

Guest editorial: Transdisciplinary workplace research (TWR) 2024 Conference – Part 2

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This is the second special issue drawing together recent insights in the field of workplace research, which were presented at the fourth Transdisciplinary Research Network (TWR) Conference, hosted by Edinburgh Napier University from 4th to 7th September 2024.

The papers presented in this issue offer new theoretical, methodological and practical perspectives on contemporary workplace challenges. Collectively, they demonstrate the breadth of current workplace research, addressing topics that span the physical, social, technological and organisational dimensions of work. While diverse in focus, the contributions share a commitment to understanding how workplaces can create value for individuals, organisations and society.

As workplace transformation continues at pace, the need for rigorous and impactful research remains paramount. The articles in this issue reinforce the importance of transdisciplinary collaboration in addressing complex workplace problems and translating evidence into practice. Together, they contribute to a growing body of knowledge that supports the design, management and governance of workplaces that are resilient, inclusive and sustainable in the face of ongoing change. This special issue provides further development of several topics that were presented at the conference as follows.

“Teleworking in South Africa: Enhancing Work-Life Balance and Employee Motivation” by Thabelo Ramantswana explores the experiences of teleworkers in South Africa and examines the implications of teleworking for work-life balance, motivation and workplace practices. Based on interviews with professionals from a range of sectors in Gauteng Province, the study finds that teleworking is widely valued for the flexibility it provides, enabling employees to better integrate work and personal responsibilities, reduce commuting time and costs and exercise greater control over their daily schedules. These benefits were strongly associated with enhanced wellbeing, productivity and motivation, with many participants reporting a preference for continuing to work remotely.

The research also highlights several persistent challenges. Participants reported difficulties in establishing boundaries between work and personal life, often working longer hours than they would in traditional office settings. Distractions within the home, feelings of professional isolation and reduced opportunities for informal collaboration and mentoring were also common concerns. While many organisations provided technical and practical support during the transition to remote working, the findings suggest that formal teleworking policies and greater attention to employees’ workspace needs remain important areas for development.

“It’s a Match! Aligning Employer Branding and Corporate Real Estate Management” by Maria Günther, Martin Höcker and Andreas Pfnür examines how corporate real estate management (CREM) can contribute to employer branding by aligning workplace design with the needs and preferences of different employee groups. Drawing on survey data from 937 German office workers, the authors explore how employees perceive corporate real estate through social, economic and ecological lenses and identify distinct workplace preference profiles. The findings reinforce the growing importance of the workplace as a strategic component of the employer value proposition.



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Using cluster analysis, the study identifies three employee segments: “user-centrics”, who place greatest value on workplace functionality, comfort and productivity; “economists”, who are more sensitive to the economic and status-related aspects of the workplace; and “environmentalists”, who prioritise ecological considerations and biophilic workplace features. While all groups recognise the social value of the workplace, their preferences differ significantly in terms of the attributes they most value.

The paper highlights the importance of creating a strong person-environment fit between employees and the workplace to bring added value to the employer’s branding success. The findings demonstrate that effective collaboration between human resource management and CREM can strengthen employer branding by ensuring that workplaces not only support organisational objectives but also deliver meaningful value to current and prospective employees.

“Transforming University Campus – students and Informal Learning Environments” by Kirsi Mäenpää and Suvi Nenonen examines how the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent rise of hybrid learning have reshaped students’ expectations of university campuses, libraries and informal learning environments. Drawing on an extensive case study at the University of Helsinki, the authors used workshops, observations, utilisation tracking, surveys and pilot projects involving more than 1,000 students to explore how contemporary learners use and value study spaces. The findings suggest that students continue to see the campus as an important destination, not only for academic work but also for social connection, wellbeing and access to services. However, traditional study environments designed primarily for individual, in-person learning no longer fully meet the needs of students who routinely move between face-to-face, remote and hybrid modes of study.

A central message of the study is that future learning centres and university libraries must provide greater diversity of spaces. Students seek a balance between quiet, ergonomic areas for focused individual work, technology-enabled environments that support hybrid participation and social spaces that foster collaboration, community and peer interaction. The research highlights growing demand for flexible group-study facilities, improved digital infrastructure and environments that accommodate students using their own devices. At the same time, the need for silent study areas remains strong, demonstrating that future campuses must support multiple modes of learning simultaneously.

The paper contributes to campus planning by translating these insights into practical design principles. The authors propose a framework organised around three categories of space: places for individual work, places for physical and digital presence and places for social presence. Applied to the redevelopment of the university’s learning centre, this framework led to the creation of new concepts such as hybrid study rooms, relaxation areas, family study spaces and sensory-friendly environments. More broadly, the study argues that the post-pandemic university campus should be viewed as a connected learning ecosystem where physical, digital and social experiences are integrated to support both academic success and a stronger sense of community.

“Unlocking Collaboration: Enabling Effective Knowledge Transfer Between Service Design and Architectural Design in Workplace Development” by Valeria Gryada, Eevi Juuti, Aulikki Herneojä and Emilia Rönkkö explores how collaboration between service design and architectural design can be improved in workplace development projects, where creating successful workplaces increasingly depends on understanding user needs and employee experience. Drawing on in-depth interviews with leading Finnish service design practitioners before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors investigate why valuable user insights gathered through service design are often lost as projects move into architectural design. The

study argues that the key challenge is in ensuring that user knowledge is effectively transferred, interpreted and applied across disciplinary boundaries.

The research identifies two main project structures. In the first, a traditional linear process, service design is completed before architectural design begins, creating handover points where knowledge can be diluted or misinterpreted. In the second, service designers and architects work concurrently, allowing continuous dialogue and shared problem-solving. The findings favour this overlapping approach, which enables architects to engage directly with user insights and reduces reliance on formal reports alone. The study further identifies three essential knowledge-transfer practices: documentation, interaction and mediation. While concise and well-structured documentation remains important, regular communication between disciplines and the presence of a “knowledge mediator” who can translate, interpret and maintain continuity across project stages are shown to be critical for successful collaboration.

We hope the articles gathered in this issue provide fresh perspectives, practical insights and inspiration for future research and practice. Thank you for reading and enjoying the issue.

Andrew Smith

*School of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment,
Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh, UK*

Alasdair Reid

Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh, UK, and

Mina Jowkar and Suha Jaradat

*School of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment,
Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh, UK*