Work, Employment and Society
Annual Conference 2025

Abstract Book
Monday 8 September 2025

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Abstracts are listed by Paper Session then alphabetically by Stream Name.

WELCOME

Welcome to the Work, Employment and Society Annual Conference 2025 at University of Manchester. The theme of the 2025 conference is 'Continuities and Discontinuities in Work and Employment'. It is a pleasure to announce our two plenary panels:

Our opening panel 'Continuities and Discontinuities in Life, Work and Employment' will be given by Jean Jenkins and Miguel Martinez Lucio.

Our closing panel 'Rethinking continuities and discontinuities: work & employment futures' will be given by Manjo Dias-Abey, Eleanor Kirk, and Pratima Sambajee.

The programme also includes a variety of special events, journal events and PhD Showcase presentations.

This conference offers a rich and challenging programme and it is hoped that every delegate will find sessions of interest.

A conference of this breadth depends on the efforts of many committed individuals. Significant thanks are due to all those who have helped with the organisation of the conference, particularly the committee members:

Chris Chan, *Royal Holloway, University of London*

Susan Kirk, *Newcastle University*

Marti Lopez-Andreu, *Newcastle University*

Toma Pustelnikovaite, *Cardiff University*

Jenny Rodriguez, *University of Manchester*

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We would like to express our appreciation for the support of our sponsors and exhibitors. The Exhibition Area includes exhibitions from organisations that offer services and information for conference delegates. Please take some time between sessions to visit these exhibitors.

Main Conference Sponsor

Sage Publications

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The BSA would like to thank SAGE Publishing for funding a portion of the free places for this year's conference.

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Bristol University Press is offering a 50% special pre-order discount for *UberTherapy: The New Business of Mental Health* by Elizabeth Cotton, which will have a launch event on Monday, Paper Session Two. Use code BUP10 on bristoluniversitypress.co.uk by 31 October 2025.

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IMPORTANT DELEGATE INFORMATION

Arrival and Registration

Please collect your badge promptly on arrival and step away from the desk to allow others to register. Feel free to grab some refreshments, explore the venue or take a moment to familiarise yourself with the programme.

Your badge must be worn at all times for security and meal access.

Registration will take place in The Drum, University Place:

Monday 8 September from 09:00

Tuesday 9 September from 08:00

Wednesday 10 September from 08:00

Venue Details

Venue address: University Place, 176 Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL

What3Words: ///parade.paint.washed

Directions:
- Interactive map
- Travel by train
- Travel by bus, tram or coach
- Travel by car
- Travel by air
- Travel by bicycle

Virtual Tour of University Place: https://www.conference.manchester.ac.uk/virtual-tours/universityplace/

Sessions will take place in various rooms at University Place.

Chairing

We are extremely grateful to all those who have agreed to chair one or more sessions. If you find yourself in a session without a chair we would be grateful if someone in the audience could volunteer to take this role. Chairing guidelines will be available in each room and a copy is also available here.

Meals and Refreshments

Tea and coffee	Throughout the conference	The Drum
Lunch	12:30-13:30 on Monday 8 September	The Marketplace Restaurant
	12:30-13:30 on Tuesday 9 September	The Marketplace Restaurant
	13:30-14:30 on Wednesday 10 September	The Marketplace Restaurant

Vegetarian and vegan options will be available as part of the standard catering provision. If you have notified us of any other specific dietary requirements, please make these known to the catering staff when collecting your meals and refreshments.

Your badge must be worn to access refreshments.

No breakfast or evening meals are included in your registration. Manchester offers a wide range of local dining options nearby.

Wellbeing and Reflection Spaces

We recognise that conferences can be full-on, and we want to support your wellbeing throughout the event. Whether you're looking for a moment of quiet, a space for prayer or reflection or time to recharge outdoors, a range of supportive environments are available during the conference.

Quiet Room
We have allocated a room for those seeking quiet time at the conference and this can be found in University Place Room 4.212.

Prayer Room
A dedicated prayer room is available in Room 4.213.

Mothering Room
A mothering room will be provided in Room 4.210.

Green space
There is plenty of green space to enjoy around the conference site as shown on this virtual tour of the university: https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/virtual/360-tours/parks-outdoor/

Cloakroom

A free cloakroom is available in The Drum, University Place. Please note items are left at your own risk. Opening hours are:

Monday: 09:00 - 19:00

Tuesday: 08:00 - 17:30

Wednesday: 08:00 - 16:30

Drinks Reception

There will be a drinks reception held in The Drum, University Place on **Monday 8 September 18:00-19:00**. All delegates are invited to attend and complimentary drinks will be provided.

Publicity

Share your experience using #wesconf25 on social media!

PAPER SESSION 1
11:00-12:30

Difference, Diversity & Social Justice 1 – Room 3.210

Employment Competition Shaped by Major-Based Bias: Structural Hiring Barriers in the Labor Market

Sheng Fu

(London School of Economics and Political Science)

The increasing number of university graduates in China, along with intensifying labor market competition, has partially exacerbated major-based hiring biases. These biases create structural barriers, disproportionately disadvantaging graduates from certain disciplines and reinforcing hiring hierarchies, where some majors have privileged access while others face systemic disadvantages. While prior research has examined employment barriers or discrimination, most studies focus on non-academic factors, leaving major-based hiring thresholds underexplored. This study investigates the presence of major-based hiring thresholds and their impact on students from different majors.

This study employs word co-occurrence network analysis and word vector analysis (word2vec model) to systematically compare university curricula with labor market demands. By analyzing job postings from Boss Zhipin, a leading Chinese job portal, and curriculum data from Z University, the study uncovers a hierarchical employment structure, where majors like Computer Science are widely accepted in hiring, while majors like Political Science face significant barriers.

Text data analysis shows that 53% job positions impose strict major-specific requirements. This means that most job postings screen candidates based on their academic background. In word co-occurrence network analysis, the Industry-Major Graph highlights that while certain fields (e.g., IT, finance) exhibit strong linkages between job roles and majors, other industries have more flexible major restrictions. The Position-Major Graph further quantifies employment accessibility across disciplines, showing that a small number of dominant majors benefit from extensive job opportunities, while others experience a professional crowding-out effect. Additionally, the network graph of major co-occurrences suggests that a few dominant majors are favored by employers, which can displace employment opportunities for others.

Furthermore, word vector analysis reveals systematic misalignment between employer expectations and academic curricula. By analyzing the word vector representations of different majors, this study applies cosine similarity and pairwise difference to quantify the meaning gap between higher education and recruitment environments. The findings indicate that the labor market clusters disciplines in a coarse-grained manner.

Through cosine similarity analysis, the perceptual gap between the labor market and higher education is found to be smaller only for STEM, finance, and other dominant majors, which are identified in network analysis. This suggests that major-based structural hiring barriers limit job market diversity, placing graduates from non-dominant fields at a disadvantage. The labor market's coarse-grained classification of academic backgrounds further hinders students from accessing diverse employment opportunities and reduces labor market flexibility. By computing pairwise vector differences, this coarse-grained classification reveals two forms of bias: (1) First-Type Bias, where closely related disciplines in academia are treated as distinct in the labor market; (2) Second-Type Bias, where majors trained as distinctly different in higher education are considered equivalent in the labor market.

This study examines major-based hiring biases and their influence on employment competition. Through network and word vector analysis, the findings reveal structural hiring barriers and a misalignment between higher education and labor market expectations. The results highlight the role

of major-based thresholds in shaping recruitment practices, calling for a broader reconsideration of hiring criteria to better align academic training with workforce needs.

Conflicting Identities and Labour Market Outcomes of Minorities: Evidence from Arabs in Israel

Ilan Shdema, Yaron Mor, Hisham Abu Rayya

(Max Stern Yezreel Valley College)

Relaying on discrimination and social categorization theories, this study examines the associations between conflicting identities of ethnic minorities and labour market outcomes, focusing on Arabs in Israel. The case is interesting due to the substantial contradiction between Arabs' national-Palestinian identity and their civic-Israeli identity, stemming from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unlike studies of immigrant minorities where ethnic and civic identities do not overtly conflict, this research provides unique insights into identity dynamics. Most studies addressing these associations have mainly examined employment participation, often overlooking quality measures of employment (Bisin et al., 2011; Carillo et al., 2023; Khattab & Hussein, 2018).

The current study provides a more thorough outlook by relating in addition to employment status, also to quality measures (wages, job prestige, and rank). Additionally, is addresses these relationships in predominantly majority vicinities (Jewish in this case) and exclusively Arab localities (ethnic enclaves), assuming that the examined identities may act differently in these environments. The study used a sample of 552 participants collected by a survey institution analysed quantitatively (using bivariate tests in addition to a series of regressions and moderations).

Core findings uncover that Israeli identity is positively associated with employment probability, while Palestinian identity does not. Regarding employment quality, both identities studied, as well as their interaction, are associated with higher income, highlighting the labour market advantages of a bicultural identity. However, Israeli identity is linked to less prestigious positions. Additionally, the study uncovers distinct identity dynamics in predominantly Arab versus Jewish work environments. In predominantly Jewish locales, the findings are consistent with the overall sample. In Arab areas, a positive association was found between Palestinian identity and income and an interaction effect between Israeli and Palestinian identities on income was observed. Moreover, Palestinian identity does not seem to hinder career advancement in Arab locales, as might occur in Jewish areas as interaction effect was observed between both identities studied and rank.

The study promotes existing literature by providing a more enhanced outlook on the relationship examined. Theoretically it suggests that the while discrimination explains the probability of being employed, social categorization theory explains better quality measures of occupation. Regarding bicultural identities, it uncovers that this identity pattern forms an advantage also in the contested case of Israel. The study has been completed, was submitted to a refereed journal and is currently evaluated for publication.

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Negotiating Disadvantage and Successful Job Crafting: Understanding Female Entrepreneurs' Daily Working Practices in the Global South

Jane Parry, Trang Gardner Vu, Brian Hracs, Nguyen Phuong Minh (Known As Minh) Tran, Sajeda Pervin, Peter Rodgers

(University of Southampton)

Applying Global North-centric expectations of entrepreneurship, which privilege gendered and profitability norms (Burns, 2001), to businesses operating in the Global South can have limited value in a context where culture, traditions, and religion are key to understanding priorities and structures. Our

research with female entrepreneurs running diverse businesses in Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Vietnam takes a broader perspective on disadvantage and the barriers and facilitators to setting up and running enterprises in the Global South, looking at how intersectional differences affect women's daily practices and negotiations. Continuities and discontinuities are a central part of these female entrepreneurs' daily working practices, as they adapt their work and relationships to macroeconomic forces, alongside negotiating gendered expectations around respectability (Skeggs, 1997), which we found manifested around stigma and scepticism in these communities.

Drawing on the first set of fieldwork in Vietnam from our two-year research project, in this paper we explore female entrepreneurs' motivations and redefinitions of business success, which are embedded in a more holistic understanding of work quality or good work (Green, 2021; Warhurst and Knox, 2022; Williams et al., 2020). We examine Vietnamese female entrepreneurs' strategies to job craft their way out of disadvantage, drawing upon our qualitative data, which comprised a tripartite approach of interviewing, work observation, and diary-keeping.

We argue that for female entrepreneurs in the Global South, the organisation of working practices is both a practical project to achieve business goals and sustain everyday survival, but that these fundamentally also enable female entrepreneurs to nurture the kind of enterprises that provide personally meaningful activities (Rosso et al., 2010). For example, these included being in control of one's work and feeling self-sufficient, acting in ethical ways that benefited local communities, and developing expertise around local products. In this analysis, we look beyond economic capital, to understand how social (such as making use of local entrepreneurial networks) and cultural capital (such as earmarking time for learning within working schedules) (Bourdieu, 1996) are accumulated and coalesce to support sustainable and meaningful enterprises.

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Difference, Diversity & Social Justice 2 – Room 3.211

Painting Trucks Pink? Representations of Working (Petro-) Femininities in UK HGV Driving

Kaveri Medappa, Ac Davidson

(University of Oxford)

Dominant cultural tropes portray truck drivers as independent, ultra-masculine 'kings of the road' and indeed truck-driving in the UK is predominantly a middle-aged white male occupation (98% male, 96% white, 62% over 45 years). Yet, in a context of an aging workforce, high turnover and persistent concerns around driver shortages, there have been increasing calls for workforce diversification – including encouraging more women to take up truck driving work. Given this context, we explore cultural representations of trucking femininity through UK print media analysis, alongside female truck drivers' everyday experiences in the industry. We ask: what are some of the prevalent discourses around female truck drivers and how do these relate to the everyday practices and negotiations of gender by female truckers?

This paper, part of the ESRC-funded Trucking Lives (2022-2026) project, offers a work-in-progress analysis of the representations of female truckers in news media (using LexisNexis), policy literature and industry blogs. Our media analysis found a disproportionate number of references around female truckers as women (in hyper-sexualised images and wording of truckers with, for example, OnlyFans accounts, or to a lesser extent as mothers ie. Mothertruckers) and mythologized as news-worthy trailblazers ('the first, oldest, youngest'). Other discourses centered on the 'benefits' of women drivers to the road haulage industry. We contrast these dominant media representations and discourses with interview data from women drivers that foreground how they experience and navigate structural obstacles to their entry and retention in truck driving work. We show how women drivers locate satisfaction, and even joy, in driving work whilst simultaneously experiencing poor working conditions, roadside facilities, and often times, misogyny and sexual discrimination (Hopkins et al., 2024).

We engage with existing scholarship examining women's entry and 'inclusion' into male-dominated sectors and highlight how popular discourses frame female truckers in hyper-visible and gendered ways (in pink trucks!), while obscuring how women truckers are structurally marginalised. We find that women truck drivers participate and negotiate their 'out of place' identities in spatially and materially-contingent ways that 'rework' (Katz, 2004) the masculine gaze and orientations that structure truck driving work. Drawing on research within the environmental humanities on petro-cultures and, specifically, the entanglement of forms of (toxic) masculinity with the valorisation of fossil fuels and climate denialism in petro-masculinity (Daggett, 2018), we ask what it might mean to theorise these representations and everyday negotiations of female truckers in HGV driving as manifestations of 'petro-femininity'. We argue that women's negotiations of working life and gendered occupational identities are shaped in and through fossil-fuelled accelerations/exhilarations in mobile work - but in more complex, nuanced and creative ways than in dominant media depictions.

These findings contribute to limited research on the lived experiences of truck drivers and that of women truck drivers more specifically, adopting a multi-methods approach. Theoretically, it broadens extant debates on women's experiences labouring in male dominated sectors by bringing sexuality, embodiment, social reproduction and crucially, the materialities and spatialities of heavy goods haulage work, more centrally into analysis of gender and mobile labour.

PhD Showcase

Drinking As Part of Work? Navigating Masculinities in the Drinking Culture of State Sector in China

Luna Yihan Fu

(University of Leeds)

China's state sector, commonly referred to as 'Tizhi', meaning 'system' in English, comprises civil service, public service units, and state-owned enterprises and is ultimately governed by the Communist Party. Around one in four workers in China are employed in the state sector and since the 2010s, economic changes including downsizing in the private sectors and rising youth unemployment have made public sector jobs increasingly desirable among younger generations due to their perceived stability, status and job security. Against this backdrop, this paper exposes the "dark side" of these sought-after jobs - how drinking is deeply embedded in this sector's working culture, and its relation to organisational masculinities.

Drawing on my current PhD project on Chinese masculinities within the working culture of the 'system' and tech-companies, the paper will examine the dynamics of masculinities and drinking culture in the system. Specifically, I analyse how men embody, negotiate, or resist hegemonic masculinity in work drinking scenarios, while also exploring how women are excluded and marginalised through homosociality within this gendered working culture.

This research draws on narrative interview data from 11 employees working within the system, including 8 men and 3 women with the age range between 25 and 35. The findings highlight that drinking with superiors is an important context in which men perform and shape their masculinities and is a key site for networking and career advancement. In this context, the hierarchy of masculinity is reinforced at the dinner table, shaped by the amount a man can drink, his enjoyment of drinking, and his ability to maintain decorum even while intoxicated. Additionally, men must master interpersonal skills including sensing their superiors' needs and thoughts and being tactful in conversations.

The research reveals how men who do not have these abilities on the dinner table deploy various strategies to navigate these demands. Some create a separate "drinking self"—a distinct identity from their workplace persona—allowing them to conform without fully internalising this masculinity. Participants view this as a constructed work identity rather than an authentic one. Others perform complicit masculinity by blending in and listening to key information without drawing attention. Meanwhile, marginalised men either passively or actively resist drinking. Furthermore, the drinking masculinity in the system not only alienates and marginalises alternative masculinities that contest drinking culture but excludes women from their game, thereby preventing women from accessing the same resources for career advancement as their male colleagues.

Overall, this study offers a culturally diverse perspective on Western mainstream studies of the Public Sector and addresses a key issue in work and employment studies by exploring how gendered organisational culture is constructed and reinforced through the ways men strategically perform gender and relevant emotional labour as they seek to integrate into the bureaucratic environment.

PhD Showcase

Intersectionality and Fair Work: Exploring the Job Satisfaction Levels of Female Migrant Hospitality Workers

Olaiwola Ogunpaimo, Áine Ní Léime, Deirdre Curran

(University of Galway)

Key Findings in the literature reviewed: The hospitality industry is recognised as one of the most diverse sectors globally, with migrant workers constituting a significant proportion of its workforce (Ndiuini & Baum, 2020). However, the experience of migrant workers in the Irish hotel sector has been shaped by various factors, particularly for female migrants, whose work experiences are often influenced by the intersection of gender and migrant status (Lima Rabelo et al., 2023). Notably, empirical research exploring their lived experiences in Ireland is evidently lacking.

Aim/Objectives: The broad objectives of this study are to investigate the experiences of female migrant hotel workers and to analyse their perceptions of job satisfaction from a fair work and intersectional perspective. Specifically, the study examines how gender, migrant status, race, and cultural background influence the work experiences of female migrants employed in two-star and three-star hotels in Ireland. The aim is to shed light on the challenges they face, how they cope, and what can be done to enhance their experience.

Research Questions: The study aims to investigate the following questions:
1. What constitutes fair work in the Irish hospitality industry?
2. How does an intersectional lens of gender, migrant status, race, and cultural background shape the ways in which female migrant hotel workers in Ireland experience job satisfaction?
3. In what ways does intersectionality enhance our understanding of fair work for female migrant workers in Irish hotels and job satisfaction theory?
4. What are the implications of findings for policy and practice?

Theoretical frameworks: The main theory drawn upon in this study is intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). This is in addition to the Two-Factor theory (Herzberg 1987) and Fair Work (Hadjisolomou et al., 2022) framework.

Research Methodology: The study adopts a qualitative methodology to achieve its objectives. Following ethics approval by the University of Galway Research Ethics Committee, semi-structured interviews will be used to gather in-depth narratives from a total of thirty-two female migrant hotel workers (i.e., eight each from Asia, Africa, South America, and the EU). No interviewee will be less than 18 years of age, and only female migrants who are currently working and have at least one year of work experience in any department within 2-star and 3-star hotels in Ireland will be considered. Personal networks will be used to access research participants. However, depending on the participants' preferences, interviews will be conducted either via Microsoft Teams or face-to-face. The data collected will be analysed using thematic analysis, following the guidelines of Braun & Clarke (2006).

Proposed contribution of the study:

Theoretical: The study's theoretical contribution lies in using intersectionality to interrogate job satisfaction theory and fair work principles. By extension, it seeks to shift the focus from identifying inequalities to using intersectionality as a solution-driven tool for fair work practices.

Managerial: Provide evidence-based findings that may offer practical guidance to hotel managers and employers on how effective diversity management can improve the job satisfaction of employees.

Policy Insights: Research recommendations may inform policy and fair work practices in secondary employment.

(Dis)Continuities in Professions, Occupations & Skills – Room 3.212

Diversified Routes to the Nursing Profession: Providing a Second Chance for Young Adults to Obtain a 'Good' Job at the Age of Uncertainty?

Anita Koo, Yi-Lee Wong, Cody Chan

(Hong Kong Baptist University)

An increased number of young workers face difficulties to secure decent jobs in the increasingly unstable labour market. Over decades of educational expansion, high-status work opportunities for high school graduates erode. Quality high-paid 'middle-class jobs' previously accessed by college/university graduates have also been in rapid decline. With a strong desire for stable employment and career advancement, some young working adults choose to transit to or re-enter higher education to pursue a professional qualification.

This paper looks into diversified pathways to becoming a registered nurse in Hong Kong: from obtaining a professional diploma through hospital-based training to pursing a master degree in high-ranking research universities. This exploration reveals huge differences of costs, status, and admission requirements among these nurse training programmes that lead to the same licence which then leads to a steadily high-paid professional job. Based on a part of interview data from the qualitative arm of a large-scale research project on the development of vocational/professional training, this paper examines the motivations, decision-making process, and further aspirations among the young adults who enrol in different types and levels of registered nurse training programmes. Making use of such findings, we week to address how and why young workers regard/value registered nurses as an 'attainable' professional job that ensures stable employment and promising career advancement. We also seek to underscore how aspiring nurses from different family and educational backgrounds make use of various pathways to cope with the unpredictable and deteriorating labour market conditions.

Over the years of professionalization, nursing education has transitioned from hospital-based training to university-based education. This paper reveals how the diversionary, lower status route for a professional licence and qualification might effectively serve as an alternative to university as a path for stable employment or even a vehicle for social mobility among young workers from disadvantaged backgrounds. It, then, contributes to a collective reflection on the life chances of young workers for a promising future in the context of labour market restructuring, professionalization of occupation and massification of higher education.

Between Hope and Reality: Navigating Vocational Education and Labor Market Pathways in Delhi's ITIs

Meghna Khurania

(Jawaharlal Nehru University)

This research examines the role of vocational education in shaping labor market aspirations and outcomes, with a focus on students from Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) in Delhi. The study explores the continuities and discontinuities in students' educational trajectories, skill development, and transitions into the labor market. Through qualitative interviews with ITI students, graduates, and industry stakeholders, the research investigates the intersection of socio-economic background,

gender, and educational choices in determining labor market success. In the context of increasing demand for skilled labor, ITIs are expected to bridge the gap between education and employment. However, the study identifies several discontinuities in the expectations and realities of vocational education, including misalignments between curriculum and industry needs, gender-based barriers to labor force participation, and the precarious nature of employment opportunities for ITI graduates. These findings are analyzed through the lens of social mobility and the potential of vocational education to offer stable, long-term employment for marginalized groups. This research contributes to the sociology of work by highlighting the dual forces of continuity and change in vocational education. It examines how persistent socio-economic inequalities shape educational choices and labor market aspirations, while also discussing the transformative potential of TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) in reducing gender disparities and enhancing labor force participation. The study concludes with recommendations for policy reforms aimed at improving alignment between vocational training and labor market needs, with a focus on promoting gender inclusivity and improving job quality for TVET graduates. Keywords: Vocational Education, Labor Market Aspirations, ITIs, Social Mobility, Gender, Precarity, TVET, Delhi

Balancing Act: Managing Tensions in Work, Study, and Wellbeing in Alternative Pathways to Law

Caroline Barrett, Daniel Muzio

(University of York)

Social mobility remains a persistent challenge in the UK, exacerbated by widening income disparities and a geographically skewed distribution of professional employment opportunities favouring London and the Southeast (Dorling, 2019; Major and Machin, 2018; Martin et al., 2022). Degree apprenticeships (DAs), introduced in 2015, were intended to widen the pool of talent to include young people not intending to go to university and provide an alternative pathway to a professional occupation. This represents a significant 'discontinuity' within the traditionally rigid structure of legal education in England. However, research demonstrates that professions are highly institutionalised and access (and progression) tends to favour those seen as possessing 'legitimate' forms of cultural capital, typically those from more-advantaged backgrounds (Ashley and Empson, 2017; Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Giazitzoglu and Muzio, 2021; Ingram and Allen, 2018; Rivera, 2016). Therefore, this shift in legal education creates a complex web of challenges. This research explores how DAs intersect with opportunity structures and established professional norms, revealing the tensions that shape apprentices' experiences as they simultaneously engage in full-time employment and rigorous academic study, a 'discontinuity' that alters the student experience.

Crucially, this study addresses the impact of geographic location on the apprentices' pathway experiences. The uneven distribution of solicitor apprenticeship opportunities, often concentrated in major urban centres, necessitates significant commuting for many apprentices. This introduces a 'discontinuity' in their daily routines, impacting their ability to manage work, study, and personal life. This creates commuting pressures for some apprentices and highlights the geographic dimension of social mobility (Savage, 2016) within the legal profession.

The study employs a qualitative methodology, recruiting 12 aspiring solicitors from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds across London, the Southeast, the Northwest and the Northeast, using purposive sampling. A qualitative, longitudinal approach was adopted for data collection, comprising initial interviews, online diaries over six months, second interviews and a focus group. Preliminary observations from the analysis of the interview transcripts and diary entries indicate several recurring themes. Participants across the sample express a strong motivation to pursue law through a practical, work-based route, highlighting the appeal of avoiding traditional student debt. However, they also articulate challenges related to balancing work and study demands and navigating workplace cultures. Emerging findings suggest that this balancing act is marked by both continuities and discontinuities, significantly impacting well-being, and suggests a complex interplay between the perceived benefits and challenges of DAs. This research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of apprentice solicitors navigating alternative pathways into the legal profession. The UK government has recently announced cuts to Level 7 apprenticeship levy funding, which threatens to further limit access to alternative professional pathways and disrupt efforts to increase social mobility within the professions. In this context, the study builds upon existing literature in the sociology of the professions,

which highlights the persistent challenges of social mobility within elite professions and the enduring role played by social and cultural capital.

From Baby to Adult: An Exploration of the Formation of Veterinary Surgeons' Professional Identities

Rachel Williams

(Cardiff University)

Professional identity is a complex concept that encompasses behaviours, skills, values, context, and both group and personal identity (Fitzgerald, 2020). While much research has examined the development of professional identity within healthcare (Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann, 2006; Santivasi et al., 2022), less attention has been afforded to the veterinary profession, with studies predominantly focussing on the relationship between professional identity and well-being (Knights and Clarke, 2018; Armitage-Chan and May, 2019). New professionals experiment with alternative versions of their provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999), drawing on perceptions of their self, the role and the practice context (Rasmussen et al., 2021). In time, their identity shifts from focusing on performing tasks to embodying their broader professional role (Barnhoorn et al., 2022).

This presentation explores continuities and discontinuities in the professional identity of veterinary surgeons (vets). It is informed by an ongoing longitudinal study tracking the experiences of 25 vets who qualified in 2021. More than 100 interviews have been conducted over three years, mapping the vets' role transitions, learning experiences, and socialisation into the profession. The findings suggest that the vets' identity is tied to their confidence and ebbs and flows as challenges are faced. They initially adopt the identity of a 'baby vet,' a status that provides a psychological safety net, legitimising their need to ask questions and admit lack of knowledge. Over time, they relinquish this identity, transitioning towards a 'toddler vet'. The vets shape their identify through comparisons with colleagues. When judged against younger vets they recognise their growth but, compared with 'adult' vets they cling to a comfortable child-like identity.

The vets' identity is influenced by their confidence in their clinical skills plus feedback from colleagues and clients. However, the findings also indicate that, consistent with the assertion of Roberts (2005), the vets employ impression management with clients, concealing any self-doubt to maintain a professional image and project confidence. When with clients they consider themselves to be 'a vet' but with supportive colleagues they are 'baby vets', comfortable to reveal their inadequacies.

