Crisis of meaning at the fringes of economy

Critical Management Studies Conference, 2017

CONVENORS

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We invite contributions that consider how ‘crises of meaning’ are contributing to the development of new frameworks for understanding work that takes place at the fringes of the traditional paid economy, such as work by those undertaking volunteering, creative and digital self-employment, or those in precarious work. Fields of interest include creative and digital labour, freelancing, self-employment and volunteering, the creative industries and community sharing economies of ‘independent workers’ (e.g. Uber, Deliveroo, AirBnB). The notion of crisis speaks beyond defining critical historical events to the gradual transformation of the traditional social frameworks with which we understand and conduct our lives. Historical crises (present in our minds with the approaching centenary of the Great War) and modern crises (global economic crises of 2009, modern wars, migration and looming Brexit) are felt not only at a national level but also as individuals and communities. Crises are experienced, by many, as an everyday struggle in which the frameworks traditionally used to attribute meaning to labour and work have been fundamentally unsettled. The creative industries in particular have been subject to claims that work has become increasingly precarious (Gill and Pratt, 2008) and that the divisions between work and leisure are blurred. In recent years we have seen the rise of boundaryless careers (Rodrigues & Guest, 2010) that collapse traditional divisions: such as between work and play through gamification and ‘playbour’ (Kücklich, 2005); and between paid and unpaid labour through volunteering (O’Toole and Grey, 2016), the sharing economy (Bauer & Gegenhuber, 2015) and the connectivity of social media (van Dijck, 2013; Dery, Kolb & MacCormick, 2014). For those at the edges, where traditional frameworks have been eroded, there is a pressing struggle to identify new ways of finding value in work and understanding the place that work holds in their lives.

Through exploring their part in a wider crisis of work, we call for contributions that question the common assumption that creative forms of labour represent a new, enlightened future for employment. We invite papers that challenge assumptions that are often made about the forms of work that we have outlined, such as ‘humane work’ (Ross, 2004), ‘good work’ (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011), the ‘creative class lifestyle’ (Florida, 2005), and project-based enterprises (Pratt, 2009). This call is interested in hearing from those who return to traditional theorists (Marx, Bourdieu, Foucault, Douglas, Hochschild), as well as those who explore new theoretical possibilities and open up discussions around class, gender, race, embodiment, emotions and the materiality of labour at the fringes of society. We particularly welcome papers which explore whether there is a fundamental human need for greater meaning in work (Yeoman 2013) and the success or failure of such pursuits through new forms of work, spaces, and technologies; and equally whether these environments
transform work experiences, diminishing some traditional frameworks of meaning and offering new ones in their place. Such frameworks may draw on and re-work notions such as autonomy, dignity and meaningful work.

We call for participants to engage with the idea of 'crises of meaning' both theoretically and empirically. We welcome contributions on topics that may include (but are not limited to):

- Crises at the level of the community and the individual, especially related to employment in the ‘creative class’ and 'sharing economy’
- Valuing work: unpaid labour, hope labour and insecure conditions of employment
- Autonomy and dignity
- Spaces of work and their meaning or value (e.g. co-working, home working and working in virtual space)
- Boundaries and interrelations of work and non-work (e.g. creative labour, technology and the right to disconnect, playbour, gamification, privacy)
- Emotions and affect in relation to crises (e.g. 'crises of happiness’ & narratives of disappointment)
- Class, gender, race, embodiment, emotions and materiality of labour at the fringes of society

REFERENCES

SUBMISSION DETAILS

Please send abstracts or any questions to: Deborah Brewis at D.Brewis@Kingston.ac.uk
Abstracts should be a maximum of 500 words, A4 paper, single spaced, 12 point font.
Abstract submission deadline:
Notification of paper acceptance: Authors will be advised within four weeks of paper submission.

CONTACT DETAILS:

Corresponding convenor: Dr Deborah Brewis, Kingston University, UK. Email: D.Brewis@Kingston.ac.uk
Prof. Anne-Marie Greene, De Montfort University, UK. Email: amgreene@dmu.ac.uk
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EXPECTED NUMBER OF SUBMISSIONS: 15

CONVENOR BACKGROUNDS AND EXPERIENCE:

Dr Deborah Brewis is Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour at Kingston University. Her broad interests are in organisation, (in)equalities, ethics, and subjectivity. She has particular expertise in equality, diversity and inclusion - having conducted research with diversity practitioners - and in digital labour. She is currently developing a research project exploring the work of 'social influencers'. She has previously participated at CMS 2015 in the VIDA critical friendship, doctoral stream, and 'Curating ideas: for an alternative business school’ workshop. In addition to her academic role she is Social Media Editor for the journal Management Learning, a key organiser of the VIDA Writing Project, and an Associate Fellow of the Institute of Advanced Study, University of Warwick.

Prof Anne-Marie Greene is Professor of Employment Relations within the Contemporary Research in Organisations, Work and Employment Group (CROWE), Department of Human Resource Management, Leicester Business School, De Montfort University. She has particular expertise in the area of equality and diversity, equal opportunities, diversity management, gender and race, and the industrial relations of unusual work, including clergy and volunteers. She has been or currently sits on the executive boards of the Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism (SCOS) and British Universities Industrial Relations Association (BUIRA), and organised the BUIRA Conference in 2015 which was held at DMU. She is joint convenor of the Gender and Industrial Relations Study Group of the International Labour and Employment Relations Association (ILERA). In addition to her academic role, she is Vice Chair and Trustee of the Criterion Theatre, Coventry and regularly participates in productions as Director, actor and in various backstage roles.

Dr Carolyn Hunter is Lecturer in Organisation Theory and Behaviour at York Management School, University of York. She has particular expertise in humour, play and fun corporate cultures; organisational space drawing on Henri Lefebvre and Michel De Certeau; gender, emotions and embodiment; and labour practices within the creative industries. Currently she is investigating the working lives of children’s authors as an example of precarious and insecure employment, and previously
she has explored the use of humour within IT, publishing and advertising. Dr Carolyn Hunter has been a stream convenor at the 2012 The Art of Management Conference for 'Music' and 'Emotions and Aesthetics' streams, and presented at the Critical Management Studies Conferences in 2011 and 2009.

Dr Laura Mitchell is Lecturer in Management at Keele Management School. She has particular expertise in the areas of dignity and meaningful work in organizations and has conducted research with leisure volunteers and high tech infrastructure companies. Her current work explores the problems of autonomy and structure in the daily enactments of organisational employees. She has previously convened the CMS stream 'Escaping Capitalism's contradictions' in 2015 and has participated in the Critical Management Studies conference in 2013 and 2007. In addition to her academic role, she undertakes volunteer work as a larpwright and events manager.