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Part-time work as practicing resistance: The power of counter-arguments

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Abstract

Contributing to a Foucauldian perspective on 'discursive resistance', this paper theorizes how part-time workers struggle to construct a valid position in the rhetorical interplay between norm-strengthening arguments and norm-contesting counter-arguments. We thereby suggest that both the reproductive and the subversive forces of resistance may very well co-exist within the everyday manoeuvres of world-making. The analysis of these rhetorical interplays in 21 interviews shows how arguments and counter-arguments produce full-time work as the dominant discourse versus part-time work as a legitimate alternative to it. Analyzing in detail the effects of four rhetorical interplays, we show that while two of them leave unchallenged the basic assumptions of the dominant full-time discourse and hence tend instead to reify the dominant discourse, two other interplays succeed in contesting the dominant discourse and establishing part-time work as a valid alternative. We argue that the two competing dynamics of challenging and reifying the dominant are not mutually exclusive but do in fact co-exist.

1. Introduction: Part-time work as a challenge to the norm

Even though the implementation of 'flexible working policies' is positioned as highly relevant for increasing workplace diversity, full-time work is still constructed as the 'standard practice', marginalizing those who do not perform within its boundaries: part-time workers (Hyde, 2008). The ability and willingness to work what counts as full-time has become a synonym for commitment, productivity, and professionalism (Dick and Hyde, 2006; McDonald, Bradley and Brown, 2008; Ozbilgin, Tsouroufli and Smith, 2011; Smithson, 2005) as well as masculinity (Meriläinen et al, 2004; Simpson, 1998; Smithson, 2005). Consequently, the full-timer is perceived as an evidence of prioritizing work over non-work, while the part-timer is associated with 'women's issues' (McDonald, Bradley and Brown, 2008) and career-limiting 'mommy tracks' (Buzzanell and Goldzwig, 1991), revealing disadvantages to women's life time employment and earning prospects (Lane, 2004; McDonald, Bradley and Brown, 2008; Smithson, 2005). In this context, part-time work becomes a sensible and contested category that essentially violates the deeply-held beliefs about the importance of 'being there' (Lawrence and Corwin, 2003).

These discursive constructions of work time arrangements mark important mechanisms of control (Covaleski et al 1998; Foucault, 1977). In such a Foucauldian view, subjectivities are produced through processes of normalization which control the behavior, appearance, and beliefs of individuals by means of differentiating, comparing, homogenizing, hierarchizing, and excluding (Collinson, 2003). In that way, employees are not only positioned, but actively position themselves within organizational discourses (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Such 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988) construct full-time workers as the 'ideal worker' (Benschop and Dooreward, 1998; Tienari, Quack, and Theobald, 2002), while marginalizing part-time workers as 'the Other' (Fournier, 1998; Tsouroufli, Ozbilgin and Smith, 2011).

Reading the part-time worker as the marginalized Other particularly emphasizes the reproductive functions of power: the continuous reproduction of the time and gender regimes already in place. However, not only may power reproduce itself through discourse; it also subverts dominant understandings (Foucault, 1977, 1982; Fournier 1998; Kärreman and Alvesson, 2009). Hyde (2008, p. 1105) for instance argues that part-timers do not 'simply accept their subordinate position passively'; rather, 'they are involved in an ongoing struggle to establish and maintain their identity as professionals'. In other words, by constructing their image of a professional self, part-time workers are discursively fashioning and (re-)constructing an image that challenges, denies, or dynamically rewrites the subject positions offered by the dominant discourse of full-time work (Dick and Hyde, 2006; Meriläinen et al., 2004; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005).

Contributing to such a perspective of 'discursive resistance', we theorize the struggle of part-timers for an alternative position as the rhetorical interplay between norm-strengthening arguments and norm-contesting counter-arguments. We thereby suggest that both the reproductive and the subversive forces of resistance may very well co-exist within the everyday manoeuvres of world-making and becoming a subject. From such a perspective, part-time work is a severe challenge to conventional notions around professional identities and traditional ways of organizing and hence resisting the dominant discourse of full-time work (Dick and Hyde, 2006; Lawrence and Corwin, 2003).

After elaborating on discursive practices of resistance as theorized in the organizational literature so far, we elaborate on a rhetoric perspective on resistance through the interplay between arguments and counter-arguments. We then present the results of our empirical analysis: 21 interviews in which workers account for their working time arrangements. Furthermore, our analysis shows how resistance towards full-time work is practiced, by means of four counter-arguments that hold the potential to either reproduce or

subvert the norm of full-time work. The paper contributes a micro-discursive understanding of how discursive formations may gradually shift over time when the ubiquitous as well as dominant discourses that shape these norms are persistently being undermined and altered in everyday and rather small rhetorical moves (Heracleous, 2006).

Literature Review

Over the last decade, organizational researchers have shifted their focus from overt and collective acts of resistance to more subtle everyday ways. Within the legacy of Foucault, organizational control became framed as 'identity regulation' (Alvesson and Wilmott, 2002), as the self-disciplining practices of creating subject positions in a specific power/knowledge regime (Symon, 2005). Through discourses such as the 'enterprising self' (du Gay, 1996) workers become inscribed in power relations which make them 'the principle of their own subjection' (Fleming and Spicer, 2003) whose sense of meaning is determined by their participation in dominant discourses. What counts as 'normal, standard and acceptable' is produced by discourse (Meriläinen et al, 2004, p. 544).

