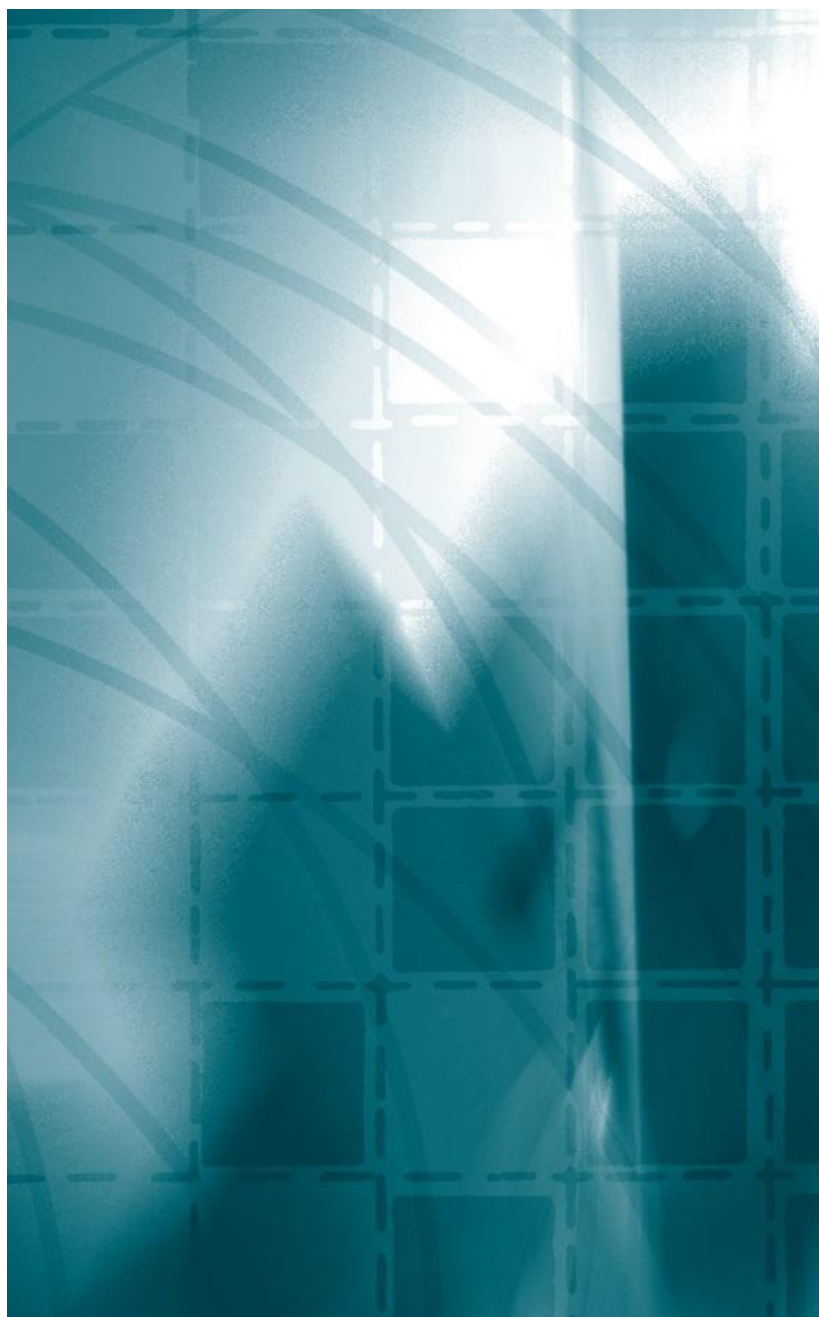


Work, Employment and Society Annual Conference 2026



**Abstract Book
Thursday 10 September 2026**

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Work, Employment and Society Annual Conference 2026 at University of Bath. The theme of the 2026 conference is 'Work and Employment in the Great Reshuffle: Navigating the Polycrisis'. It is a pleasure to announce our two plenary panels:

Our opening panel 'AI, Digitalisation, and Labour in the Polycrisis: Global and Institutional Perspectives' will be given by Mohammad Amir Anwar and Valeria Pulignano.

Our closing panel 'Precarity, Inequality, Migration, and Worker Agency in a Changing Political Economy' will be given by Patrizia Zanoni and Gabriella Alberti.

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:

Mariachiara Barzotto, *University of Bath*

Deborah Giustini, *Hamad Bin Khalifa University and Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven*

Alvaro Martinez-Perez, *University of Sheffield*

Aditya Ray, *University of the West of England*

Mayra Ruiz Castro, *Queen Mary, University of London*

Wen Wang, *University of Leicester*

PAPER SESSION 4

09:00-10:30

Algorithmic work and data justice - Room 0.23

Watched but Not Heard: Algorithmic Management, Worker Experience, and the Transformation of Control

Penny Williams, Maria Khan

(Queensland University of Technology)

Algorithmic management (AM), which is the use of automated systems to perform supervisory functions with limited human oversight, is expanding rapidly into conventional employment relationships (Meijerink et al., 2021). This has prompted researchers and policy makers to reassess how AM shapes the nature of work, the balance of power between employers and employees, and existing frameworks aimed at promoting decent work (Keegan & Meijerink, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Emerging research has explored the implications of AM for worker agency, and health and wellbeing (Nilsson et al., 2025; Kinowska et al., 2023), and raised new questions about algorithmic transparency and voice in algorithmically managed workplaces.

Drawing on labour process theory (Thompson, 1990; Edwards, 1979) and employee voice frameworks (Townsend et al, 2020; Wilkinson et al, 2021), this paper examines AM as a modern form of control that reshapes workplace power and agency in ways that affect social relations at work and whether and how workers can speak up. We argue that algorithmic opacity, i.e. the lack of transparency in the decision-making processes of automated managerial systems, is a control mechanism (Kellogg et al., 2020) that requires deeper exploration. By making automated decisions difficult to understand or challenge, and by digitally distributing rosters, tasks, and communications, AM disrupts workplace social dialogue and weakens worker voice.

Drawing on original qualitative data encompassing interviews with workers across healthcare, finance, retail, and white-collar office settings, HR managers, union representatives, and HR technology vendors in Australia, we present a multi-perspective account of AM as it operates in practice. Our findings, show that vendors, employers and HR managers frame surveillance technologies primarily through logics of productivity, efficiency, and remote work management. Workers, by contrast, describe experiences of intensified pressure, micromanagement, isolation, and reduced autonomy. Union representatives highlight the dehumanising dimensions of monitoring and the absence of meaningful channels through which workers can contest algorithmic decisions that affect them. These divergent accounts indicate an asymmetry of power where AM is designed with opaque parameters and deployed to optimise labour whilst workers have limited capacity to express concerns about how it governs their working lives.

We extend the labour process and voice literature through analysing AM beyond platform and logistics work and into white-collar and desk-based employment (Krzywdzinski et al., 2025; Dupuis, 2024), offering one of the first multi-stakeholder accounts of how AM is simultaneously constructed and experienced in an employment relationship. We argue that algorithmic opacity represents a distinctively contemporary mechanism of control, one that intensifies managerial power by rendering it invisible, and that undermines the conditions for voice not by silencing workers directly, but by removing the transparency and human accountability needed for meaningful contestation (Zhang et al., 2025). As organisations become increasingly automated, understanding how AM reconfigures power, agency, and voice is not only a theoretical imperative but an urgent practical one for those seeking to ensure decent work in the future.

The 'Platform Trap': Algorithmic Management and the Disposable Worker

Juyeon Lee, Abbey Davis, Ellen Maceachen, Samantha Meyer, Basak Yanar

(Keimyung University; University of Waterloo)

This study examines the experiences of platform-based domestic workers in Ontario, Canada, situating their labour within the rapidly expanding market response to the societal "crisis of care." Platform domestic services, including cleaning, furniture assembly, and heavy lifting, operate through algorithmically managed applications such as TaskRabbit that match clients with on-demand workers in real time. Using a longitudinal qualitative design, fifteen workers (five women) were interviewed initially, with ten re-interviewed six months later. This design captures how workers' experiences of algorithmic control, bodily strain, and economic precarity evolve over time within the platform economy.

The findings demonstrate that what initially appears as autonomy and flexibility ultimately constitutes a "platform trap," where high short-term earnings are traded for long-term income instability, limited career mobility, and cumulative bodily exhaustion. While workers initially embrace the "entrepreneurial" promise of being their own boss, follow-up interviews reveal the erosion of these benefits, exposing the structural precarity embedded in platform labour.

Three critical dimensions of this trap emerge from the longitudinal data. First, algorithmic management restricts workers' control over income and opportunities through pervasive opacity. This manifests in abrupt declines in task availability that often occur without clear explanation, leaving workers with no mechanism to understand or contest the loss of work. By obscuring the logic of task allocation while simultaneously intensifying competition, the platform undermines stable earnings and reinforces income unpredictability. Second, the physical and emotional toll of platform labour accumulates over time and manifests in distinctly gendered ways. Male workers more frequently report acute accidents and environmental hazards, while feminised domestic tasks, such as cleaning and care, require substantial emotional labour while imposing cumulative bodily strain. Notably, the only workers who ultimately left platform work due to health issues were two women performing these feminised tasks. In both contexts, the platform treats workers' bodies as disposable assets, extracting labour while providing no institutional protection against injury or long-term health deterioration. Third, repeated interviews reveal a shift from platform reliance to pragmatic exit or strategic bypassing. By six months, several participants had either moved into traditional employment to gain stability or established independent businesses, relocating clients off-platform. Yet this mobility was uneven. For migrant newcomers, platform work often becomes a critical source of immediate income. Because gig work rarely counts toward the formal employment experience required for immigration pathways such as permanent residency, and barriers to the conventional labour market remain high, these workers faced a "newcomer's dilemma": dependence on platform work for survival despite its limited prospects for mobility.

Using repeated qualitative interviews, this study traces the trajectory of platform work, showing how flexibility and autonomy are often illusory, masking a system that externalizes risks onto workers' bodies and careers. These burdens are unevenly distributed, reflecting gendered patterns of bodily depletion and the constrained mobility of migrant newcomers. Without effective regulation of platform companies, the gig economy reproduces itself through a constant influx of "fresh" workers who replace those worn down by algorithmic management and demanding labour.

The Social Reproduction of Generative AI: Synthetic Cognition's Achilles Heel?

Conor McCabe

(Dublin City University)

One of the key debates on the future of work surrounds the potential level of job displacement afforded by generative AI (gen AI). While initial reports of large-scale disruption now appear exaggerated, there is a consensus emerging that gen AI is here to stay and some displacement is inevitable (Srinivasan 2026). As such, the technology is of significant interest to those in work and organised labour studies, where analysis to date has tended towards a focus on gen AI's potential duties, roles, responsibilities and targets in work, as well as those sectors where job losses may occur.

