

# Blinded by the Light? Progress and Pitfalls in Critical Applied Psychology

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**Abstract:** This contribution provides an update on developments within the social science discipline of applied psychology. Precisely, it offers an account of the emergence of a critical scholarly paradigm in work and organizational psychology. Introduced and advocated for in recent publications, this new direction has sparked intense debates about its necessity, scientific value, and legitimacy. Disciplinary roots, paradigmatic principles, and ontological, epistemological, and axiological premises of critical perspectives in applied psychology are recapitulated. This includes their critique of conventional or mainstream work and organizational psychology, as well as complex relationships with the previously institutionalized stream of critical management studies. Progress in critical applied psychology is mapped out, giving an overview of foundational academic events and activities as well as the growing body of publications, structured into distinct waves, including information on research topics and geographic strongholds. Academic criticisms of the critical paradigm by proponents of the mainstream are reviewed, focusing on its distinctiveness, scientific rigor, and communication style. Drawing on theorizing in philosophy of science and the history of critical movements in other fields of social science, possible future trajectories are speculated about, including paradigmatic consolidation, integration, and fragmentation. Despite the momentum of the current version of critical perspectives in applied psychology, the track record of critical movements in the social sciences is modest and includes the risk of becoming a victim of one's own success. Pitfalls and possible ways to avoid them are discussed and recommendations for scholars seeking to 'criticalize' their research are developed.

**Keywords:** Academic Movements, Critical Work, Organizational Psychology, Engaged Scholarship, Epistemological Critique, Higher Education, Research Paradigms, Philosophy of Science

## Introduction

Recent developments in the academic field of applied psychology focusing on work and organizations have been interpreted as the emergence of an epistemologically critical paradigm (Hornung, 2025; Sanderson, 2024). On an international scale, applied psychology more broadly, and work and organizational (W-O) psychology more specifically, are currently perturbed by the (re-)discovery and growing institutionalization of scholarship drawing on an alternative, critical social science paradigm (Gerard, 2016). These positions have attracted attention by calling for a fundamental reform of conventional research, portrayed as inherently biased towards managerial positions and profit interests (Weber et al., 2020). The normative mainstream is exposed as lacking integrity, credibility, and relevance to economically exploitative, socially unequal, and ecologically unsustainable real-world conditions in work organizations around the world. Among others, this critique has been formulated in terms of theoretical (ontological), methodological (epistemological), and ethical-moral (axiological) inadequacies of the status quo (Gerard, 2023; Röllmann et al., 2023). The background of this development is increasingly blatant contradictions inherent in the current system of work and employment. Obviously, this refers to the escalating socio-ecological polycrisis and exploding social injustice (Rakowski et al., 2025), manifesting in unjustifiable, dystopian developments in the discipline's immediate field of research and practice.

Examples supporting respective claims are readily found in ubiquitous tendencies towards perpetual intensification and extensification of work (Pérez-Zapata et al., 2016; Telford & Briggs, 2022), socio-economic polarization and precarization of the global workforce (Ishchuk et al., 2024; Seubert et al., 2023; Shin et al., 2023), and general shifts in risks and responsibilities from employers to workers (Hornung et al., 2021; Mumby, 2019). Chronic overload, stress, insecurity, and the ensuing social corrosion, alienation, and disintegration result in increasing work-related psychological and psychosomatic impairments

and diseases among large segments of the working population, not to speak of the working poor and those disenfranchised by unemployment and a total lack of income (Schulte et al., 2024; Thanem & Elraz, 2022). Conventional W-O psychology tends to neglect or downplay the systemic and structural basis of these matters, to disregard the human suffering of marginalized, exploited, or excluded workers in both the Global South and North (Banerjee, 2021), and to ignore the role of the domain of work and production in the climate crisis threatening the survival of human civilization (Adams, 2021; Gerard, 2023).

Comprehensively reviewing this burgeoning academic debate is certainly beyond the present contribution. Its main objective is to call attention to recent scientific debates, groups, and events involved in the observed emergence of a more cohesive stream of critical perspectives in W-O psychology. This includes providing an overview of relevant journal articles and special issues, conferences, scholarly networks, and other attempts at institutionalizing the new paradigm. Prior to this, characteristics and aspirations of critical W-O are reviewed. The approach adopted here corresponds to the methodological model of the ‘problematizing review’ (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020), as a critical engagement with a selective body of literature with the purpose of raising issues and opening up discussion. The reviewed literature was selected based on the author’s involvement in the emerging W-O movement (Hornung et al., 2023), complemented by targeted literature searches. A meta-theoretical framework of social science paradigms is presented, which permits an ontological, epistemological, and axiological allocation, as well as the discussion of possible trajectories for the emerging critical paradigm. In addition to reviewing the literature, this article also includes an attempt at theory-building, aimed at informing and cautioning scholars striving for social transformation in W-O psychology and beyond.

