustainable model with a sustainable one, as this would still reproduce the logic of domination, merely with different values. Instead, the goal would be to explore new ways of thinking and acting upon change. This idea can be informed by other traditions of thought, which suggest that transformation does not consist of „imposing one’s plan on the world, but rather leveraging the potential of the situation“ (Jullien, 1996). Such a perspective presents challenges for psychology, both in terms of theory and practice. First, it requires us to critically examine our implicit anthropological assumptions and promote a „different anthropology“ or vision of the human being. We need to move away from the notion of the omnipotent actor, driven to control and perfect the world. This shift demands a reconsideration of key concepts in our discipline, such as the subject, the individual, identity, and agency. Furthermore, it calls for the development of a new conception of change – not as the imposition of a model that serves as an external norm for action, but rather as a process that draws on the inherent tensions and dynamics within any given situation, recognizing and supporting the „new possibilities“ they represent.

These reflections open the door to a potential research agenda. One of our tasks should be to investigate, study, and reflect on organizations, collectives, movements, and associations that propose, pursue, and are already realizing alternative „ways of life“ at a local, situated level. These initiatives operate within their immediate context, without claiming to offer definitive solutions to global problems. By understanding their conditions of existence, characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses, we can gain insight into how different modes of living are practiced and sustained. This research would focus not on universalizing these practices but on learning from their diversity and the specific realities they navigate. We should also work collaboratively with people from these alternative collectives, offering our expertise to support and accompany their projects. This approach emphasizes partnership over intervention, recognizing the value of existing initiatives and aiming to enhance their potential through shared engage-

ment. Thus, our role is not to impose a new grand project but to explore, understand, and support the many alternative ways of living that already exist. By working collaboratively and respecting the limitations inherent in each context, we can promote a more nuanced, context-sensitive approach to building a sustainable and equitable future. In this sense, I advocate for a reimagining of our work – not as architects of a new utopia, but as humble collaborators in the ongoing, multifaceted efforts toward a world that supports both human and ecological well-being.

Hypernormal frequencies: What is our role as academics in absurd times?

(Matthijs Bal)

In the context of the current collection around the role of work psychologists in addressing inequalities and the unsustainability of our world and workplaces, we cannot afford to treat this as a mere ‘academic’ debate, in which the role of the academic work psychologist is only to analyze the situation from a distance, while retreating into the classical ivory tower. While academia has played a large role in collecting evidence of the staggering inequalities throughout the world and the disastrous state of the climate, the path towards actually changing society has been less clear, and subject to heated debate across academia. On the one hand, the purist perspective dictates that academics should only objectively study society and their practices, and only report on what is happening, rather than intervening. On the other hand, activist scholars argue that academics have a unique role to play in society, by using their abilities to contribute to a better society. Activist scholars are not necessarily critical, as many scholars in work psychology may engage in consulting or paid research projects for and within organizations in order to make them better performing and more efficient (and thus engage in a rather status-quo driven ‘activism’). This constitutes a kind of non-critical activism which remains compliant with dominant ideologies within organizational life. What is the role then of the critical, activist work psychologist, as it is those scholars who can make more critically informed assessments about the state of inequality and unsustainability of our economic system, organizations, and planet more widely (Islam & Sanderson, 2022)?

While generally the idea is that critical work is a necessity within a field in order to counterbalance hegemonic ideology (such as would be the case with neoliberal ideology in W-O psychology), we are also entering a fundamentally different phase in the development of capitalism, in which critique itself becomes hypernormalized, or integrated into authoritative discourse itself (Bal et al., 2023). In other words, critique becomes commodified within capitalist ideology. For instance, an Extinction Rebellion demonstration that is organized via social media (Instagram, Facebook) is both a critique on and resistance