While discourse has strong normative effects, there is always also a 'productive' side. As discourse always contains its antithesis that opens up space for agency, the creative capacity to resist and subvert normative discourses must not be underestimated (Nentwich, 2008; 2009). For example, in exploring the identities of female part-time police officers Hyde (2008) noted that the same techniques that generate discourses and their potentially normalizing effects (in this case the construction of the police profession as calling for a male and full-time engagement) are also deemed to generate resistance. In this view resistance becomes possible through the opening of marginalized discourses, making them available as a source from which to fashion alternative realities.

In a similar vein, Meriläinen et al. (2004) in their research on discursive resistance exercised by management consultants fashioning their professional identities, emphasize the possibility of resistance through making use of 'the contradictions, weaknesses and gaps between alternative subject positions: where there is a space between the position of subject offered by a discourse and individual interest, a resistance to that subject position is produced' (p. 545). Hence, discourses may become a site of resistance where identities are produced and transformed in creative and unpredictable ways (Smithson, 2005).

In this agentic view (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), resistance can be considered to provide space for self-determined action and alternative subject positions (Meriläinen et al., 2004). Assuming that fashioning the self is a practice of subjectivation - of becoming a self - and hence negotiating the effects of power, identity work can become a major site of resistance (Nentwich, 2009; Thomas and Davies, 2005). In fact, unlike violence, power can only be exercised over free subjects - agents who have a real choice of behaving in several ways - practicing resistance also bears the power to challenge and change dominant world views (Bevir, 1999).

For instance, rather than narrowing down one's sense of professional self to discourses of 'who I am' and 'who I should be', and hence performing within the normative discourse, people can also develop a counter-identity by being cognizant of what they are not 'and what it is we aren't, don't do and desire not to be thought of.' (Carroll and Levy, 2008, p. 80). By generating narratives of 'who one is not', individuals may distance themselves from other identities. In this way, anti- or dis-identification (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) often marks an active separation between people's 'own sense of identity and a competing, imposed identity that they perceive as having negative effects on their 'image of self.

Resisting dominant organizational identities has therefore often been described as distancing oneself from normalizing discourses that the self feels disconnected or excluded

from or even threatened by (Carroll and Levy, 2008). When employees resist normalizing discourses, they may draw on multiple oppositional practices (Collinson, 2003; Halsall, 2009) including humor, irony, satire, skepticism, cynicism, or alternative interpretative repertoires, or they may simply voice disbelief about the organizational norm and its implications for professional identity (Fleming and Spicer, 2003).

However, the gap that enables resistance seems to be fluid, shifting, and also dangerous. As Collinson (1994, p. 29) stated, consent and resistance are 'linked, often in contradictory ways (...). Resistance frequently contains elements of consent and consent often incorporates aspects of resistance.' Examining 'cynical distancing' as one particular practice of dis-identification, Fleming and Spicer (2003, p. 160) describe what happens 'when we dis-identify with our prescribed social roles'; they say 'we often still perform them – sometimes better, ironically, than if we did identify with them.' 'Still performing' one's social role can be considered as a form of confirming the norm, which the authors frame as an inadvertent success of subjectivation efforts, rather than a failure. The danger that lies at the heart of cynicism then is that it leads to what Žižek (1989) calls an 'enlightened false consciousness' with the unintended consequence of undermining more effective, meaningful strategies of opposition.

In that sense, dis-identification allows employees to simultaneously 'buy into' the notion of creating one's own sense of self, and meanwhile at least partially still conserve imposed and normalizing images of professionalism (Dick and Hyde, 2006). Also Thomas and Davies (2005), in their study on the micro-politics of resistance and professional identities, show how the attempt to challenge the competitive masculine subject position that seems to serve here as an ideal is reproduced and legitimized through its critique. They conclude that while individuals may attempt to 'subvert and 'wriggle out' of the other ways that New Public Management attempts to classify, determine and categorize', this

nevertheless 'results in the reification, legitimization and reproduction of the very subject positions that they are denying.' (Thomas and Davies, 2005, p. 700). As resistance in this view can never happen 'in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault, 1976, p. 95), resistance is always in danger of reproducing the power regime that it actually tries to confront.

Resistance: A rhetorical perspective of argument and counter-argument

To further investigate the possibilities of practicing resistance, without losing sight of the potential dangers of resistance 'firing back', we draw on a rhetorical perspective (Symon, 2000; 2005; 2008). In line with the recent departure from seeing resistance as an overt, collective, and monolithic act and instead seeing it as a discursive understanding of power and resistance, the rhetorical perspective reconceptualizes resistance towards a 'multidimensional, fluid and generative understanding of power and agency' (Thomas and Davies, 2005, p. 700); thus the more subtle moves of disruption are taking center stage.