The vets' identities are not static and evolve as they gain experience. After two years in practice, most vets, acknowledge their transition to 'adult vet' status. Interestingly, while their conceptualisation of what it means to be a vet changes very little, their identity as a vet often becomes less important to them. At three years qualified, although still proud to be a vet, this identity is no longer all encompassing. This shift allows them to achieve a beneficial work life balance or to view a move away from clinical practice as merely career progression and not career failure.

This paper is work in progress, contributing to existing literature by offering a longitudinal perspective on the evolution of professional identity among vets. It highlights the role of confidence in enabling vets to embrace the identity of 'adult vet' and underlines the fluidity of professional identity. It thereby provides valuable insights into the broader discourse on professional identity formation and its implications for career satisfaction in the veterinary field.

Ecologically/Socially Sustainable Work & Employment – Room 2.220

A 'Just Transition' or Just a Transition? Exploring Restructuring Regimes and Crises in the UK Steel Industry

Christopher McLachlan, Robert MacKenzie, Josef Ringqvist

(Queen Mary University of London)

The empirical focus of the paper is the UK steel industry, which has been under the spotlight in terms of how nations can shift to a greener economy through processes of industrial decarbonisation. Despite the contemporary pressures of decarbonisation, the sector has been dogged by frequent crises since the 1970s: economic imperatives reflected in the internationalisation of production, technological innovation and the global oversupply of steel have contributed to broader patterns of deindustrialisation of the UK economy.

Transitioning to a sustainable future involves significant structural change in the economy. Just transition refers to an approach whereby the shift towards a more sustainable society, with a distinct focus on realising a 'greener' economy, is eased for those most affected (Newell and Mulvaney, 2013; Stevis, 2013). The shift to a green economy is associated with employment restructuring and redundancies as firms switch to alternative, greener modes of production that are greener. The 'jobs versus environment' exchange is thus often seen as a zero-sum game: the prioritisation of one is seen to negatively impact the other (Stevis et al, 2019; Ringqvist, 2022).

An understanding of what is required for a just transition reflects wider debates around the extent to which employment restructuring can be mitigated through the provision of state or employer support for displaced workers such as funding for retraining or reskilling, enhanced severance packages, alternative jobs through redeployment and general careers or employability advice (McLachlan et al, 2022; MacKenzie et al, 2025). In developing deeper insights into the conditions that underpin just transition, the regimes of restructuring framework provides a useful conceptual lens through which to understand national and sectoral variations (Gazier, 2009; Bergstrom, 2019; Ahlstrand et al, 2024). Regimes are based on governance mechanisms related to labour market regulation, which parallel the types of social interventions expected in mitigating the effects of restructuring.

Through a critical case study of a steel plant in South Wales, the paper explores the announcement of 3,000 job losses due to the switch from the blast furnace operation to a 'greener' electric arc furnace. The analysis focuses on the response to the announcement through the establishment of the regional Transition Board along with the unions' negotiations with management over the restructuring process and attempts to mitigate the consequences for workers and the local community. A just transition is not a future without a past. We argue that the effectiveness of support for workers affected by a just transition is not only shaped by the national institutional profiles that constitute the wider restructuring regime, but also the regional or sectoral histories in which restructuring occurs. We highlight that the combination of a history of restructuring, economic crises, public sector heritage, high trade union density and collective agreements over restructuring set important conditions for the prospects of a just transition in the UK steel industry. Theoretically, we advance the need for an analysis of the role that restructuring regimes play in our understanding of the process and outcomes of just transition.

Gender at Work in Logistics Supply Chains: Mother Truckers 'In a Man's World'

Al James, Debbie Hopkins, Kaveri Medappa, Ac Davidson, Nicky Gregson

(Newcastle University)

With 79% of all goods sold in the UK moved by road, freight drivers form an essential component of supply chain capitalism. However, with high rates of driver attrition and an estimated UK shortage of 100,000 truck drivers, these supply chains are threatened. In seeking to understand the origins and solutions to this crisis, research in logistics and transport studies is presently constrained: drivers are analysed as mere 'operators of mobile freight units', or else rendered invisible in the careful coordination of 'freight flows' and optimisation of 'freight tonne miles', 'mobile inventories', and 'movement of vessels'

metrics. In seeking to advance an alternative humanistic analysis grounded in drivers' everyday lived experiences of being used as labour in logistical supply chains, this paper presents new findings from an ESRC-funded project 'Making Space for People in Truck Driving Work'. This research engages with drivers of Heavy Goods Vehicles in the UK - previously identified as a 'logistical precariat' –whose demographics are striking: 287 000 drivers, 99% male, 95.5% white, and 65% aged over 45 years. Less well documented are the 2200 women HGV drivers in the UK, who remain largely invisible in logistics research, employer provision, and government response. Accordingly, this paper asks: (1) How is trucking work differently experienced by the women truckers whose labours enable supply chains to function? (2) How might women truck drivers be better supported at different stages of the lifecourse, in ways that can enhance the recruitment and retention of women in UK trucking? The paper draws on rich ethnographic data from in-depth interviews with 14 women HGV drivers juggling the demands of trucking with care for younger and older children and family dependents, as part of our larger survey cohort of 229 women HGV drivers (or 10% of the UK's total female driver population). These data offer vital new insights into women drivers' experiences of struggling to juggle the unpredictable demands and rhythms of trucking work with family responsibilities of unpaid domestic labour, social reproduction, and care – alongside common experiences of misogyny, harassment, and lapses in female health and safety. These tensions and hardships span different stages of motherhood, including pregnancy, maternity 'leave', post maternity return, and care for older children. The analysis also explores women drivers' coping tactics and support networks, developed in the absence of effective employer support. The paper breaks new ground by demonstrating how gender identities, uneven household divisions of labour, and gender relations of care powerfully shape labour dynamics amongst drivers in logistics supply chains, in ways which remain heavily under-researched within transport and logistics studies. We argue that these women's experiences must necessarily frame sustainable and effective employer, industry and government responses to the UK HGV driver shortage and to high rates of labour attrition amongst experienced drivers. The project is part of the ESRC's Transforming Working Lives Programme, and has been designed through engagement with high profile industry and government actors (Eddie Stobart, UK Road Haulage Association, (Department for Transport freight policy team).

(Im)Mobility & Migration – Room 3.214

Gendered Labor Migration Patterns in South India: Experiences of Women Migrants in Kerala

Sandra MJ

(English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad)

Gender and migration are interrelated in different ways. There are changes in migration pattern of women, especially on internal migration in India, more women started to migrate for employment opportunities than due to marriage. This paper focuses on comparing the experiences of interstate female labour migrants who work in Kerala and international women labour migrants from Kerala. There are very few studies focusing on lived experiences of interstate female migrant workers in Kerala. Kerala is a southern state of India and has a rich experience of migration for a long term and praised for its migration policies. On this context, by conducting direct interviews with female migrants who are part of in and out migration in Kerala; researcher is looking into whether the experience of women migrants differentiated internally and internationally ;Or are they crossing the same paths? Additionally, how they experience particularly in the sociopolitical context of Kerala Includes their interaction with local people, their social networks, challenges and opportunities.

Looming Lives: Examining Migrant Women's Assessment of Debts and (Im)Mobilities in the Handloom Industry of Assam (India)

Nandini Das

(University of Southampton)

The act of borrowing or the state of indebtedness is not new; however recent changes in market regulations and labour relations within the context of neoliberalism have led to growing emphasis on these issues in recent years. This encompasses scholarship that examines newer forms of debt and how indebtedness has progressively permeated all levels of social life. The evolving market regulations have also resulted in the reallocation of labour across sectors and geographic regions, driving labour

movements, especially from rural to urban areas and from agriculture to service sectors. Debt and migration have now emerged as two defining characteristics of contemporary societies across most regions of the world. Debts have significantly influenced this reallocation, either by financing the migration process (debt-financed migration) by necessitating that migrants repay existing debts through work in locations where the wages are higher or by accepting advance payments for future work (debt-driven migration). Despite the important roles debts play in migration, relatively little research has explicitly examined their role in the migration process; even existing studies do so primarily within the context of debt-financed transnational migration. Regarding internal migration, the focus has largely been on seasonal migrants entering into debt bondage with contractors and labour intermediaries.

This research study investigates how women utilise debt and internal migration as strategies to finance their everyday lives by negotiating unequal power relations and evaluating their risks and opportunities. Based on an ethnography in Assam (India) and centred on the handloom industry in the state, the study reveals that women often migrate to escape debts with high interest rates in their villages but subsequently incur debts with their employers through advance payments. Consequently, their status as migrants and their indebtedness shape their life course, presenting them with opportunities that they might have otherwise been inaccessible while also constraining their choices and mobility in certain situations. The paper offers insights into how women leverage migrant networks and friendships to navigate their lives amidst escalating financialisation, which compels them to work long hours due to the connection between their piece-rate wages and productivity. This study adds to the expanding research on debt and internal migration in India, highlighting how women use debt and migration to support their lives and aspirations while continually navigating power relations that they encounter at the intersections of their socioeconomic and cultural identities, including gender, caste, ethnicity, class, migrant status, and age. In developing this analysis, the study has been able to highlight the role of the advance payment system, which is so integral to the labour relations in handloom weaving yet has long been overlooked. This system has not only been utilised by the weavers to finance their lives but has also created a disciplinary mechanism for them through the accrued debts.

Prevalance and Consequences of Sickness Absence among Migrants and Natives in Finland

Waseem Haider, Laura Salonen

(University of Turku)

Sickness absence (SA) is a significant public health concern that indicates ill health and leads to substantial production losses and financial burdens for individuals, families, employers, and society. Among migrants, sickness absences reflect physical illness and challenges in labor market integration and societal adaptation.

Migrants, especially from non-Western countries, face greater risks of social exclusion, chronic poverty, and employment in low-paid, hazardous jobs with poor working conditions, leading to increased health risks and higher likelihood of sickness absence. Yet, full-population studies explicitly comparing SA between migrants and natives remain scarce. Previous research on SA disparities has rarely incorporated detailed occupational class and diagnostic information.

Using comprehensive population register data covering around two million individuals in Finland, this study examined medically certified SA prevalence among migrants and natives in 2015 across occupational classes and their employment outcomes three years later. Logistic regression models were employed, estimating odds ratios (OR) and average marginal effects (AMEs), with separate analyses for migrants, natives, and the full population. Models were adjusted for sociodemographic, occupational, and health-related factors. An interaction between occupational class and country of origin was included in SA prevalence models. The models included diagnostic group interactions with country of origin for employment outcomes.

Results from fully adjusted models indicated lower odds of SA among females, younger individuals, singles, those living with a partner and children (OR=0.87, 95% CI 0.85-0.88), residents in Uusimaa, higher-income earners (OR=0.81, 95% CI 0.80-0.83), upper-service workers, and migrants from Asia (OR=0.29, 95% CI 0.17-0.51) and Russia/Ex-USSR (OR=0.54, 95% CI 0.41-0.71), as well as recent migrants (stay <7 years). However, within skilled non-manual/manual occupations, country of origin significantly influenced SA, with AMEs ranging from 3.21 to 5.02 percentage points; the highest effect was among Asian migrants (5.02 pp, 95% CI 0.032-0.068). Semi/unskilled occupations consistently showed high AMEs (5.45-6.67 pp), strongly linked with increased SA regardless of country of origin.

For employment outcomes, fully adjusted logistic regression models revealed significantly lower odds of employment three years after SA among males, older individuals (OR=0.63, 95% CI 0.60-0.65), married (OR=0.95, 95% CI 0.91-0.99), divorced (OR=0.92, 95% CI 0.89-0.96), those with 'other' family structures (OR=0.82, 95% CI 0.77-0.87), lower-income individuals, workers in 'other' occupations (OR=0.40, 95% CI 0.37-0.47), and residents of southern (OR=0.88, 95% CI 0.84-0.92) or eastern Finland (OR=0.90, 95% CI 0.86-0.95). Lower employment odds were also seen among migrants from 'other' countries (OR=0.70, 95% CI 0.57-0.84), refugees (OR=0.74, 95% CI 0.59-0.93), and individuals with SA due to mental disorders (OR=0.53, 95% CI 0.51-0.56), nervous system diseases (OR=0.62, 95% CI 0.58-0.66), and circulatory diseases (OR=0.65, 95% CI 0.61-0.70). Compared to natives, migrants consistently showed poorer employment outcomes three years after SA, particularly among those from Asia and refugee-exporting countries experiencing SA due to neurological disorders and cancers.

Although SA prevalence was generally lower among migrants, their employment outcomes were substantially poorer than natives, suggesting persistent, unexplained disparities between these groups.

Menstrual Health Management, Work and Care in Transitional Urban Settings: A Social Practice Theory Approach

Elizabeth Parsons, Supriya Garikipati

(University of Liverpool)

This paper applies a social practice theory (SPT) approach to study changes in menstrual health management (MHM) practices and how they intersect with changed working and caring practices on migration. SPT takes practices rather than individuals or institutions as its unit of analysis, foregrounding habit, and routine in social life (Schatzki, 2002). Crucially SPT also focuses on the changing interconnections between practices (Schatzki, 2002; Shove et al., 2012; Hui et al., 2017). In the fields of health and sustainability SPT has been promoted as a means of moving away from individual choice and agency towards a more systemic view (Maller, 2015; Spotswood and Gurrieri, 2023; Scheurenbrand et al. 2024). SPT has also received some attention in exploring changes in domestic practices (Maller and Strengers, 2013) and food practices (Tezzo et al. 2021) in migration. But it has yet to be applied to MHM which is surprising because it can help us understand how infrastructure, knowledge, and cultural beliefs shape MHM practices, and how they intertwine with other practices, such as working and childcare, in transitional urban settings.

Methods: The research was co-designed with Streedhan, a research and advocacy NGO based in Delhi, A total of 27 low-income migrant women in a central Delhi slum settlement were interviewed. Interviews discussed the changes and challenges in MHM practices on migration, with a focus on how they intersect with changed caring and working practices. The authors followed the principles of the 'relational engagement' approach (Ozanne et al. 2017) working with Streedhan across all phases of the project.

Findings and Discussion: The study shows how women's bodies continue to be regulated (and potentially oppressed) not only via free-floating discourses but through socio-materially embedded everyday routines. We find this operates at a granular level from male control and priority over the household budget which restricts access to commercial pads, making them an individual expense for the women we spoke to, but also inadequate infrastructure and claims on space necessary to prepare and change absorbents. Further we show how the 'elective affinity' of patriarchal neoliberalism (Bannerji, 2016) works on women's bodies through localised grounded practice performances. For example, in the shift to smaller nuclear-sized households on migration the requirement for women to participate in culturally embedded restrictions involving seclusion in the domestic sphere, and refraining from cooking or touching food are overridden when those same bodies are required for their labour power in both domestic food work and paid work outside the home. This is an example of how women's bodies are required to be always available for both productive and reproductive work (Lahiri-Dutt, 2014). The increasing availability, promotion and adoption of commercial absorbents has emerged as a 'modern', convenient and aspirational solution to the need for sanitisation and containment of leaky, bleeding, labouring bodies. Within this nexus medical/technical and commercial discourses of menstruation serve to reinforce and multiply one another (Lahiri-Dutt, 2014).

(In)Decent Work & Employment 1 – Room 2.217

The Precarious Career: How UK Oil and Gas Workers Cope and Exercise Agency in a Volatile Career Context

Kirsty Denyer

(Henley Business School)

Research issue: Insecure work is increasingly widespread in the UK (Florisson, 2024). Previous research has highlighted the adverse consequences of insecure work, particularly poor physical and mental health. More recent interest in precarious work highlights the loss of control and personal agency caused by insecure work; and there is a need for research exploring the psychological experience of this (Allan, Autins & Wilkins-Yel, 2021; Irvine & Rose, 2024).

Much research positions insecure or precarious work as a temporary state to be resolved. However, some workers are committed to careers in volatile employment contexts, and their working lives are hallmarked by long-term precarity. Furthermore, there is limited research on the experience of precarious work by highly skilled workers. Therefore, this study explores the experience of highly skilled workers leading careers characterised by precarious work.

Methodology and data set: This qualitative study was conducted in the context of the UK's highly cyclical oil and gas industry. UK oil and gas employment has long been characterised by low job insecurity, with economic upturns and downturns driven by oil price fluctuations.

37 semi-structured interviews were conducted with two groups of participants: 24 highly skilled workers, and 13 industry stakeholders who provided insight into the employment context. Data were analysed using template analysis. Data collection and analysis are complete, and the paper is at write-up stage.

Findings and contribution: Findings suggest that leading a career in an inherently volatile employment context entails pervasive, long-term insecurity. For some, the unpredictability is invigorating; for most, it is highly stressful, and can damage mental health and reduce personal agency. Yet many people choose to stay, or face high barriers to exit; and must develop coping strategies. Personal resources (health, psychological and practical) were identified as helping an individual to cope, and potentially regain some personal agency, in the face of long-term precarity; however, there is no one formula for coping, and uncontrollable factors such as time and luck may help or hinder.

Findings are used to propose a new career construct, the 'precarious career', to capture careers characterised by long-term precarious work, and subjective work precarity (Allan et al., 2021). The sustainable career (de Vos, Van Der Heijden & Akkermans, 2020) is proposed as a framework to understand how workers to cope with the stress of a precarious career, and regain some personal agency. These findings are intended to generate interest in the phenomenon of highly skilled workers leading precarious careers across employment contexts.

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Living With 'Uncertainty': Gendered Precarity among Women Home-based Workers in Tiruppur Garments Industry, India

Madhuvadhani M

(South Asian University)

Examining uncertainty helps us better understand the perceived threats which shape precarious livelihoods, reflecting the unpredictability imposed by the global capital economic order. Such precarious work arrangements benefit capitalists but impose uncertainty on workers, integrating them into the exploitative global production networks. The Global assembly line of the Garments industry possessed 'home' as a parallel site of production through the outsourced work arrangements with a feminized labor force in the Global South. Existing literature helps understand women's entry from the Global South into the circuits of Global capital through the 'flexibilization and despatialization' of the production process relying on gendered ideologies and deciding which bodies are suitable for specific tasks imbibing 'home' as a site of production. While the concept of 'home' as a spatial structure in capitalist production has been explored, I aim to problematize it, examining how the uncertainty of women's precarious relationship with labor (not identifying work as labor, not identifying home as a space of productivity) allows capitalism to invisibilize labor– which is central to the workings of capital. How does capitalism sell an imagination of "hope" while sustaining conditions of uncertainty?

The works of Dalla Costa and Selma James, Maria Mies, Tithi Bhattacharya, Fortunati and Federici underexplored 'home' as a site of production and reproduction simultaneously and produces varied precarious labor experiences for women workers from multiple vulnerable positions in the social landscape. Against this background and the data gathered in my fieldwork in Tamil Nadu, India, among the women home-based workers of the Garments industry, I propose to examine how capitalism exacerbates this uncertainty for women home-based workers in Tiruppur while recognizing their pursuit of independence and social mobility amidst patriarchal constraints. Globalization and flexible labor markets have led to insecure labor, deepening inequality, and challenging class structures. By fragmenting production into simpler tasks, the garment industry drives the feminization of labor, treating home-based work as an extension of unpaid care work. In the context of home-based work, home becomes the space for inseparability between the rhythms of production and reproduction, capitalism colonizing the entire life of a woman worker. Hence, the departure of capitalism starts from home, not from the factory, where the laboring bodies are reproduced and tagged based on caste, gender and other attributes; hence analyzing social reproduction is quintessential to understanding the process of production as labelling specific forms of labor as 'unskilled' has to do with spatiality and genderedness of production. Unpacking the dynamics of time is highly complicated as it intertwines the temporalities of production and reproduction, shaping distinct forms of labor circulation that constantly regenerate the Indian Garment workforce as mobile, precarious, vulnerable and transient and the labor experience as temporary, exhausting and depleting. Despite all such incalculable risks and ambiguities associated with home-based work, why do women still hope that this work can enhance their living conditions and perform home-based work? How women workers adapt to flexible work arrangements and their meaning-making process within precarious workspaces using precarity as the theoretical framework.

Navigating through Precarity: Informal Work and the Disruptions of Urban Redevelopment in India

Raveena Esther Ravichandran

(Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee)

Precarious work, primarily characterising informal work and employment in the Global South, is increasingly aggravated with the global push for privatisation and market-driven development. With approximately ninety percent of the economy in the informal sector, India faces the unique challenge of balancing development with informalisation and casualisation of work, often viewed as 'proxies for precariousness' (Maiti, 2012). Street vending, one such category of precarious work, constitutes a significant section of the urban informal economy. This ethnographic study conducted in the Goubert Market in Puducherry contributes to existing scholarship by first introducing a distinct vending category of adikasu. The adikasu identity is derived from the space occupied intergenerationally within the marketplace, where the adikasu view themselves as distinct from the general category of street vendors. The precariousness of adikasu vendors stems from occupying fixed yet non-permanent spaces within the market, lack of legal documents, and their informal nature of work, which pushes

them to the periphery of the market. Further, challenges related to harsh working conditions, low earnings, threat of competition from street vendors outside the market, and stigma associated with work add to their vulnerability.

Secondly, the study extends the discourse of precarity and examines how urban redevelopment projects exacerbate the precarious work conditions of the adikasu vendors. Scholarly engagements on neoliberal discourses have shown how large urban development projects driven by market rule are mostly guided by a subjective aesthetic of cleanliness and order. Accordingly, the Goubert Market is set to be redeveloped as an initiative under the Smart Cities Mission and the demolition process is yet to commence. The study draws on Sara González's concept of retail gentrification to highlight how redevelopment serves the needs of the wealthier male permanent shop owners of the market and simultaneously ignores the needs of the marginalised adikasus, who are predominantly women. Though the work of adikasu was invisibilised within the market, with the demolition, the adikasu were apprehensive of uncertainty with regard to earnings, customer turnout, relocation, and reallocation of stalls in the redeveloped market. Put simply, the redevelopment would strip the livelihoods of the adikasu vendors in terms of their work as well as identity. The study, therefore, argues how neoliberal policies have further accentuated inequality where redevelopment intensifies the already existing socio-economic precarity of informal vendors, in this case adikasu. The impact of such redevelopment projects deepens the inequalities by marginalising the voices of the most vulnerable, resulting in adikasu vendors becoming victims of 'the politics of forgetting.'

Configurations of Precarious Work in the Chilean Public Sector

Francisca Alvarez Figueroa, Jenny K. Rodriguez

(University of Manchester)

Purpose: This paper discusses how contextual factors at the macro, meso and micro levels interplay to shape worker experiences of precariousness. The paper mobilizes the idea of 'precarious work configuration' to advance a multilayered understanding of precarious work as embedded and reinforced in the design of processes and dynamics that result from the implementation of New Public Management reforms.

Methodology: The study draws on 48 semi-structured interviews with administrators across four School District offices in Chile. Data were analyzed following a thematic analysis protocol to highlight the interconnectedness of macro-, meso- and micro-level factors in shaping experiences of precarious work.

Findings: Findings suggest that the infrastructural and spatial conditions of work that emerge as a direct result of New Public Management reforms embed precariousness in work design, reinforced through organisational processes and dynamics that ultimately frame the experiences of highly skilled workers as disposable. In turn, workers navigate these conflicting demands by narratively justifying precariousness through the promotion of a collective culture and ethos of self-sacrifice. These findings enable a situated, multilayered theorization of precariousness.

Originality: The paper responds to calls to advance systemic thinking about precarious work, especially a more nuanced and contextual understanding of how structural, organisational and individual factors interplay in the structure of precarious work.

Implications for future research: The paper offers new insights into the importance of advancing context-based understandings of precarious work and suggests a research agenda on precarious work configuration to advance discussions about the sociology of precarious work and employment.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 2 – Room 2.218

Mental Health in Context: Work and Welfare Transitions over Time

Annie Irvine

(University of York)

This paper takes the conceptual framing of sustainable careers theory, to examine the factors shaping work transitions and trajectories over the lifecourse for people with experience of mental health problems. The paper draws on a recent UK-based qualitative longitudinal study involving 23 people who each had experience of work, the welfare system and mental distress, but whose wider circumstances were diverse in many respects. The aim of the study was to understand people's lived experience of these three interwoven aspects of work, welfare and mental (ill) health, in temporal and narrative perspective. The study deliberately aimed to 'de-centre' mental health, inviting biographical narratives which had employment trajectories as the central thread, and allowing the role, salience and influence of mental health problems to emerge in narratives on participants' own terms. Study participants ranged in age from 24 to 58 years, and were interviewed at three timepoints over 18 months, beginning with a retrospective narrative biographical interview followed by two longitudinal waves (at approximately 8-month intervals) to capture more proximate changes in work, welfare and mental health.

This rich qualitative data showed that numerous factors beyond mental health influenced participants' working lives over time. People's mental health difficulties were often the upshot of the same social, economic or relational experiences that were themselves direct shapers of employment transitions. The contrasting life histories of this diverse group of participants revealed how adverse childhood and educational experiences, caring roles, partnerships and their breakdown, all had a bearing on the ways people's working lives unfolded and the extent to which they were able to maintain or regain their foothold in the world of work, at times when mental health problems reached crisis point. Moreover, the precarious jobs and marginalised labour market positions occupied by some participants were in stark contrast to the occupational and contractual safety nets available to others at times when mental health affected work capacity. Speaking directly to themes of this year's conference, the narratives contained clear examples of the entangled, complex and inseparable junctures in people's lives, that shaped work and employment transitions and outcomes.

In short, the study demonstrates that continuities and discontinuities in employment trajectories cannot be understood through the lens of mental health alone. At a time when the relationship between mental health and economic (in)activity is rising ever higher on policy and political agendas, this study asks whether we need to step back from the 'mental health conversation' and place mental health back into its wider social and economic context. Without ever undermining the veracity of people's distress, we need a more critical approach to interrogating the range of social, economic and relational influences that bring about employment continuity and change for people with experience of mental health problems. Only by doing so can we properly understand how and why mental health impacts people's working lives, and how governments, civil society and employers can support more people to achieve sustainable careers.

'Unaffordable work': Hopeless Labour, Low Pay and Young Women's Autonomy

Lilith Brouwers, Kim Allen, Rachel Cohen, Kirsty Finn, Kate Hardy

(University of Leeds, University of Manchester, City St George's, University of London)

The impact of low-paid work on workers' lives is important context to the governmental 'making work pay' agenda, yet missing from this agenda is an acknowledgement of, or engagement with, gendered inequalities in pay. Despite dramatic increases in women's labour market participation (Rowntree and Vira, 2017), gendered inequalities in working lives remain. The gender gap in earnings is evident at the beginning of young women's careers (Young Women's Trust, 2021), exists for women across education levels, including graduate women (Dias et al., 2016; Purcell et al., 2006), and is present regardless of whether or not they have children (Dias et al., 2016). The gendering of women's working lives through

occupational segregation (Hegewisch and Hartmann, 2014) before they have their first child remains underexplored, despite the fact that employees without children are increasing across the working-age population (Wilkinson et al., 2018) and the average age of first-time mothers is rising (ONS, 2020).

