

Workplace ethnographies – an underestimated source of subject- oriented work research

Andrea Gabler

The article tries to argue why workplace ethnographies, with their deep immersion into daily social action, are more than other approaches appropriate to illuminate hidden and subjective levels of work. Insofar they should be more picked up by the current debates on subjectivation, subjectivity and informal organisation of work in German sociology of work and industrial sociology. A cursory view of the rich tradition of ethnographic research and of examples within the anglophone language area will show the methodical and factual gains of this approach. The US-American “Workplace Ethnography Project” demonstrates an interesting way to deduce more general insights and patterns from ethnographic case studies. Exemplary findings can be linked to the German debate. Finally a view on one of the few German ethnographic studies will show its value to the analysis of subjectivity, subjectivation and informal organisation of work: and gives reasons for pursuing similar research.

Key words: workplace ethnography, subjectivation of work, informal organisation of work, transformation of work, subject-oriented work research

1. The debate on subjectivation of work

“I am an entrepreneurial self now”, Christoph Bartmann writes on his brave new, ‘post-bureaucratic’ world as an employee (Bartmann, 2012, p. 15). In fact, the subject seems to have been allocated a larger space in the work