This paper proposes an expansion of the current theoretical interrogation of gen AI by applying social reproduction theory (Bhattacharya 2017 and Ferguson 2020) and the Marxian concept of necessary

labour time to its mechanisms and systems. Capital requires workers not only to produce surplus value, it also requires them to depend upon largely unwaged socially organised reproductive labour to replenish their labour power – labour which capital requires but does not directly compensate. As such, any displacement caused by gen AI in the workplace will also affect this dynamic, moving costs associated with the social reproduction of labour, in part at least, onto the spreadsheet of the gen AI developer, provider, and user.

Although such costs are often considered with regard to fixed capital and automated labour systems, gen AI differs in that it is a dynamic technology that must change and adapt its outputs to each situation it faces – indeed, it is this dynamism that gives gen AI the appearance of learning. While intelligence is an integral part of a human workforce, the developers of gen AI systems must create and recreate gen AI's "intelligence" constantly, as these systems do not learn, they mimic.

The verisimilitude of intelligence is a very costly affair. Gen AI requires physical and computational architecture in the form of energy-intensive data centres and software programming in order to operate. It also requires a constant stream of new information and content in order to retain its standards of inference – including copyrighted material that it scrapes from the internet. Seen in this way, the ongoing attempts to exclude gen AI from copyright law is in effect a struggle over the social reproduction of labour – with creatives in the role of the uncompensated household – and is reflective of a wider structural component of capital's extractive profit-seeking systems (Bhattacharya 2017 and Ferguson 2020).

This paper will expand upon these ideas, arguing for the importance of social reproduction theory for understanding the actually-existing dynamics of production that surround gen AI.

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Hybrid work, organisational restructuring and emerging workplace forms - Room 0.18

Flexible Working, Workplace Norms and Managerial Interpretation: Insights from a Narrative Review

Dennise Shepherd

(University of Salford)

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of flexible working arrangements (FWAs) in many developed economies (Chafi et al., 2022), particularly through the rapid expansion of remote and hybrid practices (McCartney, 2025; Vohra et al., 2024). Remote working has altered how work is coordinated and monitored and expanded the range of tasks possible outside traditional organisational settings, leading employees to re-evaluate work, location and lifestyle choices amid rapid but uneven structural change (Li & Su, 2026). These developments reflect how flexible working practices are helping to reshape expectations around availability, autonomy and the structuring of work in the post pandemic period (McCartney, 2025), which may have implications for gender equality.

UN Sustainable Development Goals for gender equality identify FWAs as key to expanding women's economic participation and career progression (United Nations, 2015). In the UK, recent 2024 and forthcoming 2027 legislative changes aim to widen access to flexible working, yet the success of these policies depends on managerial judgement (Acas, 2024). Research suggests that managerial decisions are often shaped by expectations around visibility, trust and commitment (Kasperska et al., 2024), which in turn are influenced by past experiences and organisational culture (Buick et al., 2024). While early

post-pandemic studies indicated that Covid 19 broadened managerial exposure to flexible working and appeared to soften scepticism (Williamson et al., 2023), recent UK evidence shows signs that traditional expectations of presence and visibility are returning (McCartney, 2025).

This presentation provides insights from a narrative literature review of flexible working scholarship. It explores how workplace norms and organisational practices may shape managerial decision making and considers the implications for gender equality.

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More than Just a Coping Strategy: Exploring the Value of Informal and Formal Flexible Working Practices for Parents in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Bianca Stumbitz, Helen Norman, Emma Banister

(Middlesex University)

Understanding and addressing challenges in managing the transition to parenthood in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (1-249 staff) is critical given they account for 99.4% of the UK business population and 52.3% of private sector employment. Yet little is known about the processes of managing this, and its effect on work-family reconciliation for SME employees. SMEs face specific challenges in supporting parents. Particularly in small organisations, resources tend to be very limited, they often do not have a dedicated Human Resources department or written maternity or paternity policies, and they often adopt more informal approaches to staff management. Our research set out to explore how the transition to parenthood is managed in different types of SMEs.

Our paper is based on a large-scale study on the management of parenthood in UK SMEs, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council's Transforming Working Lives call. We draw on qualitative interviews with 32 employers and 36 employees, repeated at two time points over an 18-month period, as well as large-scale surveys of 2000 SME employers and 2000 employees. Interviews were conducted with employees currently expecting a child or having at least one child under five, and employers with HR responsibilities (e.g. owner-manager in smaller organisations).

While large workplaces often seek to attract good staff by providing work-family support beyond legal entitlements, most notably in the form of enhanced leave and pay, most smaller workplaces cannot afford this type of support, and this is particularly true for micro businesses with fewer than 10 employees. However, our research demonstrated that flexible working is a key support tool in many SMEs, especially where more costly benefits are out of reach. Our survey showed that SME employees even valued informal (41.7%) and formal flexible working (36.2%) slightly more than enhanced maternity (34.8%) and paternity leave and pay (32.2%). Informal flexibility is often used to respond to unexpected situations, such as leaving work early to pick up a sick child from childcare. Formal flexibility usually involves a written request and a longer-term arrangement. Flexibility can become a lifeline for parents, as it makes juggling work and family more manageable and, in some cases, allows them to stay in the workforce in the first place.

Theoretically, we focus on ongoing processes of 'mutual adjustments' within SMEs (Stumbitz et al., 2018; Rouse et al., 2021), through which employers and employees negotiate support based on their judgment of what is feasible in a specific workplace context. These judgements are shaped by available resources, the degree of (in)formality, and awareness of legal entitlements to parental support. Employees' sense of entitlement to support, or what they feel is fair to expect, is based on social comparisons with colleagues and employees working in what they regard as comparator firms rather than large corporates. The nature and extent of mutual adjustments is also explored in relation to the workplace culture and relationships rooted in trust, respect, open communication and 'give and take'.

One Third Place, Three Modes Of (Co)Working

Maria Gratsova

(University of Bath, School of Management)

This socio-spatial study investigates changing work geographies alongside worker subjectivities and experiences. As rising prevalence of self-employed work is among the most notable trends in the UK labour market over the last 25 years (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2025); where do, could and should these people work is a question that is both timely and worthy of academic inquiry. Growth in self-employment has been followed by growth in coworking spaces, with the latter plentifully theorised in recent literature. Aligned with the core promise and purpose of coworking, studies have largely focused on collaboration (Yacoub & Haefliger, 2024) and community (Blagoev et al., 2019). However, the search for spaces that make one feel at home, furnish emotional comfort and help workers be productive can yield surprising results, with some among these unconventional (Vesala, 2024). From purpose-built, formally or commercially designated spaces, this study shifts the attention to third places (Oldenburg, 1989) — neither one's home nor formal workplace — as a site of (co)working, framing these as de facto coworking spaces. Introducing this concept, denoting spaces adopted for similar purposes as formally designated coworking spaces, is the paper's first contribution. Its second contribution is to problematise the singular understanding of the now ubiquitous term coworking, theorising instead three distinct modes of working with and alongside others in shared spaces.

As an ethnographic study of the public foyers of the Barbican Centre, this research relies on multiple qualitative data collection methods: interviews (29), observation (120 hours), in-situ ethnographic interviews (>120), photographs (>480) and archival material. Data collection is complete and inductive thematic analysis ongoing, with early findings indicating three distinct modes of (co)working: active collaborators, attuned companions and anonymous solo workers. Active collaborators engage in joint activity and enact coworking as designed and intended, as they seek synchrony in time and space. Attuned companions design a workday with the optionality of social exchange, dwelling alongside friends or associates for comfort and support, but not actively working together. Anonymous solo workers yearn for a feeling of belonging, finding this in assumed similarity with complete strangers, and benefitting from social scenery. Apart from describing functional variety, these exemplify different modes of togetherness enacted in a de facto coworking space; as such, advancing Sennett's (2012) notion of cooperation as closely linked with togetherness and embedding cooperation in the study of coworking.

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Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification - Room 0.09

Reframing Maternity Leave: Invisible Labour and the Neoliberal Mother During the Global Pandemic

Chloe Tarrabain, Mahwish Khan, Jenna Pandeli

(University of the West of England)

This paper explores the lived experiences of maternity leave during the Covid-19 pandemic through a feminist lens, critiquing neoliberal and postfeminist perspectives. Based on qualitative data from 16 women who gave birth during the Covid-19 pandemic, the study challenges dominant constructions of maternity leave as a period of rest or withdrawal from work. Instead, it conceptualises maternity leave as a site of invisible, intensive, and emotional labour. The findings highlight how neoliberal postfeminist discourses compelled women to internalise responsibility, self-regulate, and perform resilience, while masking exhaustion and emotional strain. The Covid-19 pandemic reinforced gendered divisions of labour and intensified the individualisation of motherhood. The paper contributes to feminist and organisational scholarship by foregrounding the labour of maternity, exposing the limits of empowerment narratives, and calling for greater recognition of maternal work as legitimate and structural. By situating maternal labour within broader discourses of productivity, value, and care, the study urges a rethinking of how maternity leave is framed and supported in both policy and organisational contexts.

Inter-generational Occupational Mobility among Indigenous People in India

John Kujur, Sachin Topno

(Indian Institute of Management, Ranchi)

In Indian society, the economic entitlements become narrower when moving further down the hierarchical ladder of the caste system. This lower access to economic entitlement by the lower castes results in their occupational vulnerability and immobility. Indigenous people, one of the marginalised communities, have been affected by this economic constraint. Building on this context, we explore how the employment pattern of indigenous people vis-à-vis other social groups has changed during the period between 1993 and 2024 by analysing the intergenerational occupational mobility. We rely on data from the Employment and Unemployment Survey and Periodic Labour Force Survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Office, Government of India. In this study, we explore the information using descriptive statistics and the mobility matrix. The study indicates that precarious employment is widespread among the Indigenous population, while intergenerational occupational mobility remains largely constrained. Although some Indigenous people who are engaged in precarious occupations have witnessed occupational mobility, their mobility is confined to lower and lower-middle occupations, i.e. mobility from agricultural labour to non-farm unskilled labour. Noticeably, downward mobility from the salariat, skilled & semi-skilled and cultivating occupations is also witnessed among them. On the other hand, the upward mobility among Scheduled Castes, a marginalised group, is relatively higher, while the Other Backward Castes and 'Others' groups, who are largely employed in higher-paid jobs, witnessed immobility. However, those households employed in precarious occupations in 1993 have witnessed upward mobility over time. To understand what makes indigenous people's occupational

mobility different from other social groups, we examine the land vulnerability, labour market discrimination, lack of social network and social capital and other socio-economic factors, and inter-relation between them. This study holds importance in terms of policy making as it helps to understand the inter-generational persistence in occupation among indigenous people and the determining factors in a caste society. The study also contributes towards the theory of social mobility by explaining the role of caste in the Indian labour market.

Intersectionality of Race and Disability within the Workplace: The Research Findings

Denise Murdoch

(London Metropolitan University)

Aim 1: Explore the lived experience of the Black & Brown Community (B&BC) with dyslexia, its effect on employment, and issues around mental health.

Aim 2: Effects of intersectionality: how do dyslexics from B&BC navigate the workplace, the effects on gaining promotion, the general tasks and performance in the workplace.