Analysing data generated as part of a three-year UKRI-ESRC mixed-methods study, this paper interrogates the effects of low-paid work in gendered occupations on the autonomy, major life decisions and ambitions of young women. Through 60 semi-structured interviews with women aged 23-29 without children – working in England in the fields of Health & Social Care, Beauty & Fashion and Education, Childcare & Youth Work – we found that participants experience their occupations as 'unaffordable'. Low paid gendered work with few opportunities for progression curtails women's full autonomy, as they are reliant on partners, parents or other family for housing, financial stability, and even their ability to stay in the occupation of their choice. A lack of potential career and pay progression often means that future plans are articulated as limited to leaving their field or entrepreneurship. We propose the seemingly paradoxical concept of 'unaffordable work' to capture the low levels of pay and progression potential in gendered occupations and their negative effects on women's autonomy and agency. Unaffordable work leaves women labouring without hope for a financial stability, and is characterised by a narrowing of personal and professional aspiration and hope for their futures.

Working with Industry to Develop New Practices to Support Sustainable Freelance Careers in TV

Richard Wallis

(Bournemouth University)

This paper reports on the Supportive Offboarding Project (2024-25) which set out to design, develop and test an intervention to better support freelance TV production workers at the point at which their contract to work on a show is coming towards its end. The research extends our knowledge of new models of work by shedding light on the experience of a form of skilled contingent labour, one that cannot be accurately described as either 'gig' or 'portfolio' work. The Principal Investigator was embedded within the global television conglomerate, Fremantle (Britain's Got Talent, The Apprentice, The Rap Game), representing an example of industry-academic partnership that is rare in this field.

Nowhere have both the neoliberal restructuring of employment and advances in technology had greater impact than in the TV industry. The shift from a traditional and heavily unionised employment model to one that has become highly fragmented and casualised has had a profound impact on the subjective experience of work in this sector. Meanwhile, the rapid evolution of digital tools that continue to revolutionize ways of working, pale in their significance when compared to the disruption caused by global technology giants now recasting themselves as the principal providers of TV content. TV work remains highly demanding in terms of expertise and personal commitment. Yet it is work characterized by poor management, lack of training and professional development (or career support of any kind), a culture of bullying, burn-out and poor levels of mental health (Comunian & England, 2020). In aggregate, this 'freelance'-dominated workforce reports a profound ongoing sense of lacking support (van Raalte et al. 2021).

Adopting a pragmatic approach, the project deployed the concept of 'perceived organisational support' as understood within organizational support theory (Kurtessis et al, 2017). Research in this area suggests that the way in which workers perceive how their contribution is valued and the extent to which their well-being is considered is reflected in performance and withdrawal behaviours. The liminal period approaching the end of a freelancer's contract was identified as a particularly significant opportunity for review and reflection and a point at which the expression and demonstration of support was most likely to be effective. Design of the intervention, informed by the principles of positive psychology, takes the form of a structured conversation that includes the expression of gratitude, the offer of feedback, the request for feedback, and a career focus (Wallis, 2022).

The methodology has drawn significantly from the principles of action research - qualitative, inductive and interpretive (McNiff, 1992). Notably the work was cyclical (the same essential process was repeated) and the creation of the intervention was iterative and incremental across three cycles. The intervention has been applied across Fremantle's companies and with a range of different shows.

The project was enabled by The British Academy's Innovation Fellowship scheme.

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Happy Together, Resist Alone: Food Delivery Couriers' Strategies to Defend Dignity

Bo-Yi Lee

(National Tsing Hua University)

This article examines how platform-based food delivery couriers in Taiwan defend and restore their dignity amid precarious working conditions. Drawing on Hodson's (2001) framework, the study finds that couriers cultivate coworker relationships, engage in citizenship behaviours, and employ individual resistance strategies to maintain their dignity. These efforts enable couriers to navigate public narratives that characterize their work as low-skilled and lacking career prospects. Additionally, the study identifies an overlooked strategy for preserving dignity—the deliberate "ignorance" of negative work experiences. Despite fostering positive coworker relationships, couriers do not engage in collective resistance against platform companies. Using Atzeni and Cini's (2024) theoretical approach, this study argues that the absence of collective action is shaped by Taiwan's relatively weak political activism tradition, particularly in the labour domain, which hinders the development of a shared injustice frame among workers. By situating these findings within the institutional context, the article advances current understandings of workplace dignity and resistance in the platform economy, while shedding light on the conditions that constrain solidarity and collective action.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 3 – Room 2.219

Employment Quality and its Relation to Mental Well-Being in the Belgian Gig Economy: An Empirical Assessment

Elief Vandevenne, Christophe Vanroelen, Lara Stas, Jessie Gevaert

(Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Employment Quality (EQ) is a social determinant of mental well-being. While existing EQ measures primarily focus on waged workers, this study develops and validates an EQ indicator that can be applied to various types of gig work, and explores its relationship with mental well-being. It also assesses whether intrinsic quality of work (IQW) mediates this relationship and explores important differences between main gig workers (those working over 24 hours per week) and supplementary workers (those working fewer than 24 hours). The construct validity of the new EQ measure (termed EPRES-gw) was tested through confirmatory factor analysis on primary survey data from 397 Belgian gig workers. Structural equation modeling was employed to explore the relationships between EPRES-gw, mental well-being, and IQW. The EPRES-gw demonstrated strong construct validity, but measurement invariance was not established, indicating significant differences in how EQ is assessed between main and supplementary workers. A strong, positive association was observed between higher EPRES-gw scores, indicating adverse EQ, and poorer well-being among main gig workers. This relationship remained significant after accounting for IQW. IQW mediated this relationship through high work intensity, physical demands, and low social support among main gig workers. For supplementary workers, low autonomy was the primary mediator. This study underscores the critical role of EQ in the mental well-being of gig workers and presents the EPRES-gw as a valuable tool for examining this relationship. Moreover, this study highlights the necessity for research to differentiate between main and supplementary gig workers.

Human Capital, Labour Market Dualism and the Wage Gap for Temporary Employment

Yongchao Jing

(Cardiff University)

Temporary employment is widely associated with a wage penalty compared to permanent employment, even after accounting for individual and job-specific characteristics. This study advances existing research by examining two key mechanisms underlying this wage gap: (1) the extent to which the wage gap can be explained by individual differences in finely measured human capital and (2) the role of asymmetric power dynamics embedded in labour market dualism in shaping wage differentials beyond what can be explained by human capital differences alone. Using cross-national data from 27 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in the 2017 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), this study employs a multilevel analytical framework that integrates country-level characteristics to test three hypotheses First, it examines whether the wage gap for temporary employment is confounded by individual differences in general skills. Second, it explores whether the remaining wage gap is mediated by disparities in job-specific skills. Third, it investigates whether institutional factors central to labour market dualism—specifically, union density and employment protection legislation—moderate the wage gap net of detailed skill differences. The findings provide empirical support for the argument that temporary employment is associated with lower wages not only due to the comparatively lower human capital of temporary workers but also due to the weaker bargaining power within segmented labour markets. These results highlight the role of skill composition and institutional dualism in shaping the persistent wage disadvantage of temporary workers.

(Re)Examining Power Dynamics between Workers, Employers and the State in an Evolving Active Labour Market Policy Context

Katy Jones, Anne Green, Paul Sissons, Ruth Webber, Ashwin Kumar

(Manchester Metropolitan University)

An emerging literature focuses on how active labour market policies and services affect job quality (Wong and Au Yeung 2019; Haapanala, 2022; Jones et al, 2024). Central to most definitions of job quality is the notion of workers' autonomy and empowerment (Warhurst et al, 2017), which existing scholarship has argued is undermined by punitive welfare policies. Qualitative research (Briken and Taylor, 2018; Jones et al, 2024) demonstrates how work first welfare regimes compel people to take poor quality jobs and how some people actively disengage from the welfare system to take back power and control of their working lives. Existing research has not set out to examine the extent to which varying dimensions of job quality, including aspects of empowerment and voice, such as feeling able to speak with line managers about flexibility around care or health needs, are integrated into employment support provided for those existing within welfare regimes, or indeed, to what degree the both desired and inevitable continuities and changes in peoples' lives are taken into consideration.

This paper takes an explicit focus on in-work and out-of-work Universal Credit (UC) claimants' feelings of control and power as they engage with welfare and work. We (re)examine how power dynamics between the individual, employer and the state shape workers' control over their working lives. We consider how possibilities of continuity and change in work and employment are shaped by evolving welfare policies which involve increased state intervention through the extension of active labour market policies to social security claimants who are in work. We consider how continuity and change in the contexts of everyday lived realities interacts with labour market prospects and work seeking, to explore changes to policy and practice required to meaningfully empower workers to find and deliver "good work" (Green and Sissons, 2023).

We present emerging findings from the Nuffield Foundation-funded Universal Credit, Good Work and Progression project, a mixed-methods study comprising: (1) A longitudinal survey of 4000 recent UC claimants and (2) Qualitative research with 30 UC claimants, frontline employment support advisors and policy and practice stakeholders. This includes data collection which focuses explicitly on UC claimants' feelings of control and power. This project is being undertaken during a period of UK welfare policy reform characterised by both continuities and change. While continuing a focus on fast job (re)entry, UC has reshaped the UK government's approach to supporting low-income households by introducing job search requirements for both in-work and out-of-work claimants, and encouraging low-

paid claimants to increase their earnings. Such commitments include work-focused interviews and job searches, with the risk of sanctions for non-compliance. We argue that active labour market policies must endeavour to work with UC claimants to find a balance of change and continuity in their search for good quality work, rather than just any job. Such a balance could empower people to find good work that keeps them financially stable, without compromising their ability to navigate (dis)continuities and uncertainties in their lives.

Labour Agency, Trade Unions, & Social Movements – Room 3.213

The Effectiveness of Trade Unions as a Mechanism of Voice for Employees in Emerging Economies: A Case Study of Nigerian Banks

Gogo Anyanwu

(University of Leeds, Leeds University Business School)

As research on changing world of work increases, employee voice via trade unions becomes increasingly crucial in ensuring that employers' decisions align with the best interests of workers and stakeholders. Union effectiveness becomes imperative, though research in this area in developed economies is limited and underexplored in emerging economies such as Nigeria. The Nigerian banking sector, with its unique characteristics of deregulation, privatization, and modernization, poses distinct challenges to unions as the Bankers Union of Nigeria (BUN) strives to remain relevant in an increasingly competitive and globalized environment. This research is important because union members in Nigeria including those of BUN, are losing confidence in their ability to organise, achieve desired union objectives and quality collective bargaining outcomes. These have become an issue especially because of the inadequate representation of employees in the financial sector and seeming evidence that the interests of union leaders differ from those they represent. Thus, facilitating the abuse of employees' right and voice, decline in union membership, participation and influence which have become consistent in the banking sector. These are significant issues that require further research. Therefore, this study investigates the extent and form of how employee voice operates in the Nigerian banking sector, with focus on the role of trade unions in facilitating and guaranteeing effective voice.

Data collection was done via semi-structured interviews with 51 participants (experienced union members and executives, managers and union employees) drawn from 5 unionized Nigerian commercial banks and a labour centre. Currently, the research is at its data analysis and write-up stages drawing on union revitalization theory which provides valuable insight into the adjustments and change initiatives undertaken by unions to restore strength and influence. Thus far, data analyses of BUN's union practices, reveal a union grappling with deep-seated structural and contextual challenges. Ineffective communication strategies, a lack of technological integration such as use of digital platforms, and inconsistent engagement with potential members have weakened both recruitment and retention efforts. A prevailing concern among participants is the inadequate communication between BUN and its members, often leaving them to speculate about union activities and decisions. Findings underscore the critical and fundamental role of leadership in guaranteeing union effectiveness, recruitment, active membership and collective bargaining outcomes. Additionally, a lack of leadership has impacted the need to revamp BUN's internal structures which has influenced the type or degree of response to union challenges. Findings also reveal a lack of union democracy as a major hinderance to the emergence of effective union leadership and workplace influence. This study contributes to union revitalization literature by highlighting union organising practices in a context that is underexplored, revealing significant challenges that impact the effectiveness of trade unions in the financial sector of emerging economies. It also highlights potential initiatives and strategies that unions such as BUN can adopt to revitalize their strength, resources and influence. This research further advances the understanding of the renewal of union power in particular contexts and enables BUN to be a union that can deal with challenges and members demands.

Giving and Demanding Care: Authoritarian Populism, Protests and Mobilizations of Women Ancillary Health Workers (ASHA) in Western India

Shray Mehta

(Queen Mary University of London, School of Business and Management,)

How is authoritarian populism influencing the doing and demanding of care work in India? Moving beyond the framing of the state as neoliberal, this paper argues that the focus needs to be shifted to populism and authoritarian forms of state control to understand the politics of care work as demonstrated through the protest movements of health-care workers in India.

Care, broadly defined as the processes of creating, sustaining and reproducing bodies, selves and social relationships (Nguyen, Zavorretti and Tronto 2017), is a concept that can be used to analyse social relations often referred to as kinship, state-society relations, or welfare and social security. Such relations are all underpinned by human needs for care, even as care itself emerges as a discursive field that can be mobilised or manipulated to change or reproduce structures of power, and therefore is deeply political. This paper focuses on one of these nodes i.e. state-society relations to ask what is the politics of doing care work and demanding that the state be a caring state?

Through ethnographic data collected over 16 months between 2020-2022, this paper opens up the discussion on issues of care work by studying the protest movements of informalised care workers in the healthcare sector in India. While the state refuses to recognize them as employees, the women workers continue to demand that their 'voluntary' care work be recognised as 'work' proper. By bringing forth the building up of one of these protest cycles and its 'settlement' through state repression, bribing and electoral defeat of the movement's leaders in elections in 2021 in Gujarat, India I demonstrate that authoritarian populism and its paternalistic language of welfare leaves no space for progressive social movements to articulate care work as a political issue. Through failed negotiations with officials, politicians and activists the paper also demonstrates that the activists, as subjects of the neoliberal state, are unable to articulate that the state should care for those who give care.

The failures of these movements demonstrate the inability of 'care' to translate into a politics of work. Care is a desirable moral positioning towards recognizing human mutual dependence beyond the circle of one's intimate others and the need for public solutions to socialized needs (Tronto 1993; Held 1996). Yet, it is also a moral value that the authoritarian populist state in India often draws on for the sake of marketization, deregulation and exploitation, and a boundary-marking mechanism that excludes as much as it includes certain kinds and groups of people into kinship, welfare system and the nation alike (Nguyen, Zavorretti and Tronto 2017, Thelen 2015). The ambivalence of care is especially observable in Asian countries where authoritarian states are pushing ahead with restructuring programs, increasing privatisation of public goods, entrenched commodification of labour and deepening financialisation of economic life (Bear 2015, Lin and Nguyen 2021) makes 'care' an unsuccessful framework for political mobilisation.

Technology & Work 1 – Room 3.205
PhD Showcase

Does Internet Usage Improve Labor Income for Older Workers? Evidence from China

Keyu Peng

(City University of Hong Kong)

The transformation from industrial society to digital society has introduced new a form of inequality related to the ability of using digital technology, which is summarized as digital literacy. In addition to the access to digital device, individuals from different classes also benefit differently in the usage of digital technology. The continuous work of older adults would encounter with more digital exclusion in the background of active aging, but existing research has not discussed the unequal benefits from using digital technology of older adults and the reasons. This article focuses on the impact of digital access on the labor income of older adults in China, combining Heckman model with 2SLS model based on China Family Panel Studies (CFPS) from 2014 to 2020. It is found that the use of Internet has a

significant effect on income, which is more obvious for two groups: one with higher socioeconomic status and the other with disadvantages in the labor market of industrial society. The former tend to have a better digital awareness and the skills to learn, work and socialize on the Internet. The latter are provided with a fairer access to labor market as the production mode in digital society changed. The current use of digital technology reflects both "stratified digital welfare" and "digital capability effect", and the digital literacy is an important translation mechanism.

Precarity in Motion: The Reconfiguration of Work under Platform Capitalism among E-Commerce Live Streamers in China

Yao Wang

(University of Bristol)

This paper explores how e-commerce livestreamers in China experience and negotiate precarity in platform-mediated labour environments. The rapid rise of live streaming as a form of commercialised digital labour reflects significant structural changes in how work is organised, monetised, and governed. While often framed as an entrepreneurial opportunity, e-commerce live streaming is embedded within a system of platform capitalism that intensifies financial insecurity, algorithmic control, and labour deregulation. These dynamics reflect broader transformations in precarious labour, in which digital platforms simultaneously replicate long-standing patterns of insecurity and introduce new forms of instability and dependency. As such, the live streaming economy offers a compelling case through which to examine both continuities and disruptions in contemporary work and employment.

The study draws on six months of fieldwork conducted across Yiwu and Hangzhou. The empirical basis includes 42 semi-structured interviews with e-commerce live streamers, complemented by participant observation in live streaming companies and digital marketplaces. Streamers in the sample range from contracted and self-employed workers to part-time performers across platforms such as Douyin, Taobao Live, and WeChat Channel.

Theoretically, the study integrates frameworks from platform capitalism, digital labour theory, and precarity studies to examine how technological infrastructure and economic models shape new forms of vulnerability. Findings show that financial instability is pervasive, driven by fluctuating commissions, seasonal demand, and volatile engagement metrics. E-commerce live streamers lack access to stable contracts, legal protections, or recourse mechanisms when faced with exploitative revenue-sharing arrangements or arbitrary platform decisions. The labour is also emotionally and physically intensive; long hours, performance pressure, and continuous visibility demands contribute to burnout and self-exploitation. Central to these dynamics is algorithmic governance—opaque, shifting recommendation systems that determine visibility and income, reinforcing deep platform dependency and asymmetrical power relations.

Despite the pervasiveness of financial insecurity, platform dependency, and algorithmic control, streamers are not passive recipients of platform power. They engage in adaptive strategies such as self-branding, multi-platform use, and informal support networks to navigate uncertainty, although often within highly constrained conditions. These strategies reflect both creative agency and the limitations imposed by revenue structures, algorithmic systems, and intense competition for visibility.

This paper argues that the live-streaming economy both disrupts and reinforces patterns of labour precarity. On the one hand, it offers novel forms of digital entrepreneurship and new spaces for economic participation. On the other hand, it embeds insecurity and inequality at the structural level, transforming work into a real-time contest of endurance, visibility, and adaptability. In doing so, the paper offers a nuanced account of how continuities in precarity persist, even as digital technologies create new discontinuities in the form and governance of labour. By examining streamers' lives, this research contributes to a critical understanding of how digital technologies reshape labour and deepen precariousness in contemporary economies. It further expands existing debates by offering a contextually grounded analysis of platform labour in China; it also illustrates how precarity is technologically mediated, unevenly distributed, and negotiated through compliance and creative adaptation.

Exploring the Paradox of the Contented Platform Worker through the Lenses of Job Quality and Hope Labour: The Case of Language Professionals

Bianca-Ioanidia Mirea

(University of Leeds)

This paper uncovers the paradox of fulfilling bad jobs (Knox at al, 2015) as experienced by language professionals using digital labour platforms to secure work. Most literature on platform work portrays these platforms as highly exploitative forms of capitalist exchange, often highlighting the oppressive working conditions they tend to typify. Specifically, the focus has been on issues such as algorithmic control, job insecurity, and a lack of social protection, compounded by limited or nonexistent (institutionalized) career development opportunities. However, while recognizing the drawbacks of platform work, this study reveals that language professionals often enjoy this type of work and, importantly, view it as a springboard for career development. This is a novel and largely overlooked driver of platform work, with existing debates identifying flexibility and autonomy as key motivators.

There has been little attention to the sense of potential and hope that drives workers' engagement with platform work. The ability to harness hope in shaping professional trajectories has been underexplored, limiting our understanding of worker experiences, the nature of platform work and their impact on career trajectories. Drawing on a solid dataset of interviews with language professionals, supplemented by desktop research, this study contributes conceptually by applying the notion of "hope labor" (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013) to platform work. Far from being purely passive or utopian as suggested in the literature, hope labour involves a dynamic process combining open-ended and goal-oriented hope. It reflects active agency across both personal and professional spheres, extending beyond mere (professional) aspirations to encompass the pursuit of dignity and a better quality of life (Alacovska, 2019).

Technology & Work 2 – Room 3.209

Changes and Continuities in the Working Conditions of Indian Non-film Musicians under Platformisation

Aditya Lal

(University of Leeds)

Platform-mediated work tends to shift working conditions from long-term, secure employer-employee relationships to short-term, precarious client-worker engagements. The cultural industries have traditionally embodied such precarious working conditions; and by mediating the discovery, prominence, and circulation of cultural goods, platforms have additionally come to control the ability of cultural workers to reach their audience and earn a living. These effects have become an overwhelming topic of interest for scholarly debates on cultural work under platformisation in the Global North. However, a striking gap exists with respect to the Indian cultural industries which are vital economic and cultural assets to one of the world's largest countries but have been conspicuously ignored by scholarship on cultural work. This paper contributes towards addressing this gap by focusing on the Indian recorded music industry.

The Indian recorded music industry has traditionally been dominated by film soundtracks and has relegated non-film musicians to precarious careers with unsustainable work. However, platformisation has ushered a new wave of non-film musicians whose survival was previously fraught with neglect by the film music-facing Indian recorded music industry, but who are now posing unprecedented challenges to the cultural hegemony of film music.

This paper analyses the continuities and changes in the working conditions of Indian non-film musicians between the pre-digitalisation and platformised eras. First, it examines their working conditions before digitalisation, focusing on the 1990s when non-film pop music peaked in India. Next, it explores their working conditions under platformisation, highlighting the distinctiveness of the Indian music steaming economy. This is then followed by an analysis of the changes and continuities effected by platformisation in their working conditions. The paper argues that platformisation reinforces the oligopolistic power of local major record companies and maintains the dominance of film music. While there is increased opportunity for Indian non-film musicians to flourish, often they eventually need the support of the film industry and the major record companies to sustain a long-term career. For the vast

majority of Indian non-film musicians who fail to win this support, the live events industry continues to remain their primary source of income which, alone, is not sustainable either. Yet, this paper finds that, compared to the pre-digitalisation era, the current age of platformisation affords greater sustainability and diversity to the Indian non-film music sector.

The paper draws from a wider project for which primary data was collected using 41 semi-structured interviews with musicians and industry stakeholders in India. Interview data was also triangulated with ethnographic observations at industry conferences and with data from secondary sources. The analysis utilises critical political economy, cultural studies, and critical sociology to foreground issues of power and inequality that shape continuity and change in the working conditions of Indian non-film musicians under platformisation.

By taking direction from leading scholarship on cultural work, this paper contributes towards building a long-overdue research agenda on the sustainability and working conditions of musicians in the Indian music industries and aims to enrich debates on developing modified frameworks for researching indigenous cultural industries in the Global South.

Working Beyond Organizational Boundaries in Open Source Software Ecosystems

Rebecca Taylor, Mark Weal, Anthony Quinn

(University of Southampton)

Software is designed, built, distributed and maintained in socio-technical ecosystems. Debates in Computer Science, Information Systems and Business and Management have explored the parameters of these ecosystems although there are, unsurprisingly, substantial differences in definition and focus. From a technical perspective, software ecosystems describe the languages, codebases, and libraries that constitute interrelated software projects and the shared market in which developer communities, users, suppliers, distributors, and complementors of that software operate (Manikas 2016). Different software models (propriety, open source, and scientific) give rise to intersecting ecosystems with important distinctions in resourcing, licensing etc. (e.g. Sun 2024). Scholars of Business and Management have sought to bridge social and technical elements, integrating software ecosystems with those of business and entrepreneurship ecosystems (Burstrom et al 2022). Meanwhile, a small number of Information systems scholars have drawn on ANT to understand, at a micro level, the social relationships between and within actor networks such as developer communities, and between the technologies they produce and implement (Gallivan 2024). There is considerable potential to develop socio-technical tools to understand various aspects of software ecosystems.

For sociologists, interested in the work and labour of software development and the careers and working lives of software engineers and others in the field, the notion of a socio-technical ecosystem (if developed and crystalized) provides a potentially useful multidimensional conceptual framework. Crucially it could illuminate the context to software production in which traditional organizational and sectoral structures, hierarchies and boundaries are not always clearly defined (Dahlander and Magnusson 2008). Actors make, scale and maintain software in distributed, diffuse (community) contexts (Geiger, et al 2021). Who they are working for and how they are rewarded may not reflect traditional (self) employment relationships. This is particularly pertinent for Open source software ecosystems and their intersection with propriety and scientific ecosystems. The incursion of commercial organizations into open source ecosystems further blurs organizational boundaries (Germonprez et al 2017, Ciesielska and Westenholz 2016)

This paper aims to explore an open source software ecosystem and its networked labour practices, relations and interests across and beyond organizational boundaries. To do this it draws on data from two qualitative projects; the first, a study of open source software developers that explored how they managed and resourced (unpaid) aspects of their work and built their careers in this context; the second, 'Beyond Boundaries', looked at how open source software was used and developed by organisations in four broad fields across the public and commercial sectors; global technology corporations, UK public sector (local government), UK Higher education, and Open Source first companies. The paper looks first at the conceptual challenge of understanding software ecosystems from a socio technical perspective, building a framework from which to analyze the work that happens in those ecosystems. Second, it will draw on data from the two studies to locate the experiences of developers in an open source ecosystem, and understand how organizations manage open source

work and contribute to open source communities and how that gives rise to new models of work organization.

Professional (Dis)Integration: Assessing GenAI's Consequences on Early-career Journalists

Vincent Pasquier, Catherine Lespérance, Xavier Parent-Rocheleau, Marie-Claude Gaudet, Turcotte-Légaré Nicolas, Antoine Bujold

(University of Montreal, Hautes études commerciales de Montréal)

This article explores the ways in which the recent emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is transforming the nature of work and employment conditions for young professionals, with particular attention to the field of journalism. The rapid advancement of GenAI technologies, exemplified by ChatGPT and Midjourney, has stimulated extensive scholarly debate on their implications for professional occupations (Eloundou et al., 2023; Felten et al., 2023). While GenAI significantly surpasses earlier AI technologies by enabling non-experts to complete diverse tasks, its broader impact remains unclear (Feuerriegel et al., 2024; Larson et al., 2024). Existing research primarily theorizes GenAI's potential consequences across professional fields, yet empirical studies investigating its actual effects remain limited (Hui et al., 2024).

This study addresses this gap by specifically examining the journalism profession (Diakopoulos, 2019; Marconi, 2020), focusing on how GenAI affects journalists based on career seniority. Specifically, although journalism is often portrayed as a homogeneous profession, junior journalists may experience disproportionate challenges due to GenAI's capability to automate routine, entry-level tasks. Broader professional concerns have also emerged regarding GenAI's potential to diminish critical thinking and reduce engagement with generated content (Diakopoulos, 2019; Lindebaum & Fleming, 2024). Such disruptions are particularly significant, as early-career stages substantially shape journalists' skill development, professional expertise, and identity (Susskind & Susskind, 2022).

Accordingly, this research investigates how GenAI transforms work practices and employment conditions for early-career journalists, guided by two primary research questions:

1. How does GenAI shape early-career journalists' perceptions of their work?
2. How does GenAI influence their skill development and professional identity formation?

To answer these questions, the study adopts a sequential mixed-methods approach. First, a quantitative survey of 400 journalists was conducted, including 116 journalists under the age of 30 and 124 with fewer than six years of professional experience. Subsequently, qualitative data are being gathered through in-depth interviews. To date, 14 preliminary interviews have been conducted with journalists and industry experts, and an additional 25 interviews with early-career journalists are scheduled for completion by July 2025.