Implications of this contribution are, first of all, theoretical, relevant for the academic discipline of psychology. Nonetheless, they are also applied in terms of making the reviewed literature accessible, introducing core principles and main proponents of critical W-O psychology to interested scholars and organizational practitioners. Potentially, this creates opportunities to connect, collaborate, and continue to collectively ‘criticalize’ the field of psychology applied to work and organizations. However, as cautioned in the last section, there are also counterforces and pitfalls, putting the emerging movement at risk of failing to live up to its aspirational goals.

### **Principles and Paradigm of Critical Applied Psychology**

It has been argued that universal definitions of critical W-O psychology would be neither feasible, nor desirable, unnecessarily introducing boundaries, dogmatic positions, and restricting the evolving plurality of alternative approaches (Sanderson, 2024). Instead of presenting critical W-O psychology as a homogeneous or unified movement, this position refers more modestly to critical perspectives (Islam & Sanderson, 2022), speaking of a diverse range of approaches that aim to fundamentally reform the discipline and contribute to an orientation that prioritizes human well-being and dignity, social justice, and environmental sustainability (Sanderson, 2024). This implies the criticism that conventional W-O psychology does not do this to a sufficient extent, and, in particular, fails to take a strong and principled stand against the psychologically, socially, and ecologically harmful systemic effects of prevailing economic interests and power structures.

Although the caution above is warranted, it seems essential to specify some general features of critical applied psychology. Several attempts in this direction have been made. Importantly, Islam and Sanderson (2022) have positioned critical W-O psychology between mainstream W-O psychology and critical management studies along the dimensions of core themes, disciplinary roots, socio-political context of emergence, dominant conceptions of the person, epistemological and methodological orientations, and relation to practice. Socio-historical disciplinary roots have been traced by Weber (2023) along the lines of dialectic and materialist psychology and activity theory, Frankfurt School Critical Theory, different traditions of critical psychology, socio-critical

streams of action regulation theory and self-determination theory, as well as the major current influence of critical management studies. Below, defining features of critical W-O psychology are summarized and a perspective from the meta-theory of scientific paradigms will be developed.

### ***Definitional and Descriptive Principles***

Critical W-O psychology, according to a definition influenced by action regulation theory (Weber, 2023), emphasizes dialectical interactions between individuals and society, aspiring to the goal of socially embedded, collective self-determination, manifesting in cognitive and socio-moral personality development through democratically organized work. Based on the ethical foundation of radical humanism, this entails the theoretical and empirical critique of capitalist deformations of societies, economic systems, organizations, and work. In addition to a pluralistic methodological orientation anchored in the social sciences and humanities, the core characteristic is an emancipatory epistemic interest, i.e., the goal of liberating people from limiting, unjust, and exploitative conditions. Based on previous descriptions, the characteristics and aspirations of critical W-O psychology can be summarized as being socio-critical, dialectical, deconstructing, self-reflexive, emancipatory, and humanist. These features are briefly elaborated in the following:

*Socio-critical* refers to explicit and substantive grounding in critical social theory and critical psychologies, albeit with a pluralistic and undogmatic orientation, including sociological (unorthodox) Marxism (Burawoy & Wright, 2002), Frankfurt School Critical Theory (Granter, 2014), (psycho-)analytical social psychology (Funk, 2023), various streams of critical psychology (Teo, 2015; Tolman, 2009), feminist and postcolonial theory (Strasser & Dege, 2021), critical race theory (Teo, 2022) as well as critical theories of socio-ecological transformation, such as critical sustainabilities, degrowth, and ecosocialism (Fuchs, 2017; Rose & Cachelin, 2018).

*Dialectical* means directly addressing historically determined conflicts of interest and power imbalances in labor relations, economy, and society, examining their effects on social and ecological problems and crises, such as socio-economic inequality, marginalization, polarization, and offloading of societal risks and costs to underprivileged groups (Pitts, 2022; Saito, 2023).

*Deconstructing* refers to an ideology-critical perspective that analyses, exposes, and negates superficial interest-guided accounts and explanations (Hornung et al., 2023; Islam & Zyphur, 2009), for instance, the framing of social responsibility and sustainability as 'business models' (Schneider, 2020) or myths of convergence of interests in employment relations (Sandoval, 2015).