1. Researching into how B&BC perceive themselves, how these perceptions, beliefs have been internalised, externalised and interpreting their lived experience.

2. The common themes which arise from the semi-structured interviews and Visual journaling will be used to examine the impact of the demands of working and being employed.

Dyslexia has been examined in depth, focusing on children and young people. Adult dyslexics in employment are less prevalent, with minimal data from B&BC.

Society values the written word, which negatively impacts those who struggle with writing and reading. To gain a deeper insight into the experiences of adults who lack agency.

Study examines the intersectionality of diagnosed and un-/self-diagnosed dyslexic B&BC, their workplace experiences, how they navigate the workplace.

Revealing participants had an extremely difficult time securing positions and remaining in employment.

This impacted on self-care and self-esteem.

Furthermore, gaining insight into workplace strategies.

A major strategy were the resources of family and colleagues. These echoed those of Logan (2019).

Research focuses upon papers derived from semi-structured interviews and visual journaling from 12 participants.

Researcher will be using a qualitative methodology Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is about individuals lived experiences, Smith, and Nizza (2022).

Utilising Multimodal approach (MA), employing a visual journal and semi-structured interviews. Data will offer insights into lived experiences and strategies used to navigate the workplace. Collected data uncovers participants thoughts, experiences, practices, structures, successes, and emotions.

Current themes and outcomes of the study are still being analysed.

Current societal context, it is vital that all those experiencing intersectional identity be supported to remain in the workplace. Clear policies and procedures, from the governmental level downwards, must be established to remove disadvantage, ensure true inclusion, and change attitudes. The voices of the B&BC and those with dyslexia.

Revealed that promotion and competence are seen as major challenges to participants progress in the workplace.

In the Equality Act (2009) the phrase "reasonable adjustments" has led to inconsistent and assumptive employment approaches.

Employment gaps become wider for neurodiverse employees and increase during economic recession. For workplace equality to be truly functional, this must be addressed to provide a level playing field for all. It could be time to update the Equality Act (2009).

Participants experienced issues in the workplace such as sleep deprivation, lack of confidence, low visibility, and shame.

The conclusion drawn would suggest that intersection of ethnicity and dyslexia would be the most significant factor in the research. However, the most fundamental finding is being in the workplace is detrimental to the well-being of neurodiverse individuals.

Follow-up in 5 years

Neurodiverse and mental health in the workplace

Reshaping the workplace- (hybrid practices).

Worker subjectivities, experience and agency 1 - Room 0.11 PhD Showcase

Identity Management of Gender and Sexual Minority Employees in the Workplace: A Study of Strategies and Challenges in the Chinese Context

Yanbo Zhao

(Leeds University Business School)

Research on gender and sexual minority employees' workplace experiences has grown significantly in recent decades. However, this literature remains heavily concentrated in Western contexts, particularly the United States and Western Europe, where legal protections and organisational diversity policies are relatively developed (McFadden, 2015; Combs et al., 2018). Much less is known about how gender and sexual minority employees manage their identities in non-Western contexts where institutional protections are limited and heteronormative norms remain powerful. This research addresses this gap by exploring the identity management strategies of gender and sexual minority employees in Chinese workplaces.

China, which is estimated to have the largest gender and sexual minority population in the world, at more than 70 million people (Wang et al., 2020), provides a distinctive context for examining workplace identity management. While same-sex relationships are not criminalised, explicit legal protections against workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity remain absent. At the same time, strong sociocultural expectations rooted in Confucian traditions – particularly those emphasising heterosexual marriage, filial piety and reproduction – reinforce heteronormative norms within both family and organisational life. These conditions create what this study conceptualises as a context of “multiple barriers”, including limited legal protection, constrained political discourse, cultural pressures and underdeveloped organisational diversity practices.

To analyse identity management in this environment, this study integrates Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. While Goffman emphasises individuals' strategic self-presentation in social interaction, Butler highlights the disciplinary power of heteronormative norms that shape identity through repeated performances. Drawing on these perspectives allows identity management to be understood as a multidimensional process involving both agency and structural constraint. This research in the theoretical sensitising stage therefore conceptualises identity management strategies across three interconnected dimensions: agentive behaviours, referring to strategic self-presentations in workplace interactions; passive behaviours, reflecting conformity shaped by internalised heteronormative expectations; and subversive behaviours, which subtly challenge and destabilise dominant norms.

Methodologically, the project adopts a narrative research approach, using the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) to explore how gender and sexual minority employees construct and make sense of their workplace experiences. Narrative methods are particularly valuable for examining identity management because they allow participants to articulate life stories in their own terms while revealing how identities are shaped across different social contexts. BNIM also enables analysis of the ways individuals negotiate tensions between personal experiences and broader social norms through processes of internal dialogue within their narratives.

By focusing on narrative constructions of workplace experience, this study seeks to illuminate how gender and sexual minority employees interpret, negotiate and manage their identities within the constraints of heteronormative environments in contemporary China. In doing so, this research contributes to the sociology of work by extending discussions of workplace identity management beyond Western contexts and by highlighting the analytical value of narrative approaches for understanding identity, power and work.

How do UK Orthodontic Clinicians Experience Formal Patient Complaints and What Roles Do Workplace Factors Play in Shaping that Experience?

Farnaz Parvizi

(University of Bristol)

Formal patient complaints can arise at any point during the orthodontic treatment journey. They can not only trigger formal disciplinary workplace procedures but if escalated to the regulator of UK dentistry (The General Dental Council), they can have serious implications for the clinician's professional identity, reputation and licence to practice. While the dental profession, like that of medicine, has become more concerned with the wellbeing of its workforce/registrants in recent years, no study has yet been undertaken to explore the effects of formal patient complaints on the wellbeing of the orthodontic workforce. My doctoral research and insights as a practicing clinician are attempting to address this knowledge and research gap

This PhD presentation will provide an overview of the research design and focus on the findings from the qualitative stage of this thesis.

The overall aim of this study is to advance our understanding of the effects of formal patient complaints on the wellbeing of a body of UK dental healthcare professionals, as a theoretically grounded model bounded by current UK employment and regulatory frameworks.

By utilising a mixed-methods approach in a sequential exploratory manner, in Study 1 the orthodontic workforces' emotional, cognitive, professional, and behavioural responses to formal patient complaints as well as their experiences of organisational responses at local and regulatory levels were explored. Contextual and interpretive analysis of the qualitative data from Study 1 allowed me to develop six themes. Each theme captured a unique aspect of the formal patient complaints experience with rich diversity and nuance.

The themes were as follows:

- Complaints: The High Spots on the Graph of Unhappiness
- Making Sense of Complaints
- The Cloak of Professionalism
- Workplace Matters
- To Punish and to Protect: What the Regulator Does and Clinicians Need

Changing Behaviours and Practice: This qualitative study enabled me to conceptualise the "Formal Patient Complaints Experience" as a multidimensional phenomenon with different domains relevant for clinicians' wellbeing in different ways. It also uncovered that workplace factors fundamentally shaped wellbeing impacts.

Study 2 is a quantitative enquiry that builds on the findings of Study 1. By evoking relevant workplace, social and motivational theories this phase of the research refines the formal orthodontic patient complaint experience model, examines the relationships between the distinct domains of this experience to specific and theoretically grounded wellbeing pathways whilst considering the impact of

workplace factors that are pivotal to how the UK orthodontic workforce experience formal patient complaints as well as integrating organisational context as boundary conditions.

This study is currently underway and the full results will be published on completion.

The Escalatory Spiral of Self-optimization: Worker Subjectivities, Alienation, and the Trap of Seeking to Control the Uncontrollable

Fatemeh Jafarzadeh Dogouri, Dermot O'Reilly

(Lancaster University)

Contemporary work is beset by a polycrisis, a state of interconnected and accelerating crises, that has destabilized traditional employment structures (Williams and Erickson, 2024). In this context, while the 'great reshuffle/resignation' is often framed as workers' quest for autonomy and flexibility (Klotz, 2021; Coin 2025), we interrogate such cultural changes through a deeper critique of modern alienation. Synthesizing Rosa (2019, 2013) and Rose (1996), we explore how the existential longing for a resonant life (Rosa, 2019) is transfigured into a technical quest (Rose, 1996, p. 151) for performance: transforming the search for resonance into a trap of self-instrumentalization. Following recent calls within the sociology of work to utilize Rosa's framework as a critical yardstick for assessing meaningful work (e.g., Hancock, 2025; Gandini et al., 2025), we argue that this lens shifts the focus from structural reconfiguration and its objective reordering to a relational ontology, seeing the 'worker' not just as an entity searching for 'meaning' (Laaser and Karlsson, 2022), but a being searching for resonance; yet, disciplined into a logic of escalation which inadvertently reinforces the very alienation they seek to escape.

We contribute an empirical exploration of how a subjective 3A logic helps to explain how the escalatory imperatives of contemporary political economies, Appropriation, Acceleration and Activation (Rosa et al., 2017) are internalized as personal strategies: reclaiming appropriation (the instrumentalizing of the life-world as a professional asset for external gain), internalizing acceleration (somatic anticipation of, and synchronizing with, system speed) and performing activation (mobilizing the self as a disciplinary project for efficient appropriation and acceleration). Following Rosa (2019, p.37), we position these strategies as a terminal stage of social mutability, which represents a form of hyper agency, turning individuals into voluntary engines for a process that systematically expropriates from them.

Employing a phenomenologically informed constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach (Charmaz, 2014), we present analyses of 25 in-depth semi-structured interviews with professionals alongside a critical study of relevant societal and organizational discourses and structures from PhD-research-in-progress. This design enables the operationalization of Rosa's dual perspectival approach: capturing first-person narratives while relating them to a third-person cultural-structural analysis. This allows us to examine how these subjective 3A strategies are intertwined with the broader socio-economic, political and cultural setting of the global polycrisis, revealing how macro structural imperatives both colonize and express the corporeal and intentional life-world.

Our findings provide empirical evidence of the subjective internalization of these 3A strategies that have been hypothesized to animate the escalatory logic through which contemporary political economies dynamically stabilize themselves (Rosa 2013, 2019). This develops the theoretical refinement of the concept of alienation by shifting the focus from the macro structure and external factors to how they relate to internalized 3A logics. By documenting the colonization and activation of subjectivities, we highlight how the system variously eliminates the friction or resistance that usually signals alienation. We conclude that the respondents struggle to repair their disturbed relationship with the world and to renegotiate the terms of their existence; yet they remain haunted by 3A escalatory logics.

Professional Identity in Turbulent Skies: Inter-level Dynamics of Professional Identity Threat among Commercial Aviation Pilots

Kristal Jericho, Áine Ní Léime, Maeve O'sullivan

(University of Galway)

In recent times, debates regarding the decline of work have become a hot topic for many organisational sociology scholars, with papers ranging from the threat of AI to increasing precariousness of

employment. One area that has received attention is how changes in employment and work affect professional identity. As professions shift and adapt to what Strangleman (2007) calls the 'new capitalism', there is an increasing need to consider how these changes effect identities and how professionals will accept, adapt or resist these changes.