Preliminary quantitative findings confirm that GenAI disproportionately affects early-career journalists, who report significantly higher usage rates compared to senior colleagues. Additionally, younger journalists appear to be developing an increasing dependency on GenAI, a trend likely to intensify over time and potentially hinder essential skill development. These findings raise important questions regarding the evolving nature of journalistic expertise and professional identity. The ongoing qualitative phase aims to explore more deeply how these technological transformations shape professional identity and critical skill acquisition during the formative stages of journalists' careers.

By combining empirical insights and theoretical considerations, this research contributes to technology and work literature by providing a nuanced understanding of GenAI's differentiated impact across career stages. It highlights the implications of increasing technological dependency for professional identity, expertise development, and employment conditions in knowledge-intensive occupations.

Librarians as the Last Rescue Workers in a Thoroughly Digitalised and Platformised Society: Some Findings from Finland

Seppo Poutanen

(University of Turku Turku Centre for Labour Studies)

The ongoing various processes of digitalisation and platformisation, with increasing contributions from fast developing AI applications, are transforming work, employment and working life in many unprecedented ways. Typically motivated and implemented in the name of better efficiency, productivity and innovativeness, the processes in question often carry significant unintended and/or unexpected consequences, which can have complex and important effects on working life.

We have studied some effects of the aforementioned kind in Finland, a country in the forefront when it comes to digitalisation and platformisation of work, economy and society in general. In Finland, comprehensive undertaking of replacing corporeal face-to-face customer services with online self-service and digital apps has in recent years extended to both private (e.g. banking) and public (e.g. social security) sector operations. Unintendedly and unexpectedly or not, these major shifts have led to a situation, where notable sections of population find it difficult or almost impossible to get access to such private and public sector services they necessarily need. These difficulties may be due to limited language skills, insufficient economic resources, or other problems in so-called digital literacy. As a solution, a kind of silent societal agreement seems to have emerged in Finland, according to which these "digitally defective" citizens must be helped in public libraries.

Public libraries enjoy institutionally high status in Finland, and they offer their services for free. A mission of messengers for digital society has been assigned to service personnel of public libraries by Finnish governmental programmes, and typically Finnish libraries are technologically well equipped for the task. However, library patrons with special needs related to digitalised services often demand from service personnel deeds of complex and sometimes ethically problematic nature. For example, an elderly person may want to give a librarian her PIN codes and passwords, so that a necessary transaction in online bank service could be performed.

By applying concepts "digital care" and "ethical stress", for example, we have analysed, both qualitatively and quantitatively, effects of the mentioned silent societal agreement on Finnish librarians' work. Beyond introducing some results from this research project, we also reflect on whether some more general kind of dynamics in the societal processes of digitalisation and platformisation might be indicated by the elaborated phenomena.

PLENARY PANEL
13:30-14:30
Lecture Theatre B

CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES IN LIFE, WORK AND EMPLOYMENT

Jean Jenkins, *Cardiff University*

Miguel Martinez Lucio, *University of Manchester*

Chaired by Toma Pustelnikovaite, *Cardiff University*

The Past Isn't Such a Foreign Country: Employers Did the Same Sort of Things There…

In the 1950s and 1960s, a group of ethnographers at Manchester University compiled what came to be known as the Manchester Studies. Scholars like Tom Lupton and Sheila Cunnison gave us thick descriptions of workplace relations where the interactions between society and workplace were woven into compelling accounts of the lives of workers and the workings of industry. Such accounts remain entirely relevant, despite the passage of time. They serve to remind us that in the struggle between labour's interests and those of capital, there is very little that is new. Intriguingly, similar concerns, similar employer strategies and similar barriers to an idea of workplace justice prevail across time and place. It is far more challenging to undertake such detailed studies today, and this is why informing ourselves about the workplace dynamics of long ago can illuminate and deepen our understanding of workers' current experience of regulation, rights and freedom to organise. In this discussion, I take the example of debt and the ramifications of indebtedness for a woman's position at her workplace, in order to illustrate essential continuities in the exercise of power at work, in employment and in her society beyond the factory gates.

Jean Jenkins is Emerita Professor of Employment Relations at Cardiff Business School, and a Co-Director of the Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research Data (Wiserd) at Cardiff University, Wales, UK. Her research focuses mainly on industrial relations and labour conditions in the international garment sector and precarious and low paid work more generally.

The Widening of the Employment Relations Agenda: Trajectories, Possibilities and Challenges

There has been a long tradition of seeing employment relations, broadly speaking, as being in crisis and the focus has been on 'decline' or 'renewal' in terms of representation at and the regulation of work. There is much more occurring but overall the debate has been framed in these reactive terms. Nevertheless, what we have seen more recently is an emerging plethora of new forms of rights and concerns at work that have entered the agenda of various debates and struggles at work. In some senses there is a range of interventions that point to a broader set of constituents and issues at work and in the labour market. In this respect, as has been noted, the crisis, to use that term, is not one of irrelevance or marginalisation but a widening of themes at work and issues and this has been picked up over the years in a set of literature especially within WES. This gives rise to a new set of challenges as to how such sets of developments can be sustained and how

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forms of representation at work and its regulation are constructed (or can be reconstructed) to ensure a broader approach. In some senses, the challenge is one of articulation and one of there being competing approaches to the way broad issues at work are linked and underpinned institutionally and politically.

Miguel Martinez Lucio is a Professor of International HRM and Comparative Industrial Relations at the University of Manchester, and member of the Work and Equalities Institute. He completed his PhD in Industrial Relations at the University of Warwick, and has worked at Cardiff University, Keele University, Leeds University, Durham University, Bradford University as well as the local government prior to joining Manchester. Miguel has had a lifetime interest in representation at work and the political context of industrial relations. The main focus of his research has been concerned with the changing patterns of rights and regulation within labour and employment relations and human resource management, dealing with issues such as the position and role of regulation and institutions in the context of globalisation, increasing managerialism, and socio-economic uncertainty.

PAPER SESSION 2
14:40-16:10

Difference, Diversity & Social Justice 1 – Room 3.210

Enduring Ableism in Times of Change and Crisis: A Socio-legal Analysis of Disabled NHS Workers' Experiences at Work

Liz Oliver, Becca Jiggens, Jen Remnant

(University of Leeds)

The NHS is in crisis following over a decade of real-terms budget cuts, reduced staff wellbeing, staff turnover, rising rates of sickness absence, and lingering effects of both the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit. These structural pressures create an environment in which disabled workers can be subject to workplace ableism, as existing barriers to inclusion are exacerbated by resource constraints, shifting priorities, and organisational instability.

This paper draws on qualitative interview data from a sample of 27 NHS workers, 20 of whom identify as disabled. From this overall sample, we have extracted three analytical case studies which allow us to explore three contexts where organisational change interacts with ableism:
1. A disclosure. A worker discloses a new diagnosis, and this alters (epistemic) relations despite no actual change in their work capacity,
2. Employer-led structural change. Planned organisational change that is inattentive to existing workplace accommodations and so disrupts them, and
3. External crises. Rapid adaptation becomes necessary, and this has negative implications for a disabled worker who is not factored into the response.

In each scenario, we examine how ableism manifests and perpetuates disability within workplace change processes.

Using a new materialist framework, we explain how ableism materialises and persists in NHS employment. The NHS, as a national institution and the largest employer in Europe, shapes labour market norms and embodies paradoxical roles in both constructing and resisting disability through diagnostic practices, allocation of support, and cultural imaginaries of normalised, healthy bodies. Our findings explore how ableism becomes re-entrenched through change.

In the second part of our analysis, we extend the new materialist analysis to the legal system. We go on to explain how this ableism is insulated from rights-based challenges because it is reinforced by a 'double deference' within British employment law—which favours managerial prerogative in times of change and centres medical expertise to understand disability.

Our legal analysis of disability-based employment cases involving the NHS reveals a judicial reluctance to scrutinise organisational change using the Equality Act 2010. A tenacious line of jurisprudence that predates the Equality Act continues to narrow legal interpretations, rendering workplace changes largely immune to scrutiny from a disability perspective. Additionally, judicial deference to medical expertise reinforces rather than disrupts NHS ableism and prevents legal challenge to discriminatory employment practices. Thus, excusing the exclusion of disabled people from other workplaces.

By integrating empirical and legal analysis, we theorise organisational change as a site of inferential injustice, where disability knowledge is systematically misrecognised and subordinated in legal adjudication. This contributes to broader sociological discussions on embodied inequality regimes, epistemic injustice, and workplace regulation. We conclude by advocating for a re-conceptualisation of workplace change that centres relational understandings of disability, and utilises the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to challenge entrenched ableist reasoning. We argue that

finding ways to realise disabled NHS workers' human rights at work can generate insights that have transformative potential for employment practices and wider systemic change.

Intersectionality of Race and Disability within the Workplace

Denise Murdoch

(London Metropolitan University)

Aim 1: Explore the lived experience of the Black & Brown Community (B&BC) with dyslexia and its impact.

Aim 2: Effects of intersectionality: how do dyslexics from black and brown communities navigate the workplace?

Background: Knowledge about dyslexia stems over a hundred years, with ongoing research into the area today increasing the growing awareness. Dyslexia has been examined in depth, mainly focusing on children and young people using the deficit model to label and define dyslexia.

Adult dyslexics in employment are less prevalent, with minimal from B&BC. Current research will employ a strength/ success model.

Purpose: The study examines the intersectionality of diagnosed and un/self-diagnosed dyslexic B&BC by employing Critical Race Theory, which explores the complexity of intersectionality, COVID-19 exposed the discrepancies between B&BC, which revealed working conditions, health and technology poverty. Those individuals' workplace experiences in the UK and how they navigate the workplace. Research findings show there is a disproportion of young adults from B&BC who are less likely to transition to competitive employment, independent living or education and will tend to experience poverty. It aims to provide greater insight into how neurodiverse individuals perceive their intersectionality while gaining insight into strategies within the workplace.

Methodology: The researcher will use a qualitative methodology: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is a valued form of research that regards individuals' experiences as meaningful and relevant. The researcher will employ visual journals and semi-structured interviews to construct meaning from these experiences. Data will offer insights into lived experiences and strategies to navigate daily life. Visual journaling and interviews will explore encounters, thoughts, successes and emotions.

Results/Findings: The study is currently collecting data and will be analysing themes and outcomes. Implications/ Recommendations: In the current societal situation, it is vital for all those experiencing this intersectionality to be supported and remain within the workplace. Clear policies and procedures from the Government level must be established to remove disadvantages, ensure true inclusion, and change attitudes. This must be rooted in the voices of black and brown people and those with disabilities.

Discussions/conclusions: Findings suggest a gap in knowledge and understanding of being neurodiverse in employment. The Equality Act (2010) prohibits discrimination based on protected characteristics, like disability, and requires employers and educational settings to anticipate reasonable adjustments for individuals with protected characteristics. This is problematic as it is interpretive legislation and can lead to inconsistent employment approaches. Fundamentally, it issues self-diagnosis with no evidence. There are several reasons for the prohibitive cost of assessment and demand. For equality in the workplace to be truly functional, this will need to be addressed to provide a level playing field for all.

Contribution: The current studies on social justice, contribution to research on neurodiversity and racialised inequality

(In)Decent Work, Disability, and Intersectionality in Employment: Structural Barriers, Mental Well-Being, and Precarity in the Research and Innovation (R&I) Ecosystem

Siddhartha Saxena, James Richard, Kate Sang, Jos Collins

(Heriot Watt University)

Workplace equity and social cohesion remain elusive goals in many professional sectors, particularly for disabled and neurodivergent employees, who continue to experience exclusion due to institutional barriers rather than individual limitations. This study applies the social model of disability (Schur et al., 2020) to critically examine how employment precarity, workplace inaccessibility, and performative diversity policies shape the lived experiences of historically marginalized employees. Findings from the UK Research and Innovation (R&I) sector illustrate that organizations often claim to promote inclusivity while simultaneously reproducing structural disadvantages (Focus Group Report, 2024). Using qualitative insights from focus groups and survey data, this study challenges the individualized framing of workplace mental health and accessibility issues, arguing instead that organizational structures actively disable employees (Acker, 1990; Focus Group Report, 2024).

This research employs a Gioia-informed qualitative methodology (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013) using focus groups and survey data collected through the EDICa project. A purposive sampling strategy ensured representation from racialized minorities, disabled professionals, and individuals with long-term health conditions (Focus Group Report, 2024). The analysis centers on institutionalized resistance to accessibility, the psychological toll of workplace exclusion, and the contradiction between corporate narratives of inclusivity and lived employee realities.

Key Findings

Workplace Structures as Disabling Mechanisms: Institutions publicly commit to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) while failing to dismantle structural barriers that disable employees (Focus Group Report, 2024). Workspaces remain designed for non-disabled, neurotypical workers, with open-plan office designs exacerbating sensory overload and rigid work norms limiting access to flexible employment (Doyle & McDowall, 2021).

Mental Well-Being and the Structural Production of Disability: Workplace harassment, excessive workloads, and rigid performance expectations worsen mental health disparities, particularly among employees requiring accommodations (Focus Group Report, 2024). Institutional neglect of proactive mental health interventions (Schur et al., 2020) results in a lack of accessible psychological support and continued stigma around disability disclosure.

Precarious Work and Career Stagnation for Disabled and Neurodivergent Employees: Disabled and neurodivergent employees face career penalties due to managerial bias, inaccessible hiring practices, and limited promotional opportunities (Focus Group Report, 2024). The persistence of presenteeism and the "ideal worker" norm disproportionately disadvantages employees requiring alternative work arrangements (Acker, 2006).

The Limits of Flexible Work as an Inclusion Strategy: While hybrid and remote work offer greater accessibility for some, institutional reluctance to embed accessibility into core employment policies (Focus Group Report, 2024) means that disabled employees remain excluded from networking opportunities, leadership roles, and career development pathways (Ezerins et al., 2024).

Theoretical Contributions: This study advances HRM research by applying the social model of disability to organizational practices, shifting the discourse from individual impairment to institutional responsibility (Schur et al., 2020). It provides theoretical insights into labor precarity, workplace exclusion, and intersectional discrimination, while offering practical recommendations for HR professionals, policymakers, and business leaders to implement workplace reforms that promote genuine accessibility.

Stage of Research: This research is in its final stages, with thematic analysis completed and policy recommendations in development. The next phase will involve translating findings into cross-sector HRM interventions

Difference, Diversity & Social Justice 2 – Room 3.211

On the Front Line

Impact of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) on Employee and Organisational Outcomes: Evidence from an Intervention Study in the Highways Sector in England

Jaejin Lee, Jennifer Tomlinson, Danat Valizade, Jack Daly, Kathryn Watson

(University of Leeds)

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives are increasingly positioned as tools to foster workplace equity, improve retention, and enhance organisational performance (Martín-Zamora et al., 2024; Hsiao et al., 2020; Kochan et al., 2003). Consulting firms and financial institutions, including McKinsey & Company (Hunt et al., 2015) and Credit Suisse (Credit Suisse Research Institute, 2012), argue that greater diversity, particularly gender diversity on corporate boards, enhances financial outcomes. Yet, findings from academic research and meta-analyses spanning hundreds of studies indicate that the link between diversity and performance is either negligible or only marginally positive (Jeong & Harrison, 2017; Post & Byron, 2015; Pletzer et al., 2015). Moreover, outcomes are often contingent on external factors, such as regulatory and cultural contexts, and internal dynamics, including an organisation's strategic focus, especially on innovation and reputation (Dezsö & Ross, 2012).

Acknowledging the absence of a clear causal relationship, recent scholarship has shifted focus towards understanding the organisational conditions that promote inclusive behaviours encouraging not only the recruitment of diverse employees but also how to best leverage their participation and utilise their specific skill sets. However, research largely concentrates on professional service firms or senior management teams (Jeong & Harrison, 2017; Martín-Zamora et al., 2024), leaving significant gaps regarding male-dominated sectors like construction. In construction, where persistent labour shortages, high turnover, and an ageing workforce present critical challenges (Farmer, 2016), EDI initiatives are increasingly framed as potential solutions. Yet, empirical evaluations of their impact, especially on workforce perceptions and retention, remain scarce (Greed, 2002).

To address this gap, the present study examines EDI interventions implemented over four years within National Highways' (NH) supply chain, a government-owned company responsible for England's major roads. Developed collaboratively with industry partners and informed by academic evidence (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018), these interventions focused on systemic rather than individual change, aligning with the lifecycle of major infrastructure projects to enhance employee engagement.

A quasi-experimental, mixed-methods approach was employed, including two waves of an original employee survey conducted pre- and post-intervention, alongside quarterly KPI data covering 26 infrastructure schemes over five years (2019–2024). This quantitative data was complemented by qualitative interviews and focus groups with employees and key stakeholders. Findings indicate significant shifts in perceptions of diversity and inclusion, particularly among women, who reported marked improvements as opposed to their male counterparts. These changes correlated with reduced turnover intentions and improvements in key performance metrics.

Overall, this study contributes to debates in employment sociology by offering rare empirical evidence on the effects of EDI interventions in a male-dominated sector. While demonstrating the potential of EDI to improve workforce outcomes, the research also reveals that impacts are uneven, depending on organisational commitment and the degree to which inclusion is embedded in workplace structures (Park et al., 2022; Leonard & Levine, 2006). These findings underscore the need for context-sensitive, integrated diversity strategies to achieve lasting structural change in workplace culture and employment relations.

'Keeping Commerce Human': Platform Labour and Craft Authenticity in the Age of AI

Susan Luckman

(University of South Australia)

Focussing on Etsy's stated mission to "keep commerce human", this paper examines how this ethos has manifested in the site's content and branding and what this reveals about cultural politics and economics. It will critically examine Etsy initiatives aimed at providing a valuable income source for economically marginalised people, such as during the war in Ukraine (Dent 2023), as well as through more enterprise-level initiatives such as the Etsy Uplift Makers Program. Bringing key feminist materialist analysis (Barad 2007; Berlant 2008 & 2011; Braidotti 2019 & 2022; Haraway 2016) into dialogue with Benjamin's (1969) concept of aura, Marxist ideas of alienation, postcolonial critiques of racial exoticisation and 'Othering' (Said 1979), it will document the allure of the "authentic" in terms of goods, production, and the retail experience, especially in what has been termed the "hipster economy" (Gerosa 2024; Ocejo 2017) and the neo-craft movement (Gandini and Gerosa 2023). It then documents the more recent rise of resellers and the blurry lines defining handmade goods that the platform allows, and how this reconfigures the nature of the platform for sellers and traders alike. As a key example of this tension, it examines how the shifts associated with the 2015 IPO – and especially the ending of its B Corp status which once attested to the importance of its ethical relationships with traders – puts the platform in contradiction with the mythologies of artisanal production and ethical consumption that animate its brand. However, the paper will argue that while the public slide from community to corporation has changed the face of Etsy for seller and buyer alike, the tension is overstated. The contradictory pulls of creative labour and industrial settings is typical of many cultural industries, and especially those mediated by platforms. It will be suggested, however, that this dynamic is exacerbated by Etsy's reliance on its ethical and craft credentials in its charismatic appeal to retailers and sellers, as well as the contradiction between the organic warmth of the handmade and the cold calculations of the digital environment and platform labour. Contradictions becoming all the more evident in the current global political moment.

Value of Multi-generational Teams and the Role of Older Workers: Findings from an Online Experiment

Zeewan Lee, Hui Foh Foong, Joelle Fong, Xinyi Chen

(National University of Singapore)

While stereotypes persist regarding the declining productivity of aging workers, evidence often comes from studies measuring productivity at an independent work settings. In light of the recent literature highlighting that age is associated with enhanced workplace wisdom, mentoring abilities, operational acumen, foresight, familiarity, and other soft skills, we conjecture that older workers' productivity may be better measured in team settings. In this study, we conduct an online randomized control trial (RCT) to evaluate the performance of multigenerational teams (consisting of older and younger workers) in relation to that of unigenerational teams (consisting only of younger workers, and separately only of older workers).

Building on Börsch-Supan et al. (2021), which studied multigenerational teams in manufacturing, this research focuses on teamwork in the service industry, a growing employment sector for aging workers. Using Prolific, 700 active labor market participants aged 18-85 were recruited and randomly assigned to multigenerational or unigenerational teams. Teams completed two simulated service-industry tasks: managing a virtual store and optimizing delivery routes, with performance measured using key performance indicators (KPIs) such as accuracy, correctness, and cost efficiency.

In addition to measuring the teams' outcomes, we inspect the role of older workers in the teams, examining a rich array of their work-related soft skills (e.g., experience, wisdom, conflict resolution skills, atmosphere maintenance, emotional perceptiveness) (Weidmann & Deming, 2021) utilized to contribute to the teams' outcomes.

This study aims to generate novel insights into the comparative advantages of older workers and offer potential directions for workplace and job reconfiguration to better integrate an aging workforce, which is becoming increasingly prevalent worldwide.

(Dis)Continuities in Professions, Occupations & Skills – Room 3.212
PhD Showcase

Who Cares? Undoing Gender at the Household Level in Pakistan

Zoha Aamir

(Queen Mary University of London)

Over the years scholars have shown that unpaid care work, including care of persons and housework, is one of the most gendered spheres of social life where equality is hard to achieve. Yet, some couples are able to push gender boundaries and achieve a more egalitarian division of care work. Studying these couples could potentially reveal the mechanisms that allow men and women to overcome traditional conceptions of paid and unpaid work. However, much of the existing scholarship focuses on the persistence of these gendered patterns, with limited attention to how couples actively challenge and renegotiate the division of labour. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by proposing a multi-level framework to answer a central question: How do couples 'undo' gendered divisions of socially reproductive labour to create more egalitarian households? With a focus on both structural and individual levels, this study examines how dual-earner couples in Pakistan negotiate domestic responsibilities, the extent to which traditional gender norms are challenged or reinforced, and the factors that enable or constrain more egalitarian arrangements.

Using a constructivist epistemological approach grounded in feminist theory, this study adopts a mixed-methods design. It combines time-use diaries with semi-structured interviews conducted in two phases: first, joint interviews with couples, followed by individual interviews. The dataset comprises 25 dual-earner couples (50 individuals) with children under 18, based in Lahore, Pakistan. This methodological approach allows for an in-depth analysis of both structural constraints and individual agency in shaping household labour division.

Preliminary findings reveal a paradox: while men's involvement in housework and childcare has increased compared to previous generations, deeply embedded gender norms continue to structure care work. The breadwinner-homemaker ideology remains firmly intact, with men still perceived as primary earners even when women contribute financially. Interestingly, one emerging theme is that couples rarely cite gender as the reason for these inequalities. Instead, they attribute the unequal division of care work to employment-related constraints—such as long work hours and the absence of or limited paternity leave—framing men's lower involvement as a consequence of time limitations rather than gendered expectations. However, some emerging shifts in masculinity are evident with some fathers engaging more actively in caregiving activities.

This study makes two key contributions. First, while much existing research focuses on women's experiences, this study brings men into the conversation, capturing how they navigate and negotiate their roles in care work. Second, by shifting the focus from the persistence of traditional norms to the potential for change, this research opens new avenues for examining the valuation and redistribution of care work in Pakistan. As data analysis progresses, these findings will contribute to broader discussions on gender, work, and family in the Global South, offering insights into changing household dynamics in contexts where patriarchal constraints remain strong.

Gendered Employment Discontinuity and Occupational Gender Segregation in South Korea

Min Young Song

(Cardiff University)

This paper addresses a unique phenomenon observed in Korea, concerning gender, employment, and education. In most OECD countries today, where gender equality in educational attainment has been achieved, highly educated women have employment rates similar to those of men, while less educated women are still likely to be underemployed. Interestingly, in Korea – one of the most highly educated countries in the world – the reverse is true: highly educated women are more likely to be underemployed

than less educated women. This suggests that in Korea, education plays a limited role in improving women's labour market status.

This paper examines this problem of underemployment of highly educated women in Korea in the knowledge economy, where skill investment is crucial for maintaining high status in the labour market. It asks two questions. First, how does higher education – both the degree level and field of study – interact with gender in affecting employment continuity? Second, how effective are skill investment practices – such as certificate attainment and vocational training – in reducing the risk of employment discontinuity?

Drawing on Korea's nationally representative data collected annually between 2003 and 2021 from the Korean Labor and Income Panel Study (KLIPS), I analysed the hazard rate of leaving the labour market for 6,967 respondents representing the post-1970 generation who started a new job in their 20s and 30s. I performed survival analysis, which consists of two parts as follows.

First, non-parametric analysis shows that additional education does not reduce the gender gap in labour market exit rates. On average, highly educated women are twice as likely as men to leave the labour market throughout the analysis period – a pattern similar to that for non-college graduates. In particular, STEM graduates exhibit a larger gender gap than non-STEM counterparts.

Discrete-time event history analysis then reveals that, holding all other factors constant, women continue to face a significantly higher risk of employment discontinuity. Notably, this gender effect interacts with educational attainment: while additional education reduces the labour market exit rate, this effect is significantly weaker for women than for men. Moreover, the effect of education interacting with gender is moderated by field of study: STEM women experience a stronger gender disparity, as additional education hardly improves their employment continuity. Lastly, vocational training significantly reduces the risk of employment discontinuity for STEM graduates, while the effect of certificate attainment is insignificant. Given that women are often excluded from on-the-job training, and in response, tend to invest more in certificates, this suggests that part of the gender effect is mediated by gender differences in skill development.

To summarise, STEM women face a higher risk of employment discontinuity, not only compared to STEM men, but also compared to non-STEM women. As a result, despite the increasing number of women with STEM degrees, Korean women remain severely under-represented in engineering professions. In other words, gendered employment discontinuity, combined with the gender stereotype that defines engineering as a male-typical career, contributes to reinforcing occupational gender segregation in Korea.

Under-rewarding and Reinforcing Poor Skills Opportunities in Times of Crisis: The Polarised Cases of Key Workers and Furlough during Covid-19 in the UK

Michael Francis

(University of Manchester, Work and Equalities Institute)

This study presents a theory of how Covid-19 disrupted skills development opportunities for workers during the Pandemic, and how this skills disruption may have impacted on wages post-Pandemic. The two key forms of disruption are: firstly, (I) disruption to formal employment status, such as being furloughed, laid-off or having working hours reduced. Secondly, (II) in-person work versus the shift to remote working. To illustrate these two divergent paths, furloughed workers and key workers are used as the main examples of each form of disruption. At this crossroad, these two groups were set on very different career trajectories and experiences, one which was publicly celebrated but overworked and under-appreciated, and one which was involuntarily disenfranchised and inactive. This separation fundamentally affected the access to work-related skills acquisition or development, namely employer-provided training. While research has detailed the unequal demographic impacts of Covid-19-induced economic hardship particularly on ethnic minorities and women, in regions of relative depravity, the longer-term impacts of acute skills development disruption are poorly understood. To address these gaps, this research makes two key contributions, first in assessing how disruption to these two groups affected access to skills and training opportunities (I), and how these disrupted opportunities relate to post-Pandemic wages (II).

The theoretical approach taken is a structural one in which occupational requirements often dictate the parameters of training regimes which are presented to workers, rather than training being a rational-choice component of individual human-capital accumulation. In this regard, Covid-19 is viewed as an additional compounding disruption on top of this system in which gender and occupation segmentation in the labour market underpin the training-wage relationship.

The method employed uses longitudinal panel data, from the UKHLS, with a quasi-experimental pre and post 'treatment' research design. Skills development opportunities are proxied by the probability of participating in employer-led training, in which a distinction is made between skills-related training, which is positively associated with wages, and training which is more perfunctory in nature, such as induction and health and safety training, which is negatively or neutrally related to wages.

