

The entry of self-leadership into work environment research

Pia Bramming, PhD, Senior Researcher, NRCWE



DET NATIONALE
FORSKNINGSCENTER FOR ARBEJDSMILJØ

The point of departure – and line of argumentation

- What does the dissemination of self-leadership as organizing principle mean for work environment research?
 - The transformed economy changes the conditions of work, employee and management
 - These changes creates a constellation of productivity, well-being and self-leadership, internally related and mutually constitutive
 - Work environment problematics become in this constellation a question of conditions rather than actions
- The main challenge is to understand how the alliance of productivity, well-being and self-leadership is constituted and what the consequences are on work environment research

Change in economy

- Change towards knowledge economy, experience economy, new economy, globalised economy, network society (crisis economy, post-crisis economy)
- Changes are exposed as changes in the economy and as a general shift in mechanics and sociality of production methods.
- 'A transformation of capitalism itself' (Vercellone 2007)



Change in economy



- Value is less found in physical production and more in the ability of the employee to communicate, start over, change, feel and think
- ‘Dead knowledge’ – ‘Living knowledge’.
- Value is produced through employee subjectivity (lean)

Hardt & Negri 2000
Vercellone, 2005
Moulier-Boutang 2007



Consequence for work environment

- The 'traditional conditions of work' started to transform in the 70's and 80's.
- Personal involvement and consciousness of responsibility becomes prerequisites for entering a work relationship
- Work environment concepts propagates and are diluted



Allvin & Aronsson, 2003

Self-leadership

- Self-leadership combines commitment to the organization with the idea of the employee as a psychological being with needs for self-realization and a capacity to self control (Manz & Sims, 1989)
- In the fordistic area, thoughts, language, fantasy, passion, empathy were perceived as external factors to the productive processes of the organization.
- Now thoughts etc are integrated into the production (Quigley & Tymon, 2006)

The management system

- Work environment in the new economy cannot (only) be dealt with in terms of physical or psychological health hazards in the work place (Allvin & Aronsson, 2003)
- The relation between employee, leader and organization are bound together by commitment
- 'People that are happy and have the freedom to be themselves are more productive and give more of themselves' (Bains et al, 2007)
- How motivation and commitment is conceptualized and achieved has changed over time:

The new commitment

- From how self-leadership could be ensured to how modern management technologies regulate and penetrate subjectivity (neo-normative control; Fleming & Sturdy, 2007)
- The employee is asked to be 'him or her self'. The key to organizational success is seen to be found by liberating the diversity already inherent in employees.
- Self-leadership is not about empowerment or self-determination as opposed to an adjustment of self to a shared set of values. It is about existential empowerment: to be and lead your self in a productive way.
- Healthy employees are not important from a humanitarian point of view. Health is important because of organizational productivity and societal competitiveness.

The challenge for work environment research

- To investigate the conditions for well-being and productivity
- To formulate the consequences of the new conditions for work, organization and employee: Highest output at minimum cost and change handling in the pursuit of innovation
- To understand the emphasis on employee subjectivity as an emphasis on the conditions for being a human employee. Not at the level of the individual employee but as a pre-individual condition
- To understand how management of the self-leading employee is management of the potential productivity of the employee, just as prevention of obesity, smoking, drinking etc. is organizing the potential risks of non-productivity
- To develop the concept of organizational work environment