Focusing more closely on the micro-practices of resistance, rhetoric as a specific theory of communication draws attention to issues of persuasion, meaning, and argument (Bonet and Sauquet, 2010). It focuses on the strategies of argumentation that construct certain versions of reality as legitimate, at the same time undermining other versions (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). It is through rhetoric as well that underlying assumptions of arguments can be tackled, challenged, or re-worked to construct new organizational realities.

Potter (1996, p. 106) for instance differentiates between two particular forms of talk: 'reifying' is the attempt to convince others that accounts are facts, and 'ironizing' aims to expose those 'facts' as social constructions. Thus, individuals may be seeking to convince an audience that a particular social construction is true (and not a social construction) while simultaneously seeking to expose other accounts as social constructions (or as not being true).

Hence, an important 'part of the job of the rhetorical analyst is to determine how constructions of 'the real' are made persuasive' (Simons 1990, cited in Potter, 1996, p. 106).

As rhetoric can be considered to be dialogical (Billig, 1996), *arguments* are produced in a context with potential *counter-arguments* that may be oriented toward undermining them, thereby creating alternative world views and subjectivities. In that view, any topic can be opened up either for public debate or for internal debates of solitary thought. Focusing on arguments and counter-arguments emphasizes this disputative, politically oriented, and dialogical nature of reality construction. Hence, counter-arguments are as much setting out towards undermining dominant versions as they are aiming at creating alternative realities (Symon, 2005, p. 1658).

Theorizing the dynamics of power and resistance as intertwined in the form of argument and counter-argument, a rhetorical analysis of resistance aims at showing how particular interpretations of reality are both established and resisted (Symon 2000; 2005; 2008; Hellgren et al, 2002). Setting out to justify one position and to destabilize the other, arguments and counter-arguments in a dialogical way have to constantly anticipate their potential criticism. This rhetorical interplay between argument and counter-argument holds the potential for continuous re-invention: 'the creation of particular arguments allows the possibility of new (counter-)arguments, which, in turn, introduces further arguments and so on' (Symon 2005, p. 1661). In fact, from a rhetorical perspective, 'resistance, accommodation and reification may happen concurrently' (Thomas and Davies, 2005, p. 700).

To shed more light on the question of how resistance is practiced and how it leads to either confirming the status quo or establishing valid alternatives, a more in-depth analysis of the rhetorical interplays between argument and counter-argument is important. For instance, Bamberg and Andrews (2004, p. 363) show that 'Speakers never totally step outside the dominating framework of the master narrative, but always remain somewhat complicit and

work with components and parts of the existent frame 'from within.' (...) Speakers do not present a simple counter story but seem to be juggling several story lines simultaneously. It is in this sense that counter narratives always operate on the edge of disputability and require a good amount of interactional subtlety and rhetorical finessing on the part of the speaker'.

Bamberg and Andrews (2004) show, convincingly, that as counter-arguments are only to be understood in relation to a specific argument, they are always also complicit with the dominant discourse and hence bear the danger of reifying the norm in order to develop legitimacy. At the same time, counter-arguments have to communicate something new and different in order to be identified as countering. In other words, the construction of counter-arguments is only possible from within, but to develop their critical potential, they must also open up new perspectives and world views. In this perspective, resistance becomes a balancing act between being identified as belonging to the (dominant) inside and countering this perspective (Nentwich, 2009).

Another crucial issue for dealing with dominant world views are the premises or basic assumptions that Heracleous (2006) elaborates. With his analysis of enthymeme structures - that is, of how arguments are related to the premises held in a particular context - he demonstrates two different ways in which the dominant discourse and possible counter-discourses can be related. While a strong version of a counter-discourse is in an antagonistic relationship and hence based upon different premises, a weaker version would develop alternative world views compared to the dominant one, based on the same premises. While the strong counter-discourse might be less effective, if not marginalized, as the basic assumptions are not connected but instead come from 'outside' the dominant discourse, the weaker counter-discourse is positioned in a rather co-optive relationship towards the dominant discourse and clearly lacks opposition. Hence, it might not be as effective in terms of resistance. As this example shows, counter-arguments are never in a clear-cut oppositional

position to the dominant. The question is not whether a speaker is complicit with existing master narratives or countering them, but how s/he succeeds in positioning the argument in an in-between space that is both complicit with the dominant discourse in order to gain legitimacy, and also counters it in order to introduce something new (Nentwich, 2008; 2009).

Conceptualizing resistance to the dominant discourse as a constant dialogue between norm-confirming argument and norm-contesting counter-argument, a rhetorical perspective enables us to take a closer look at the micro-dynamics of resistance that result in either a potentially severe challenge to the dominant discourse or else in the danger of 'firing back', where resistance merely reifies what it tried to attack. Furthermore, studies emphasizing the relevance of underlying assumptions underline the importance of counter-arguments that aim to challenge these assumptions in order to succeed in making a step outside the dominant discourse's legacy (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004; Heracleous, 2006).