Building on these foundations, it is theorised firstly, that for key workers, in the midst of the intense and stressful working conditions, that we would expect to see a rise in OSH training, and that this went unrewarded in terms of positive wage associations, compared to non-frontline workers who could train and work from home. Secondly, for furloughed workers, it is hypothesised that a lack of job-related training resulted in wage scarring later down the line. However, it is also expected that those who remained in work in locked-down sectors also suffered a comparative lack of training due to sector-level financial distress. Finally, it is predicted due to the uneven distribution of childcare responsibilities during Covid-19, that furloughed women would have even worse training and wage outcomes than furloughed men.

These hypotheses are still being tested to ensure valid results, and will be presented at the Conference.

Ecologically/Socially Sustainable Work & Employment – Room 2.220

Interrogating Responsive and Relational Autonomy in Leicester's Garment Sector

Shoba Arun, Samsul Alam, Nicolae Radulescu, Patsy Perry, Linh Truong

(University of Essex)

This paper investigates how garment sector work sites can build just and responsive working environments as part of sustainable and responsible business agenda. Despite multifarious pressures and agreements to ensure sustainable workplaces, global supply chains are often marred by reports of exploitative work practices, challenged by the highly changed environment in a post-Covid, post-Brexit context. Using detailed mixed method research with workers, employers and worker organisations in Leicester, we strive to find ways to foster conditions for autonomy and economic justice in the workplace. We take a granular level of analysis with a worker-centred intersectional focus to measure responsive interventions and practices and to help shape policy and actions through a globally situated, theoretically informed, locally contextualised and mixed methods approach. We ask how do we co-create sustainability models in the Leicester garment sector that can be transferred to other sectors and contexts? To what extent are garment sector work sites in Leicester responsive to workplace regulations and compliance? What challenges do employers and firms face in creating just and responsive workplaces?

We deploy an intersectional understanding of garment sector work regimes based on the Leicester garment industry to unravel the nature of individual vulnerabilities and economic pressures which pose both limits and opportunities for responsible business agenda with implications for social and economic justice. From a relational autonomy perspective, focusing solely on adjusting formal regulations—like wage laws or safety standards—will not suffice if the interpersonal and organisational dynamics that foster trust, transparent communication, and responsive management are ignored (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). Workers, including those from marginalised groups such as migrant or BAME, seek intrinsic value and dignity in their roles (Sayer, 2007). This means that workers need not just formal rights but daily interactions and confidence to express concerns, negotiate working conditions, and see meaningful responses from supervisors and management. Addressing these interactional challenges is both a social justice imperative and a strategic consideration for business, as engaged, autonomous workers can enhance performance and sustain reputations (Donaghey & Reinecke, 2018; LeBaron,

2020). For us, relational autonomy emphasises the relational aspects of work, communities and individuals and ensuring ethical and sustainable businesses. We examine three distinct levels of autonomy: individual, interactional, and institutional, and our findings emphasise that autonomy is intertwined with power relations, social interactions, and socio-political contexts, primarily influenced by organisational practices and policies.

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Ecology of Tuna Extraction and Labour Exploitation: How Does Ecology Shape Labour Relations?

Hyunjung Kim, Liam Campling, Elena Baglioni

(Queen Mary University of London)

The paper investigates how ecology plays a role in shaping labour exploitation and labour relations in the tuna longline fishery. The material processes of nature are a key to understanding production and industrial dynamics in capitalist accumulation (Boyed et al., 2001; Bridge, 2008). Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of nature and natural processes in capitalist production, there has been a limited engagement with 'the dynamic interplay between labour and nature' (Boyd and Prudham, 2017) in understanding industrial relations. This seems odd, given that the process of the appropriation of nature necessitates the labour process, and natural processes and the associated socio-ecological changes serve as the biophysical basis of the labour process (Schaupp, 2024). Indeed, the role of ecology is not fully acknowledged in Labour Process Theory, nor are the ways in which natural resources and the environment interact and intersect with capital-labour relations (Baglioni and Campling 2017, Baglioni 2023). Some exceptions include recent work by Clark and Longo (2021) and Velásquez and Ayala (2024).

To fill this gap, the paper unravels the articulation between nature and labour in the labour process on tuna boats, and how this gives rise to distinctive forms of labour control and relations in industrial fisheries production. The paper is based on PhD research examining labour exploitation of migrant crews in the South Korea and Taiwanese tuna longline industries. A multi-sited fieldwork was conducted in three countries and through fieldwork observation and 88 semi-structured interviews.

This paper examines how the timing, rhythm, pace and length of the labour process at sea is shaped by the biophysical materiality of the commodity, and how the control and discipline of labour onboard vessels is driven by the accumulation strategies of fishing firms to capture greater value in response to the increasing 'ecological indeterminacy' (Baglioni and Campling, 2017) embedded in the availability and commodification of tuna. In doing so, we explore the details of how and to what extent the labour process is organised, syncronised and mediated, based on the combination of the ecological dynamics of tuna extraction from the sea and the reconstitution of tuna's biophysical properties demanded by the market. Through this research, we argue that the intensity of nature appropriation and labour exploitation appear to be directly correlated, particularly in the context of industrial fisheries. This implies that the structural underpinning of labour exploitation represents the flip side of the same coin of nature appropriation, encompassing both ecological resources and human bodies. In other words, the process of capitalist accumulation inevitably leads to the depletion of both human and non-human nature as ecological disruption and unpredictability increase. By bringing ecological dynamics embedded in the commodification of 'nature' – e.g., species biology, oceanography, perishability etc – into conversation with labour studies, the paper contributes to an emerging literature on labour and ecology that speaks to broader debates on sustainable and just transitions.

PhD Showcase

Beyond Bullshit and Batshit Jobs? Organising De-alienating Ecological Labour in Alternative Organisations

Fabian Maier, Adele Gruen

(Université Paris Dauphine PSL)

Amidst accelerating ecological crises, a growing phenomenon has emerged where often younger employees turn away from work-centred and work-intensive lifestyles. Such career shifts have been theorised as forms of 'degrowing', often prompted by a profound dissatisfaction with exploitative structures of the larger system (Ehrnström-Fuentes and Biese 2023). These shifts can be interpreted as emerging out of a widespread alienation of life in capitalist society (Harvey 2018), and what Graeber (2018) called 'bullshit jobs'. It may also hint at a growing recognition of 'batshit jobs': the insanity of having to 'destroy the conditions of life in order to make a living' (Hansen 2019). How we understand ecological (Snikersproge 2024) and sustainable (Hoffmann 2022) labour, however, remains open to debate, highlighting the need for sociological analysis of how people who transition into more ecologically viable work experience such shifts.

This study addresses these concerns by investigating the possibility of de-alienated work in ecological labour. We unpack workers' imaginaries of ecological labour in alternative organisations and contrast them with lived work experience, asking: How is ecological labour experienced in alternative organisations? To what extent and under what circumstances can it be considered de-alienated? Drawing on a comparative maximum variation case study of two Community-supported Agriculture (CSA) co-operatives in Germany, we analyse how and to what extent the ecological labour of CSAs can provide an outlet for de-alienation. We build on an 8-month online participatory engagement with the CSA network, a focus group, field visits, document studies, and 39 semi-structured interviews with participants of both co-ops.

Findings outline a broader pattern amongst CSA workers identified as a 'crisis of meaning', indicating alienated experiences within previous jobs. Such crisis of meaning evokes imaginaries of prefiguring alternative forms of labour deemed more ecologically and socially sustainable, which often gives rise to career shifts into CSA work. Next, we explore how and to what extent such imaginaries materialise in CSA work by analysing how the organisation and negotiation of CSA work supports or hinders de-alienated work experiences. We present mechanisms through which workers experience and try to resolve contrasts between prefigurative imaginaries and their day-to-day experiences of ecological labour across relations to co-workers, the wider membership, as well as the meaning and process of CSA work itself.

This paper contributes to sociological scholarship of work and organisation by foregrounding the pursuit of de-alienated ecological work within and through CSA co-operatives as a terrain of struggle. Rather than viewing alienation as an insurmountable state under capitalism or co-operative work as necessarily emancipatory, this research theorises an understanding of the social processes of de/re-alienation as a dynamic continuum, mediated by inner-organisational negotiations and antagonisms. The extent to which ecological labour constitutes a source of de/re-alienation is thus posited as contingent upon how its organisation considers personal boundaries as extension of planetary boundaries, involves efforts to decommodify work, and avoids reproducing norms and patterns of conventional workplaces. While CSAs can provide an outlet for imaginaries of de-alienated ecological labour, we challenge perspectives primarily foregrounding the emancipatory characteristics of such work.

(Im)Mobility & Migration – Room 3.214

PhD Showcase

The Fluid Boundary and Shifting Borders: The Lived Experience and Temporal Intensity of Work among Chinese Expatriates in Transnational Spaces

Muhao Du

(University of Bristol)

The intensity of work across various sectors has been widely documented, with scholars highlighting the increasing demands placed on workers in the global economy. Recent attention has focused on China's internet and technology firms, particularly the extreme 996 schedule—working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week. This high-intensity work culture, reinforced through corporate ideology, performance ranking systems, and peer surveillance, has been widely criticized for its impact on employee well-being. However, existing research has largely examined domestic Chinese firms, with relatively little exploration of how these working patterns evolve when Chinese professionals are assigned abroad by Chinese multinational corporations (MNCs). This study addresses that gap by investigating the work intensity experienced by Chinese expatriates in high-tech telecommunications MNCs' overseas subsidiaries.

Drawing on long term in-depth qualitative interviews with twenty-seven respondents—including Chinese expatriates and host-country employees—across two leading Chinese telecommunications MNCs in multiple host countries, this research explores how the intensity of work is shaped by organisational controls, sectoral expectations, and cultural norms. Findings reveal that while some expatriates experience an intensification of 996 into an even more extreme "007" schedule—working from midnight to midnight, seven days a week. The study interrogates the mechanisms through which high-tech MNCs sustain or adapt their work intensification practices in overseas operations, including close surveillance, performance pressure from headquarters, and expatriates' internalised career expectations.

By situating Chinese expatriates within the broader literature on work intensity, labour control, and global workforce mobility, this study advances understanding of how labour regimes operate transnationally. Drawing on the labour regime framework (Smith et al., 2018; Baglioni et al., 2022), it examines how Chinese high-tech MNCs institutionalise and extend domestic labour control mechanisms abroad, reinforcing sectoral norms of overwork through bureaucratic discipline, performance incentives, and structural dependence on the firm. This analysis reveals that expatriates' labour mobility is constrained not only by contractual obligations but also by corporate governance structures that embed them in firm-specific labour regimes, limiting their capacity to exit or resist extreme work intensification.

This research contributes to debates on work intensification, expatriate labour experiences, and the globalisation of Chinese management practices by providing a comparative perspective that moves beyond the China-specific focus of existing 996 literature. It highlights the role of transnational labour regimes in reproducing high-intensity work cultures across borders, demonstrating how corporate governance, sectoral norms, and expatriates' own career aspirations sustain extreme work practices in diverse regulatory and institutional contexts. By critically engaging with the intersection of technology-driven labour control, expatriate employment conditions, and transnational corporate governance, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how Chinese professionals navigate extreme work intensities in different international settings, challenging assumptions about expatriation as a pathway to improved working conditions.

Identity across Digital Platforms: A Typological Study of Content Creators' Identity Transitions

Yin Liang, Jeremy Aroles, Bernd Brandl

(Newcastle University, Newcastle University Business School)

Digital content creators navigate multiple platforms to sustain their visibility and maintain their economic returns, thereby having to adapt their identity to fit the specificities of the platforms on which they operate. Previous studies on identity regulation have primarily focused on single platforms, neglecting how creators dynamically manage their identities when migrating across structurally distinct platforms.

Drawing on Wittman et al.'s (2025) theory of identity holism, this study explores how creators regulate their identities through narrative identity work during cross-platform transitions.

This article employed a two-stage methodological approach to investigate identity regulation across digital content creative platforms. First, the article adapted Porter's (2004) 5P model to the context of content creative platforms, using data from 143 platforms in the UK, the US and China, in order to build a typology of content creative platforms. Doing so, we identified four types of platforms: (1) large commercial platforms (e.g., YouTube, Xiaohongshu), prioritising branding and commercialisation; (2) leisure-oriented platforms (e.g., Reddit, Tumblr), emphasising community engagement and non-commercial interests; (3) knowledge-sharing platforms (e.g., HelloTalk), foregrounding expertise and professional credibility; and (4) task-driven platforms (e.g., Changba), characterized by structured interactions and gamified engagement. In the second stage, we conducted 40 semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, with content creators active across these four platform categories. Interviews explored participants' experiences of identity maintenance and adaptation during their platform migrations.

We identified three distinct modes of identity transition: continuity (minimal identity change within similar platform types), adaptation (moderate identity adjustments aligning with new platform expectations), and transformation (comprehensive identity reconstruction when transitioning across fundamentally different platforms). The data reveal that creators' initial identities, shaped significantly by their original platform's structural category, influence their migration pathways and determine the extent of required identity adjustments. For example, creators initially based on leisure-oriented platforms experienced substantial identity reconstruction when migrating to commercial platforms, due to pronounced structural and cultural differences. Conversely, creators migrating within similar commercial platforms primarily maintained identity continuity. Additionally, creators actively engaged in narrative identity strategies – credibility, coherence, continuity, and causality – to manage identity transitions and mitigate potential conflicts. These strategies enabled them to rationalize identity shifts, maintain legitimacy among diverse audiences, and sustain professional viability. Furthermore, creators strategically prioritized platforms closely aligned with their evolving career aspirations, selectively managing visibility and engagement, while using secondary platforms for experimentation or supplementary visibility.

This study advances our understanding of identity regulation by connecting structured platform categories with identity transition dynamics, offering insights into identity negotiation costs and strategies. In practice, it provides actionable guidance for creators and platform managers aiming to facilitate smoother transitions and address identity-related tensions, ultimately enhancing creators' sustainability and success within diverse digital ecosystems.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 1 – Room 2.217
PhD Showcase

Pathways between Precarious Work and Health: Developing a New Framework through Longitudinal Research of Young Adults

Cara Leavey

(Newcastle University)

Precarious work can be broadly characterised by inconsistent working patterns and income, risk of arbitrary dismissal, restricted access to benefits such as pensions and sick pay, and limited opportunities for skills development and career progression (Vosko, 2006). In turn, this type of work has implications for financial and housing security, as well as affective experiences such as relationships and identity. Precarious work is an important issue for public health: the strong causal relationship between work more broadly and health is well-evidenced (Bambra, 2011). However, there are critical gaps in the literature on the health impacts of precarious work, particularly for people with pre-existing mental health problems and those in zero-hour contracts (Irvine and Rose, 2022). This paper seeks to develop existing literature by exploring the pathways between precarious work and health, drawing on emerging findings from a mixed methods study of young adults in precarious work.

The paper predominantly draws on findings from a qualitative longitudinal study of young adults, aged between 24 and 35, in the North East of England who are working in precarious jobs. The workers in the sample (n=8) are predominantly in zero-hour contracts, but also includes those engaged in agency, seasonal, temporary, and cash-in-hand work. Participants completed two interviews over a six-month period, working with the interviewer in the initial interview to produce a 'life grid' (Clausen, 1998) to map out their experiences across themes of education and work, life at home, finances and health. In a follow up interview, participants reflected on changes in their work and wider life since the previous interview and considered their future plans for work.

The qualitative data has been analysed using narrative analysis methods, exploring work as part of each participant's wider experiences (Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysis offers an opportunity to explore precarious work through the lens of the 'life course model of health', where it is recognised that disadvantage is clustered throughout the life course and each exposure to disadvantage amplifying the health effect (Elder, 2008). More broadly, it develops existing literature by considering how experiences growing up shape a person's ability to tolerate working conditions, and situates precarious work within broader life experiences, such as financial and housing stability.

Findings suggests that lack of control at work is a key driver of psychological strain for precarious workers, developing Karasek's (1979) demand-control model to consider how work shapes the sense of control across wider life experiences and trajectories, which is of particular importance for young adults. It further adds to a critical gap in the literature by considering the structural conditions shaping local experiences of precarious work. In particular, the study explores the ongoing impact of deindustrialisation in the North East region on young workers. The challenges accessing 'normative' work and the affective experience of service-based roles has heightened feelings of alienation, particularly where parents were occupied in industrial work.

Not Bright Like a Diamond: Employment Relations in Surat's Diamond Cutting and Polishing Sector

Kavya Bharadkar

(University of Bristol, University of Bristol Business School)

Over the last six decades, an Indian city called Surat has emerged as the world's largest centre for diamond cutting and polishing. Over 80,000 workers labour in Surat's diamond polishing workshops and factories, cutting and polishing 14 of every 15 diamonds currently set in jewellery. Although cutting and polishing captures only 8% of value in the diamond supply chain, the sector offers skilled and well-paying jobs to a workforce largely deprived of higher education. Employment in diamond mining has been the subject of academic research and activism, but the Indian node of this global value chain remains invisible to consumers, and under-researched among employment sociologists. Sporadic sociological and development research between the 1980s-2010s focused on social identity and community dynamics, and the industry's vulnerability to external shocks (Kashyap and Tiwari, 1987; Engelshoven, 1999, Hirway, 2013). But structural transformation in the industry, which moved from home-based/micro units to medium and large factories over the last two decades warrants a 'revisit' of the diamond cutting and polishing sector and its shifting employment relations. Two contemporary phenomena are rewriting its rich tapestry of relationships – a protracted slowdown in demand, and the soaring popularity of Lab-Grown Diamond (LGD) jewellery.

I propose to present emerging insights from my doctoral fieldwork in Surat's diamond sector, focusing on three factors shaping its employment relations – place, people, and labour process. I draw upon interviews with workers, trade unionists, employers' representatives, and regulators, conducted in Surat from September to December 2024, and field observations from visits to 4 polishing factories.

Several factors are credited for the clustering of diamond cutting and polishing in Surat (where it migrated from Antwerp and Israel). Most prominent among them are the entrepreneurial culture and transnational mobility of its business communities, social trust, and strong caste networks. The Saurashtra Patels and to a lesser extent, Palanpuri Jains, have a 'stranglehold' over the diamond cutting and polishing industry. A majority of employers and workers in this sector are Patels – though internal migrants from western and northern Indian states have also integrated into this workforce.

Employment and workplace relations in the diamond polishing sector are highly informal. Larger firms which hold 'sights' (buying contracts) with De Beers or export to international brands are mostly

compliant with labour law and Ethical Codes of Conduct, usually exceeding the legal minimum standards. Employment in medium- and small-sized firms is characterised by extreme organisational and time flexibility. Most jobs are piece-rated, and workers report denial of other benefits (paid time off, sick leave, and mandatory contributory social security). While larger firms use regimentation and gamification (skill-ranking systems) as their primary tools of managerial control, smaller firms rely on piece-rated wages, intensification, and employment flexibility.

Gender and Temporary Employment in the Public Education Sector in China

Ying Huang

(University of Warwick)

With the public sector impacted by the expansion and entrenchment of neoliberalism, feminist researchers connect the commodification of care with state governance, highlighting social reproduction as a critical lens to examine the dialogue between individuals and the increasingly precarious global/regional labour market (Glucksmann, 1995; Bakker, 2007; Mezzadri, 2010; Glucksmann & Lyon, 2006). As a major consequence of China's market reform since 1980, the precarious labour market and the worker's response to the market have been mostly studied within the manufacturing and service sectors (Pun, 2004; Shen & Hu, 2020). However, limited research has looked into how public sector employment has been affected by neoliberal development policies and governance and how the lens of social reproduction helps to understand policy contexts and individuals' negotiation with the differentiation of social protection.

In many public schools across China, there has been an increasing number of teaching staff working on temporary contracts; they are working the same workload as government-appointed teachers but covered by fewer salaries and welfare packages. The reasons why they choose to stay are partly attributed to policies for budgeting the public sector while achieving regional development achievements as a result of fiscal decentralisation introduced in the 1980s (Lü & Perry, 1997; Hawkins, 2000). Another reason is attributed to the re-traditionalization of gender roles as a part of the state governance of the labour market. With the policy background, this PhD project studies the gender impact of development policies by focusing on the lived experience of female temporary teaching staff in development zones in China.

The methods for this project are the policy analysis and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and female temporary teachers. By these methods, the study aims to tease out the facilitators and barriers for the social protection of temporary teachers at the institutional level; the study also aims to explore at the individual or community level how female temporary teachers negotiate with and navigate through the precarious working conditions to enable their own social protection.

Precarious Employment and Health Inequities among Minoritized Workers: An Intersectional Political Economy Inquiry Connecting Policies to Lived Experiences of Discount Nail Salon Workers in Toronto

Momtaz Begum

(University of Toronto)

Context: Extensive research has consistently shown a strong association between precarious employment and adverse mental and physical health outcomes, particularly for individuals with intersectional identities. Although statistical data on the nail salon industry, workforce characteristics, and labour practices in Canada is sparse, anecdotal evidence from newspaper articles and labour and community health organizations suggests that many minoritized workers, including immigrants and women of colour, face precarious employment (PE) conditions in Toronto's discount nail salon industry. Research on Toronto's discount nail salon workers (DNSWs) has predominantly focused on occupational health and safety, leaving the broader implications of precarious employment conditions and relations on their health unexplored. This research interrogates the influence of social policies on the employment conditions and relations, and health of minoritized workers, like DNSWs.

Theory: This research in informed by two social theories: critical political economy (CPE) and intersectionality. While Canadian labour market and welfare policies aim to promote equity, emerging evidence suggests that these policies are failing to protect DNSWs, contributing to employment and

income inequities. This study employs a CPE and intersectional lens to critically examine the role of social policies in either mitigating or exacerbating employment precarity for minoritized workers like DNSWs with intersecting identities.

Methods: This multimethod study employs a generic qualitative research approach, integrating policy analysis with the collection of empirical primary data. The policy analysis focuses on the Ontario Employment Standards Act (ESA) as a key entry point, alongside related documents such as press releases. A total of 14 documents/sources are analyzed, including the ESA, its interpretation manual, employment standards guiding policies issued by the Ministry of Labour (MOL), records of MOL enforcement activities, and 10 publications including press releases from the MOL newsroom. Thematic coding is used to examine legislative texts, media reports, MOL's activities, and government statements, identifying patterns, enforcement gaps, and policy weaknesses. The next phase of the study will involve generating qualitative empirical data, exploring the lived experiences of DNSWs and the perspectives of other stakeholders.

Results: Preliminary findings from the policy analysis suggest that employment standards enforcement in Ontario operates primarily through a reactive, complaint-driven model. In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, 10,515 claims related to labour exploitation were investigated, while only 1,025 proactive inspections took place – mostly in high-risk industries such as construction, excluding nail salons. Furthermore, an analysis of the ESA and its interpretation manual reveals ambiguities in policies concerning the classification of independent workers. These ambiguities contribute to worker misclassification, limiting access to essential social protections.

Implications: This research examines a critical issue concerning the employment and well-being of minoritized workers, such as DNSWs. By providing an in-depth analysis of social policies like the ESA and their impact on vulnerable workers, it offers practical insights that can inform future research and policy development. The findings aim to contribute to improving employment conditions and health of minoritized workers, including DNSWs.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 2 – Room 2.218
Special Event

UberTherapy: Is a Mental Health and Safety at Work Possible?

Elizabeth Cotton, Miguel Martinez Lucio, Pauline Whelan

(University of Leicester, University of Manchester)

This special book launch event will be a discussion between Elizabeth Cotton (University of Leicester & Surviving Work), Miguel Martinez Lucio (University of Manchester) and Pauline Whelan (University of Manchester) about mental health, digitalization and wellbeing at work from industrial, digital health and sociological perspectives, drawing on the speakers' research and engagement. We will present our work around digitalization and mental health - including collaboration on The Digital Therapy Project, Elizabeth's new book *UberTherapy: The New Business of Mental Health* (BUP, 2025) and Miguel's work around health and safety labour regulation and inspections. The session will explore the impact of uberization and platformization on our states of mind, of union and regulatory responses, welfare reform and the emergence of digital therapy and workplace wellbeing programmes. The speakers will exchange ideas about future research and socially engaged work on digital tools, co-production, regulatory systems and organizing, emergence of responsible business in the therapy sector and what an AI-Mental Health & Safety would look like.

Our key question will be to ask each other where is the hope for regaining and protecting our mental health and safety at work?

(In)Decent Work & Employment 3 – Room 2.219

Have Women Truly Achieved Work-Life Balance? An Analysis of Female Managers' Career Progress in Japanese Companies and Their Happiness

Kuniko Ishiguro, Makiko Fuwa

(Tokyo International University, Tokyo Metropolitan University)

This study analyses the progress of women's advancement to the managerial level in Japanese companies and whether those advancements have created real equality in both work and private life. Women's participation in the employment market and the promotion of work-life balance are urgent issues for Japan and its economy. The analysis in this study focuses on the stress levels of female managers and employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the status of work-life balance in Japan. The quantitative analysis, which uses the Japanese Panel Study of Employment Dynamics for 2017, finds that although male managers report lower levels of work-family stress than non-managers, this does not apply for female managers. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis finds that female senior and executive managers reported a more equal division of housework with their partners, they do not subscribe to conservative gender roles, and they have more freedom in decision-making at home, which is backed by their earning power. These different observations may suggest that 1) current work-life balance policies assume that women are expected to advance in the workplace while still assuming family responsibilities, resulting in more stress regardless of their status in the workplace; and 2) couples' values diverge from the conservative gendered division of labour when the woman's earning power is equal to or higher than their partner's. These couples, however, are very rare, which suggests it remains difficult for the majority of women in Japan to achieve real work-life balance.

The 'Unholy' Trinity? A Critical Assessment of 'Trafficking', 'Slavery' and 'Hazard' as Metaphors of Discontinuity in Migrant Child Fishing Intervention in Ghana

Bernard Koomson

(University of Warwick)

This paper is a critical reflection on three specific metaphors of discontinuity situated within the discourse on children's economic mobility to fishing communities for work as fishers. Economic mobility among Ghana's under-18 population has been a significant piece of the country's migration trends (Whitehead, Hashim, and Iversen 2007; Kwankye, Anarfi, Tagoe and Castaldo, 2009; Okyere, 2017; Koomson, Manful, Yeboah and Dapaah, 2021). Apart from being a bulwark against economic hardships and contribution to household income, teenage labour has remained vital to the homes and lives of lower middle income since the colonial era (Boakye-Boaten, 2010; Hashim and Thorsen 2011). It usually entails manual and artisanal labour within the indigenous fishing sector, mining, and farming (Agbenya 2009; Okyere, 2017). While activities within these sectors were considered normative, recent developments within Ghana's child protection space have led to the problematisation (within policy) of children's mobility for work in fishing. A significant point in this 'shift of goalpost' (Koomson et al, 2021) was the promulgation of the Palermo protocol and the consequential enactment of Ghana's Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 694). Following the enactment of Ghana's Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 694), child rights NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) in Ghana, working with international partners and state agencies, have employed metaphors of 'trafficking', 'slavery' and 'hazard' to problematize children's economic migration to fishing communities in Ghana. In addressing this problem, child rights NGOs and state actors have rescued children (mostly boys) brought to riverine communities from coastal communities in Ghana under thematic campaigns of 'trafficking', 'slavery' and 'hazardous labour' (Okyere, Agyemang & Saboro, 2021). Nonethless, this new normal in Ghana's child protection space is confronted by the socioeconomic inequities and cultural value systems that have long preserved traditions of children's economic migration to fishing communities (Koomson et al, 2021; Koomson, 2024). This paper will demonstrate how the utilisation of metaphors such as 'trafficking', 'slavery' and 'hazard' in discontinuity discourses remain alien to indigenous fishing communities historical and cultural forms of work socialisation. Through in-depth interviews with fishers and ethnographic observations within two fishing communities considered as hotspots of trafficking, the

paper illuminate's complexities and tensions of the utilisation of these metaphors and the extent to which this informs child trafficking intervention. This paper is by no means an attempt to dismiss the efforts of child rights NGOs working within human trafficking intervention; rather it draws attention to the missing voices of fishers in child trafficking discourse, and the extent to which this produces a narrow perspective about the problem of child trafficking. The paper argues that the utilisation of the treble metaphors of 'trafficking', 'slavery' and 'hazard', as justifiable grounds for the discontinuity of children's involvement in fishing, is alien to fishing communities norms of work socialisation.