While various management theorists have published research regarding identity formation, change and conflict, Chreim et al. (2007) argue there is limited research looking beyond micro-levels of identity, and a lack of consideration for inter-level analysis, such as individual identity perspectives juxtaposed with institutional theories. This angle is important, as identity threats are not faced in a vacuum, but often affected by different levels of influence. This research asks the question, as professionals face changes to their working lives, what are the individual, institutional and industrial factors at play, and what does this mean for agency in one's career?

This presentation aims to explore professional identity threat through an inter-level analysis lens, considering the micro, meso and macro levels of the commercial aviation pilot profession. This research is focused on the context of the commercial aviation pilot profession, as it is a profession facing constant industry changes, from privatisation to product cost changes to consumer perception. Furthermore, most past research in this field has overwhelmingly studied healthcare, education and business task-oriented professions, such as accounting. Therefore, a focus on commercial aviation provides a new and unique area to investigate. Furthermore, the aviation industry, known for its inherent instability, as seen in recent years through global issues, means pilots are often facing industry challenges.

This presentation will present findings from 30 semi-structured interviews with commercial aviation pilots, trainee pilots and aviation personnel from across Europe and Australia, including a range of genders, ages above the age of 18, and career stages. Methodologically, by using a life course perspective, and focusing on life course grids in the interviews, we aim to map different influences affecting commercial aviation pilots, across different levels of the profession, from personal to industry wide, and map these issues against wider industry trends and changes.

This research aims to add valuable contribution to understanding how professional identities are being shaped in current Western economies. Interestingly, by examining the pilot profession, this research will also provide an added level of complexity as it considers a high stress, male-dominated profession that has seen many different industry complications and issues over the past few decades, as well as the ongoing call for more pilots due to a perceived global shortage in the profession.

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Worker subjectivities, experience and agency 2 - Room 0.13

When Work Becomes Capital: Financialization and the Reconfiguration of Labour Values in China

Aihong Li, Ran Ren

(Nanjing University)

In the context of intensifying economic uncertainty, technological disruption, and the expansion of financial markets, this paper examines how financialization is reshaping workers' orientations towards work in contemporary China. While state discourse has long celebrated labour as a source of moral worth, social contribution, and material betterment, the rise of shareholder primacy and corporate financialization has introduced alternative value logics centred on financial returns, asset accumulation, and imagined exit from work.

Drawing on 32 in-depth interviews with individuals with long-term experience of stock market investing, the paper asks how everyday participation in financial markets transforms workers' perceptions of work,

effort, security, and the future. Respondents were initially drawn into stock investing through a range of motivations, including fear of falling behind, the desire to supplement income, and encouragement from family members, friends, and colleagues. Over time, however, engagement with the stock market began to reshape how they understood work itself. Many described paid work as increasingly exhausting, monotonous, and insecure, offering diminishing material reward, social recognition, and personal fulfilment. At the same time, financial investment was imagined as an alternative route to autonomy, security, and upward mobility.

Importantly, this shift did not simply mean abandoning work. Even when respondents experienced significant investment losses, many did not withdraw from the market. Instead, they sought to work harder, save more aggressively, and reinvest in the hope of recovering losses and eventually turning financial participation into a viable pathway towards a different future. In this sense, labour was not displaced by finance so much as increasingly instrumentalized by it; work became a means of generating capital for further investment rather than an end in itself. The findings point to a form of aspirational rentierism, in which respondents remained dependent on labour income while orienting themselves towards the promise of asset-based security and partial escape from work.

The paper argues that financialization is reconfiguring the moral economy of work. Rather than treating labour as the primary route to dignity, security, and a good life, respondents increasingly framed work as something to endure, optimize, or eventually escape. For some, this took the form of FIRE aspirations; for others, it appeared in fantasies of being able to work less (“tang ping”) or to refuse unwanted labour if financial luck or investment success allowed. More broadly, financialization encourages reflection on the standards by which a good life is defined, reshaping both imaginaries of the good life and the practical strategies through which it can be pursued. The paper contributes to debates on worker subjectivities, precarity, and financialization by showing how workers in contemporary China negotiate competing logics of labour, finance, and future-making.

Blood, Freedom and a Way of Life: The Antinomies of HGV Driving during the ‘Great Driver Shortage of 2021’

William Kendall

(London School of Economics and Political Science)

In 2021, a national ‘shortage’ of Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) Drivers gained significant media coverage as part of Britain’s supply chain ‘crisis’. At the height of the crisis, industry figures and trade unions estimated a shortage of over 100,000 drivers. Drivers exiting the industry cited long hours, stagnating wages, high degrees of responsibility at work, and a profession whose social value had been degraded over decades. This paper explores what I call the antinomies of HGV driving. On the one hand, HGV driving is a form of labour associated with a set of strong cultural sentiments around ‘freedom’, ‘independence’, and ‘being your own boss’. It is described as being ‘in the blood’ and even ‘a way of life’. On the other hand, the realities of the labour process often come into tension with these ideals, as exposed by the shortage. I deploy the term ‘antinomies’ to refer to the internal contradictions and instabilities attached to the experience of driving. In doing so, I do not present the drivers themselves as contradictory, but as living with a situation in which the meaning and experience of their work presents contradictions.

This paper proceeds as follows. Firstly, I introduce the driver shortage of 2021 as a ‘reproductive dilemma’ to bring together social reproduction and the cultural meanings of work. HGV driving represents not only a key logistical infrastructure in capital’s efforts to realise value, but a major form of contemporary employment. Yet, HGV drivers have received less scholarly attention than platform-delivery or mega-warehouse workers. While there is a strong US sociological literature on truck drivers with its own distinctive cultural story, the UK literature is far less developed.

Secondly, I examine how the daily experience of HGV driving comes into conflict with the cultural ideals that motivate drivers. I draw upon ethnographic data and biographical interviews with drivers collected during my doctoral fieldwork in the South Lincolnshire Fens. The driver shortage was felt particularly strongly in this ‘agro-logistical hinterland’, where the haulage industry is deeply entangled with agriculture. Through the experiences of drivers I interviewed, I explore how this tension is lived through the daily rhythms of drivers, as they make sense of these contradictory impulses.

Thirdly, I explain the persistence of persistence of these strong cultural sentiments by situating them in the historic structure of the haulage industry, the labour process, and the wider biographies of drivers' lives. I argue that the particular social identities and histories of HGV drivers are consequential for how they make sense of their work. Finally, I reflect on the fact that HGV driving is not the only form of work promising emancipatory discourses of "freedom" or "no bosses." I ask, what do workers mean when they narrate HGV driving as a form of 'freedom'? What does this reveal about the ways in which people negotiate with the current impossibilities of work?

Learning to Imagine the Future: Apprenticeship, Work, and Future Orientations in the Swiss Watch Industry

Mirela Ivanova

(University of York and University of Basel)

Young people are increasingly encouraged to be highly agentic in shaping their life courses and futures, while at the same time experiencing a growing sense of personal and societal futurelessness. While these tensions have been widely discussed, we know far less about how they are produced through concrete experiences of work. Focusing on the Swiss watch industry, this paper examines how labour experiences inform young workers' orientations toward both their personal and societal futures.

Theoretically, the paper combines labour process theory, the sociology of work's concern with worker subjectivities, and the sociology of the future to conceptualise how labour experiences inform subject formation and orient young workers toward both personal and societal futures. Rather than treating these as separate domains, it argues that they are relationally intertwined and mediated through labour experiences. In this perspective, orientations toward one's own future (e.g. career expectations, self-realisation) are closely linked to broader imaginaries of socio-economic stability, crisis, and change.

Empirically, the Swiss watch industry provides a particularly instructive case. It combines a historically rooted craft-based labour process and strong occupational identities with contemporary transformations, including technological change, global market volatility, and geopolitical pressures such as tariffs. The paper draws on 30 problem-centred interviews with watchmaking apprentices and young workers, complemented by interviews with vocational teachers and trade union representatives. The interviews focus on young people's experiences in apprenticeship and employment, their orientations toward their personal futures, their perceptions of the socio-economic future of the sector and the country, and their understandings of employer–employee relations more broadly.

The findings show that workplace socialisation during apprenticeship fosters a craft-based orientation that generates a specific repertoire of critique and future-related fears. These are centred on the perceived devaluation of repair, durability, and craftsmanship, the rise of a "throwaway society," and tensions between artisanal ideals and industrial production, including criticism of companies that mobilise the image of craftsmanship while relying on industrialised production processes. This demonstrates how socialisation into a specific labour process during vocational training generates distinct forms of critique and future imaginaries. At the same time, apprentices tend to reproduce a harmonious image of employer–employee relations and show limited critique of working conditions. In contrast, longer work experience gives rise to more critical perspectives that extend to (future) labour conditions and capital–labour relations.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that personal and societal future orientations are entangled. What unites these orientations is a shared belief in Swissness as both a territorial and a symbolic source of security. A central pattern is a strong belief in Switzerland as a comparatively stable context, articulated through constant comparison: even in the face of crisis, things are expected to be less severe than elsewhere. At the same time, the status of being a Swiss-trained watchmaker is seen as a form of symbolic capital that can be converted into opportunities abroad.

The paper contributes to debates on worker subjectivities by showing how labour process socialisation mediates the coexistence of agency and futurelessness.

In Pursuit of Legitimacy: The Struggle for Meaningful Work among Swedish Military Police

Jennifer Hobbins

(Swedish Defense University)

Following recent developments permeated by geopolitical shifts, ongoing wars and polycrisis, disruptive forces are reshaping working lives (Beck & Brook, 2020; Sargent et al., 2021). Recent commentators have claimed that shifts in the organisation of work and the broader sociopolitical context are causing employees to re-evaluate the status and implications of their work (Jenkins, 2025; Laaser & Karlsson, 2022; Lavery, Checkland & Spooner, 2024). This article examines the work of Swedish military police officers during a tenure of geopolitical transformation. The article seeks a deepened understanding of how employees pursue and navigate struggles associated with meaningful work during tenures when disruptive forces have set occupational and legal authorities in motion.

This study builds on ongoing discussions of meaningful work. The notion of meaningful work implies that it holds particular significance or purpose, and that such perceptions ultimately hinge on the extent to which individuals believe that their work provides value beyond themselves (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Yeoman, 2020). Laaser & Karlsson (2022, 2023) launched a typology of meaningful work that represents a dynamic continuum, in which the emphasis lies on autonomy, dignity, and recognition. As organisations are increasingly permeated by competing interests and logics, this leads to fragmented work practices and a weakened collective experience of the labour process. These contributions have been expanded upon by Jenkins (2025), who demonstrates how labour processes are situated within organisational contexts and sociopolitical conditions that reshape work meanings, and the value of work practices. Such features are particularly salient within the military police, a role that has been historically torn between organizational and political interests. These tensions may be accentuated during times of crises, where uncertainties regarding the future are impeding employees' meaning making processes (see Lavery et al., 2024).