Analyzing the rhetorical interplays of part-time work in 21 interviews, we show how exactly the double-sided effects of resistance, as either firing back or establishing new realities, are rhetorically established. We thereby aim to contribute to a more differentiated perspective on how discursive resistance is achieved, thereby establishing part-time as the Other, or as a legitimate alternative and hence countering the dominant discourse. Analyzing these differences between rhetorical interplays and their effects, we particularly focused on three areas:

- 1) the arguments and counter-arguments available for constructing both the dominant and alternative positioning of part-time work (research question 1),
- 2) the micro-discursive moves of fact-making through the use of ironizing or reifying language (research question 2), and
- 3) the degree of connectedness between counter-arguments and the basic assumptions of the dominant discourse (research question 3).

2. Methodology and sample

To explore how part-time work was either constructed as a violation of the full-time norm (argument) or else as a legitimate alternative to this norm (counter-argument), we analysed 21 interviews with employees of a science and engineering research institute in Switzerland. The organization was deliberately chosen: it stands out as an equal-opportunity employer that tries to attract women in a male-dominated field. Of its employees, 28% worked part-time, compared to the national average of 33% part-time workers; this is quite a high proportion, taking into account the male-dominated field (Strub, 2003; Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2003). However, part-time work was considered feasible mainly for those at the level of researchers but not for directors; it was considered impossible for higher management positions. Working part-time is closely connected to being in charge of a family. As a study by Strub (2003, p. 8-9) shows, 80% of the part-time workers in Switzerland are female while 94% of the full-time workers are fathers; part-time work primarily enabled the mothers in this organization to balance work-family demands.

As employees in a research institute, six interviewees had earned a master's degree and twelve a Ph.D. Most interviewees were between 35 and 45 and the majority (15) was of Swiss origin. Two had immigrated from Poland, one from former Czechoslovakia and three from Germany. We interviewed part-time (12) and full-time (9) working individuals in both researcher (11) and director positions (10). Of these 21, 10 were male and 11 female; 13 were parents and 8 childless. In terms of part-time work, the sample included both men (7) and women (5) with and without children (see Table 1). Full-time work was defined as a working time of at least 91% of the standard of 42 hours or more, while part-time work was defined as any arrangement of 90% or less.¹

Table 1: Interview partners working part- and full-time

Working time arrangement	Interview partners
Full time (9)	2 fathers, 1 man without children, 2 mothers, 4 women without children
Part time (12)	5 fathers, 2 men without children, 4 mothers, 1 woman without children

The interviews were conducted by the first author in order to study the broader questions of discursive biography and identity constructions in the context of gender, work, and family (Nentwich, 2004; 2008). The objective of the interviews was to allow for a variety of meaning making and dialogue (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Nentwich, 2003). The flexible interview guide integrated very specific questions as well as narrative elements, as suggested by Witzel's (2000) problem-centred interview. The questions focused on the topics of work and life, family and organization, part-time and full-time employment, gender, leadership, and career planning.

Data analysis

For our rhetorical analysis of the resistance practiced in the interviews, we first performed an analysis of the rhetorical construction of working time.² According to our first research question, we were interested in the arguments that contribute to establishing full-time work as the dominant discourse, and resulting in the positioning of part-time work as the marginalized 'Other'. We also investigated the counter-arguments that participants had available for practicing resistance and eventually establishing part-time work as a legitimate reality. As our focus of analysis is on the arguments and counter-arguments available in the debate on working time issues, the results do not reflect the working time actually practiced by the participants but how they accounted for their own and other people's arrangements.

Further analyzing the material according to research questions two and three, we investigated the specific interplays between arguments and counter-arguments and the ways in which they resulted in new legitimate ways of perceiving part-time work or, on the contrary, in reifying the dominant discourse. Analyzing these differences between rhetorical interplay and their effects, we mainly focused on the micro-discursive moves of fact-making as well as on the degree of connectedness between the counter-argument and the basic assumptions of the dominant discourse.

3. Results

Through our analysis we have identified four rhetorical interplays: ways that counter-arguments are dialogically connected with arguments in order to resist the dominant discourse that constructs full-time work as the norm and part-time work as a violation of this norm. These four ways are (1) invalidating arguments; (2) claiming the opposite; (3) challenging basic assumptions; and (4) changing basic assumptions. We observed that each of these rhetorical interplays had different effects in efforts to resist the discourse of full-time work, depending on how the underlying assumptions of the dominant discourse were questioned by the counter-argument.

Invalidating Arguments

In the first rhetorical interplay, counter-arguments aimed at 'invalidating arguments' by making claims that directly questioned these arguments and by providing examples that contested the marginalizing reality constructions around part-time work. This is illustrated in the following discussion around whether or not part-time workers could potentially hold management positions.

I would say from the level of department head onwards, where they are responsible for 10 to 30 people, that doesn't work if they are not there 100%. ... They have to be approachable, they have to be available, they have responsibilities both internal and external. And at some point they run out of appointments if they are only around four days or three. It just doesn't work out. (Interview 13)

Here the argument that part-timers are not suitable for 'high responsibility' positions is based on the notion that for these positions one has to be present in the office 100% of the time. The underlying assumption for this argument is a constructed link between 'being present' and 'responsibility' that is supported by drawing on notions of approachability and availability. The claim is made persuasive by maintaining that 'it just doesn't work like that', pointing out the potential problems that can already be anticipated: a lack of time for appointments (McDonald, Bradley and Brown, 2008).