Labour Agency, Trade Unions, & Social Movements – Room 3.213

r/Antiwork as a Neoliberal Labor Movement

Ari Stillman

(University of Edinburgh)

Social movements have typically been studied in terms of recognizable forms of collective action while individual acts of resistance that do not directly confront holders of power are seldom afforded sociological significance. Such everyday forms of resistance likewise tend to be dismissed in the online sphere as 'slacktivism', or inefficacious, performative gestures in support of a cause. In the same vein, the US labor movement, historically conceptualized in terms of union power, over the last half century has become structurally atomized and disempowered as exemplified by the rise of the gig economy.

In the context of a single factory, the late Michael Burawoy writes about the process of 'making out on the shop floor' to assert worker interests and how similar mechanisms might iterate in other industrial settings. However, no one has explored how doing so at scale and across sectors could constitute a movement in itself. Drawing from Burawoy's extended case method, which affords a dialogical relationship between collecting empirical data and expanding sociological theories, I investigate the digital infrapolitics of the subreddit r/Antiwork, a 2.8M-member online community oriented against capitalist exploitation. This research entails two years of digital ethnography, interviews with twenty pseudonymous members, and content analysis of archived discussions. I find that the anonymity and accessibility of Reddit enable members to offer social support and share resources about labor issues in the absence of physical 'third spaces'. Typical of Reddit communities, many members of r/Antiwork are American. Therefore, most members lack access to unions. As the anonymity of the platform deters organized collective action mobilizations and accountability characteristic of union involvement, members discuss alternative strategies and tactics to assert their agency against the domination of managers and capitalist institutions. This often entails individual forms of infrapolitics such as 'quiet quitting', or only performing the minimum labor necessary.

Given the size of the subreddit membership, the aggregate effect of r/Antiwork has been cited by financial firms as a threat to labor force participation. A number of managers inside and out of the space have reported proactively changing workplace policies lest the issues discussed in r/Antiwork percolate into their company and teams. Both of these responses suggest that rather than dismissing r/Antiwork as a 'safety valve' for airing out workplace grievances, this paper argues that r/Antiwork ought to be conceptualized as a new form of digitally mediated labor movement. Supported with evidence from my extended case study, I highlight the characteristics of r/Antiwork that are indicate of a social movement: 1) its sizable following that transcends organizational membership and geographic boundaries, 2) individual infrapolitical action frames to empower adherents without access to union representation, and 3) the reach of its impact on corporate culture and policy. My findings have practical implications for how labor organizations recruit and mobilize as well as theoretical implications for how social movements are conceptualized going forward.

The Labour Process and Labour as a Class for Itself: Towards the Political Organisation of Workers

Carl Hughes

(University of Liverpool)

The article contributes to the extension of labour process theory (LPT), by borrowing elements of class composition theory (CCT), in order to critically revise LPT. The article adapts the conception of the technical and political composition of the working class outlined in CCT, to propose a two-stage process of labour process research – the first stage focusing on the technical organisation of work (the working class as a class in itself, as is the case with orthodox LPT), with the second stage focusing on the political organisation of workers (the working class as a class for itself). The article engages with the existing (recent) LPT literature (including many articles within WES), to justify its claim that existing LPT leads to research that is focused on the technical organisation of the workforce but does not adequately move beyond this to its political composition. This means that LPT suitably explains the nature of workplace relations but does not adequately examine how workers can be organised in response to this, in order to improve their conditions. This leads to a situation in which the collective agency of workers is under-theorised, with resistance usually framed in individualised terms and often based around attempts to 'game' or adapt to the system of managerial control.

The article then links this to the literature based around the 50th anniversary of the publication of Labour and Monopoly Capital, particularly around the International Labour Process Conference and the work of key researchers associated with this. It draws on recent literature making explicit comparisons between LPT and contemporary forms of Italian-influenced workerism (operaismo) and some of the shared origins and divergences between the two approaches and recent attempts to bring operaismo back to the study of the labour process – this is of particular relevance as CCT has close links to and emerged out of the operaismo movement. The article then makes the case that through a two-stage process, LPT can be strengthened by broadening its analysis from the technical organisation of workers, to incorporating a wider focus that builds upon this to analyse and guide the political organisation of workers.

The article contributes to LPT, by expanding its scope to examine the political organisation of workers and centring the collective agency of the working class, providing a theoretical framework through which to develop the collective agency of workers. It combines the ability of LPT to explain the technical organisation of the working class as a class in itself, with the ability of more activist focused research (such as CCT) to explain the political organisation of the working class as a class for itself. It therefore contributes to the study of the collective organisation of workers, by grounding this in an understanding of the technical organisation of work, thus providing a more rounded and holistic theorisation of both the way in which control operates within the workplace and the agency of workers to shape and resist it.

PhD Showcase

Data Imaginaries in Union Organising: Tensions & Contradictions

Jim Doran

(University of Glasgow)

For unions to thrive rather than merely survive, they need to continuously review and assess their renewal and revitalisation efforts. In the UK, such efforts have prioritised organising since the 1990s (Heery, 2015) although this has not been universally transformative (Simms et al., 2018; Ibsen & Tapia, 2017). Meanwhile, for much of this period, a 'data revolution' powered by digitalisation, datafication and digital transformation has been unfolding where the dominant discourse is of data as mighty and fundamentally transformational (Beer, 2019; Kitchin, 2014). Despite such hype, however, calls to rethink and reassess the role of data in building stronger unions have been emerging from within unions themselves (Hunt, 2022; TUC, 2019; TUC, 2023).

To contribute to those calls, an ongoing doctoral research project has been asking: how can data be used by unions to review and assess their organising approaches and models in order to bolster and strengthen their effectiveness and outcomes?

To answer that, the research is of a case study union (anonymised as: CSU) which was chosen for being an avowed early proponent and adopter of a strategic approach to data including in its organising. The study is using a focused ethnographic (FE) approach. An initial pilot study shaped the subsequent adoption of shadowing, observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of CSU documentation as appropriate data collection methods. In line with FE approaches, thematic data analysis has run in parallel with data collection.

Two early themes have emerged. First, a tension between data imaginaries of those at a leadership level and those in the field. For the former, data is imagined as omniscient – data reports, it tells, it answers. For the latter, data is imagined as smaller, limited, more practical – data enables the everyday. Second, there is emerging a contradiction between mobility and fixedness. Here, imaginaries of data as fast, mobile, prepped, available run up against realities of fixedness of systems, processes and indeed attitudes.

The study contributes to the understanding of the actual and potential role of data in union organising and in union building more generally. It provides insights into the use of data in unions' own reviews of organising approaches and models, and to how data can be used as a catalyst for integrating organising across a union's internal organisation.

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The Role of Community Unionism in Responding to Migrant Labour Exploitation in Care

Kezia Pugh

(University of Brighton, South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership)

Amongst scholars of migration studies and care labour, it is widely known that migrant care workers have an acute vulnerability to labour exploitation. Recent reports of forced labour and debt bondage among migrant care workers have become increasingly common, particularly since the introduction of the Health and Care Visa in 2021. Many have theorised the intersection between restrictive migration and fragmented care regimes, as well as the gendered and racialised aspects associated with the social organisation of this labour. There is also growing consensus among academics in labour policy and law that labour exploitation can be best understood as a continuum of interrelated practices, with workers' consent to this considered on a spectrum. Research has historically focused on both the nature and extent of labour exploitation among migrant care workers, as well as the systemic causal factors behind these practices. Far less time and study has been devoted to the expansive landscape of community-led reports, responses, and resistance to migrant labour exploitation in care. This paper aims to explore the significance of community unionism within this landscape and the implications it has for social policy and society. It does so through triangulation of existing datasets situated within civil society groups and organisations, alongside emerging findings from empirical qualitative interviews with campaigners, policy researchers, and community and trade union organisers. The paper argues that the third sector plays a pivotal role in knowledge production, advice and service provision, and mobilisation of migrant care workers to resist practices of labour exploitation. The non-traditional sites of labour provided by migrant care workers promotes more creative methodologies of engagement and participation, which fosters a dynamic form of community unionism and collaboration.

Technology & Work 1 – Room 3.205
PhD Showcase

Platform Labour and the Indian State: A New Interface?

Debopriya Shome

(University of Bristol)

Shifts in technology, organisation, and markets have catalyzed the global rise of platforms (Srnicek, 2017). Particularly, within this ascendant moment, labour platforms are key actors transforming the dynamic of work and employment. These platforms, often described as "shadow employers," manage large fleets of workers without granting formal employment contracts (Friedman, 2014). Recent scholarship on platform work has effectively taken the workplace as the entry point to demonstrate the expansion of disaggregated forms of employment relations in the context of advanced capitalism. Building upon these lines of inquiry, scholars from the Global South have argued about the relevance of "informality" and "informalisation" as key concepts and processes that are reproducing and reinforcing the further expansion of platform work (Surie and Huws, 2023).

A key emphasis on the part of Global South scholars has been to disaggregate global discussions by re-emphasising the particularities of local realities. In this regard, the variegations within the national scale and particularly the question of the state is fundamental. However, academic discussions on the relationship between the state and platform work have remained muffled. In India, conservative estimates suggest there are 7.7 million platform workers (AYOG, 2022). This expansion is happening at a background where the Indian State is intent on fashioning itself as a technologically modern enterprise instituting policies such as Digital India, within which labour platforms play a major role (Thomas, 2024).

Against this backdrop, the present study asks two research questions:

1. How does the state influence work practices in local platform economies?
2. How do platform workers interact with the state?

By interrogating these two questions this paper intends to present empirical observations about the relations that bind the state and platform workers while also making arguments about the particularities of platform expansion in the Indian context. This paper follows a qualitative approach by employing semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. This includes 50 interviews done in two important metropolises --- Kolkata and Bangalore --- with workers from Ola (ride-hailing) and Zomato (food delivery), as well as other stakeholders such as union leaders, platform managers, and government officials.

Preliminary analysis reveals how platform workers negotiate with institutional practices and state-imposed regulations. The condition of informality, which is a mediating principle for platform work in India, is reinforced through informal transactions with state actors, for instance with the police force. Although the state is often unambiguous in its collusion with platform companies, the relationship between the state and platform workers is not simply underscored by antagonism or contradictions. Relative to the associational power of workers the state can be seen taking a more reconciliatory approach in its dealings with labour. Secondly, action emanating from the state and resistance from labour are dispersed in multiple sites and dynamically intertwined. From a labour standpoint, workers can act individually, in informal solidarity, or in non-workplace settings to engage in negotiation. I argue this necessitates an integrative approach, where the state-labour interface is relational and understood as a site of dynamic interaction between two actors.

The Sociomateriality of Emotions, Cognition and AI: Practical Lessons from India

Vaishalini Singh Jamwal, A Venkataraman

(Indian Institute of Management Kashipur)

Humans possess proactive, self-organising, self-reflective, and self-regulating attributes (Bandura, 1986). Humans go beyond the role of mere observers of their actions, which shape their perception of

the surrounding environment. These embodied and intentional perceptions are socially constructed and influenced by the socio-cultural context in which humans are immersed. Through this context, they assign meaning to both material artefacts and human interactions, engaging in reflexive introspection of their daily experiences. Taking cognizance of this knowledge, how can we comprehend the significantly complex AI production process from a socio-technical lens.

Premise: The central premise of this paper is to understand the subjective underlying space between the interaction of emotion and cognition and the production process of AI by human actors drawing upon a critical realist framework.

Gap: While many people now think that technology will soon outsmart humans and replace them in the job because of the current hyperbole around AI and similar technologies, others view this as just another overhyped claim.The burgeoning field of Human-AI interaction, which is extensively studied in STS, philosophy, and Information Systems journals, demands careful consideration of its multifaceted impact on organisations and individuals.The fundamental gap that emerges in the literature is that few studies have empirically examined the underlying cognitive mechanisms and human emotions, temporal meanings of the employees responsible for the creation and execution of AI from a multidimensional sociological perspective. By neglecting the dialectical interplay between human agency, technological affordance, and the underlying power structures and the iterative meanings and interpretations of human actors within and from the AI development process within organizations, these studies fail to adequately capture how these forces shape the evolution and unintended consequences of AI development and the impact it has on individuals who build these modules.

Research Questions: Our research questions are based on unpacking how human cognition and emotions are threaded through the morphology of AI development.

- RQ1 : Is the relationship between Emotions and Cognition dyadic or scalar?
- RQ2: How does this relationship impact the AI development process?
- RQ3: Do Emotions,Cognition and AI mutually exhibit the properties of sociomateriality?

Mode of Inquiry :The focus of the interpretive qualitative study is to understand the development process of AI from the lens of employees who execute the process.We focus on the dimensions and experiences emerging from respondents' explanation of the said process.We employ the Critical Realist framework to understand the microdynamics of structure and agency through our data.This study is at the stage of data collection and so far employs data from 13 respondents who participate in the development process of Artificial Intelligence in the Indian IT sector.For the current study,purposive and snowball sampling is used to recruit respondents who work on the algorithmic development of AI. We are employing a constant comparison method of evaluating transcripts and generating participant centric codes and researcher determined themes using Gioia Methodology. We are currently in the process of analysis and data collection simultaneously and expect to deliver substantial findings of our 3 research questions.

Well-being at Workplace in the Processes of Digital Transformation: A Multilevel Perspective on Collective Sense-making and Contextual Influences

Yingqian Wang

(University of Manchester)

Digital transformation (DT) has garnered substantial attention from both scholars and practitioners, leading to extensive research on its definitions, impacts, and success factors. However, DT is not a one-size-fits-all solution, as each organisation conceptualise, design and implements it in a unique manner. There remains a lack of in-depth analysis on how enterprises concretise abstract DT concepts, and the role of contextual factors in this process. Meanwhile, employee well-being (WB) in China faces significant yet overlooked challenges. Prevailing societal phenomena such as "lying flat" and "slacking off," alongside widespread burnout, underscore the urgent need for research into workplace WB. Despite their profound implications for employee behaviours and experiences, these issues remain understudied, particularly within China's collectivist socio-cultural context. Furthermore, DT extends beyond technological applications, reshaping work behaviours, organisational structures, cultures, and collaboration models, thereby significantly influencing employees' experiences and WB. However, the intersection of WB and DT remains an underexplored area of research. Lastly, existing models of

contextual factors predominantly originate from Western academic research, failing to adequately account for China's unique social, cultural, and economic contexts.

This research addresses these gaps through an in-depth case study of a large state-owned enterprise in China. Grounded in sense-making theory and job demand-resource (JD-R) theory, it explores how multilevel collective sense-making translates abstract DT concepts into practical applications, analyses how employees perceive these transformations and their influence on WB, and examines the role of contextual factors in both the conceptualisation of DT and the processes influencing subjective well-being.

By doing so, this study aims to: (1) address existing research gaps and extend and modify contextual models to better reflect the Chinese context; (2) offer new perspectives and practical guidance for enhancing workplace WB during organisational change processes; (3) raise managerial awareness of the importance of employee well-being and the protection of labour rights; and (4) provide evidence-based insights for labour and human rights policymakers.

Technology & Work 2 – Room 3.209

From Computerisation to the Present: Discourses on Remote Work between Continuity and Disruption

Caroline Roth-Ebner, Larissa Herrnhofer

(University of Klagenfurt)

In the 1980s and 1990s, computerisation transformed work, with digitalisation reshaping working environments and practices. Media and communication studies refer to the interrelation between technological change and transformations in work environments as the mediatisation of work (Roth-Ebner 2022). The transformation of the office is a central focus of research on this topic, as space is considered a key factor in analysing social and cultural transformations (Günzel 2014; Will-Zocholl & Roth-Ebner 2021).

According to Henri Lefebvre (1991), space is not merely a container but a construction shaped by social action. Consequently, new practices and experiences emerging from technological innovations lead to new spatial arrangements and relationships (Will-Zocholl & Roth-Ebner 2021). However, this transformation is not a linear process. Traditional settings and practices persist, and both organisations and workers often resist adopting innovations.

In our funded research project (Austrian Science Fund), we are particularly interested in how this topic is discussed in the press. We view media discourses as both an expression and a constitutive factor of the social (Keller 2011: 52; Fast & Jansson 2019: 53, 64). They drive societal developments by shaping power relations, influencing communicative processes, and generating calls for action.

This study examines media discourses on the mediatisation of the office using press articles from a high-quality newspaper and two magazines (n = 390, all in the German language) that discuss the transformation of the workplace in the context of technological change. It explores how the office has evolved since the computerisation of the 1980s to the present, considering technological, social, economic, and political factors. The study applies Reiner Keller's (2012) sociology of knowledge approach to discourse, viewing discourses as both reflecting and shaping reality while focusing on hegemonic narratives, subject positions and suggested practices. The project will contribute to the theory of mediatisation twofold: First, concerning the historical transformation of the office along with the establishment of digital media. Second, concerning the occurrence of this topic in media discourses – which shows another aspect of mediatised work. The study is now in its final phase, with the data already analysed and currently being further refined.

This paper focuses on the issue of remote work (telework, home office, etc.) and examines how discourses have addressed it over the past decades. These discourses reveal both continuities and disruptions in the world of work. Early discussions often painted an optimistic picture of what was then called telework, emphasising newfound freedom and increased productivity due to the detachment from spatial limitations. However, with the rise of the internet, tensions between autonomy and control, the blurring of work and private life, and the challenges of availability management became more prominent.

The COVID-19 pandemic further amplified the significance of remote work (now predominantly referred to as home office or hybrid work), transforming it from an option into a necessity and making it a central topic in media coverage. This has intensified the discourse in both directions—both in favour of and against remote work, reflecting its diverse and sometimes conflicting dynamics.

Algorithmic Management under the Fairwork Lens: Germany's Location-based Platform Economy

Didem Özkiziltan Wagenführer, Patrick Feuerstein, Tobias Kuttler, Zeynep Karlidag, Debarun Dutta, Martin Krzywdzinski, Mark Graham

(Berlin Social Science Center)

The transformative power of location-based platform companies (i.e. ride-hailing, delivery, domestic/care work services) fuelled by (partially AI-driven) algorithmic management (AM) practices, digital infrastructure, a flexible workforce, and the increasing consumer desire for on-demand convenience, is challenging traditional labour relations globally. Germany is no exception, as the number of location-based platform companies and people working for them has increased in recent years. This situation has attracted considerable scholarly attention, resulting in a growing body of research shedding light on precarious work and working arrangements, the significant presence of migrant workers in the platform economy, and the serious challenges the workers face in raising their voices against platform companies. While these topics provide essential insights into the nature of work and work relations in Germany's location-based platform economy, issues related to the forms and complexities of AM systems used by location-based platform companies, their similarities and discrepancies among platforms operating within and across sectors, and their impacts on workers and the world of work remain significantly under-researched. This research addresses these gaps by posing the central question: "How can we understand and explain the forms and uses of AM across Germany's location-based platforms, and what are their sociopolitical implications?" To answer these questions, the study draws on desk research and insights from 65 in-depth, face-to-face qualitative worker interviews, along with additional interviews with the management of selected platforms conducted as part of Fairwork Germany's 2025 annual report.

The research's key findings contribute to the development of a typology of forms of algorithmic management on location-based platforms in Germany. We show that the degree and nature of algorithmic control are shaped not only by the sector in which the platforms operate but also by the contractual arrangements through which labour is organised. Forms of algorithmic management differ depending on whether the platforms rely on a freelance workforce, on subcontracting to independent firms, or on regular employment contracts, with the subcontracting platforms relying particularly strongly on algorithmic control of work and workers with minimal human oversight.

These findings have important socio-political implications. First, decision-makers must be vigilant when implementing the EU Platform Work Directive's presumption of employment, as an approach that favours subcontractors may incentivise platforms to shift toward subcontracting. This could lead to an intensification of algorithmic control over workers, further eroding their bargaining power and weakening labour protections. Additionally, the Directive's requirements for transparency, fairness, human oversight, safety, and accountability in AM procedures within platform work should be transposed into national legislation in a manner that ensures the meaningful inclusion of workers and their representatives in the design and implementation of these systems. Without such an approach, these systems will remain opaque, further reinforcing platform companies' power over workers and limiting workers' ability to negotiate better working conditions.

Digital Technologies of Transparency as a Power Resource for Employees in Workplace Conflicts: Case Study Evidence from German Hospitals

Isabell Mader, Ingo Singe

(University of Osnabrueck)

"Datafication" is becoming increasingly widespread in the world of work. In labour research, the collection, storage and analysis of data about the labour process made possible by digital technologies is predominantly viewed either as a means of process rationalization or as a management control tool. In our fieldwork in German hospitals, however, we encountered something different: care workers use

digital transparency as a resource to protect their interests. Based on collective agreements, specific mandatory patient/worker ratios for different hospital wards and shifts are defined. These ratios are being monitored and made accessible to workers by technical systems. Whenever collectively agreed staffing levels are not being met, work is deemed excessively burdensome and a mandatory compensation mechanism sets in. Workers who have accumulated a certain number of straining shifts can choose between extra payment or payed time off as compensation. The union's rationale is to make understaffing costly for hospitals and thus to stimulate them to increase employment.

In our presentation we are going to focus on two key questions: First, what social and technological conditions made this innovative use of digital transparency possible? Second, to what extent does it have the intended effects and what are its limitations?

In order to answer these questions, we draw on qualitative workplace case studies in two German state-owned hospitals. We conducted interviews with representatives of the works councils, activists of the hospital movement, with employees from human resources and IT and finally with several nursing staff. Additional data was gathered in an in-depth study of the Berlin hospital workers strike of 2021. Theoretically, we look at digital transparency through the lens of a "power resources approach", building on work from Beverly Silver, E.O. Wright and Klaus Dörre. This approach enables us to understand digital transparency in the context of workplace power relations.

We will focus on three main findings: firstly, using digital transparency as a resource for asserting workers' interests was possible only in a very particular social constellation: a transformative organizing campaign contributed to the expansion of hospital workers' power resources in several dimensions. Secondly, through pro-actively creating technical systems for the automatic overseeing and sanctioning of the agreed upon measures for reducing overwork, the workers were able to inscribe their collective power into technology. Technology supplements and strengthens the legal institutionalisation of collective power, thereby contributing to its stability over time. Finally, our cases also show major limitations of the inscription of power into technology. Without constant interventions by the hospital workers or the works councils, employers will find ways of circumventing or ignoring the agreed upon rules.

Our research shows that digital transparency can, under certain conditions, not only be used as a tool for management control, but also as a resource for promoting workers' interests. It thereby highlights, once more, the contested nature of the course of the digital transformation of the working world.

PAPER SESSION 3
16:30-18:00

WES Special Event – Room 2.220

Navigating the Ethics of Authoring and Publishing

Marek Korczynski, Jeremy Aroles

(Work, Employment and Society co-Editor-in-Chief and Editor, University of Nottingham, University of York)

In this session, we will use the BSA guidelines on authorship as a basis upon which to reflect on questions linked to the ethics of publishing and authoring. We will discuss the difference between providing support and actively contributing to the writing/research process. Our discussion will consider both PhD showcase as well as regular submissions. We intend this session to be interactive.

Difference, Diversity & Social Justice 1 – Room 3.210

Fertility, Migration and Work: A Douglasian Analysis of Highly Skilled Female Migrants' Accounts of Fertility and Maternity

Patrizia Kokot-Blamey, Sreenita Mukherjee, Tessa Wright

(Queen Mary, University of London)

This paper explores how highly qualified professional women from India make sense of becoming or being a mother within a new capitalist and cultural context following migration to the UK. Drawing on the works of British anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966), we examine the ways in which, for the highly-skilled migrant women we interviewed, having a child, in modern Britain is framed not as a natural part of the human life cycle for many, but instead as a potential disruption to ones' present and future human capital accumulation. The findings show how children are simultaneously produced as risky and at risk: it is a risk to the mother's career and her ability to remain in the public sphere; and it is a risk to the firm and its business of production. To mitigate this riskiness, both employer and employee adopt a range of rituals: the mother delays or foregoes pregnancy, the mother and father work together to contain the child and its neediness in the private sphere, and employer and employee adopt norms, figures of speech and ways of doing to maintain a gender neutral façade at work. Yet, slip ups occur with both employer and employee at times failing to keep up the pretence, causing frictions and distress. The findings share rare insights into the fertility decisions of a group of highly-skilled professional women, who face multiple dilemmas arising from their migration status which entails requalification and gendered family expectations from their home countries. Through adopting a Douglasian lens, we show examples of the rituals within and outside of work to keep in check the danger and chaos that children are thought to bring to work. Theoretically, the article demonstrates the capacity of the anthropological work by Douglas to help elucidate the experiences of working women in the UK today and the extent to which ideologies of motherhood have shifted and the variegated and gendered effects of these shifts on highly skilled migrants.

'Betwixt and between': Permanent Liminality and Women's Experiences in Banking following the Lifting of the Irish Marriage Bar

Kate O'Keeffe, Aisling Tuite, Zeta Dooly

(South East Technological University)

The Irish marriage bar legally mandated women to resign from certain occupations upon marriage (Foley, 2020). Although abolished in 1973 during a transformative era of legislative, economic, and social change (Jobling, 2023), significant structural and cultural barriers continued to influence women's experiences in the workplace. Despite this transformative era, Inglis (2008, p. 7) frames the period as 'insular, Catholic [and] rural.' Harford and Redmond (2012, p. 192) discuss the role of work as it related to women in this period: it was a source of 'amusement… not professionalism… [they were] marking time until… their real role: motherhood.'

This research critically examines how women were integrated into banking organisations after the removal of the marriage bar, emphasising their lived experiences navigating professional and personal identities within traditionally male-dominated environments. Turner's (1969, p. 47) liminality comprises 'detachment of individual or group… from… fixed point… in social structure.' The communitas (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003) which should emerge in the ambiguity of this liminal period does not materialise. Rather, those working within banking organisations (both women and men) experienced an ongoing sense of being suspended between legal equality and entrenched organisational practices that continued to reproduce gender inequalities. Szakolczai (2016, p. 220) offer a definition of 'permanent liminality': within the middle temporary levelling of social distinctions, progress becomes 'frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame'. Despite legislative advances aimed at gender equality, workplace norms remained anchored in male-oriented ideals, perpetuating implicit biases and structural barriers to women's career progression, thus perpetuating this permanent liminality.