to the prevailing system, and at the same time compliant with the underlying systemic commodification imperative. Hence, everything becomes commodified, a product, and critique on the system itself becomes merely part of the system of capitalist reproduction. The field of Critical Management Studies has become such an enterprise, with journals owned by private, profit-based publishers, conferences, and other activities (e.g., the use of Zoom for critical webinars) all being fully compliant with status-quo capitalist reproduction. However, the actual hypernormalization of critique also functions at a level deeper than capitalist compliance – it actually sustains the status-quo and allows an even deeper investment into hegemonic practice (hence the denotation that we live in absurd times; Bal et al., 2023). This legitimization of the status-quo through critique may function through two ways. The first, most obvious one, is that elites within a field may claim that the field is open and pluralistic, as critical voices exist. In this sense, the existence of Critical W-O psychology shows that W-O psychology itself is not a field overdetermined by hegemony but actually open to critical voices. The truth, however, is that these voices are perpetually marginalized, excluded, ridiculed, and kept out of the elite platforms (e.g., journal space, conferences, and grants are almost by definition not open to critical work or critical researchers). The second is that the rise of critical scholarship is perceived as a threat to ontological security of academics in the field. Those who have invested their entire careers and lives into mainstream scholarship, may feel threatened when critical researchers interrogate their research and practices. In response, the rise of critical research spurs a deeper investment into the status-quo, as a counterreaction by those elites in the field. At times, they may violently reject and attack the scientific credibility and validity of critical research, and do everything to antagonize critical researchers to make them retain their marginalized position in the field. So what is to be done?

Work psychologists have the opportunity to integrate our knowledge into addressing inequalities and unsustainability of our world. After all, these problems are a problem of the mind, and psychologists should be ideally placed to address the psychological dimensions of the transformation towards a more sustainable world. Nonetheless, given the abovementioned resistance against critical work, it is more likely that the status-quo will be maintained within work psychology, perpetually circulating around obsolete models of productivity, profitability and utility maximization. It is therefore important for critical work psychologists to continue working on the intellectual models for a transformation of our world to sustainability and lesser inequalities, but at the same time, also engage in much more strategic, political work. Such political work may involve local activities within our own universities, such as lobbying for curriculum reform, divestment from unsustainable collaborations, reprioritizing strategic goals for universities (e.g., de-emphasizing publication outputs as the criterion

of good academic work), but also activities to maintain health and well-being of academics in an increasingly precarious and neoliberal academic environment. Moreover, lobbying work may extend to associations, organizational bodies and governments. Such lobbying should not be aimed at trying to adapt to authoritative discourse for individual adjustment (i.e., making sure how we as psychologists can ensure that workers are adjusted to and compliant with dominant managerial ideologies), but to contribute to a more fundamental change in our society towards sustainability and reduced inequalities. The critical work psychologist knows that this transformation is not one of technical solutions that can be implemented top-down, but of radical change, and it is the duty of critical work psychologists to play their part in this much needed radical change.

The democracy of us: A new turn towards collaboration? (Mara Gorli)

In recent years, many countries have experienced significant political upheaval, marked by the rise of authoritarian regimes and the reassertion of sovereignty, trends that are increasingly concerning. Economically, neoliberalism is placing immense strain on individuals and workers alike, as the relentless pursuit of profit exacerbates social inequalities (Han, 2017). On the one hand, technology and goods-producing companies are surging, generating substantial (and unequal) income opportunities and fueling constant consumerism. On the other hand, service organizations that operate outside of profit-driven motives and embody principles of social solidarity are receiving diminishing support. This has led to new forms of fragility and vulnerability (Habran et al., 2024), particularly in two critical areas. Firstly, the very workers who are employed by service organizations and who dedicate themselves to addressing the vulnerabilities of the most disadvantaged segments of society are themselves becoming more vulnerable. This negative spiral entraps and weakens a wide range of organizations, including healthcare providers, educational institutions, community service, and services for youth, migrants and prisoners, among others. A pressing question arises for W-O psychologists: where can our expertise in research and intervention be most effectively applied to generate impacts that reorient society towards values of equity, solidarity, and fair access to conditions that enable peaceful coexistence? Could this be a perspective that needs strengthening within our field? Moreover, a society grappling with complex issues such as those we face today requires multiple systems of thought, interpretation, and action, as well as collective responses and plural perspectives. There is a renewed need to focus on systems of participation, democracy, and collaboration. Yet, workplaces and organizations are often built around systems where those who excel in competition and individual