To invalidate this argument that part-timers are not suitable for positions higher up in the organizational hierarchy, interviewees formulated reasons why the given argument could be considered as not true or relevant. For instance, they invalidated arguments by drawing attention to their prejudiced nature or even rejecting them as nonsense, thereby ironizing the other position (Potter, 1996). More concretely, in the following extract the interviewee clearly objects to the argument that managers need to be present all the time.

People generally say that superiors should preferably be there all the time. Whereas, if you look more closely, superiors are less around in the office than others, right. That's how it is. (Interview 7)

Taking note of the dialogical nature of this rhetorical interplay (Billig 1996), the opposing party, which is actually not present in the interview setting, is still represented in the statement of what 'people generally say'. Thus, the given counter-argument may be acknowledged as being clearly targeted towards the argument presented earlier: 'that superiors should preferably be there all the time'. It offensively discounts this claim with an alternative reality construction: that superiors, just like part-timers, are actually not in the

office all that much. Also in this rhetorical construction the fragments 'whereas, if you look more closely' and 'that's how it [really] is' are making the alternative construction persuasive. Looking at the assumption, however, it becomes obvious that the speaker does not question the dominant discourse link between being present and taking responsibility, which was put forward in the argument. As both are still the dimensions being drawn upon to invalidate the argument, the rhetorical creativity for constructing an alternative account may be considered rather limited in this strategy (Heracleous, 2006).

A similar rhetorical interplay can be observed in the discussion around whether or not part-time work causes problems:

Oh well, one problem would be, if maybe I did less than 80%. ... Then you lose the plot and a certain rhythm, or the planning goes wrong, no, that doesn't work. (Interview 19)

A list of potential problems with working less than 80% is assembled in this argument that constructs part-time work as problematic, for both the individual and the organization, if things 'go wrong'. The dominant discourse's assumption is here that part-time work causes disadvantages for the organizations that offer it. Even though the interviewee's claims remain hypothetical, by stating so firmly that 'that doesn't work' she objects to the viability of part-time models and reifies her concerns as actual facts (Potter, 2006). A second interviewee counters this very argument by stating that

When I'm not there, well, nothing ever happened just because I wasn't there. (Interview 2)

By asserting that nothing ever happened 'just' because she was not in the office, she implies that other people might argue exactly that; she thereby draws attention to the dialogical nature of her claim. By showing that nothing ever 'went wrong' in her absence, she ironizes and thereby invalidates the argument that part-time work is problematic (Potter, 2006). Again, this counter-argument operates on the basis of the argument's assumption: the idea that part-

time work causes disadvantages for the organizations that offer it. Even though the argument is invalidated on the surface because it does not 'give in' to this reality construction, the underlying assumption at the heart of the dominant discourse remains intact (Heracleous, 2006).

Thus, this rhetorical interplay does not succeed in constructing part-time work as a legitimate alternative (Symon, 2005). Although the counter-argument aimed at resisting the dominant discourse through ironizing, the underlying assumptions were not challenged. Because it still argues along the same lines - the assumed link between being present and responsibility, or the assumption that part-time work causes disadvantages for the organizations that offer it - we see no substantial change that might significantly shift the dominant discourse of work time arrangements.

Claiming the Opposite

In the second rhetorical interplay, counter-arguments set out to undermine arguments by 'claiming the opposite', as illustrated in the following example where part-time workers are constructed as being either less or more committed to their work than full-timers.

Well, the problem also is that, I think, most people who work 30%, they are emotionally somewhere else. ...I have indeed the feeling, well people, who work so little, they are usually at a different place emotionally and then there is also a lack of commitment. (Interview 9)

Here the underlying assumption is an unambiguous link between working time and commitment, while commitment is defined as prioritizing work over non-work. Within the boundaries of that argument, part-time workers who do not spend 42 hours a week at the workplace are regarded as distracted from their work commitments by other engagements. Hence, this argument marginalizes part-timers as the inferior, uncommitted, and low-performing other, thereby strengthening the norm that is constructed in the dominant full-time discourse (Tsouroufli, Ozbilgin and Smith, 2011).

In clear (dialogical) conflict to this argument, another interviewee claimed the exact opposite: that part-timers are more committed to their work, as they actually work more than what they get paid for. Thus, part-time work is constructed as an organizational benefit rather than a burden.

I think, for the employer it is of benefit to have part-timers – to have people working part-time, when you just look at the financials. Because they actually work harder for the money they get paid. And one could very well say that someone who maybe works de facto 90% gets 80% pay. (Interview 7)

To legitimize this opposite reality claim and to undermine the argument that part-timers work less, the interviewee refers to the supposedly hard facts of 'financials' in order to claim the opposite. Moreover, he ironizes the counter-position by stating what it 'actually' and 'de facto' looks like in organizations (Potter, 2006). Though these rhetorical moves help to strengthen the counter-argument, the assumption that there is a link between working time and commitment is not questioned, hence weakening the potential effects of this rhetorical resistance strategy (Heracleous, 2006).