The research employs a qualitative methodology using the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2001), which emphasizes participants' life narratives to reveal their subjective experiences within persistent structural inequalities. By applying the BNIM technique of "pushing for PINs" (Moran, Green, and Warwick, 2022), the study captures detailed accounts of pivotal personal and professional moments, minimally influenced by researcher interventions. The dataset comprises twenty-one comprehensive interviews—seventeen women and four men—offering diverse perspectives on workplace gender dynamics. Analysis is conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2019) Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), supported by NVivo software for rigorous coding and systematic data organisation.

Findings illuminate the complexity of women's experiences as they navigated financial, behavioural, and cultural constraints within banking institutions. While formal gender equality measures existed, organisational cultures proved resistant, maintaining women in a state of enduring liminality. The persistence of implicit expectations reinforced women's ambiguous professional identities and career trajectories, particularly as they balanced professional aspirations with familial responsibilities.

The study advances understanding of gendered labour market participation by highlighting how permanent liminality shapes women's integration and experiences within organisational structures. It underscores the imperative for comprehensive legislative and cultural transformations to fully dismantle systemic inequalities and resolve women's prolonged liminal states within contemporary organisations.

Work-Family Balance, Meaning in Life, and Parental Stress Among Parents of Children with and Without Disabilities Aged 0-12

Limor Gadot, Maayan Fine, Einav Segev

(Sapir Academic College)

Introduction: In Israel, the number of children with disabilities is estimated at approximately 269,000. Consequently, a significant number of parents find themselves categorized as parents of children with disabilities. Work and family play central roles in a person's life, and both can significantly impact one's sense of life's meaning. It's plausible that parents of children with disabilities experience a distinct balance between work and family demands, leading to variations in their perception of life's meaning and parental stress.

Objective: Our objective is to analyze disparities in employment data between parents of children with disabilities and those without disabilities. Additionally, we aimed to examine the relationships between the variables of work-family balance, meaning in life, and parental stress.

Participants: We surveyed 350 parents, including 168 parents of children with disabilities aged 0-12 and a control group consisting of 182 parents of children without disabilities in the same age group. All of them where Hebrew native languish speakers.

Procedure: We conducted an initial cross-sectional study during 2022-2023. Our sampling method involved snowball/convenience sampling, with research participants responding to an online questionnaire shared on social networks.

Findings: Our findings reveal noteworthy distinctions between parents of children with disabilities and those without. Parents of children with disabilities tend to work fewer hours, earned lower incomes, and had lower educational attainment compared to parents of children without disabilities.

In addition, there was a discernible difference in the family-work balance for parents of children with disabilities (M= 2.44, SD= 1.04) in comparison to parents of children without disabilities (M= 2.15, SD=0.81). Parents of children with disabilities experience a greater sense of balance between family and work responsibilities than their counterparts.

Furthermore, we observed a significant contrast in the perception of life's meaning for parents of children with disabilities (M= 4.79, SD= 1.11) as opposed to parents of children without disabilities (M= 4.91, SD=0.92). Parents of children with disabilities reported a lower sense of life's meaning compared to parents of children without disabilities.

Discussion: Work and family are fundamental aspects of daily life, and their interactions can yield both positive and negative outcomes. The transitions between the realms of work and family can be particularly challenging. Our study's findings highlight an employment gap between parents of children with disabilities and those with children aged 0-12 without disabilities. Addressing these disparities will necessitate legislative measures promoting employment rights and accommodations for this specific population. Moreover, as social workers who advocate for rights and justice, a macro level intervention are necessary so the population of parents of children with disabilities won't be adversely affected in the labor market.

Difference, Diversity & Social Justice 2 – Room 3.211

Age-inclusive Learning: The Mediating and Moderating Roles of Company Prioritised Goals across Industries

Zeewan Lee, Xinyi Chen, Hui Foh Foong

(National University of Singapore)

As populations around the world age, workplaces increasingly rely on older employees who often lack adequate training opportunities. This gap threatens both organisational competitiveness and social justice by limiting older employees' ability to maintain and enhance their skills. Despite government initiatives encouraging lifelong learning, many organisations overlook the developmental needs of older staff, worsening skills gaps and eroding workplace inclusion. Indeed, older employees in physically demanding or technologically advanced industries often face barriers to retraining, prompting calls for more evidence on how organisational and sectoral factors influence their training opportunities. This study examined how industry type and company-prioritised goals shaped training provision for older employees. Grounded in Institutional Theory, Goal-Setting Theory, and Contingency Theory, it proposed that different industries (i. agriculture, industrial and manufacturing; ii. trade and commerce; iii. hospitality and food services; iv. information, finance, and real estate; v. professional, scientific, and administrative services; and vi. public administration, education, and health) vary in their tendency to invest in older-employee development. It further suggested that revenue-driven and non-revenue-driven prioritised goals (profit maximisation; market share; diversity and equality; and social/environmental concerns) may either mediate or moderate these industry effects.

An online survey yielded 457 responses from Singaporean hiring managers, C-Suite executives, and others across 21 industries, which were later aggregated into six major industries for hypothesis testing. Data were collected online through a partnership with key professional bodies, yielding a 13.1% response rate. Multiple linear regression to assess which industries were associated with training provision. The Karlson-Holm-Breen (KHB) approach tested whether companies' prioritised goals mediated this relationship, while moderation analysis examined whether prioritised goals influenced the industry-training relationship.

The findings revealed that hospitality and food services, as well as information, finance, and real estate, consistently provided more training for older staff than agriculture, industrial, and manufacturing (reference group). Mediation analysis indicated that all prioritised goals did not account for these differences. However, moderation tests showed that specific goals could strengthen or weaken the industry–training link. For example, hospitality and food services firms that prioritised revenue growth were especially likely to invest in older-worker training, whereas socially oriented aims reinforced training efforts in information, finance, and real estate. Additionally, older companies tended to adopt more comprehensive training strategies, suggesting that organisational age contributed to established HR infrastructures and stakeholder commitments.

This study highlights that industry alone does not determine training investment; rather, company-prioritised goals moderate this relationship. Revenue-driven goals encourage training when aligned with financial gains but may deter it when viewed as a cost. In contrast, non-revenue goals, such as diversity and social responsibility, promote stronger training commitments, emphasising the need for industry-specific workforce strategies. Organisations should assess how their strategic priorities influence workforce development and adopt long-term, inclusive training policies. Businesses can use these insights to design targeted learning initiatives, ensuring older employees receive ongoing development. Policymakers should implement sector-specific incentives to support training provision. Ultimately, fostering an age-diverse, adaptable workforce enhances organisational resilience, employee retention, and competitiveness in an ageing labour market.

The Silence around 'Race' in the Discourse of Equality and Inclusion in the Labour Market

Stefania Marino, Heather Connolly, Miguel Martinez-Lucio, Holly Smith

(University of Manchester, Grenoble École de Management)

While debates on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) have become increasingly prominent in the rhetoric of institutional agencies and organisations across countries in the Global North, the extent to which they challenge the structural inequalities embedded in organisations and in the wider labour market remains limited. In contemporary DE&I frameworks, the emphasis often remains on economic value rather than equity and social justice, contributing to the marginalisation of certain axes of inequality – particularly race.

Although cross-country and cross-sectoral differences exist in how race is framed and addressed, inequalities based on race consistently remain a marginalised domain of policy and organisational action. This paper examines the persistent "silences" around race within equality discourses by looking at how these silences are manifested, legitimised and reproduced in different national and organisational contexts. The aim is to underline how equality policies and practices are embedded in specific historical, institutional and social traditions, including the presence of activism and social movements. These national configurations shape how equality is framed and how race, in particular, is marginalised, against the supposedly "homogenising" effect of international drives.

This paper draws on data collected from an ESRC-funded project (2021-2025), which compares equality policies and practices in the UK with those in Europe – France, the Netherlands, and Spain – countries that have made an explicit and concerted effort to engage with a more progressive and inclusive approach to equality. The data consists of 154 qualitative interviews (38 in Spain, 53 in the UK, 36 in France, 30 in the Netherlands, and six at the EU level) with key actors (state agencies; research departments and bodies; expert academics; employer and management organisations; consultancy firms; HRM practitioners; trade unions; labour inspectorates; and others).

The broader project focuses both on the rhetoric and policy development of equality and regulation at work and within a context of political uncertainty, including challenges posed by Brexit, the rise in right-

wing and xenophobic populist discourse, and external disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and shifting political contexts.

Incentivised Altruism: Reframing Continuities of Surrogacy Compensations in India's Moral Economy

Sagnik Bhattacharya, Anindita Chakrabarti

(Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur)

This study investigates how India's Surrogacy (Regulation) Act 2021 reframes surrogacy as 'altruistic labour', creating tensions between the sacredness of motherhood and the moral economies of intimate work. Drawing on ethnographic interviews with four surrogates and other stakeholders in West Bengal, this research explores the transformation of surrogacy relationships in the absence of legal monetary incentives and the valuation of intimate labour within such relationships. In India, motherhood's sacralisation in socio-religious norms positions it as central to womanhood and familial honour. The Act criminalises commercial surrogacy, permitting only uncompensated 'altruistic' arrangements. This legal intervention attempts to preserve the sanctity of childbirth and motherhood by removing direct monetary compensation, reflecting broader societal anxieties about commodifying the sacred.

The research findings indicate that despite the Act's intentions, altruistic surrogacy remains transactional. Compensations manifested in two forms: first, an abstract socio-cultural form of promises and obligations, and second, a material economic form of indirect cash or kind payment. In the first form of compensation, women were asked to fulfil their familial obligation or repay past favours by being surrogate mothers. In exchange, they were promised status security within the family or future favours. The Act's definition of altruism and age restrictions increase the likelihood of new daughters-in-law being pressured into surrogacy to uphold family honour and secure their status within familial hierarchies. The second form of compensation involved using alternate economic circuits to pay surrogate mothers indirectly. These indirect payments included paying off loans from microfinance banks and covering monthly expenditures, even if not directly related to the surrogate's pregnancy, for about fifteen months, extending beyond the pregnancy period. In both forms of compensation, surrogate mothers had significantly less bargaining power than during the commercial surrogacy era. Familial obligations and past favours foster a sense of indebtedness, discouraging surrogates from demanding additional compensation, while legal restrictions on financial payments eliminate room for negotiation.

The study reveals how legal-moral frameworks reconfigure intimate labour, substituting formal wage relations with informal, gendered economies of obligation. It contributes to understanding how societies navigate the tension between sacred values and economic necessities in intimate labour markets. The study employs a case study approach, analysing in-depth interviews conducted between 2023 and 2024 with four surrogates and the intended parents and their family members in West Bengal, India. This qualitative approach allows for a rich exploration of the lived experiences and decision-making processes of surrogates navigating the new legal landscape. This study's examination of the interaction between altruistic ideals and economic realities in surrogacy arrangements expands broader sociological debates on the commodification of intimacy and the regulation of reproductive labour. Additionally, it explores the unintended consequences of well-intentioned legal reforms in the context of work and employment.

(Dis)Continuities in Professions, Occupations & Skills – Room 3.212
PhD Showcase

'Sector Support Organisations' in UK Cultural Sector: Discontinuity and Destabilisation in Artistic and Administrative Work

Abigail Webster

(Northumbria University)

Over the past ten years, so-called 'sector support organisations' have gained increasing prominence within the cultural sector across the UK and have been successful in obtaining grants from public bodies such as Creative Scotland and Arts Council England. Often, these organisations position themselves as embedded spokespersons for a specific artform, constructing an artificial unity between agents that play various roles in cultural production and mediation and masking the uneven infrastructural endowment of power vested in the various roles subsumed under the sectoral 'we.' Their programmes, predicated upon provisioning 'advocacy,' 'networking opportunity,' 'professional development' and 'research,' are tangential to actual cultural production, which is to say that, through the cultural funding system, bureaucratic functions have strategically been repositioned as cultural activities. Contrary to the stated aims of these organisations, this phenomenon promotes discontinuities in the landscape of cultural work in two salient respects, which this paper will explore.

The first pertains specifically to artists and freelance cultural producers whom these organisations are intended to aid, and whose work is already marked, to a significant degree, by individuation and fragmentation. By capturing resources from the state that could otherwise have been used to pay for cultural production, sector-support organisations diminish the likelihood that freelancers will actually be offered work. The content of their programmes, moreover, specifically compounds this displacement. Under the auspices of 'professional development' and 'networking,' they ensure the capacities of the sector workforce, prospective and extant, are maintained, without actually providing freelancers with a means of subsistence. In this endeavour, they also invert the flow of resources, demanding that cultural workers 'self-invest' with respect to both time and money.

The second relates to the workers employed by sector support organisations, who, it must be noted, are generally earnest in their dedication to supporting their sectoral colleagues. The practice of funding organisations of this type may have undergone an expansion, though it is not new—it was endorsed by the Arts Council of Great Britain around fifty years ago—and was and is often leveraged for a specific purpose: cutting the state's internal costs through outsourcing, which is coterminous with the destabilisation of administrative labour. Though sector support organisations in the present may have 'fair work' policies—generally a prerequisite for multi-year organisational funding—the salaries and job security they offer is comparatively lower than in the public sector employment, where there is a greater assurance of permanence untethered to time-limited grants and access to union representation with high membership density. This circumstance, which remains underexplored in academic research compared to the precarity of freelance careers in the arts, testifies to the systematic dismantling of worker' protections within the ongoing process of neoliberalisation.

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Time Changes: Renegotiating Participation in Work in the Screen Industries

Benjamin Thomas

(University of Southampton)

Attaining and sustaining a career in the screen industries is hard. Training that is difficult to navigate (Allen et al., 2013; Harvey, 2019), informal hiring practices (Carey, Brien and Gable, 2021), precarious employment, and long, intense, and inflexible hours (Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna, 2015), all come together to limit access and progression for many people. Moreover, as these conditions interact with people's changing priorities and needs over the life course, the ability to sustain work is often not possible, reflected in the high rates of worker attrition (Carey et al., 2020; Steele, 2022).

This conference paper will explore findings from a subset of participants from my PhD which looked at how older workers (over 35) attempted to sustain work in the digital and creative industries. Here, I will discuss how 20 workers in the screen industries (film & TV and video games) – all struggling to sustain their careers due to care responsibilities, burn out, and mental and physical health issues – attempted to renegotiate their time at work using a variety of strategies.

Semi-structured online interviews were conducted in 2020-21. Participants – interviewed at a time of reflection away from their hectic work lives thanks to the Covid lockdowns – were asked about their background, upbringing and education, their experiences of entering work, and the challenges they faced in sustaining careers. A critical realist analytical approach (Edwards, O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014) incorporated multiple theoretical lenses, including a Bourdieusian exploration of inequalities (Bourdieu,

1990) and a life course approach that explores how participation in multiple social fields changes over the life course, shaping success in each field (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016).

The research revealed the choices people had to make at different points in their careers in order to strike the right balance between work and other aspects of their lives, so that they could continue in creative employment and not be 'filtered out'. These choices included reducing hours, eliminating working away, stepping back to protect health, and switching between different creative industries. In careers that all too often exemplify dis-continuity in employment and struggle, findings reveal how certain workers can continue their careers by choosing strategies that keep them 'in the game'. However, these choices often involved compromise and dissatisfaction, where workers were 'filtered sideways' or 'filtered down' as their social, cultural and symbolic capitals were degraded – especially for (older) women and those with caring responsibilities.

Navigating Turbulence: An Examination of Identification Processing and Identity Reassessment for Airline Professionals Facing Industry Disruptions

Kristal Jericho, Áine Ní Léime, Maeve O'Sullivan

(University of Galway)

As prominent identity theorists Mats Alvesson and Hugh Wilmott acknowledged in 2002, identity issues surrounding the workplace are evolving as professions, organisations and job roles change. Some changes include the increase of women in male-dominated job roles and industries, and the changing significance of professions. Occupational identity is a core part of who we are and as this identity develops, the values and norms of our occupation take root, shaping our thoughts, attitudes, and actions to reflect our role and align with our work life (Cruess and Cruess 2018). Ultimately, as people evolve through distinct life stages, their identities continue to be deeply shaped by the roles they play, while also linking into core aspects of their wellbeing. But what happens when one's work identity is threatened by external circumstances, for example economic downturns, technological advancements and regulatory changes?

Using the context of the commercial aviation pilot profession, this PhD presentation aims to explore these issues from a management perspective, to better understand how professionals navigate periods of identity processing when their professional identity is challenged through external changes, and how these impacts vary across intersectional aspects such as gender, age and career stage. The aviation industry has been selected due to its inherent instability, driven by its dependence on lifestyle trends and vulnerability to global challenges such as pandemics, economic downturns and wars. Additionally, the unique regulatory constraints on pilot licenses present an added risk, as pilots face limitations in accessing mental health support during times of personal crisis and upheaval.

The research questions for this presentation are two-fold: What key mechanisms and decision-making processes do professionals employ to solidify or adapt their occupational identity in response to external disruptions? How do these dynamics vary across gender, age and career stage?

This presentation will present preliminary findings from 10 semi-structured interviews with a diverse cohort of commercial aviation pilots, including male, female, and gender-diverse pilots from a range of ages above the age of 18. Furthermore, a life course research design will be used in the interviews to provide an interactive narrative approach that will explore the mechanisms and decision-making processes that professionals in this occupation apply as they experience various life stages. Ultimately, this method will assist with examining the interplay between personal and professional experiences, facilitating a deeper understanding of how pilots navigate their identities over time, particularly in response to external disruptions.

It is hoped that this research will add valuable contribution to better understanding how professional in a male-dominated occupation adapt and shift their professional identity, along with their other identities, to regulate their sense of self, particularly in situations where change is unavoidable.

Cruess, S.R. and R.L. Cruess. (2018) 'The development of professional Identity' in Swanwick, T., Forrest, K. and O'Brien, B.C., eds., Understanding medical education: Evidence, theory and practice, London: Wiley-Blackwell, 239-254.

Ecologically/Socially Sustainable Work & Employment – Room 3.205

The Socio-ecological Indeterminacy of the Labour Process: How Natural Resource Industries Deepen Class Struggles

Liam Campling, Elena Baglioni

(Queen Mary University of London)

In this article we recover the centrality of a materialist analysis of labour process theory (LPT) by recasting the labour process as a place of social and natural (ecological) metabolism, where outcomes are not easily pre-determined. We build from seminal contributions in LPT scholarship to reflect on the socio-ecological indeterminacy of the labour process, which we do in three analytical steps. The first reflects on evidence from the natural resource industries to highlight the dynamism, instability and open-endedness characterising those labour processes that confront nature more directly, their old and new frontiers and proliferating financialised landscapes. Our second step zooms into the metabolism of the labour process in capitalist production (e.g. appropriation, transformation, and standardisation of matter and environments, control of its bio-physical attributes, and exploitation of labour), which are always undetermined, and thus difficult to predict, and drive change within and beyond the labour process. So, while our starting point promotes an understanding of natural resources as industrial formations, the socio-ecological indeterminacy of the labour process also necessarily underpins capitalist production and the labour process in all industries. Our third step is to show how the capitalist commodification of nature fuels fragmentation between and within capital and labour. On one hand, many of the obstacles to the commodification of nature are discounted onto labour through processes of informalisation, discontinuous employment, labour intensification, migration, segmentation (gender, race, nationality), natural resources alienation (land and forest capture) and degradation (sacrifice zones), etc. On the other hand, the spreading and reallocating of risks, competitive pressures and accumulation opportunities equally drive the splintering of classes of capital across global value chains and production networks, as well as the emergence of new critical opportunities around the commodification of risk and indeterminacy itself. Ultimately, we argue, the ecological indeterminacy inherent to the commodification of nature appears at the heart of multiple class struggles.

Ecological Obstinacy: Worker Orientations in the Context of Climate Change

Simon Schaupp

(Institute of Social Research, Frankfurt)

In the wake of climate change and its political management, many sectors of the economy are undergoing profound transformations that give rise to a range of diverse and complex socio-ecological conflicts. Against this backdrop, it is crucial to understand the attitudes of different groups of employees toward climate change, as well as their specific capacities and limitations in shaping socio-ecological transformation. As a fundamental part of daily life, work plays a significant role in shaping the identities and normative orientations of individuals. At the same time, work is the central interface of society's metabolism with nature and is increasingly affected — both directly and indirectly — by the impacts of climate change. While many studies explored the stance of trade unions in green transformations, the relationship between labor processes and environmental orientations remains largely unexplored. Based on case studies from four different sectors, each with characteristic labor processes (care, construction, forestry, and energy supply), the project presented here develops a typology of distinct work-related environmental orientations regarding climate change and the measures taken to address it. Adopting a praxeological lens, the practical, action-based orientations of employees come to the fore and produce a differentiated picture of environmental orientations. The paper presents theoretical concepts and preliminary empirical results of the project that is ongoing at the Institute for Social Research, Frankfurt.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 1 – Room 2.217
PhD Showcase

Looks that Sell: Aesthetic Labour in LGBTQIA+ Online Sex Work

Bianca Mares

(Swansea University)

This study examines how aesthetic labour shapes the work experiences of LGBTQIA+ online sex workers. Existing research on aesthetic labour in sex work has largely examined in-person (direct) sex work, centering the experiences of cis-hetero women (Rivers-Moore, 2013). Moreover, there remains a limited understanding of how marginalised genders and sexualities experience sex work.

Aesthetic labour, defined as the demand of 'looking good and sounding right' (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001: 14), has been widely explored in service-oriented forms of work, including sex work (Karlsson, 2012). However, such studies have solely focused on cisgender women engaged in direct sex work, reinforcing hetero-cisnormative aesthetic ideals in this industry (Brents & Jackson, 2013). Sex work is historically constructed as feminised labour, placing hyper-femininity at its aesthetic core, resulting in distinct expectations for bodily presentation (Rand, 2019). By establishing hyper-femininity as the aesthetic norm, dominant discourses impose rigid gendered expectations on LGBTQIA+ communities, shaping how sex workers must present to maintain economic viability. Van den Bergh (2023) argues that aesthetic labour involves a meticulous negotiation of embodiment, as workers must align their physicality with client desires while maintaining professional and personal boundaries. On this note, Sanders (2005) asserts that sex workers strategically construct manufactured identities, not merely performing dominant discourses but deliberately conforming to heterosexualised imagery to meet cisgender male clients' expectations. Similarly, Petersson (2014) highlights the economic pressures sex workers face in adhering to hyperfeminine or heteronormative aesthetics.

However, these studies focus exclusively on cis-hetero women in direct sex work, leaving unexplored how such dynamics unfold among LGBTQIA+ online sex workers. My research addresses this gap by examining how aesthetic labour is performed in online sex work, where digital platforms offer LGBTQIA+ communities unique affordances for identity exploration that are often unavailable offline (Geeng & Hiniker, 2021).

I conducted a narrative thematic analysis (Smith, 2016) on 41 semi-structured interviews with LGBTQIA+ online sex workers based in seven countries. Three preliminary narrative themes were identified. These are summarised below:
- The Art of Detached Acting: Participants use digital sex work platforms to "pass as femme", further constructing a distinct work persona that remains separate from real-life gender identity and sexuality.
- The Burden of Cosplaying Femininity: While hyper-feminine aesthetics are deliberately adopted to enhance financial success, distinctions between work and daily life are unclear. This performance can lead to discomfort, self-doubt, or, in some cases, gender dysphoria.
- Channelling Inner Femininity: Online sex work provides a space to express a form of femininity not typically reflected in offline lives. This representation is not perceived as a contradiction but rather as an identity aspect participants wish to engage with on their terms.

To conclude, this study contributes by broadening the scope of aesthetic labour research beyond cisnormative understandings, which have dominated discussions on bodily commodification in sex work. Secondly, it challenges the invisibility of LGBTQIA+ sex workers in platform-based economy discussions. Finally, my research offers theoretical contributions to queer aesthetic labour by illustrating how digital workspaces reshape bodily commodification, self-presentation, and agency.

Comparative Perspective on the Role of Gender in Job Quality Variation Over Time

Gal Lifshitz

(Tel Aviv University)

Ample research shows that throughout history, in all developed countries, women fare worse that men in the labour market, in all aspects of employment (Blau & Kahn, 2017; OECD, 2023). Yet comparative research on gender differences in job quality are rare. Notwithstanding the profound consequences of job quality on health, social, psychological, economic well-being and productivity (Burgard, Kalousova, & Seefeldt, 2012; Gevaert, et al, 2021; Faragher, Cass, & Cooper, 2005).

Another corpus of sociological literature emphasizes the significant increase and advances in women's labour market participation in the second half of the 20th century, often dubbed the "gender revolution" (England, 2010). One the one hand, gender desegregation has been limited to high-level jobs, as women's entry to the labour force was primarily into previously male-dominated white-collar professions with relatively good job quality (Charles & Grusky 2004; Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman 2004). On the other hand, this led to feminization of occupations and the establishment of "pink collar" occupations (Mandel, 2012; 2013; Weeden, 2004). While research shows that predominantly female occupations are devalued, and have lower job quality, on average, than jobs with a higher proportion of men (Levanon, England, and Allison 2009; Mandel, 2013).

To note, the "gender revolution", while distinct, is not independent of other socioeconomic changes brought by economic-liberalisation trends and technological developments. For example, due to technological advancements, there is a gender change in occupational distribution. Male dominated occupations are becoming obsolete at a much higher rate than the disappearance of female centered jobs (Ruggles, 2015).

Using multilevel regression analysis of 4 decades of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) survey, the study examines a representative sample of 36,602 employees in 14 OECD countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United States of America) . The current study examines the effects of the aforementioned changes on job quality. To explore three research questions- How does job quality vary over time, and is the trajectory different for men and women? How does the rate of women employed effect the change in job quality? And, is there an interaction between the role of gender on the labour market level, that is rate of women employed, and gender as an individual's characteristic?

Findings show that job quality is time and place dependent. The trajectories are not identical, both across countries and between genders. While most countries (excluding Japan and Hungary), experienced an increase in average job quality, the trajectories for women are varied. The main effect to the change in women's job quality can be accounted for by variation occupational distributions. The effect of the rate of women employed on the average job quality, of both men and women, is more complex, and is mitigated by both country level variables and individual's characteristics. Namely, the size of the public sector, and a cross level interaction with gender and occupation.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 2 – Room 2.218

Employment Security and Power Resources within the Automotive Industry in South Africa

Andrea Schaefer

(University of Bremen)

Interest in the standard employment relationship in countries of the Global South is often contested by the argument that informal and precarious work is the prevailing norm, rather than permanent full-time contracts. This view is supported by data showing that approximately 90 percent of employment in developing countries and 67 percent in emerging economies is informal (Chen and Carré, 2020). However, what constitutes a 'standard' employment relationship varies significantly by sector and country (ILO, 2018). The automotive industry, in particular, is widely recognized for creating high-quality

jobs worldwide and is often seen as an 'enclave' of formal employment within national labour markets otherwise marked by high unemployment and widespread informality in the Global South (Lakhani et al., 2013).

This study focuses on segmentation patterns and practices within a local production network in South Africa's automotive industry, even in the context of a strong presence of standard employment contracts. While the analysis is grounded in a specific regional case, it draws on the Global Value Chain (GVC) framework to highlight the interdependencies between firms along the production chain. Furthermore, the Global Production Network (GPN) approach is employed to emphasize not only the power resources of different actors but also the 'agency of labour'—namely, the role of trade unions—as well as the influence of national institutions and broader economic conditions.