*Self-reflexive* means considering and problematizing, how scientific theories, methods, and results are influenced by epistemological positioning, economic interests, and power structures, for instance, with regard to the dominance of individualistic, managerialist, ethnocentric, and patriarchal perspectives, including in one's own research (Cunliffe, 2022; Seubert et al., 2023).

*Emancipatory* intention challenges the primacy of economic goals, such as performance, efficiency, or growth. Instead, prioritized are socio-ecological concerns and objectives, such as health, personal development, social justice, democracy, and environmental protection as values in themselves, not degraded as means to economic ends (Klikauer, 2015; Weber et al., 2020).

*Humanist*, finally, emphasizes a categorical, unconditional, and uncompromising focus on human dignity, well-being, and development, reconfirming the inherent value of human and non-human life, including the natural planetary environment (Dashtipour et al., 2025; Weber, 2023).

Although not comprehensive, these six definitional features provide a pragmatic starting point to define critical W-O psychology. Their content can be interpreted as an adaptation and extension of the three paradigmatic principles of anti-performativity, denaturalization, and

reflexivity, formulated earlier for the field of critical management studies (Fournier & Grey, 2000). However, despite parallels and overlaps, with some considering critical management as a precursor or role model of critical W-O psychology (Islam & Sanderson, 2022; Parker, 2023), the latter is unique and distinctive, partly due to its strong disciplinary roots in psychology.

### ***Critical Research as a Scientific Paradigm***

An established way of conceptualizing the emerging movement of critical W-O psychology can be found in the meta-theory of scientific paradigms (Hornung & Höge, 2024). Burrell and Morgan (1979) have famously distinguished radical humanist, radical structuralist, interpretive, and functionalist social science paradigms for organizational analysis, based on two intersecting dimensions: a) Underlying theories of society emphasizing conflict and radical societal change versus harmony and regulation; and b) Underlying conceptions of social science as concerned with subjective versus objective social realities (Ardalan, 2019; Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Goles & Hirschheim, 2000). Later, these four paradigms were recast by Deetz (1996) with some important adjustments into dialogical, critical, interpretive, and normative studies. Today, these are commonly referred to as postmodern or poststructuralist, fundamentally critical, interpretive or hermeneutic, and postpositive or mainstream approaches (Hornung & Höge, 2024; Kornau et al., 2020). Over time, various dimensions have been suggested to differentiate these approaches, such as reference to social discourses emphasizing dissensus vs. consensus; conflict vs. convergence of interests; structures as socio-historically determined vs. created or chosen; coercion vs. free will; and inductively deriving knowledge from organizations vs. deductively applying knowledge to organizations (Hornung & Höge, 2024). An additional way to characterize scientific paradigms is based on their distinct ontological (theories), epistemological (methods), and axiological (values or objectives) principles (Shan, 2022; Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2012), as elaborated below.

*Ontology:* Applied to organizational research, the critical paradigm is characterized by a realist ontology, which means that societal and organizational power structures and exploitation are assumed to have an objective existence that reflects dominant political-economic interests and is shaped by socio-historical forces, independent of the subjective perceptions and interpretations of people (Telford & Briggs, 2022). This is in contrast to the relativist ontologies of postmodern and interpretive paradigms, which see organizations as socially constructed and existing only temporarily and within the subjectivities of individuals (Deetz, 1996). Moreover, the critical view is oppositional to the affirmative realist ontology of the postpositive paradigm, portraying organizations as objectively existing and enduring social systems with a legitimate societal function taken as a given and to be optimized rather than called into question (Gerard, 2016).

*Epistemology:* In the critical paradigm, knowledge-creation is based on the epistemology of dialectical analysis and theory-based critique, applying theoretical frameworks to expose hidden interests and power structures and resulting ideological delusions (Saito, 2023). In contrast, the epistemology of the postmodern paradigm emphasizes inductive reasoning, decoding, and deconstruction, which, although sensitive to politics and power relationships, is more closely related to the hermeneutic approach of the interpretive paradigm (Primecz, 2020). These approaches are decisively distinct from the systematic empirical observation, abstraction, and identification and generalization of causal mechanisms in the postpositive paradigm (Teo, 2022).