achievement thrive. Psychologists are frequently called into organizations to provide an individualistic perspective on problems and processes, aiming to enhance the competencies of individual workers. The application of psychological help – arguably the foundation of our profession – often aligns with the logic of system efficiency rather than the development of responsive capacities (Cunliffe, 2005, 2021) to address the tensions and paradoxes of contemporary society. The focus remains on the production and profit that individuals can generate, as evidenced by competency assessment systems, performance management frameworks, and professional development programs. What role should W-O psychology play in fostering collective dimensions capable of rethinking the directions and orientations that need to be taken, particularly in response to the needs of not only the competitive market but also society at large? We might reconsider our role as psychologists in the workplace. This reconsideration should include the following key directions:

Active engagement in local contexts: As W-O psychologists, we must not only develop theories but also engage directly with local contexts. This involves getting close to workers, practices, workplaces, and living systems, as well as confronting the contradictions and tensions they experience.

Promoting collaboration within organizations: We need to foster collaboration within organizations by working alongside managers rather than against systems. By engaging from within, we can better understand diverse perspectives and subtly influence processes while respecting everyone's viewpoints.

Rethinking classical themes of work psychology: Many of the traditional themes of work psychology need to be re-examined in light of the dynamics occurring within individuals. For example, what are the unconscious tensions that neoliberalism induces in people? This might include the internal push towards incessant work (workaholism), characterized by speed and efficiency in productive responses, versus the push towards withdrawal – a drive impulse that can lead to depression and addiction. Both of these tendencies hinder collaboration and democratic forms within our social reality, as they affect the possibility of creating and using collective thinking spaces. What factors facilitate or hamper collaboration within workgroups and towards common good objectives? How does the tension between individuation and belonging manifest within individuals today? What new meanings sustain workers and citizens? Revisiting and reinterpreting certain aspects of clinical psychology may be necessary to explain the new meaning of work and the relationship between the individual, the work object, the Other, and the organization.

A renewed, multi-perspective, multi-disciplinary and collective approach might be essential for addressing the com-

plex challenges of our time, where W-O psychologists can play a crucial role in connecting with other disciplines to foster collaboration, solidarity, and social justice in the workplace and beyond.

Public-a(c)tions in the vast and terrible world (Francesco Tommasi)

Many may agree with me on how great it has been to attend the last FoWOP Small Group Meeting (SGM) in Milano, July 2024. This has been an occasion in which we have (finally) brought to the public the attention toward the role of W-O psychology in the era of grand challenges. I do also believe that many may join my pleasure of being part of the FoWOP initiative and seeing so many international and interdisciplinary scholars taking part at the SGM with their critical, thought-provoking and compelling works. I believe so because I do recognize how many scholars within W-O psychology are craving for something new (Gerard, 2022). Witnessing workers' exploitation, and the suffering of marginalized and oppressed people while bearing the escalation of the environmental crisis, nurture our desire to manifest our dissent and objection to the fall of a silent and dormant academic W-O psychology in front of the forces of injustice. Indeed, the last FoWOP SGM of 2024 represented a public action as it was a space for liberation and emancipation in which both organizers and participants lived their crave for a responsible W-O psychology confronting grand challenges.