By integrating labour market segmentation theory, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of the conditions under which various employment forms are used. It also explores how pay structures and other working conditions are differentiated within the industry. The central argument is that patterns of employment security—serving as indicators of job stability or precarity—emerge from the interaction between actors' employment practices and their institutional, structural, and associational power within the GPN. These dynamics are further shaped by overarching social inequalities, such as gender and education.

The study addresses the following research questions: What segmentation patterns exist within South Africa's automotive production industry? And how do actors implement segmentation practices based on their respective power resources within the production network? To investigate these questions and understand the complexity of segmentation practices in a real-world context, the study adopts a case study approach. This allows for an in-depth examination that preserves the richness of the phenomenon while enabling analytical generalization. The case study focuses on a South African automotive production network and is based on multiple sources of evidence, including documents, expert interviews, and secondary statistical data. A content-analytical summary serves as the primary methodological approach.

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Job Quality in Small and Medium Enterprises in Sub-Saharan Africa

Kayaga Matovu

(University of Leeds)

This study explores job quality (JQ) in the socio-economic and cultural contexts of developing economies, focusing on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Research on JQ has primarily examined developed economies, creating a critical gap in understanding how JQ and the concept high-quality jobs is constructed and experienced in low-income economies. Given the central role of SMEs as key employers in SSA, this research is crucial in informing policy and practice for fostering decent work and economic growth in the region.

The study is positioned within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8, which advocates for inclusive economic growth and decent work for all. It also aligns with the African Union's "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want," which envisions sustainable economic transformation. Despite these global policy commitments, SSA accounts for only 2% of global economic activity while comprising 13% of the world's population, a figure projected to rise to 22% by 2050. The persistence of poor job quality presents a significant socio-economic challenge.

Job quality is often linked to high-income employment, but this research investigates how JQ manifests in a low-income context. The study seeks to draw upon established JQ models from developed economies, particularly the UK, while integrating perspectives from economic development and labour

market theories relevant to SSA. This approach broadens the discourse on JQ by situating it within developing economies in SSA.

The research adopts a quantitative methodological approach, collecting survey data from employees of SMEs in Uganda to assess importance attached to the existing job quality dimensions and collecting new data on self-reported items linked to a high-quality job. A Job Quality Index (JQI) tailored to SMEs in SSA will be developed based on existing frameworks from developed economies. Data collection is currently underway, focusing on key dimensions of JQ: skills utilisation and development, pay, job security, working hours, desirable work conditions, employment opportunities, equal opportunity, and voice & social dialogue. Statistical analysis will be applied to identify trends and correlations within these dimensions.

At this early empirical stage, preliminary data suggests that SMEs in SSA exhibit distinct job quality determinants shaped by economic constraints, cultural work perceptions, and informal employment structures. These insights have implications for policymakers, development organisations, and SME stakeholders seeking to enhance job quality while accounting for local economic conditions.

This research makes a significant contribution to the field by addressing the under-explored topic of JQ in developing economies. It proposes a framework adaptable to similar socio-economic contexts and provides empirical evidence on how SMEs in SSA can improve job quality. The findings will support strategies for achieving inclusive economic growth and increased access to decent work as well as sustainable development, aligning with policy objectives at national, regional, and global levels.

What Explains Differing Rates of Low Pay in Europe?

Sean O Riain

(National University of Ireland Maynooth)

Levels of low pay, defined as pay below 67% of median hourly earnings, vary significantly across Europe. Rates are particularly high among younger workers but the degree to which low pay extends into older age groups is also critical in shaping overall levels of low pay. Furthermore, low pay is more prevalent among women workers. What explains cross-national variation in these levels of low pay for different age and gender groups?

This paper uses Structure of Earnings Survey data on low pay levels to analyse these questions for 2018 and 2022, the most recent year available, in 26 European countries. A variety of variables are constructed to examine the effects on these national levels of low pay of labour demand (unemployment), labour force composition (non-tertiary education, foreign born), regulation (employment protection legislation), welfare provisions (replacement rates for unemployment), active labour market policy (spending, strictness of requirements) and representation and organisation of labour (union density, coverage of collective agreements, autonomy at work). We extend the analysis of Pedersen and Picot (2023) of how labour market regulation affects low pay to this broader set of labour market, demographic and institutional variables.

We find that, particularly for mid-career and female workers, Union Density and Bargaining Coverage are critical. These factors related to union mobilisation consistently reduce low pay and also have separate effects reducing low pay levels (eg by gender). Active Labour Market Policy is critical in 2018 (although apparently not in 2022) while conditionality in labour market activation tends to increase levels of low pay (although not in 2022). Labour Market Protections also only reduce pay when combined with worker representation. Worker representation and active labour market policies are critical elements in tackling low pay. In their absence, factors such as employment protection legislation have little or sometimes negative effects on the prevalence of low pay.

However, the labour market for younger employees is different. There is some suggestion that factors such as tertiary education, unemployment and regulation of temp work reduce low pay among young people but the overall level of low pay across countries, absence of many significant independent variables and low explained variation between countries suggest that this segment of the labour market operates quite differently those related to workers of other ages. Nonetheless, Union Density and Training seem to act as a buffer against the persistence and diffusion of the widespread low pay levels of the youth labour market.

The greatest reductions in national levels of low pay is associated with a cluster of factors - active labour market policy (but not conditionality), relatively generous replacement rates in case of unemployment, moderate employment protection and most importantly union density, bargaining coverage and control at work. The 'Social Democratic' regulation of work and employment remains the strongest protection against high levels of low pay.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 3 – Room 2.219

On the Fifth Day: Autonomy, Organizational Control and the Ownership of Time in the Four-Day-Work-Week

Daniel Wheatley, Mengyi Xu, Tony Dobbins, Holly Birkett

(University of Birmingham)

The four-day-work-week has gained global attention as high profile international trials and emerging evidence have prompted debates around its potential to act as an economic and social change engine to reorient the future of paid work. Based around the 100:80:100 model*, i.e., 100% pay for 80% of work-time while delivering 100% productivity, evidence suggests a variety of potential benefits for productivity, recruitment/retention, work-life balance and employee and organizational well-being. Drawing on qualitative interviews with stakeholders at 20 UK SMEs in 2024, we probe an important unanswered question around the utilisation of the fifth day and whether its use matters to individual and organizational outcomes. Applying longstanding debates around autonomy and organizational control to the four-day-work-week, we investigate how employer concerns around moonlighting and malfeasance come into tension with employee preferences for control over their time and freedom to engage in activities that support career development, work-life balance and well-being. We find a myriad of uses from leisure time to enhance work recovery, use to ease flows of caring responsibilities, education and training activities targeting personal and professional development, civic engagement (employer linked or not) and more controversially side hustles. Impacts appear similarly diverse reflecting individual and organizational nuances and a mix of benefits, challenges and risks. We outline agendas for future research to inform policy and develop practical guidance on the ownership of the fifth day and autonomy-control balance as critical factors influencing application and longer-term success of the four-day-work-week.

*100:80:100 is a trademark of 4 Day Week Global.

Between Choice and Constraint: Working Time Reduction and Subjective Well-being in Hungary through a Capability Approach Lens

Timea Venczel

(HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences)

Working time reduction (WTR) is often presented as a transformative break with traditional work structures, promising improved work-life balance and well-being. However, its impact continues to be shaped by existing inequalities, with access to benefits unevenly distributed across worker groups.

I examine the impact of WTR policies on workers' well-being in Hungary, focusing on strategies that reduce working time without a proportional reduction in income. The theoretical framework of the research is the Capability Approach (CA), which allows for an investigation of how employees can use working time reductions to increase their subjective well-being. The research is based on 67 semi-structured interviews with 41 employees and managers from three organisations: a wholesale company (older blue-collar workers on a four-day week), a creative studio (younger professionals on a four-day week) and a multinational company (middle-aged employees on parental leave). Follow-up interviews were conducted 6-12 months later in two of the organisations. The three different workplace contexts allow for an analysis of differences between employee groups, considering both their socio-demographic characteristics and their labour market position.

The CA highlights that subjective well-being is closely linked to an individual's ability to make meaningful choices. Based on the literature and adapted to assess the impact of changes in working time on well-being, I examine five key dimensions of well-being as capabilities. These are: temporal harmony and synchronisation, physical and recreational well-being, social connection and community involvement, personal development and altruistic engagement, autonomy and freedom. Based on the research findings, the impact of working time reduction on employee well-being is influenced by several socio-economic, organisational and personal conversion factors.

The results show that economic uncertainty, Hungary's workfare policy - linking social benefits to employment - and limited worker participation tend to restrict the advantages of WTR. None of the organisations studied fully absorbed the costs of reduced hours, with lower status workers facing disproportionate barriers. Personal circumstances - such as caring responsibilities, financial security and gender roles - also influence workers' ability to use WTR to improve their well-being.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to a more equitable approach to work and leisure in contemporary work-centred societies with apparent inequalities in access to fulfilling employment. These findings also address important gaps in knowledge about WTR in Central and Eastern Europe, highlighting the need to consider both employer and employee perspectives and to take a longitudinal approach to policy evaluation.

It raises questions about who has the agency to benefit from WTR and under what conditions. Beyond simply reducing working hours, its impact depends on the freedom to engage in meaningful activities that enhance well-being. However, not all workers can fully benefit, as socio-economic conditions, organisational priorities, and individual circumstances shape their experience. To make WTR policies more equitable, they need to address these systemic barriers. This is essential if WTR is to fulfil its promise of improving well-being and work-life balance, rather than reinforcing existing inequalities.

Negotiating Productivity and Job Quality: Young People's Intersectional Experiences of Hybrid Working

Jane Parry, Mina Beigi, Wee Chan Au, Melika Shirmohammadi, Yafan Yu

(University of Southampton)

With hybrid working mainstreamed in many workplaces, organisations have entered a period of learning around curating and supporting workforces communicating across multiple locations. For many, hybrid working consists of variable patterns of being based on site, working from home, and from third spaces, and where flexibility around hours is combined with flexibility around place (Parry et al., 2024). While organisations have moved towards output-based measures of productivity in adapting to hybrid working, employees have taken on much of the cognitive work of developing working practices that align the productivity benefits of distinctive environments with worktasks. It has been a period of both change as organisations and individuals adapt to still-evolving working practices, and continuity as organisations seek to sustain productivity and organisational belonging around increasingly dispersed workforces.

Our research looked at hybrid working through the lens of younger workers, a group often identified as 'digital natives', who might be anticipated as more adaptable to new ways of working (Osorio and Madero, 2025). A focus on this group additionally enabled us to look at working experiences largely before family responsibilities affected preferences and practices around workspace. Our previous research indicated that younger workers faced challenges in moving to remote working, having fewer housing resources to adapt to home workspaces, and being more vulnerable to losses in experiential learning early in their careers (Parry et al., 2022). They are consequently an important group to study around new ways of working. Taking a three-stage qualitative approach, we interviewed young people working in three organisations, collected data from a four-week workspace diary, and reinterviewed them to reflect upon their working practices.

In this paper, we reflect on how workspace choices are impacted by job tasks, workplace suitability, and individual needs. An unexpected feature of the research was the significance of invisible individual factors around health and learning differences, which affected hybrid working choices in ways often unknown to organisations. Person-environment fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998) is utilised to explore how young people sought out environments that aligned with their preferences and work characteristics

(Tinsley, 2000) to maximise productivity and balance it with meaningful working experiences (Blustein et al., 2023).

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Work Standards and Chronobiology: Rethinking Working Hours through the Lens of Science and Sociology

Meriem Regragui

(Université Internationale de Rabat)

The organization of contemporary work is based on a mix of historical models, ranging from Fordism to the flexible forms of post-industrial work. Although these models have evolved over time, they remain rooted in an approach that does not sufficiently take into account scientific advances regarding biological rhythms and the social conditions of workers. The presentation aims to explore the necessity of rethinking working hours in light of chronobiology and sociological dynamics, in order to better reconcile productivity and workers' well-being.

First, the persistence of the Fordist model—with its rigid schedules and standardized view of work—is now out of step with scientific data that highlight the impact of sleep, circadian rhythms, and cognitive fatigue on performance. Experiments, such as the four-day work week or schedules adapted to biological rhythms, demonstrate that well-designed forms of flexibility can improve both productivity and employees' quality of life. Moreover, the digital economy and new forms of work (hybrid work, digital platforms) are prompting a reexamination of the relationship between working time, autonomy, and constraint.

Secondly, taking into account the social and biological specificities of workers is becoming indispensable. Mental load and family obligations, particularly for women, influence their relationship to work and efficiency. The issue of female labor must be reconsidered from the perspective of work time management, integrating physiological particularities (such as the impact of the menstrual cycle and differences in sleep and recovery). More broadly, inequality in the face of flexibility and time burden is a crucial social and legal issue, raising questions about discontinuities in workers' rights according to their sector and status.

Finally, it is necessary to envision the transformation of work standards based on scientific and sociological data, rather than solely on economic considerations. Advances in neuroscience, the sociology of work, and gender studies are opening up new perspectives on the organization of working hours, calling for a revision of existing standards. This paradigm shift implies a redefinition of legal frameworks, taking into account the new realities of work and the aspirations of workers.

This communication is situated within the theme of "continuities and discontinuities" by questioning the necessary break with obsolete temporal models, while exploring the conditions for a transition towards forms of work that are more respectful of individuals and their life rhythms.

Technology & Work – Room 3.209

Generative AI and Skills in Digital SMEs

Dimitrinka Stoyanova Russell, Ödül Bozkurt, Christopher Russell

(Cardiff University)

The impact of AI on the future of work is a current debate intensely present in the public discourse and academia alike (Daugherty and Wilson, 2018; Hunt et al., 2022). Skills is one of the core areas of concern and speculation: are Generative AI tools going to replace the need for human input, obliterate skills and by consequence, jobs (Acemoglu et.al., 2022; Lakhani, 2023)? The research agenda Generative AI poses is vast, complex and requires knowledge of a wide range of organisational and institutional contexts (Dwivedi et al., 2023). The variety of contexts and organisational choices however remain understudied (Budhwar et al., 2023; Pereira et al., 2023) while the impact on jobs is already unfolding (Frey and Osborne, 2024; Brynjolfsson et al, 2024).

A key issue in this debate is whether AI will affect work involving high skills and enable automation of complex and previously less susceptible to automation tasks. The technological capabilities of AI and Generative AI in particular may enable displacement of white collar and even knowledge work (Gmyrek et al. 2023). Further, Chohan (2023) argues that it is especially white collar and creative jobs that are at most risk from being changed or displaced by Generative AI capabilities. Yet, Petterson (2019) asserts that high skilled knowledge work with its reliance on social skills, its context-dependent decisions, its processual nature and collaborative practices is difficult to replicate or codify into an algorithm-based technology and AI. This latter point appears to be key in this difference of opinions. Here we aim to further some of the above questions by drawing on research into micro-and SMEs in a digital cluster of early adopters in Greater Brighton, UK.

This paper explores the ways in which Generative AI tools change the skills required in micro-and SMEs. It analyses the (parallel) processes of skills augmentation or obsolescence. We do so by detailing and debating the adoption strategies and practices in our sample of 'early' and mostly enthusiastic adopters. The study draws on 38 semi-structured interviews with micro-and SMEs in Greater Brighton, six expert interviews, two focus groups and five observations at industry events dedicated to Generative AI, all conducted between February and July 2024. Generative AI is used by SMEs for writing, audio and video production and coding. Augmentation and transformation claims dominate most account of current experiences. We found three ways in which skills were augmented by the introduction of Generative AI tools. Some skills were rendered irrelevant, or considerably reduced Experience and domain-specific knowledge seemed to work well and add advantage in the use of Generative AI tool. The lack of experience and comprehensive holistic knowledge of the jobs, by contrast, raised concerns about the long-term impact of Generative IA on expertise, especially in areas such as coding.

Digital Entrepreneurship and Neo-marriage Market Practices in Post-Reform India: The New Aesthetic

Debalina Roy

(Indian Institute of Technology Mandi)

The economic arrangements surrounding marriages are expanding exponentially, especially in post-1990 India. The digital platforms play a crucial role in organizing such functions which includes elaborate venues, intricate attire, themed rituals, and extravagant celebrations. The service providers such as wedding planners, decorators, caterers, photographers, make-up artists, and entertainers operate remotely and efficiently through online platforms for execution of such functions. This shift reflects the expansion of the informal economy, as individuals, often lacking formal employment opportunities, are increasingly seeking work in the growing service sector. The privatization of various sectors and the rise of digital entrepreneurship have transformed the marriage market into a highly commercialized space. Digital platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and personalized websites enable service providers to advertise and brand their services, creating a market for tailored, desirable marriage experiences. In this context, the present paper aims to understand how the digital platforms create this new aesthetic by looking into the spectacles of consumption being produced and deployed. The paper attempts to

understand how service providers bank on the requirements of the clientele and construct the notion of a desirable marriage ceremony thereby contributing to the platform economy. This paper, through content analysis of various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and personalized websites used by the service providers attempts to see how the modes of advertising, promotions, branding and portrayal serve as a site to understand the informal economy associated with the digital entrepreneurship embedded in the marriage market too. Such service providers generate business by attempting to construct an idea of desirable marriage thereby emphasizing their increasing demand in the marriage market, especially in the post-reform period. Lastly, the paper explores the consumerist ethos often marketed in correspondence with the execution of an ideal marriage event by these several service providers.

Hybrid Control Systems: The Return of the Human Manager in Chinese Platform Delivery Work

Wei Wei, Ziheng Liu, Tony Royle

(University of Sussex)

With the rapid expansion of platform work, existing research has highlighted how digital platforms employ sophisticated algorithmic management systems to control workers and the labour process (Griesbach et al., 2019; Huang, 2021; Veen et al., 2019). These studies have sparked a growing debate on whether algorithms can fully replace human discretion in platform-based work. Scholars such as Stark and Pais (2020) and Vallas and Schor (2020) argue that algorithms augment rather than replace human oversight, creating hybrid systems of control. However, there remains a lack of nuanced understanding of how these hybrid control regimes operate in practice. Additionally, while previous studies have examined the role of customers in shaping the labour process within platform work (Gandini, 2019), the influence of human managers has received insufficient attention.

To address these gaps, we draw on labour process theory (LPT) to examine how algorithmic management and human managerial discretion interact in platform work, with a particular focus on the role of frontline managers in shaping workers' experiences and labour relations. With over 10 million platform couriers (Xinhua News, 2025)—more than the populations of many European countries— Chinese on-demand delivery platforms operate under diverse organizational and work models, including station-based delivery (Zhuansong) and crowdsourcing (Zhongbao) (Sun et al., 2023). In addition, in recent years, within the crowdsourcing model, outsourcing and team-based schemes have been introduced to ensure the labour supply and accommodate varying market needs, such as delivery districts and peak periods. These developments have given rise to frontline managerial roles, including station managers, hub supervisors, and team captains. Therefore, Chinese on-demand delivery platforms serve as a critical case for examining the evolving dynamics of labour control in platform work.

A multi-method qualitative approach was applied in this study, combining digital ethnography, content analysis, and semi-structured interviews, so that we can collect perspectives from both frontline managers and couriers. Our empirical investigation of Chinese on-demand delivery platforms reveals a complex and hybrid control system. The findings suggest that frontline managers play a crucial role in key aspects of the labour process, including courier selection, task allocation, performance appraisal, income distribution, and disciplinary measures. We identified three main ways in which frontline managers interact with algorithms: mediation and interpretation, manipulation, and overriding. Moreover, we found that the hybrid control system enabled Guanxi-based relationships and informal managerial practices, such as reciprocity (Renqing) to exert control over workers and elicit their consent in ways that algorithmic control alone cannot.

This study contributes to the LPT analysis of platform work. First, it challenges prevailing narratives that depict platform work as being primarily governed by algorithmic control. Instead, it highlights the interaction between human discretion and algorithmic management, demonstrating that managerial control is not displaced but rather reconfigured within algorithmically mediated working environments. Second, it highlights the role of frontline managers in shaping workers' experience in platform work. Third, it emphasises the significance of socio-cultural factors, such as Guanxi and Renqing, in the Chinese platform work context, offering a nuanced perspective on labour dynamics within this setting.

Bridging the Human-AI Gap at Whose Cost? Skill and Organizational Alignment in AI Data Annotation Work

Tongyu Wu

(Zhejiang University)

How is artificial intelligence (AI) transforming human labour skills? While some argue that AI will render human work obsolete (Frey & Osborne, 2017; Srnicek & Williams, 2015), others foresee new forms of human-AI complementarity (Autor, 2015). Yet despite growing recognition of this interdependence, little is known about how human skills evolve in response to AI-driven change. Labour skill has long been central to sociological studies of labour processes, markets, and professionalisation (Attewell, 1990; Abbott, 1988; Braverman, 1974). Building on this tradition, this study investigates how AI technologies reshape skill demands and organisational practices. It asks: (1) How are labour skills reconstructed amid rapid AI development? (2) What organisational processes facilitate AI-skill reconfiguration? (3) How do these transformations affect workers?

To answer these questions, this study examines AI data annotation through 4.5 years of ethnographic research in China's AI industry, including 192 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from firms such as ByteDance (TikTok), Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu, and Xiaoxi. Data annotation—the process of labelling data for machine learning—is foundational to AI development. Its significance is evident in market growth: the global annotation sector was valued at $2.56 billion in 2024; in China, it rose from $6.65 billion in 2020 to a projected $38 billion by 2028. Despite this prominence, annotation work is still largely framed as low-skilled, labour-intensive "ghost work" (Gray & Suri, 2019; Muldoon et al., 2024), with limited attention to its evolving skill dynamics.

Challenging these assumptions, this study shows that as AI models become more complex, annotation work undergoes continuous skill upgrading. It introduces the "skill alignment framework" to conceptualise how human labour and AI technologies co-evolve. Borrowed from computer science debates on aligning AI with human values (Christian, 2021), the concept of alignment is reinterpreted here as a socio-organisational process through which labour skills are developed, reconfigured, and managed in relation to technological change.

The study identifies two contrasting trajectories of skill alignment: downward alignment in Vision AI and upward alignment in Large Language Model (LLM) annotation. Vision AI annotation, used in applications such as autonomous driving, has become increasingly automated since 2018, diminishing demand for human skill and pushing work to decentralised platforms and lower-tier cities. By contrast, LLM annotation—central to aligning AI systems with human value and societal norms—has grown rapidly since 2022, intensifying the need for skilled labour. In response, companies have shortened data labour supply chains and re-integrated annotators into core departments to foster upskilling while increasing managerial oversight.

Theoretically, this study contributes to debates on human-AI relations by foregrounding the overlooked dimension of skill. It conceptualises human-AI interaction as an alignment process shaped by industry dynamics and organisational structures. Challenging linear narratives of deskilling or reskilling, it shows that skill transformation follows a cyclical pattern of shifts between upskilling and downskilling. It argues that labourers bear the uneven costs of ongoing skill dynamism. By mapping shifting skill configurations in annotation work, this research deepens understanding of AI labour and challenges assumptions that such work is inherently low-skilled.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS
The Drum, University Place

Difference, Diversity and Social Justice

When Women Work

Jennifer Whillans

(University of Bristol)

Much research on working time relies on categorical indicators, such as full-time/part-time status or whether work occurs in the evening or on weekends. While these measures provide useful snapshots, they obscure the sequencing of worktime – the distribution of workhours across the day and workdays across the week. This poster presents findings from my forthcoming WES paper, Women and the Standard Workweek: Developing a Typology of Work Schedules in the UK, which uses workweek grid data from the UK Time Use Survey 2014–2015 to examine the temporal organisation of women's paid work.

Unlike the Labour Force Survey (LFS), which reduces work patterns to broad categories, the workweek grid provides a sequence-based account of when work takes place. Using dynamic Hamming matching and cluster analysis, this study identifies a typology of work schedules, moving beyond the standard/nonstandard dichotomy. The findings reveal that while the standard workweek remains an organising principle of worktime, it does not straightforwardly emerge as a typical pattern. Instead, women's work schedules can be grouped into categories that capture both alignment with and departures from standard duration and timings:

- variants of the standard (broadly conceived approximations of 9-5 patterns)
- in the shadow of the standard (workweeks that all within standard timings but reduced duration)
- excessive (long workdays and workweeks that cover and exceed the standard workweek)
- shift schedules (work patterns that fall outside standard workhours and workdays)

By analysing women's work schedules, this research reconceptualises the diversity of worktime arrangements. The findings highlight how women's work scheduling is shaped by employment sector, occupational norms, and caregiving responsibilities. This study contributes to debates on the evolving structure of worktime and the relevance of the standard workweek as a framework for understanding contemporary employment.

This study contributes to debates on the evolving structure of worktime and the relevance of the standard workweek as a framework for understanding contemporary employment. Future research could extend this work by examining men's work schedules, particularly the rise of part-time work among men, or by analysing workweek grid data over time to assess changes in scheduling patterns. However, the most recent available workweek grid data is from 2015, meaning that capturing post-pandemic changes in work scheduling requires new data collection. A new dataset is essential to understanding not only when people work, but also where, with whom, and how they experience time. I hope to use this poster session to gather feedback on the direction of this research, hear from others who might be interested in such data, and explore opportunities to connect and collaborate with those working on related topics.

Work/place Alienation, Voice and Participation

Organizational Identification of Outsourced and Dispatched Employees in the Chinese High-Tech Industry

Xinru Zhuang

(Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

Over the last few decades, non-traditional forms of employment have drawn significant attention from scholars. To respond quickly to external changes and reduce operating costs, enterprises have increasingly adopted diversified and flexible employment models. In China, approximately 200 million individuals are engaged in flexible employment, with more than 60% of enterprises utilizing such models. These changes challenge long-held assumptions about labor relations and employees' organizational identification, particularly in the high-tech sector, where outsourced and dispatched workers have become more prevalent. These workers often juggle multiple organizational affiliations, complicating their sense of belonging and influencing how they construct their organizational identification.

Organizational identification refers to an individual's sense of belonging to their organization, which influences job satisfaction, organizational loyalty, and work performance (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015). Traditional research on organizational identification has primarily focused on full-time employees working within a single organization (Edwards, 2005). However, outsourced and dispatched workers have dual organizational ties: one to the third-party employer and another to the client organization where they work daily. As a result, their organizational identification is often less salient with the employing firm and more complicated due to the lack of a formal contract with the client firm (George & Chattopadhyay, 2005). This creates challenges in understanding organizational identification within multi-employment settings.

Additionally, most studies on organizational identification have relied on quantitative methods, capturing fixed points in time and potentially overlooking the dynamic processes that shape identification over time (Miscenko & Day, 2016). This study adopts a qualitative approach, interviewing 80 outsourced and dispatched workers in China's high-tech industry to explore how they construct and shape their organizational identification in their daily work.

Preliminary results from this study show that organizational identification is a dynamic process rather than a stable state. It evolves from the pre-employment recruitment stage to post-employment performance evaluations, continuously influencing workers' organizational identification, working experiences, activities, and interactions. Moreover, employees' organizational identification varies depending on the people around them, fluctuating with changes in their environment. Additionally, cultural elements unique to China, such as "Mianzi" and identity, also play a significant role in shaping workers' organizational identification.

This research contributes to our understanding of the dynamic process through which outsourced and dispatched workers shape their organizational identification and enriches the concept of organizational identification within the framework of social identity theory.

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DRINKS RECEPTION

Monday 8 September

18:00-19:00

The Drum, University Place

Please join us for a drinks reception in the Drum. All delegates are invited to attend and complimentary drinks will be provided.