*Axiology:* Finally, the critical axiology is geared towards the objective of emancipation, that is, the disruption and radical transformation of power structures and the associated liberation of people from oppressive, exploitative, limiting conditions and ideologies (Granter, 2014; Klikauer, 2015). Less action-oriented, postmodern research mostly seems to be content with exposing and denaturalizing power relationships, while research in the interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding and describing the subjectivities of

individuals, frequently even in the service of power (Davidson et al., 2006). Most explicitly a force of domination, the axiology underlying the postpositive paradigm seeks to devise, design, and test interventions to solve predominantly managerial or organizational problems, which typically involves regulating and controlling organizational members towards goals of increasing performance, efficiency, and effectiveness or towards reducing costs or identified organizational dysfunctions (Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010).

In sum, critical W-O psychology can be described and differentiated from other scientific approaches and traditions by being paradigmatically rooted in a realist, conflict-based ontology, employing an epistemology based on a methodologically dialectical and theory-based critique, and is axiologically oriented towards radical emancipation and fundamental social transformation.

### **Progress Towards Institutionalization**

The movement of critical W-O psychology does not have a strong institutional framework. Its emergence is firmly tied to the international ‘Future of Work and Organizational Psychology’ (FoWOP) network, founded in Breda in 2018 at a Small Group Meeting sponsored by EAWOP. A product of this gathering was the publication of a foundational manifesto, elaborating the social responsibilities of researchers in the field towards different communities, society, and the improvement of academic work environments (Bal et al., 2019). Initially, the group comprised four streams, focusing on a) critical research, b) substantive-methodological synergies, c) healthy universities, and d) equality in academia. Over time, the critical W-O psychology division turned out to be the most active and sustainable of these (Gerard, 2023). Since then, members associated with this division have organized numerous events and activities, established a steering committee meeting regularly to perform coordination functions, as well as several task forces (e.g., visions and values, climate change) and project-based committees (Sanderson, 2024). Despite continuous participation in activities of EAWOP, the FoWOP network does not have an institutionalized status within the association, but is merely recognized as an informal interest group.

Founded as a local spin-off in 2018, the ‘Innsbruck Group on Critical Research in Work and Organizational Psychology’ (I-CROP) is located at the Department of Psychology of the University of Innsbruck in the subject area of Applied Psychology. Inspired by the seminal contribution of Bal and Dóci (2018), the declared mission of this group is to theoretically and empirically elaborate and advance psychological research on the role of neoliberal ideology in contemporary belief systems, work organizations, and societies as well as within the discipline of applied psychology. Further, it aims to develop and strengthen the influence of the Freudo-Marxist Frankfurt School of Critical Theory on the emerging paradigm (Weber et al., 2020). Thus, the group represents the radical humanist and structuralist wing of critical applied and critical W-O psychology, as opposed to more moderate reformist and more relativist poststructuralist fractions.

In addition to EAWOP, recent conferences by the official psychological societies of Austria and Germany have hosted critical symposia on the significance of neoliberal ideology in current socio-ecological crises. Additionally, the Italian Psychological Association has financially supported a FoWOP Small Group Meeting in Milan in 2024 on the role of W-O psychology in addressing social inequality and ecological unsustainability. Nonetheless, institutional support and embeddedness of W-O psychology are sporadic. Likely, this is partly due to its stated objective of critiquing, challenging, and fundamentally transforming mainstream W-O psychology. Whether the movement can develop and sustain its own institutional framework, as critical management studies has done, or will be able to strengthen its standing within the existing infrastructure of psychological associations, and what concessions this would require, remains an open question.

### ***Three Waves of Foundational Publications***

Scientific publications are a central indicator for the establishment of an academic field or stream. From the present perspective, three waves of academic contributions in the emergence of the current manifestation of critical W-O psychology can preliminarily be distinguished. These can be pragmatically labelled pioneering, foundational, and institutionalizing articles.

The first wave (before 2018) refers to early pioneering works. Notably, Islam and Zyphur (2009) compare mainstream and critical perspectives on classic topics of W-O psychology, specifically, individual differences, motivation, leadership, employee selection and recruitment, training and socialization, occupational stress, changing career patterns, and organizational culture. In a seminal early contribution, McDonald and Bubna-Litic (2012) draw on the principle of reflexivity from critical management studies to discuss inherent shortcomings of social psychology applied to work and organizations. These limitations are summarized as a) bias towards quantitative methods and positivist epistemology; b) imbalanced focus on individual predispositions and intra-psychological processes, while neglecting structural and systemic conditions; c) one-sided identification with the perspective and interests of managers and owners, and d) lack of a basic moral-ethical framework. The first to explicitly introduce the epistemology of the critical, radical structuralist paradigm into industrial and organizational psychology was Gerard (2016), contrasting the critical tradition with the conventional positivist or functionalist mainstream and alternative social constructivist or interpretive approaches.