Another version of this kind of rhetorical interplay looked at the boundaries between private life and working life (Nentwich, 2008). While full-time arguments constructed these areas of life as having clear boundaries between them, counter-arguments claimed exactly the opposite.

And of course we have tried to find a solution so that he would be able to reduce maybe by one day, but that was unfortunately not possible. If you're in the sales force it's simply impossible.... If something should happen somewhere..., then he has to be on the spot, then he can't say, today I'm looking after my kid, I'll get back to you on Monday. [laughs] (Interview 4)

Here the interviewee tries to make her argument rhetorically persuasive by drawing on both reifying and ironizing rhetoric. By claiming that, despite all efforts, it was 'simply impossible' to find a part-time solution for someone working in the sales force, the interviewee reifies this 'impossibility'. The word 'unfortunately' frames this failed effort as not being a matter of

lacking goodwill (which might be another possible counter-argument), but rather as an inevitable constraint of that position. This argument is based on the assumption that private life and working life are two distinct spheres that are not to be mixed up with one another. By laughing at her own statement at the end, the interviewee ironizes the potentially successful accommodation of private life demands (i.e. child care) with professional work commitments by positioning this combination as ridiculously impractical (Potter, 2006).

In stark contrast to that argument, the following counter-argument simply dismisses this separation between the private and the working sphere by drawing attention to the blurred boundaries between these two life areas.

I'm always reachable on my mobile to give short-notice replies on how to proceed if something happens that day in the lab that maybe was not planned. (Interview 1)

Introducing the concepts of 'flexibility' and 'working from home', the counter-argument manages to claim the opposite of what the argument maintained: that it is not problematic to not be present as even short-notice, unforeseen events can be managed from home. However, the assumption of two distinct spheres of life remains unquestioned.

Hence, this example of 'claiming the opposite' is also only slightly effective in establishing part-time work as a legitimate alternative (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004; Heracleous, 2006). These counter-arguments merely tackled arguments on their argumentative surface and did not question the basic assumption that there is an unambiguous link between working time and commitment, or that private life and working life are two distinct spheres of life, thereby preserving the very pillars of the dominant discourse.

Challenging Basic Assumptions

In the third rhetorical interplay, counter-arguments set out to dispute arguments by 'challenging their basic assumptions' (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004; Heracleous, 2006). This

is shown in the following example of argument - counter-argument, where the notion of performance is being discussed.

People would presume that if I wanted to work let's say 80%, that I would only accomplish an 80% result [laughs], that's what I believe would happen.
(Interview 16)

Here the underlying assumption is that the time spent in the office is a reliable indicator of performance. It again highlights the fact that the interviewee's reality perception and behavior are guided by the argumentative context, that is by 'what people would presume' about him and his work and what he believes 'would happen' as a consequence of working less than full-time: a degrading of his work that might then lead to an undesirable marginalization (Tsouroufli, Ozbilgin and Smith, 2011). He reifies this reality construction and makes it persuasive by nervously laughing at his own claim to reveal his discomfort at merely thinking of a part-time model and its consequences. To counter this perspective, another interviewee stated this on the issue of performance:

It's not a matter of being present if you ask me. It's more a question of how you make use of that working time. It's no use if someone sits here for 42 hours and is just chatting around. (Interview 19)

With the words 'if you ask me', the interviewee positions herself in the middle of a dialogical debate and thus a rhetorical interplay where the most suitable solution for performance measurement is open for debate (Billig, 1996). While the counter-argument also contains elements of the invalidation strategy ('it's not a matter of being present/ of sitting around for 42 hours'), it is the particular statement about 'how you make use of that working time', which defensively ('it's more a question of') introduces a new understanding; it thereby challenges the dominant discourse's basic assumption that the time spent in the office is a reliable indicator of performance (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004; Heracleous, 2006).

The following counter-argument also challenges the assumption that long hours can be equated with good performance by drawing attention to the notion of leadership qualities instead.

Leadership is not just a matter of being present, but a matter – taking responsibility and whatever, well – all that it comprises, I mean, also a feeling for the people, isn't it. (Interview 10)

By re-introducing thus-far-neglected aspects of what management also means - 'taking responsibility' and having a 'feeling for the people' - the counter-argument succeeds in making a strong counter-point which uncouples the link between working time and performance. By pulling the audience in to take a position in the dialogical debate ('isn't it'), the interviewee seeks to reify her claim as a widely accepted fact, and thus make the alternative reality construction persuasive (Potter, 2006).

This rhetorical strategy of 'challenging basic assumptions' can be considered a successful strategy as it produces and reifies alternative claims that question the dominant full-time discourse and help legitimize part-time work as a valid alternative (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004; Heracleous, 2006). By not arguing along the same assumptions - that time spent in the office is a reliable indicator of performance - but instead challenging this assumption and suggesting better indicators of performance, this rhetorical interplay can be said to creatively undermine the boundaries of the dominant full-time discourse.

