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Critical Work and Organizational Psychology: An Emerging Paradigm of Research in Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Objective of this meta-theoretical contribution is to outline and discuss recent developments associated with the emergence of an epistemologically critical paradigm in the academic field of psychology applied to work and organizations. Firstly, work and organizational psychology (also industrial and organizational psychology) is defined and delineated with reference to related disciplines in psychology, management, and organization studies. This includes a socio-historical sketch of its genealogy as a remedy to the dehumanizing and alienating work design of Taylorism and Fordism, as well as evolving critiques concerning positivism, individualism, and managerialism. Secondly, attention is called to recent scientific debates involving renewed calls for a critical paradigm in work and organizational psychology. Representing three important geographical crystallization points, these debates were published in the European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology (2018), the journal of the North American Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (2019), and the German Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology (2020). Thirdly, extant contributions positioning and promoting the emerging stream of critical work and organizational psychology are reviewed. This includes journal articles and special issues, designated conferences and theme tracks, and other attempts at institutionalizing the new paradigm. Integrating these contributions within the framework of meta-theory on social science paradigms in organizational research, a preliminary ontological, epistemological, and axiological definition of critical work and organizational psychology is attempted. Drawing on parallels with the adjacent field of critical management studies, alternative future trajectories for the emerging paradigm are developed, including promises, pitfalls, and opportunities for researchers striving for social transformation.

Keywords: applied psychology, epistemological critique, meta-theory, philosophy of science, social transformation