A second wave of foundational publications commenced with Bal and Dóci's (2018) analysis of neoliberal ideology in W-O psychology, published in the *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, the flagship journal of EAWOP. These authors have argued that both workplace practices and psychological research on work and organizations are contaminated by neoliberal political, social, and fantasmatic logics of individualism, competition, and instrumentality. At the same time, Mumby (2019) authored an influential discussion piece in the official outlet of the North American Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP), questioning ideological idealization and fetishization of work in contemporary societies. Shortly thereafter, Weber et al. (2020) used the opportunity of responding to an article by Bal (2020) to lay out a vision for the future of critical W-O psychology. Each of these foundational articles has sparked controversial debates in W-O psychology in Europe, the United States, and Germany, representing important geographical crystallization points of the emerging paradigm.

A third wave of publications since then was aimed at elaborating, disseminating, and institutionalizing critical W-O psychology. Milestones in this phase were the comprehensive review of the emergence, principles, and positioning of critical W-O psychology in relation to critical management studies by Islam and Sanderson (2022). Further, two journal special issues were edited by Abrams et al. (2023) and Hornung et al. (2023), the latter documenting the first international conference dedicated to this emerging stream. Most recent contributions include a strong representation and a dedicated entry (Sanderson, 2024) in the 'Elgar Encyclopedia of Organizational Psychology' (Bal, 2024) and a treatise on the ethics of critical W-O psychology (Dashtipour et al., 2025) in the 'Journal of Business Ethics'. In the near future, the projected publication of a handbook of critical W-O psychology, edited by an international collective of scholars (Hornung et al., in press), is likely going to signify a new phase in the maturation and institutionalization of the emerging paradigm. Future assessment of the influence of these publications will have to take into their account their uptake and citation outside of the core group of scholars associated with critical W-O psychology and critical applied psychology.

### ***Constitutive Academic Events and Activities***

Even more than through publications, the paradigm of critical W-O psychology has established itself through scientific activities and events, organized in the context of the FoWOP network, often under the auspices of EAWOP (Gerard, 2023; Sanderson, 2024). As mentioned above, the network was founded during an EAWOP Small Group Meeting in Breda in 2018. Since then, the group organized two more of such specialized small-scale conferences in Brussels in 2022 and in Milan in 2024, the last one without funding from the association. During the pandemic, a series of substitute online events were held to assemble members and connect with colleagues from the Global South. Additionally, several virtual workshops and discussion events were continuously organized over the years, featuring prominent speakers from the broader multidisciplinary community of critical scholars (Böhm, 2002; Fujishiro et al., 2022; Mumby, 2019). Another noteworthy activity is the organization of full-day pre-conference workshops at the biannual EAWOP congresses in 2019 in Turin, in Katowice in 2023, and in 2025 in Prague (the 2021 congress to be held in Glasgow was cancelled due to the pandemic). These workshops were accompanied by organized symposia and panel discussions on critical issues in the main scientific program. Despite these activities, there has always been some tension in the relationship between FoWOP and EAWOP, which is dominated by an unitarist and managerialist ideology, characteristic for mainstream W-O psychology, as outlined by Bal and Dóci (2018). Indeed, it does not seem surprising that radical critique and calls for fundamental reforms of the discipline are met with micro-political backlash, possibly threatening the future of the critical movement.

The most focused and unparalleled event was the first ‘International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology’, held from 11th to 13th of July 2022 at the University of Innsbruck. Organized by I-CROP in conjunction with the critical division of FoWOP and the Erich Fromm Study Center at the International Psychoanalytic University Berlin, this self-funded three-day in-person event assembled more than 60 critical academics from institutions all around the globe. Keynote speeches included prominent scholars from critical psychology, critical theory, and critical management studies (Funk, 2023; Parker, 2023; Teo, 2023) and several follow-up projects emanated from this gathering. The sequel event will take place in July 2026 as the ‘2nd Innsbruck Conference on Critical Applied Psychology’ under the motto of ‘Capitalism, Crisis, Critique and Change’. This denomination signifies both a broader perspective beyond the workplace and increased interdisciplinary openness and cooperation.

