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Faculty of Psychology

Colloquium lecture by Prof. Dr. Johannes Keller

How do people experience their work? Meaninglessness & alienation in combination with satisfaction and usefulness. The Protestant work ethic as a catalyst

People experience the episodes of their lives in both affective and existential qualities. With regard to affective experience, research on the Evaluative Space Model of Affect (ESMA) has supported the view that affective experience is controlled by two separate systems, so that positive and negative affect can also occur in combination. This means that in certain episodes a co-activation of positive and negative affect can be observed. In our research on the experience of work activity, this finding is transferred to the existential experience during work. Parallel to the ESMA, we assume that work activity can be characterized by the experience of meaninglessness and alienation (bullshit job perceptions) in combination with the experience of satisfaction and significance (meaningful work perceptions). The results of our studies consistently show that people do indeed experience their work as a combination of meaninglessness and alienation as well as satisfaction and significance. A closer look specifically at the experience of meaninglessness and alienation at work shows that this is particularly pronounced in certain economic sectors. In addition, we found that the relation between the experience of meaninglessness and alienation at work and (a) subjective quality of life and (b) deviant behavior in the work context varies depending on the extent to which individuals internalized the Protestant work ethic. Our findings show how important it is to recognize and examine the experience of meaninglessness and alienation on the one hand and the experience of satisfaction and significance on the other as specific, separate aspects of subjective experiences in the work context. They thus also demonstrate the substance of the theoretical significance of the basic assumptions of the ESMA with regard to the existential dimension of subjective experiences.

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**This lecture takes place at University of Vienna,
Universitätsring 1, 1010 Vienna,
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