Changing Basic Assumptions

In the fourth rhetorical interplay, counter-arguments set out not only to challenge, but to even change the basic assumptions underlying the dominant discourse's arguments. This becomes obvious for example in the following interplay on the issue of whether or not a task is dividable.

Book-keeping ... one can easily start that part-time. Because most of the time 200 invoices, standardized tasks, that can be distributed. It doesn't matter now who does what. ... it doesn't matter whether this or that person books the 100 invoices. And I think that is a good area for, I would say not so demanding work. It's a lot of routine work that can very well be accomplished on the basis of part-time models. (Interview 18)

The underlying assumption here is that job demands are fixed and unchangeable, and whether or not a job is dividable and thus feasible for part-time work is then assessed based on these supposedly fixed and unchangeable job demands. It is argued that only 'less demanding' jobs can be divided and thus 'even' accomplished part-time. In terms of rhetorical moves, this point is reified through repetition, that is, through stating twice that in these low-skill jobs 'it doesn't matter' who does what; this also implies that it would actually matter in other positions with more responsibilities (Potter, 2006).

If job demands are considered to be fixed enablers or disablers for part-time arrangements, changing the underlying assumptions means deconstructing this link and replacing it with a different notion: that part-time work is always possible and that job demands can be organized so that all tasks, including management tasks, can be divided, and hence organized differently.

Well I think, when a firm or a department is well organized, then someone can also be in a management position here or work part-time as supervisor and that can exactly work as well. Well it is, I think, at the end of the day it is a matter of organizing. (Interview 3)

Through maintaining that 'that can exactly work as well' and implying a dialogical counter-position, in this counter-argument the interviewee explicitly seeks to reify an alternative construction of reality. By changing the underlying assumptions of the argument he suddenly places at stake the taken-for-granted way of work organization (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004). In this context, part-time work only becomes a disadvantage for the organization if it

fails to change the practices of organizing that come from a full-time work-dominated context.

In a similar fashion, the following argument assuming that tasks are assigned to persons was opposed by promoting an alternative assumption: that tasks are assigned to functions and not so much to individual people. While a person cannot be divided, in the alternative assumption a function may very well be shared by part-timers, thus opening up space for an alternative model of organizing.

Well, I think for a management position it is appropriate to have one person as a contact point or who passes on certain things, instead of having two people doing the job. Well, I couldn't imagine it that way, no. (Interview 14)

This argument, which is built on the assumption that important tasks are assigned to irreplaceable people, makes it nearly impossible to transfer management responsibilities to anyone else. By rhetorically framing it as 'inappropriate' and by being 'unable to imagine' part-timers in a responsible management position, the interviewee ironizes the option of part-time workers holding responsible positions (Potter, 2006).

To challenge that view, another interviewee gives the example of a hospital where most of the work cannot be foreseen, so it is necessary to have qualified personnel present at all times; she argues that doctors and nurses can still react flexibly to the daily demands. The alternative assumption here is that in a hospital tasks are assigned to functions with clearly established routines of knowledge transfer between shifts.

It also has to work in the hospital. The doctors are not around 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. So they have to pass the work on as well. (Interview 17)

The claim that 'it also has to work in the hospital' 'dialogically objects to the implied argument that 'it cannot work'. Part-time work in this interview extract is enacted as a critique of how work gets organized when full-time availability is taken for granted. In fact, when this

alternative model for organizing tasks and thus arranging working time and responsibilities becomes reified, the possibility of part-time work becomes the new taken-for-granted assumption.

In that sense, we see this rhetorical interplay - in which counter-arguments set out to change the basic assumptions that underlie arguments - as the most promising for establishing a legitimate alternative to the dominant discourse of full-time work (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004; Heracleous, 2006). By re-inventing the argumentative base mainly through creative rhetorical moves, this strategy holds the potential to substantially shift the dominant discourse around part-time work.

4. Discussion

With an interest in exploring how resistance towards dominant discourses can result in both alternative world views and a reification of the dominant, our analysis has focused on the micro-discursive moves through which the dominant discourse becomes constructed as well as contested in rhetorical interplays. First, by taking a rhetorical perspective, we observed that the norm of full-time work and the marginalization of part-time work are discursively constructed within an argumentative context, i.e., within some kind of dialogical debate (Billig, 1996). Throughout the interviews a counter-position of 'what others would argue' was often implicitly and sometimes even explicitly addressed. Hence, the analysis supported the view that rhetoric is dialogical as it unfolds in the rhetorical interplay put forward by opponents and proponents of new and more flexible work time arrangements. We illustrated a range of such argument-counter-argument interplays that revolved around questions of being present, responsibility, commitment, organizational disadvantages, the separation of work and private life, performance measurement, and the divisibility of tasks and functions. These showed that part-time work indeed is a controversial and highly 'debated' issue and that the

dominant discourse on work-time arrangements is constantly being negotiated in a dialogical way.