Acknowledging this space of liberation and emancipation, I wish to argue about the role of public-a(c)tions for rethinking the boundaries and rewriting the scripts of W-O psychology while also envisioning the future of W-O psychology. With public-a(c)tions, I frame my argument to the etymology of the world to reenergize the mainstay of publications in our hyper productive world. I do so simply recalling the Latin words „public“ and „act“ that form the word publications. This is not a mere opposition to the role of reading and writing publications. Recalling the etymology of publications is neither an attempt for an intellectual show off. Rather, this is a response to our overflow of emotions in the vast and terrible world. W-O psychology is in need of public actions, and a W-O psychology of grand challenges can be only justified if it alleviates our „suffering“. Responding to the grand challenges of social inequalities and environmental crisis makes us feeling terrified, anger or rather it makes us petrified when the priority of our academic work falls out the realization of public actions. Studying and addressing grand challenges makes us feeling the need to reconstitute our intellectual engagement with the offer of concrete responses – always admitted that concrete can mean anything.

To define public-a(c)tions, I list some possibilities. This list is not limited to the descriptions of processes of actions since the quest for public-a(c)tions pushes me to

talk about an ethics of public-a(c)tions in W-O psychology. Heuristically, I do so by reflecting on my experience within FoWOP and local social movements, and I complement my thinking here with insights from critical feminist community psychology and liberation psychology (Lykes & Van der Merwe, 2019; Martín-Baró, 1996). Given the ethical stance of my definition of public-a(c)tions, I would like to address my writing to all W-O psychology scholars and in particular to the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) and other W-O psychology and psychology at large associations, calling them to engage in a relational process that can respond the grand challenges. In this spirit, I engage in a dialectical work and describe three public-a(c)tions.

First, moving W-O psychology to a critical project covering social inequalities and environmental catastrophes, we can elevate our research practices to the role of documenting and analyzing grand challenges. This is to say that we can also expand our purposes from the exploration to the documentation of suffering of the human and the more-than-human in contemporary grand challenges. I believe that one of the merits of doing W-O psychology research stands in the expertise of many of us to account for the psychosocial suffering. As psychological in nature, W-O psychology can demonstrate and elevate to a normative account the psychosocial suffering of the oppressed and inform policies and institutions. To documenting and analyzing is a public action that W-O psychology can engage with for seeing the psychological effects of social inequalities and environmental catastrophes, yet they can also provide indications for a referral network of resources that other (W-O psychology scholars and practitioners) can use.

Second, and somewhat antithetic but complementary to the previous, developing relationality and building grassroots with local communities of marginalized and oppressed people is a public action that while it allows W-O psychology scholars to see themselves as part of communities, they also can engage in mobilizing processes for responding to grand challenges. Many people are subject of social inequalities in our communities: precarity, gender and racial discrimination are mere examples. Environmental crisis exacerbates such inequalities with also direct effects on their health due to expositions to air contamination, and climate events. Developing relationality and building grassroots act in tandem in order to answer questions on how we are going to organize ourselves to respond to grand challenges.

The third action synthesizes the previous ones and the way I intend public-ac(t)ions. That is, calling for public-a(c)tions is also a call for critical and reflexive engagement with our positionalities and power, and on how psychological associations can situate contemporary grand challenges. Positioning our work for public-a(c)tions implies to recognize the limits of our field and institutions. If documenting and analyzing represents a way for accountability in W-O psychology, while developing relationality

and building grassroots can help to identify potential practices, then interrogating the positionality of our institutions becomes a priority. We can do nothing than acknowledging that a shift in our field has to come from EAWOP and other psychological associations at large, and particularly on the way we disseminate our knowledge, how this knowledge is used and how our allyship with communities is valued. Many may join me when I say that W-O psychology scholars, and I include myself too, sometimes feel the threat of engaging in public-a(c)tions. Think about the limited number of signatures in the open letter against war (Köbler et al., 2024), or the silence of EAWOP and other psychological associations about the genocide in Gaza. Even if we emphasize the unbearable and agonizing the suffering of oppressed people and the environment, we feel the threat of embracing actions against the forces of injustice. This is because we can easily describe us as conflictual and opposing or, somewhat ironically, as populist or deviant scholars when we confront with dominant positions or describe ourselves as activists. One way out of this, that I believe can help to realize the promise of public-a(c)tions in the vast and terrible world, is to create the institutional condition for the liberation and emancipation of the public.