The study draws on ethnographic data. Data collection was conducted over a period of 18 months, including 36 semi-structured interviews with Swedish military police officers of different ranks and years of experience, and a total of four weeks of observations entailing everyday work practices, training sessions, meetings, breaks, and exercises to provide an in-depth understanding of the labour process. Under normal circumstances, Swedish military police are responsible for maintaining order and security within military confines. The findings depict military police officers' search for meaningful work, struggles underpinned by recent legislative delimitations. This situation has rendered employees unable to fully exercise their responsibilities, creating a legislative limbo and the experience of a diminished mandate. In addition, in light of Sweden's recent accession to NATO, there are uncertainties regarding what the future might hold for this occupational group: while some envision a more broadly formulated mandate, others foresee risks of deskilling and further erosion of autonomy and legitimacy. Overall, the study contributes to ongoing discussions regarding dark sides of meaningful work.

PAPER SESSION 5

11:00-12:30

WES Special Event – Room 0.13

Navigating the Ethics of Authoring and Publishing

Marek Korczynski, Laurie Cohen

(Work, Employment and Society Co-Editors in Chief, University of Nottingham)

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.

Algorithmic work and data justice - Room 0.23 (Special Event)

From Human to Machine Management: Algorithmic Control, Power, and Worker Health in the Digital Workplace

Carin Hakansta, Pille Strauss, Lisen Löwstedt, Karin Hennum, Pille Strauss, Heidi Lahti, Denise Harkema, Lisen Löwstedt, Steven Dhondt, Riayj Shaikh, Virginia Gunn, Carin Håkansta, Penny Williams, Michael Quinlan, Min Kyung Lee, Angie Zhang

(Karolinska Institutet)

Algorithmic Management and Occupational Health: Insights from the ALGOSH Programme

Carin Hakansta

(Karolinska Institutet)

This event begins by describing the Swedish multidisciplinary and international research programme ALGOSH, which spans over six years (2023-2029). ALGOSH consists of several work packages that aim to explore the current shift of management functions from humans to machines, delving into how algorithmic management (AM) affect the roles, tasks, power relations and health of workers and managers in the world of work, and what can be done to avoid potential and actual risks. AM has become a pervasive feature of work in most if not all industries, not simply those pertaining to Uber-style arrangements, including service sector and healthcare work where women predominate. AM enables remote micro-management of work tasks including surveillance and performance management according to standardised criteria that has been called a new wave of Taylorism. Unlike Taylorism, the specifics of these controls are embedded in algorithms that workers, unions and regulators may have little or no access to. There are some moves to address this but the opportunity to influence the design-features or negotiate the implementation of AM remains fragmented or limited. As AI gains the capacity to write its own algorithms (with features that remain opaque) these challenges are exacerbated. AM has multiple and complex effects on working conditions including occupational safety and health (OSH), being linked to psychosocial hazards through work intensification as well as direct physical hazards resulting from distraction, situational awareness or software errors in automated equipment, to give but two examples.

Drawing on evidence from Sweden, Finland and Australia and several theories including Labour Process Theory (LPT); Pressure, Disorganisation and Regulatory failure (PDR) and those pertaining to regulation/enforcement, this special event will examine the OSH implications of AM.

Outline of the event: intro (10 minutes), presentation of three papers (15 minutes each + 5 minutes Q&A), Panel discussion in which all presenters and co-presenters discuss (20 minutes).

Same system, different effects: How psychosocial risks from algorithmic management are distributed and negotiated in a non-platform logistics company

Ruben Lind, Pille Strauss, Lisen Löwstedt, Karin Hennum

(Karolinska Institutet)

Algorithmic management (AM) is increasingly leveraged to organise labour and is now deeply embedded in logistics. Yet the safety and health implications of the shift to AM are underexplored. Drawing on labour process theory (LPT) and 28 thematically analysed interviews with workers, managers, union representatives and experts, this qualitative study of a Swedish logistics company narrows this gap. The analysis demonstrates how, first, AM contributes to work intensification and stress; second, how the psychosocial effects of AM interplay with factors like skill-level and employment conditions, and; third, how co-determination of AM can mitigate and prevent psychosocial risks for workers. The paper discusses the inter-relationships between AM and associated psychosocial risks, and importantly, how the influence of both structural conditioning and agential reactions from organisational actors shape how AM is enacted in practice. While AM tends to exacerbate psychosocial risks by expanding the managerial frontier of control, such risks are unevenly distributed and experienced differently across worker sub-groups. Moreover, the influence of worker representatives and regulatory structures is important to understand how AM operates in practice. The paper contributes a new understanding of how in-situ structural and agential interactions reconfigure the labour process in ways that have implications for psychosocial risks experienced by workers.

It's more than technology or psychology: Assessing psychosocial risks in the complex landscape of algorithmic management at work

Virpi Kalakowski, Pille Strauss, Heidi Lahti, Denise Harkema, Lisen Löwstedt, Steven Dhondt, Riayj Shaikh, Virginia Gunn, Carin Håkansta,

(Karolinska Institutet)

Algorithmic management (AM) introduces innovative technological solutions and management practices to traditional workplaces, transforming work nature and conditions in ways that can significantly impact employees' safety and health. The effects of AM-related technology on occupational safety and health (OSH) are not solely determined by the technology itself; rather, socio-technical factors, especially the implementation of algorithmic management within an organization, play a crucial role.

To address this complexity, our approach complements the individual-level psychological perspective of the Job Demands and Resources (JD-R) framework with the organizational and legal perspectives of the Pressure, Disorganization, and Regulatory Failure (PDR) model. The JD-R framework helps identify the demands and resources that arise when algorithmic systems reshape work, while the PDR model allows tracing their organizational and structural origins.

This paper examines algorithmic management from a preventive perspective. We introduce a checklist developed through the ALGOSH program to assess psychosocial risks associated with AM. Our empirical foundation consists of data from semi-structured observational interviews with workers, supervisors, and specialist roles involved in the design, implementation, or use of algorithmic systems in Finland (N = 44) and Sweden (N = 26), within office and care work environments utilizing AM.

Our findings suggest that algorithmic management generates both demands and resources, which are strongly influenced by the conditions under which systems are introduced and governed. The checklist identifies risks related to five functions or activities of AM: algorithmic shift scheduling, task scheduling, distribution of document-based tasks, algorithmic management of phone-in services, and performance management. It categorizes AM-related psychosocial risks into three categories as outlined by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in Finland to support the application of the Act on Labour Protection: work content, work arrangements, and the social dynamics of the work community. Additional psychosocial risks that need to be assessed include the impact of continuous monitoring, conflicting pressures from different sources, reduced opportunities for employee influence, and potential

negative long-term consequences for individuals, such as weakened salary levels, limited advancement opportunities, increased insecurity, and concerns about job retention. Our evidence-based and regulation-informed development of the AM-related risk assessment provides detailed examples from the context of AM.

We highlight the need to expand current risk categories to encompass broader social factors beyond immediate work conditions, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the OSH impacts and risks of algorithmic management. We argue that preventing algorithmic management-related risks requires treating these systems not only as digital tools but as forms of workplace governance that necessitate consultation, discretion, and risk assessment practices tailored to algorithmic management.

Beyond Product Safety: Critical Reflections on the EU AI Act's Capacity to Protect Workers' Health and Safety

Johan Holm, Penny Williams, Michael Quinlan, Min Kyung Lee, Angie Zhang

(Karolinska institutet)

Algorithmic management is reshaping how work is organised, monitored, and controlled across a growing range of sectors. Through systems that allocate tasks, track performance, structure incentives, and influence the pace and intensity of work, managerial control is increasingly exercised through digital infrastructures. This raises a broader question about the governance of work in the contemporary labour process: how far can product-oriented regulation capture the occupational risks that arise when algorithmic systems are embedded in particular workplaces?

This paper examines how the EU AI Act addresses occupational safety and health (OSH) risks associated with algorithmic management, and how its regulatory logic differs from the preventive approach of the EU OSH Framework Directive. It argues that the AI Act approaches many workplace AI systems primarily as high-risk products, relying on ex ante risk management, technical documentation, conformity assessment, and standards-based compliance. By contrast, OSH regulation treats risk as contextual, ongoing, and shaped by the concrete organisation of work, requiring workplace-specific assessment, preventive action, and worker involvement.

The paper shows why this distinction matters for sociological understandings of work and employment. Many of the harms associated with algorithmic management are not simply technical defects but socially produced outcomes of how digital systems are configured, introduced, and used in specific organisational settings. Work intensity, surveillance pressures, reduced autonomy, opaque performance evaluation, and psychosocial strain emerge through the interaction between technology, managerial strategy, and workplace context. These risks are difficult to anticipate or mitigate through provider-led design processes alone.

The paper therefore argues that algorithmic management should be understood not only as an AI product but as a socio-technical mode of labour control. From that perspective, the AI Act provides an important baseline but remains insufficient unless complemented by workplace-level algorithmic risk assessment, stronger worker participation, and clearer guidance for employers and regulators. The paper contributes to debates on algorithmic work and data justice by showing that the regulation of workplace AI is also a question of how responsibility for risk, control, and wellbeing is organised in increasingly digitalised workplaces.

Hybrid work, organisational restructuring and emerging workplace forms - Room 0.18

'AI for thee, but not for me': Power Dynamics in AI-driven Recruitment

Maria Hameed Khan, Penny Williams, Paula McDonald, Ben Matthews

(Queensland University of Technology)

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) is now a widely acknowledged feature of contemporary recruitment practices, ranging from process automation to autonomous selection decisions (Dutta & Naveen, 2025;

Mori et al., 2025). The integration of AI across all stages of recruitment has had a profound impact on job-seekers, employers and the labour market more broadly (Xiong & Kim, 2025). AI in recruitment operates as a double-edged sword, offering efficiency gains to organisations as well as the potential to exercise normative control over job-seekers through mandatory requirements to interact with the AI system (Fritts & Cabrera, 2021; Haque, 2025). Current research indicates unintended ethical, legal and practical risks associated with AI-driven hiring compounded by an amplification of the inherent power symmetries between recruiters and job-seekers (Hunkenschroer & Kriebitz, 2023; Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022; Tholen, 2024). However, the emergence of generative AI has, for the first time, equipped job-seekers with tools to not only counteract AI-use by recruiting organisations but to also leverage AI to improve their employment outcomes (Thakur et al., 2025). Yet the impact of job-seeker AI use on the recruitment process remains underexamined.

Adopting a Foucauldian lens of power and resistance (Foucault, 1982, 2008), this study investigates the evolving sociotechnical dynamics of AI-use in recruitment by examining public discourse in online community forums shaping pre-employment relationships. We conduct a qualitative thematic analysis of subReddit threads that provide a space for discussion between job-seekers, recruiters, HR professionals and developers, drawing attention to an ongoing power struggle between the key recruitment market actors. Our analysis reveals highly polarising sentiments and acute tensions, which we articulate as a metaphorical 'AI arms race' between job-seekers and recruiters, illuminating the incremental forms of control exacted by recruiters in the hiring process using AI and the ways in which job-seekers might resist.