### **Critique and Possible Futures of Critical Applied Psychology**

As mentioned above, there has been no shortage of criticisms and backlash levelled at critical W-O psychology from established representatives of the field (Zacher, 2019; Zacher & Rudolph, 2020). For instance, a common allegation is that W-O psychology acts divisively and superior, defaming other researchers as being ‘uncritical’. This misperception, as should have become clear, however, is based on confounding the meaning of ‘critical’ as an attribute of scientific scrutiny and rigor versus a distinct paradigm with a history in the social sciences. Leading the charge, Zacher (2019) decries W-O psychology as ‘populist science’. Among others, he accuses advocates of critical W-O psychology to exaggerate and dramatize social and environmental concerns and to misrepresent the extent to which conventional research addresses these issues. According to his condemnation, what critical W-O psychology lacks in theoretical and empirical rigor, it tries to make up for by adopting an offensive and polemic communication style, telling other researchers what they should or should not do. Ironically, from the perspective of critical W-O psychology, these accusations only confirm the critique of the mainstream as downplaying the existential socio-ecological crisis and weaponizing methodological requirement to prevent meaningful research. Clearly, there exists a political power imbalance between the normative mainstream and emerging critical paradigm, which the former increasingly uses to suppress and marginalize the latter. Although, to date, the future of critical W-O psychology still exhibits an

open and dynamic trajectory, its survival as a fundamentally transformative movement, remains uncertain, precarious, if not threatened.

Previous research has drawn on meta-theory to develop scenarios for future courses of critical W-O psychology in terms of paradigm consolidation, dissemination, integration, and fragmentation (Hornung, 2025; Hornung & Höge, 2024). Following the pathway of critical management studies, it could become largely detached from and incommensurate with the mainstream. Alternatively, it could sustain as a sub-paradigm and, gradually, transform or ‘criticalize’ mainstream scholarship from within. In the less favorable scenarios, the critical paradigm could collapse and be reintegrated or assimilated into the functionalist mainstream or fragment into a number of more or less marginalized critical sub-paradigms, precariously existing at the fringe of the accepted discipline (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016). From the current perspective, all trajectories and mixed or hybrid versions are plausible. Although possible future developments can be analyzed in terms of dialectic dynamics, which scenario will eventually manifest, is not predetermined or readily predicable (Röllmann et al., 2023; Weber et al., 2020). Important questions that the critical paradigm must find answers to include: a) disciplinary purity vs. interdisciplinary associations with critical streams in management studies, sociology, geography, ecology, and other fields; b) collaborative and adaptive vs. antagonistic and combative stance toward the mainstream; and c) acceptance of internal plurality and heterogeneity regarding different stances towards the above issues vs. striving for non-negotiable common positions and cohesion. Evidently, there are dialectic tensions among these strategic dimensions. For distinctness, theoretical rigor, and deontological ethics, but not necessarily for the survival of the critical paradigm in applied psychology, a pathway of radicalization and conflict seems mandated more than one of moderation and compromise.

## Conclusions

Critical W-O psychology is shaped by critical scholarly influences from within psychology as well as other fields of social science (intra- and interdisciplinary), including both disciplines with a domain-specific focus on work and organizations as well as those with a broader socio-cultural applicability to life and societies (organizational and social science). The emergence of a critical paradigm in W-O psychology was partly inspired by critical traditions in other fields, most notably, critical management studies (Islam & Sanderson, 2022; McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012). The objective of this brief contribution was to outline the foundations and positioning of critical W-O psychology. Thus, it sought to introduce this emerging paradigm to a broader professional audience and to call attention to underlying ontological (theoretical), epistemological (methodological), and axiological (ethical or value-based) principles and conflicts. These are relevant and of interest for current development in other psychological subfields, such as community psychology (Davidson et al., 2006), positive psychology (Cabanias, 2018), health psychology (Murray, 2015), clinical psychology (Coles & Mannion, 2017), and psychotherapy (LaMarre et al., 2019). In the case of W-O psychology, the critical paradigm reflects an urgently needed contribution towards theoretical and methodological plurality and diversity in a subfield that, in recent decades, seems to have become increasingly streamlined towards a managerialist perspective. Further, it has uncritically adopted a largely unchallenged positivistic orientation towards the natural sciences, betraying earlier humanist aspirations, ethical responsibilities, and grounding in social sciences and humanities. Despite its outlined progress towards institutionalization, the future of critical W-O psychology is uncertain and precarious, depending to a significant degree on the conduct of its proponents, supporters, and opponents, but also on larger political and societal developments, specifically, with regard to academic independence, civil rights, and freedom of speech. In light of current global events, it seems safe to predict intense struggles for recognition, if not for survival.

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