

Wrocław, 22.09.2025
Zuzanna Geturko

Summary

Understanding work as a social construct – rather than merely an economic activity – provides the foundation for analyzing how its image is created, reproduced, and negotiated within discourse. This dissertation examines the image of intellectual work in employers' narratives. Drawing on the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), I analyze job advertisements and organisational self-representations (published on "Career", "About Us" or "Work with Us" website sections) of big companies operating in Poland. The research project aims to identify dominant narratives and discursive strategies through which work and the figure of the knowledge worker are constructed. In accordance with CDA principles, I attempt to capture the practices of power and possible consequences of discursively representing work in particular ways. The subject of the study has been narrowed to the image of white-collar work, as information, communication, knowledge, and affect are considered key factors in the process of value creation and capital accumulation in a post-industrial society.

The dissertation is divided into three parts, which present, respectively: the research context regarding contemporary images of work, the theoretical foundations of the project, and the findings of the analysis. The first chapter reflects on transformations of work in the postmodern consumer society. I demonstrate the process of consumption's expansion into nearly all areas of individual life, leading to the conclusion that work itself is also subject to consumption. Work, currently embedded within a complex symbolic system that extends far beyond subsistence and profit, competes in the marketplace of meanings as a "communicative offer", analogous to market brands. This offer simultaneously establishes and reproduces a normative image of both work and the employee. Chapters Two and Three introduce the theoretical frames of the project – Social Constructionism and Critical Discourse Analysis, with particular attention to the Norman Fairclough's approach, whose three-dimensional model of discourse analysis also constitutes the methodological framework of the study. Chapter Four outlines the research objective, specifies the object of study, and presents both the characteristics and the rationale for selecting the empirical material, as well as the research procedure. Chapter Five focuses on discursive practice. This chapter also briefly discusses the definitions and assumptions of employer branding, recruitment communication, and several related terms, which, as practical tools of organizational

image construction, provide the context for the production of texts. This part further describes the key components of contemporary job advertisements. The chapter concludes with a reconstruction of three subject positions appearing in the discourse – employer, candidate, and employee – and the hierarchy among them. In the final three subsections of the analytical section, I describe the categories through which the following are constructed: the figure of the "ideal" employee, the image of the work environment, and the repertoire of benefits from employment.

The project concludes with a summary, in which I recall the key observations formulated in the analytical chapters and present meta-conclusions regarding what the (remarkably coherent) employer narratives reveal about the contemporary image of intellectual work. CDA of work inevitably leads to references to broader socio-economic structures that shape it. In the case of work, this is primarily the neoliberal ideology, which discursively shapes the organizationally desired pattern of attitudes and work organisation. The expected candidate profile embodies the neoliberal project of subjectivity – the *entrepreneur of the self* – while the categories describing the contemporary work environment are semantically calibrated to enhance employee engagement in the enterprise's goals.