We extend existing knowledge on power relations in the labour market by offering nuanced insights into an ongoing renegotiation of interests in a hyper competitive and rapidly transforming recruitment market. Our findings show, how job-seekers discuss using AI tools as an attempt to reclaim their agency by circumventing restrictive algorithms and filters, improve their probability of being shortlisted and as a form of resistance by sabotaging AI training data with doctored job applications. While, recruiters frame AI tools as a strategic and operational necessity to manage spam, detect cheating and fraudulent candidate behaviour, and ultimately improve recruitment outcomes. We argue that this 'AI arms race' fosters mutual mistrust, undermines the integrity of the recruitment process and destabilises the employment relationship before it even begins.

A Multilevel Analysis on the Role of HRM between Organizational AI Transformation and Employees' Knowledge Management Behaviors

Zhenduo Zhang, Wen Wang, Gang Qu, Jianing Guo, Qi Xu

(Dalian University of Technology)

Employees' knowledge management behaviors, including the proactive acquisition of new knowledge and the deliberate withholding of information, are critical during periods of technological transformation. The integration of Generative AI represents a profound structural shock to organizations. Yet, limited research explains how the specific characteristics of this shock, conceptualized as AI transformation strength and characterized by novelty, disruption, and criticality, shape these dual behaviors. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding regarding the role human resource management can play in managing this complex process. To address this gap, the current study tests a framework explaining the dual impact of AI transformation strength by treating AI adoption as a disruptive organizational event.

Drawing on event system theory and social information processing theory, we propose a dual mediation model. High AI transformation strength simultaneously activates two distinct psychological states. Defensively, it increases employees' perceptions of social dominance threat because autonomous AI systems challenge their established expertise. This threat subsequently weakens knowledge sharing behaviors. Adaptively, the disruption caused by the event fosters learning motivation because employees recognize the urgent need to upgrade skills, which consequently enhances knowledge acquisition. We position Common Good HRM, an approach prioritizing well being, transparency, and ethical responsibility, as a crucial boundary condition. We hypothesize that Common Good HRM mitigates the positive relationship between AI transformation strength and social dominance threat while enhancing the relationship with learning motivation.

To rigorously test the proposed model, we employed a mixed methods design. Study 1 was a three-wave field study among 313 employees across 37 organizations experiencing AI integration. This study captured real world dynamics and established baseline relationships. To address correlational

limitations, Study 2 utilized a 2 by 2 between subjects' vignette experiment manipulating high versus low AI transformation strength and Common Good HRM. Using MBA students with full time work experience, this experimental approach strictly manipulated the core variables and isolated causal mechanisms.

The empirical results consistently supported the main and mediating effects. High AI transformation strength significantly increased both social dominance threat and learning motivation. Consequently, social dominance threat hindered knowledge sharing, whereas learning motivation facilitated knowledge acquisition. The data also revealed a robust asymmetric boundary condition. In both studies, Common Good HRM successfully buffered the defensive pathway. Under high Common Good HRM, the positive impact of AI transformation strength on social dominance threat was significantly mitigated. However, the hypothesis regarding learning motivation was not supported. High AI transformation strength inherently maximized learning motivation, creating a ceiling effect where the introduction of high Common Good HRM yielded no further amplifying effect.

This research unpacks the dual nature of AI transformation by simultaneously examining its defensive and adaptive psychological mechanisms. It advances the human resource management literature by identifying the asymmetric efficacy of Common Good HRM. Practically, while managers cannot entirely eliminate AI driven disruption, organizations should deploy Common Good HRM primarily as a protective mechanism to alleviate status related threats and sustain cooperative knowledge sharing, rather than solely expecting it to act as an additional motivational tool.

Learning Anytime, Anywhere? How Corporate E-Learning Quietly Transfers Learning Responsibility to Employees

Katja Schönlan

(Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg)

Corporate e-learning has become a cornerstone of organisational strategy, a trend accelerated by the shift to remote and hybrid work. Within HR management, digital learning technologies have gained momentum alongside algorithmic management and people analytics, enabling personalised learning paths and systematic data collection to monitor professional development. In the context of digital transformation, continuous employee training is widely considered essential. Digital and AI technologies play a dual role: they both drive the need for ongoing learning and provide the infrastructure, such as learning platforms and virtual seminars, through which it is realised.

This paper presents empirical findings from a research project examining the implementation and use of digital technologies in corporate change management, with e-learning platforms emerging as a focal point of current organisational transformation initiatives. The investigation centres on "I-Learn", an e-learning platform embedded in the Human Resource Development (HRD) strategy of an international high-tech conglomerate headquartered in Germany. Operating across industrial automation, transportation, and healthcare-related technologies, the company faces continuous pressure in a competitive in a rapidly digitalising sector, making the platform central to its learning and professional development strategy. The study draws on 17 semi-structured interviews with employees from various departments, including Human Resource (HR) and the works council.

Adopting a constructivist, sociomaterial perspective, the paper shows how the e-learning platform configures learning as both ambivalent and increasingly individualised. Through its design and metrics, learning is subtly shaped by datafication, influencing how employees perceive their performance and organisational expectations. In combination with temporal pressures, platform flexibility, and work demands, these dynamics configure learning as an activity undertaken largely at home, thereby shifting responsibility onto employees. Limited guidance from HR programmes and managers leaves employees to navigate and manage learning largely on their own. While corporate e-learning is often evaluated quantitatively, this study offers an in-depth, qualitative account of how such platforms are experienced and enacted, providing new insights into the ambivalent role of digital learning technologies in shaping – not merely delivering – workplace learning.

Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification 1 - Room 0.08

“Is my dream job still attainable?”: The Difference of Labour Market Perspective for Youth and Their Parents

Iga Wermínska-Wisnickska, Olga Czeranowska, Agnieszka Golinska
(SWPS University)

The progressive de-linearisation of life trajectories (Buchmann, 1989) means that young people's experiences are increasingly varied. Moreover, they rarely follow a straightforward, direct path from education to employment (Cuervo, 2022; Furlong et al., 2003; Serracant, 2011) that was typical for the previous generations.

Our presentation draws on data collected within the research project *Ultragen: Becoming an Adult in Times of Ultra-Uncertainty: An Intergenerational Theory of 'Shaky' Transitions* (funded by the National Science Centre, OPUS 2020/37/B/HS6/01685; Principal Investigator: Prof. Paulina Pustułka). The project employed a mixed-methods design and presented analysis is based on the longitudinal qualitative module consisting of two waves of in-depth interviews with young adults (G2) and their parents (G1). The first wave (W1) included interviews with 35 young adults aged 18–36 (18 women, 16 men, and one non-binary participant) and 35 interviews with parents (21 women, 14 men). The second wave, which took place about 1 year later (W2) consisted of follow-up interviews with 26 of previous G2 participants, now aged 20–38, (16 women, 9 men, and one non-binary participant) and 25 interviews with parents (17 women, 8 men). Between the waves, asynchronous written interviews were conducted.

Presented analysis focuses on career trajectories, drawing on thematic analysis conducted in MAXQDA and informed by a subject-centred approach (Zhou et al., 2008). We focus on younger generations' experiences in education-to-work transitions, engaging with the concept of “real jobs” - an employment situation that is consistent with an individual's expectations for their career. We also characterize the “not-real jobs” i.e. employment situations which are not considered by participants to be a part of their careers. Moreover, our analysis covers challenges young adults encounter on the labour market, such as balancing work and education, skills mismatch and reliance on informal job networks. We also examine labour market future plans of both generations (18–35 and 41–66), as well as processes of intergenerational transmission of occupational paths and work-related attitudes. Particular attention is paid to how the contemporary polycrisis shapes career trajectories, especially among younger participants.

Finding a Safe Haven from Academic Precarity? How STEM Culture Impacts Marginalised Individuals in an Emerging Tech Profession in Academia

Anita Banerji, Jasmine Folz, Caroline Jay, Pauline Karega, Ella Kaye, Miriam Tenquist
(University of Manchester)

As an emergent technology profession in UK Higher Education (HE), Research Software Engineering has become a space where Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) professionals with software skills are able to seek secure employment. The profession is relatively young with the Research Software Engineer (RSE) role descriptor only formalised in 2012. Since then, the number of RSE roles has expanded rapidly and there are now HE and research institutes that employ RSEs within central teams on permanent contracts to provide software expertise to multiple research teams. However, recent survey data show that those identifying as RSEs are predominantly white (75%) and male (71%), demonstrating lower diversity than academia as a whole and software engineering in industry. Although this reflects the social history of computing in the UK, computing lab culture in HE, and dominant norms in STEM more broadly, the lack of diversity within RSE is particularly pronounced. Because those with marginalised identities are more likely to be impacted the precarity in UK HE, it's imperative to understand how this emerging, stable career route is reproducing inequalities.

To explore the negotiation of personal and professional identity within Research Software Engineering, we employed a co-production approach, bringing together social science expertise and lived experience

throughout the research process from determining research goals to interpreting findings. We interviewed research software professionals with marginalised identities (e.g. gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, and disability) all of whom had PhD training in a STEM area. The interviews covered professional identity, experiences applying for research software roles, future career plans, and how interviewees' marginalised identities have shaped their education and career.

We found that precarity in UK academia led to interviewees applying for RSE roles, rather than RSE being a long-held career aspiration. Despite being unable to pursue careers in their area of research expertise (e.g. geology, physics, biochemistry) the interviewees embraced the RSE identity. They stated that the role allowed them to use a specialised skill set to do work they find meaningful in a sector that aligned with their values, with an adequate degree of autonomy. Experiences of discrimination were common for the interviewees either within their STEM education and careers and/or within Research Software Engineering. However, the interviewees maintained a belief in academic meritocracy, struggling to hold colleagues accountable for discriminatory behaviours. Despite this cognitive dissonance, interviewees noted that workplace diversity and trust in institutional commitments to equity were important to their future career decisions.

Our findings further evidence the existence of a hegemony of meritocracy in engineering and, following from this, the difficulties for engineers with marginalised identities in understanding the need to act towards structural change. We also demonstrate how the regimes of inequality seen in STEM are being perpetuated within this emerging profession. We therefore suggest that, as financial pressures in academia increase and generative AI profoundly reshapes the RSE role, RSE will only offer an equitable safe haven from precarity within academia if RSE leaders implement structural reforms to recruitment and promotion practices for professionals with marginalised identities.

Intersectional Precarity in Hybrid Academia: Black Women's Academic Labour in Post-Pandemic UK Higher Education

Tinkuma Edafioghor, Ifeoma Dan-Ogosi

(University of the West of England)

Hybrid working is now embedded in UK higher education and is often presented as offering flexibility, autonomy, improved productivity, and the promise of better work–life balance. Drawing on an intersectional lens, this paper explores how these claims are complicated in the everyday working lives of Black women academics. Based on qualitative data from focus groups and interviews with Black women academics in UK universities, the paper explores how hybrid work reshapes academic labour through the interaction of race, gender, migration status, care responsibilities, and institutional expectations.

