Bodies and intimate relations at work in the practical life of organizations

Nanna Mik-Meyer, Copenhagen Business School, DENMARK
Anne Roelsgaard Obling, Copenhagen Business School, DENMARK
Carol Wolkowitz, Department of Sociology, University Warwick, ENGLAND

This stream focuses on bodies and intimate relations at work in the practical life of organizations and, when it is possible, how the two interrelate.

Even though the sociology of the body from the 1980s and onwards has grown into a strong research tradition with key texts such as Turner’s (1992) and Shilling’s (1993) work on the body, the relationship between the body and paid work is still an under researched area (Wolkowitz 2006, 2011, Mik-Meyer 2009). There exists, of course, extensive research into marginalization processes in work organizations that focuses on the gender, ethnicity and the social status of the worker, but research that takes the body in organizations, e.g. the disabled, ageing, stressed or obese worker, to the center of the analysis is still under prioritized. The objective of this stream is to explore bodies at work in organizations with a particular interest in how the body is being classified and disciplined and hence made visible in the practical life of organizations. This stream therefore welcomes papers that pay particular attention to practices, relations and procedures that make different types of bodies respectively visible/invisible in the organization.

Looking into classic sociology, authors have examined how the organization of work and organizational rules of conduct influence peoples’ emotional lives and the ways in which they handle and cope with their job and its specific work tasks. Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Norbert Elias and Sigmund Freud among others have all focused on specific feelings, such as anxiety, embarrassment and fear as an engine of modern work. They have explored how the ‘whole’ individual has become integral to systems of management and scrutinized the social defence mechanisms we rely on when we are responding to such systems. Today’s management of the worker not only includes interest in the person’s emotional response mechanisms (stress, dissatisfaction, distress), but also includes management’s extended interest in the worker’s physical body and private, personal well-being (in the broadest possible sense). Today’s workers are hence both managed according to their psychological profile and according to their physical appearance. This stream therefore welcomes papers that examine the consequence of this extended interest in private, intimate relations in modern work organizations.

Without lending priority to any particular perspective, we welcome papers that feed into this discussion on the body and/or intimate relations at work in the practical life of organizations. In conversation with existing debates, we are particularly supportive of papers that from an empirical departure raises questions to the practices that work organizations draw on when they attempt to deal with bodies and intimate relations in work organizations. Questions and themes that may be addressed, but are not limited to, the following:

- How different type of bodies in particular settings are made respectively visible/invisible in work organizations?
- How bodies classified as marginal produce a particular kind of identity work among colleagues/management in work organizations?
- How bodies classified as marginal and intimate relations are linked in work organizations?
- How management’s extended ‘whole person’ focus on the worker influences everyday work life?
- How intimate relations are carried out in work organizations?
- How the inner workings of organizational processes determine our personal and private lives?
- The character and significance of those structures and practices that organizations draw on when they attempt to make personal and private lives into objectives for management, therapeutics and other interventions?

Abstracts of approximately 500 words (ONE page, Word document NOT PDF, single spaced, excluding references, no header, footers or track changes) are invited by 1st November 2013 with decisions on acceptance to be made by stream leaders within one month. All abstracts will be peer reviewed. New and young scholars with 'work in progress' papers are welcomed. Papers can be theoretical or theoretically informed empirical work. In the case of co-authored papers, ONE person should be identified as the corresponding author. Note that due to restrictions of space, multiple submissions by the same author will not be timetabled. Abstracts should be emailed to: Prof. Nanna Mik-Meyer at: nmm.ioa@cbs.dk  Abstracts should include FULL contact details, including your name, institutional affiliation, mailing address, and e-mail address. State the title of the stream to which you are submitting your abstract. Note that no funding, fee waiver, travel or other bursaries are offered for attendance at GWO2014.