In elaborating on a Foucauldian notion of resistance, our analysis showed that different argument-counter-argument interplays nevertheless resulted in different effects. Rather than assuming that some discourses and reality constructions are dominant per se and hence belong to the 'inside', we have provided a micro-discursive analysis to investigate how certain reality constructions were reified and made rhetorically persuasive and how other arguments were ironized in an equally convincing way (Potter, 1996). By zooming in on these small rhetorical nuances, we have intended to shed more light on the reifying rhetorical moves of creating facticity ('that's how it is'; 'it's simply impossible'; 'isn't it?') as well as the ironizing rhetorical moves of distancing the speaker ('I couldn't imagine it that way'; 'it just doesn't work out') to strengthen and undermine certain reality constructions.

Our third focus was on whether or not counter-arguments addressed the different underlying assumptions of arguments that helped to preserve and strengthen the taken-for-granted status of full-time work (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004; Heracleous, 2006). Indeed, our analysis showed that it might not be enough if counter-arguments simply invalidate existing arguments or boldly suggest their very opposite. Even though these counter-arguments set out to go against the arguments, they did not question their underlying assumptions such as the presumed link between physical presence and responsibility or the link between working time and commitment; these both framed part-time workers as being less serious about their work, less emotionally engaged, less approachable in the office, and therefore not suitable for responsible management positions. Instead of challenging the underlying assumptions, these counter-arguments remained within the dominant discourse they were trying to resist. In line with Heracleous's (2006) findings, these rhetorical

interplays between argument and counter-argument are considered less powerful in terms of breaking out and resisting the dominant discourse.

Other rhetorical interplays were considered to be more forceful and creative in resisting the dominant full-time discourse; these counter-arguments were constructed in a way that challenged and changed the very underlying assumptions, thereby creatively opening up space for alternative realities. For example, the assumption that time spent in the office is a reliable indicator of performance (thereby framing part-timers as performing 'less') was challenged by the ideas that what matters more is how one uses the time and that there are better indicators for performance such as taking responsibility and having a feeling for the people. Moreover, by completely changing the underlying assumptions of arguments, the idea that job demands are fixed and unchangeable was changed into the idea that job demands can be organized such that all tasks – including management tasks – can be accomplished by working part-time. In a similar way, the assumption that tasks are assigned to persons, making certain responsible positions appear indivisible and thus unsuitable for part-time work, was entirely replaced by the assumption that tasks are assigned by function and therefore always divisible. In this rhetorical interplay the taken-for-granted idea of how work gets organized when full-time work is assumed as the norm gets severely contested.

It is this rhetorical interplay of changing the basic assumptions of the argument that we considered most promising at the outset to resist the dominant full-time discourse and to construct part-time work as a legitimate alternative. Here, the rhetorical interplay succeeded in establishing something new and challenging from the dominant perspective as legitimate in itself. In contrast to the first two interplays that challenge or change the dominant discourse's basic assumption, this one contributed to a highly positive rhetoric: As the alternative perspective was put forward as taken-for-granted, it was not necessary either to make facts nor to ironize the dominant discourse in order to make the alternative legitimate.

Conclusion

This study contributes to an understanding of resistance from a rhetorical perspective by zooming in on the micro-discursive mechanisms that allow resistance to be achieved through talk. The investigation of rhetoric has helped to shed more light on how the notion of full-time work is constructed in a dominant way, how arguments are assembled to make it appear normal, and how language is used to frame certain reality constructions in a taken-for-granted manner by drawing on reifying or ironizing rhetoric. Likewise, the rhetorical analysis has uncovered how counter-arguments can be constructed to successfully introduce and establish valid alternatives.

By framing resistance to the dominant discourse of full-time work as a matter of rhetorical moves, proponents of part-time work were neither 'romanticized', as Mumby (2005, p. 38) warns, nor dismissed as 'unwitting dupes' in the vigorous debate on whether or not resistance to discursive normalization can be deemed successful. On the contrary, the analysis showed that resistance is in constant danger of reifying the dominant if developing alternatives do not challenge or change the basic assumptions, but highly successful if the rhetorical interplay contributes to new assumptions that are taken for granted. With its in-depth analysis of how resistance was practiced by means of four rhetorical interplays this study contributes to a more differentiated understanding of discursive practices of resistance and their danger of 'firing back'.

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Endnotes

¹ The standard way of expressing part-time work in Switzerland is to use percentages: 100% refers to full-time employment with a weekly working time of 42 hours, while 80% would be 4 days a week, 60% 3 days a week etc.

² The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and analysed with the technical help of Atlas.ti. As the original interviews were in Swiss German, a very distinct German dialect, let us offer a few thoughts on language and the problem of translation that might be relevant for readers of what look like original transcripts. First, transcribing the interviews meant translating the spoken Swiss dialect into a written version of the German language. Second, to be presented in this paper, the interviews had to be translated from German into English. If translating is to transmit the meaning of the utterances, rather than merely finding equivalent words in a different language (Janssens, Lambert and Steyaert, 2004) then the context must also be translated to enable interpretation. Hence, we did not provide exact translations but rather aimed at providing an interpretable version of the spoken original. All filler words, repetitions, stammering, and other features of spoken language were glazed over. Non-verbal noises such as laughter [laughs] are indicated in square brackets. Three dots ... indicate the omission of text not immediately relevant to the issues analysed. All the names used in this article are pseudonyms.