The paper argues that hybrid working did not flatten existing inequalities but reorganised academic labour through them. While some participants valued the flexibility of working from home and described greater control over particular tasks, these benefits were uneven and conditional. Participants also described intensified and often unrecognised labour, blurred boundaries between work and home, and pressures of constant responsiveness. However, the paper's main contribution is to show that the same formal flexibility could be enabling for one person and highly constrained for another. Experiences of hybrid working were shaped by visa insecurity, maternity and caregiving responsibilities, and formal and informal equity and diversity labour, all of which influenced participants' capacity to step back from work, manage time, and have their labour recognised. The paper contributes to debates on work, inequality, and precarity by showing how hybrid academic work can reproduce structural inequalities under the language of flexibility.

Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification 2 - Room 0.09

PhD Showcase

Locating Precarity and (Im)Mobility: A Sociological Study on Tea Plantation Workers of Dibrugarh, Assam, India

Seonti Sengupta

(Indian Institute of Technology Dhanbad)

This paper presents work in progress from an ongoing PhD study examining the labor regimes of tea plantation workers in Dibrugarh, Assam, within the broader context of the contemporary “polycrisis.” It seeks to understand how historically embedded forms of labor control intersect with current processes of economic restructuring, informalisation, and crises of social reproduction to shape workers’ everyday experiences, agency, and mobility. By situating plantation labor within these overlapping crises, the study interrogates how structural transformations in the world of work are lived and negotiated in a postcolonial context. The tea plantation sector in Assam, established under colonial rule in the nineteenth century, depended on the migration of labourers from regions such as Chotanagpur, Bengal, and the Madras Presidency, under highly exploitative conditions that resembled indenture. Despite the industry’s continued integration into global value chains and its contribution to capital accumulation, the socio-economic conditions of plantation workers reflect enduring continuities of structural inequality. Engaging with the notion of the “Great Reshuffle,” the paper critically examines whether contemporary labour market transformations generate meaningful opportunities for mobility, or instead reproduce historically entrenched forms of precarity and marginalisation. The study is theoretically informed by labour process theory and perspectives on social reproduction, enabling an analysis of the interconnections between production, reproduction, and generational continuity within plantation economies. Methodologically, it adopts a multi-sited ethnographic approach by G.E. Marcus, drawing on strategies such as “following the people,” “the commodity (tea),” and “the conflict.” The research is based on ongoing fieldwork and preliminary qualitative data derived from worker narratives, observations, and interactions across plantation sites. It also incorporates reflexive engagement with the researcher’s positionality in accessing and interpreting the lived experiences of marginalised labouring communities. Findings from the field indicate that recruitment into plantation labour is mediated through kinship-based and endogamous networks, particularly via the baadli system, reinforcing occupational immobility across generations. Workers report persistently low wages, necessitating engagement in multiple forms of labour to sustain livelihoods, reflecting broader processes of informalisation within a formally organised sector. The study further reveals gendered inequalities within institutional and workplace structures, although women are represented in trade unions, decision-making power remains predominantly male-controlled. In contrast, women workers face vulnerabilities, including harassment and exclusion from mechanised and higher-skilled tasks. It has also highlighted methodological and ethical challenges, including negotiating access within plantation spaces, building trust with participants, and tracing labour relations across sites shaped by both historical legacies and contemporary constraints. These reflections are central to understanding the production of ethnographic knowledge in contexts marked by structural inequality. By foregrounding the interconnections between global value chains, social reproduction, and institutional fragility, this study contributes to sociological debates on work and employment in the Global South. It argues that the “reshuffling” of work under conditions of polycrisis is experienced not as expanded opportunity, but as the persistence and reconfiguration of structural precarity, constrained mobility, and deeply embedded inequalities.

From Segregation to Superexploitation: Neoliberal Capital Accumulation and Dalit Settlements in Kerala, India

Shabin Bn

(University of Hyderabad)

Dalit colonies in Kerala, India, refer to caste-segregated residential settlements historically constituted through processes of social exclusion, landlessness, and state intervention. The term 'colony' does not denote colonial occupation but is locally used to describe spatially demarcated habitations predominantly inhabited by Dalit communities. These settlements are historically contingent socio-spatial formations shaped by trajectories such as land redistribution, welfare housing programmes, and caste-based marginalisation. In analytical terms, they exhibit features comparable to those of globally recognised forms of marginalised spaces, including African American Ghettos in the United States, the Banlieues of France, and the Brazilian Favelas. While differing in historical origins and political economies, they share structural characteristics such as ascriptive marginality, territorially inscribed stigma, and forms of state-mediated segregation. Official estimates suggest approximately 26,000 such colonies across Kerala. Despite their visibility, deprivation and stigma, these spaces remain underexamined in academic research.

At the initial stage of the study, the problem reflects a genuine theoretical gap rather than a mere empirical deficiency. The issue is not that Dalit colonies are under-researched. Still, the dominant spatial frameworks, particularly those derived from Western urban theory, are analytically misaligned with the historical and social specificity of caste-structured space in Kerala. In the present study, rather than using Dalit colonies as a theoretically theorised spatial formation, it is deployed as a heuristic entry point for empirical interrogation. The research does not treat these spaces as analytically autonomous, nor does it attempt to theorise them through spatial sociology or urban theory. Instead, the study uses the category as a limited methodological tool to examine whether the socially stigmatised label emerges in residents' lived experiences. The central analytical axis remains the political economy of labour, exploitation, and access to means of production, interrogating whether caste-marked spatial identity mediates engagement with contemporary neoliberal-capitalist relations of production, labour markets, and capital accumulation.

To capture this articulation, the study adopts a two-layered design. First, it undertakes a structural class analysis grounded in Erik Olin Wright's relational framework to map individual residents within specific class locations and situate their positions in relation to capital. Second, it employs a critical hermeneutic interpretation of in-depth interviews to examine whether stigma emerges within participants' partial standpoints as they navigate the contemporary political economy. These interviews are not used to catalogue subjective feelings but to interpret lived experience as texts that reveal underlying ideological and structural forces.

Based on an iterative analysis of three settlements, the study provides evidence that challenges dominant Western frameworks, particularly those of Loïc Wacquant on superfluity and disconnection from capitalist accumulation. Rather than exclusion, historically marginalised, land-dispossessed communities in caste-marked colonies are increasingly incorporated into contemporary forms of capitalism. They are exploited within contemporary algorithms of platform capitalism, precarious unskilled-labour migration, and the neoliberal regime of credit-enabled consumption, which ties identity repair to indebtedness, reinforcing labour discipline and precarity. Stigma acted as an active catalyst, reducing their local job market participation due to territorially marked stigma. The contraction of state welfare and reduced access to public employment intensify this process.

Wage Penalty in the Hospitality Sector

Albian Krasniqi, Rory O'Farrell

(Technological University Dublin)

Introduction: Workers in the tourism and hospitality sector have been systematically and persistently underpaid compared to those in other industries (Muñoz, 2009; Santos, 2007; Doğru, 2019). This persistent wage disparity is often attributed to the sector's seasonal employment patterns and the prevalence of low-skilled labour, both of which contribute to a structurally low-wage equilibrium. Over time, this has fostered what Riley (2003) describes as a "tolerance for low pay," suggesting that low wages have become institutionally embedded within the industry.

It remains unclear whether these wage differentials are entirely explained by workers' observable characteristics (e.g., education), or whether an unexplained component persists—commonly interpreted as a sectoral wage penalty. This study provides the first systematic evidence of such a pay penalty across most of Western Europe's hospitality sectors, with the gap being particularly pronounced among top quantile earners.

Data and Methodology: The analysis draws on microdata from the Structure of Earnings Survey (SES), covering seven Western European countries. The SES contains matched employer–employee records on gross hourly earnings, verified through administrative data rather than self-reports, making it particularly reliable for cross-country wage comparisons.

We apply recent unconditional quantile decomposition techniques (Firpo, Fortin, and Lemieux, 2009; Firpo, Fortin, and Lemieux, 2018) to decompose the wage gap between hospitality and non-hospitality sectors into two components: (i) the explained part, capturing differences in wages due to observable characteristics such as tenure, age, gender, and occupation, and (ii) the unexplained part, reflecting wage differences not accounted for by these characteristics and interpreted as a hospitality sector wage penalty.

Results: Findings indicate a persistent wage penalty for hospitality workers in Western Europe, ranging from 4% to 16% per hour, on average. Among top earners, the penalty is significantly larger, reaching up to 35% per hour in the United Kingdom. The penalty persists across education levels, suggesting that low pay in hospitality is not solely a result of lower educational attainment. Moreover, the penalty remains evident when hospitality workers are compared with those in the retail sector or other industries individually, confirming its robustness across alternative reference groups.

Policy Implications and Conclusion: The study provides important insights for policy debates on job quality and labour market inequality within Western Europe's hospitality sector. The evidence of a persistent, unexplained wage penalty highlights the need for targeted policy interventions, including stronger collective bargaining mechanisms, fair pay initiatives, and sectoral wage standards. This research thus offers the first cross-national evidence that, even after accounting for worker characteristics, hospitality employees continue to face a significant and enduring wage disadvantage in Western Europe.

Migration, mobility and labour reconfigurations - Room 0.19

Entrepreneurial Career Imaginaries among International Students in the UK: Rethinking Organisational Employment in Digital Labour Markets

Emine Canan Acar

(Middlesex University)

International education has long been associated with aspirations for professional employment within multinational organisations and globally integrated firms. For many students from developing economies, obtaining a Western university degree has historically functioned as a form of mobility capital, enabling access to higher-status labour markets and professional career pathways. Within this framing, organisational employment has commonly been treated as the central aspirational endpoint of international education trajectories. Research on graduate labour markets and global talent mobility similarly assumes that highly educated graduates seek organisational careers and that firms compete primarily with other employers for access to this talent pool (Collings and Mellahi, 2009).

However, contemporary labour markets are undergoing significant restructuring. Digitalisation, the expansion of online marketplaces, and the growth of cross-border entrepreneurial opportunities have reduced barriers to self-employment and independent economic activity (Kalleberg, 2018). These developments unfold within a broader polycrisis characterised by digital transformation, tightening migration regimes, and growing labour market insecurity, reshaping opportunity structures for internationally mobile populations. Situated within the “Great Reshuffle”, established expectations concerning work, career stability, and organisational attachment are being renegotiated across labour

markets (Schor et al., 2023). In this context, it becomes particularly important to examine how emerging labour market entrants themselves imagine and make sense of their future work.

This study explores how international students from developing economies studying in the UK construct their future career aspirations. It examines how students position organisational employment within their career imaginaries in relation to entrepreneurial and digitally enabled opportunities. In doing so, it considers how internationally mobile students interpret emerging labour market opportunities while navigating structural constraints, including visa regimes and unequal access to labour markets. While multinational employment has historically represented a prestigious and desirable career pathway (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013), expanding digital opportunity structures may reshape how students interpret alternative career trajectories, while potentially reproducing inequalities in access to secure work.