In closing, I wish to take the license to use the words of Gerard (2022, p. 7) as „[w]e have ample experiences of suffering nowadays to carry out such a project“ of public-a(c)tions. I tried to outline some ideas, but I am sure there are more beyond my personal perspective. The three public-a(c)tions are challenging, time consuming, emotionally difficult, and they can also lead to nothing, yet they can be transformative for us as scholars and for our field.

Growing forests, not just trees

(Zoe Sanderson)

For most of the history of W-O psychology there have been scholars who have asked difficult questions, articulated critiques, and developed alternatives to the status quo. Pioneers, such as Kornhauser who challenged industrial psychologists in 1947 to ponder whether they „work on the problems of the private businessman, or on the problems of society“ (Kornhauser, 1947, p.224), were followed by Baritz (1960), Bramel and Friend (1981), Hollway (1991), Symon and Cassell (2006) and others in creating ‘critical perspectives’ from within the field and its adjacent disciplinary territories. While these are not new, the co-ordinated intent to develop them inside W-O psychology largely seems to be and that is a reason for optimism. Isolated and sporadic critical scholarship has not gained traction in the field, let alone contributed significantly to socio-ecological transformation in the world beyond, but if such scholarship is well-organized, perhaps it might.

The quality and extent of the connections between critical scholars(hip) matters for several reasons. Where the strong disciplinary norms in W-O psychology stifle al-

ternative forms of thought and research, critical scholarly networks connect people who want to think differently together, creating the safety and space to play with new ideas. Over time, such networks facilitate the intelligent cumulation of scholarship: refining thinking, enabling debate, and accruing the potential for impact. For individual scholars, they provide support to weather the inevitable push-backs and set-backs of critical scholarship. They enable the growth of newer scholars and create opportunities for peer development. Collaboration makes it possible to attempt larger projects, and sharing connections with other networks and organizations increases the potential for impact beyond academia. Eventually, these coordinated efforts could create enough 'critical W-O psychology' that it becomes a term with meaning, potentially even as an identifiable academic field in its own right, and a more legitimate option for scholars who wish to explore it.

The metaphor of the forest springs to mind here. In his fascinating reflection on the experience of managing forests in the Eifel mountains in Germany, Wohlleben (2017) describes how trees communicate, warn of impending dangers, and nurture each other. He argues that a forest is not simply co-located trees: it is a dense network of mutual reliance that totals far more than the sum of its parts. Forests are wildly diverse, including individuals and groups that compete fiercely with each other, but overall it survives because its parts are interdependent. Established forests can last for hundreds of years or even more. They are resilient to moderate environmental changes and powerful enough to influence the world beyond their borders.

Forests are made up of trees, but not every tree is fortunate enough to be part of a forest. The isolating and competitive nature of academia tends to valorize the success of individual scholars more than the connections between them, growing trees rather than forests. In developing critical W-O psychology we can make the counter-cultural choice to focus instead on the networks that will grow and sustain our scholarship in the long term. Ideally these networks would be characterized by inclusivity, care, and a commitment to positive impact, even when we disagree. The production of conferences, journal special issues, events, and so on in recent years is evidence of budding success from our efforts but, in the timescale of both the forest and academia, these are early days and we must persevere much longer if we want to bear fruit.

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- Contributors:
- Edina Dóci (edina.doci@uclouvain.be)
- Severin Hornung (severin.hornung@uibk.ac.at)
- Franziska Köbler (franziska.koessler@leuphana.de)
- Luca P. Vecchio (luca.vecchio@unimib.it)
- P. Matthijs Bal (mbal@lincoln.ac.uk)
- Mara Gorli (mara.gorli@unicatt.it)
- Francesco Tommasi (francesco.tommasi@univr.it)
- Zoe Sanderson (zoe.sanderson@bristol.ac.uk)
- Correspondence to:
- Severin Hornung
University of Innsbruck
Department of Psychology
Universitätsstraße 15
A-6020 Innsbruck
severin.hornung@uibk.ac.at