The paper draws on protean career theory, which conceptualises careers as increasingly self-directed and values-driven. Individuals actively interpret changing labour market conditions when constructing career aspirations (Sullivan and Arthur, 2006). For internationally mobile students, these interpretations are shaped by transnational mobility regimes and the possibility of engaging in cross-border entrepreneurial activities, highlighting the interplay between agency and structural conditions.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with approximately 20–25 international students studying in UK higher education institutions, including both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Data will be analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns in how students narrate autonomy, opportunity, and work aspirations.

At the time of submission, data collection has not yet commenced, and the study is presented as work in progress. Data collection is expected to begin following acceptance, with initial interviews and preliminary analysis anticipated prior to the conference. The paper contributes to the sociology of work and employment by examining how internationally mobile students reinterpret organisational employment in the context of digital restructuring and labour market change, offering insight into how the “Great Reshuffle” is reshaping expectations of work, security, and mobility.

Migration and Education-Occupation Mismatch in the Indian Labour Market: Does Gender Make a Difference?

Indrajit Bairagya

(Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru)

“Educated workers enjoy at least three basic advantages over less educated workers in the labour market: higher wages, greater upward mobility in income and occupation, and greater employment stability” (Mincer, 1991). However, this benefit does not accrue to an individual if the supply of education qualifications does not align with the requirements of a job, leading to an education-occupation mismatch. The extant literature (Chowdury, 2014; Bahl & Sharma, 2021; 2023; Gooptu et al., 2023) has highlighted the issue of overeducation, where the educational qualification or the skill of an individual exceeds the requirements of the job, resulting in diminished expected returns from education. It not just leads to wage penalties and inefficient use of human resources but also the dissatisfaction that comes with it. The incidence of overeducation has emerged as a critical issue in India’s employment discourse. Albeit the issue is discussed round the world, it would be interesting to note its interaction of overeducation with migration and gender, an under-researched area in academia. Therefore, the study investigates the phenomenon of overeducation among migrant and non-migrant workers in India, with a special focus on gender.

A distinctive contribution of this paper lies in its use of the latest unit-level migration data from PLFS 2020–21 to particularly track gender differences in the issue of overeducation among migrant and non-migrant workers in India. The data collection period overlaps with the COVID-19 pandemic, but to ensure analytical clarity, we explicitly account for pandemic induced distortions by carefully netting out the effects of COVID-related and return migration from our sample. These adjustments allow us to examine structural patterns of mismatch that are not solely driven by temporary shocks.

It is important to make a note that the relationship between our dependent variable ‘overeducation’ and our key explanatory variable ‘migration’ is not exogenous. There are several unobserved factors that

have an impact on the variables, like motivation, family needs, migration network, determination, risk factors, and so on, making the two separate binary dependent outcomes to be determined jointly, with their error terms correlated. To address this issue, 'lagged district-level migration rate' has been used as an instrumental variable for the analysis, which helps in examining the causal effect of 'being a migrant or a non-migrant' on the 'likelihood of overeducation' based on a two-stage least square regression model.

The result of bivariate analysis reveals that while migration generally reduces the likelihood of overeducation, this effect varies across different groups, particularly, female migrants. The likelihood of overeducation was more when only female migrants were studied, depicting the socio-cultural barriers. Descriptive statistics suggests that more than 50 per cent migrants are women, but among them 90 per cent migrate only for marriage-related reasons. This means women are bound with domestic responsibilities and might prefer to take up job, that is more flexible to help her balance both family and work. But among those who especially migrated for work, experience a reduced incidence of overeducation, depicting that the reason behind migration affects the motivation to job search.

Freedom to Choose or Choosing within Limits? Preference Formation and College Choice in Disadvantage Contexts

Dauli Kumari

(Jawaharlal Nehru University)

School and college choice occupy a central position in debates on human capital formation, labour market outcomes, and higher education policy. Decisions regarding where and what to study are often treated in policy and economic models as the outcome of individual preferences, rational calculations, and expected economic returns. Within this framework, Gary Becker's human capital theory conceptualises education as an investment that enhances individuals' skills and productivity, leading to higher earnings, improved employability, and upward social mobility (Becker, 1964; 1993). From this perspective, students are assumed to freely choose educational pathways that maximise their future labour market returns, and geographic mobility for education is interpreted as a strategic response to opportunity differentials.

This paper challenges this assumption by arguing that, in spatially unequal contexts, higher education choices are better understood as human capital investments made under constraint rather than as unconstrained expressions of individual preference. In regions characterised by uneven educational infrastructure, limited local labour markets, and strong social stratification, students' choices are shaped not only by aspirations and merit but also by the resources and restrictions embedded in their social environments. The selection of a course or university is therefore not random; it reflects the interaction of academic credentials, household resources, institutional availability, and socially structured expectations.

Insights from cultural and social reproduction theories further complicate the notion of free educational choice. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) argues that educational decisions are deeply influenced by cultural capital, habitus, and social position. From this perspective, choices are not fully autonomous but are filtered through family backgrounds, social norms, and historically shaped dispositions. What appears as an individual preference is often the outcome of internalised constraints, where students learn to "choose" options that feel realistic and legitimate within their social world. Thus, higher education decisions reflect both opportunity and limitation, aspiration and adjustment.

Drawing on human capital theory and cultural capital theory, this study examines how students' preferences regarding college choice—specifically, whether to pursue undergraduate education within their home state or outside the state are shaped by individual characteristics, household resources, and institutional support mechanisms. Using primary survey data from 593 undergraduate students in Bihar, India, the analysis employs descriptive statistics and logistic regression models to assess how academic performance, gender, household economic stability, and access to policy-related supports influence students' likelihood of enrolling outside their home location.

The findings reveal that while academic merit and entrance examination performance expand formal access to higher education opportunities, they do not automatically translate into substantive freedom of choice. Instead, household resources, financial security, and institutional conditions play a decisive role in enabling students to convert educational aspirations into actual mobility. By foregrounding these

dynamics, the paper contributes to debates on work, employment, and society by demonstrating that higher education policy cannot be evaluated solely through enrolment expansion or merit-based access. Instead, it underscores the need to assess policies in terms of their capacity to expand students' real capabilities to choose educational pathways that meaningfully shape their future employment prospects.

Migrant Skills (Mis)Match in Comparative Perspective: Patterns, Determinants, Migrant Perceptions and Strategies in the United Kingdom and France

Joanne Walker, Cyrine Hannafi, Heila Sha, Christopher Forde

(University of Angers)

In a global context of interconnected crises that have caused significant shifts in work, employment and social protection relationships, international migrants are more vulnerable to skills mismatch than non-migrants (Aleksynska and Tritah, 2013). This paper examines (1) patterns and drivers of skills mismatch and (2) international migrants' perceptions of skills (mis)match and vulnerability on the labour market, and strategies they use to navigate these in a comparative perspective.

By comparing the UK and France, we seek to understand whether and how disparate labour market regimes (Amable, 2003) and lifelong learning systems (Desjardins, 2017), produce varied determinants for skills mismatch and influence migrants' perceptions of and strategies to navigate these. In comparative studies, the UK is generally classed among the more liberal labour market regimes, with a market-based adult education system requiring individual educational investment to compensate for weak equalization instruments and high inequality (Desjardins, 2017: 26-28). France, on the other hand, is classed among corporatist or stakeholder-led labour market and adult education regimes, which create fragmented and sector dependent employment and retraining opportunities (Desjardins, 2017: 29-31).

The paper draws on data collected in the context of the Skills4Justice research programme (2023-2026), funded by Horizon Europe. In France, the quantitative analysis relies on the secondary exploitation of several large-scale datasets. These include the Enquête Emploi (French Labour Force Survey) and the ELIPA survey (2018–2022), which follows recently arrived immigrants and documents their labour market trajectories and integration processes. Data from 28 semi-structured interviews with migrant workers in France will complement this. In the UK, the quantitative analysis focuses on the use of the secondary Labour Force Survey dataset, along with analysis from an original survey of 318 migrants in the UK, conducted for the Skills4Justice project. The UK analysis is also based on qualitative data from 43 semi-structured interviews with migrants in the UK.

The paper will be organized in three parts. First, patterns of skills (mis)match among migrant workers in France and the UK will be explored through data comparing their educational background to employment status. Second, factors contributing to skills (mis)match in each country (immigration policy, skills recognition, employment policy) will be compared. Third, the paper will first aggregate interview data from each country to identify common perceptions about skills mismatch experiences: in each country, some workers experience mismatch as injustice, while others justify it or reconcile with it by citing benefits from jobs, improved safety and quality of life or personal values. We will then go on to explore whether some strategies for navigating skills mismatch (upskilling/ reskilling/ deskilling/ changing locations) are specific to national labour regimes.

The insights gained through this comparative research carry important policy implications: addressing migrants' skills mismatch requires not only improved skills recognition and training policies but also coordinated reforms across labour market regulation and lifelong learning systems to better support migrants' skill utilization, mobility and wellbeing.

Open Stream - Room 0.24

Autonomy in Hybrid Working: Before, During and After Covid-19

Hugh Cook, Irena Grugulis

(University of Leeds)

This paper presents ongoing research with CollectCo investigating working practices, control and autonomy in a call centre-based debt collection firm. The project commenced in 2018 and ran through the first lockdown in response to the pandemic, where employees in this tightly controlled call-centre environment were sent to work from home. Labour process theory has a strong tradition of research in call-centre workplaces, in particular focussing on the nature of control and autonomy at work (Taylor and Bain, 1999; 2007). The literature has considered the nature of control over remote workers (Briken, Chillas, Krzywdzinski and Marks, 2017) and more recently has mapped the phenomena of control during pandemic lockdowns (Fana, Massimo and Moro, 2021). The paper seeks to explore the changing dynamics of autonomy throughout the pandemic lockdown and return to work.

Our methodology allowed us to track the unique effects of the Covid Pandemic on this call-centre workplace and on the experiences of its employees utilising qualitative and ethnographic data across three panels of data: before, during and after the pandemic. The first panel comprised of sixteen focus groups with c100 employees and ethnographic observations of 62 calls followed by snap interviews, providing detailed insight into management practices, and observed experience of the nature of the work. The second panel comprised Zoom video diaries with 17 participants, repeated monthly through the Covid-19 lockdown (February to July, 2020), with some attrition. Five in-depth interviews were also conducted to explore home working in greater detail. This provided a unique opportunity to explore employees' experiences of shifting from a tightly controlled office work environment to working from home. The third panel of data is ongoing and seeks to explore the post lockdown emergence of hybrid working.

Initial data portrayed a tightly controlled call-centre with a significant proportion of staff encountering significant mental health problems stemming from the nature of the work: collecting long standing debt from vulnerable customers and the associated exposure to their highly emotive life stories during calls. Mental health problems were exacerbated by management KPIs which sought to maximise the amount of debt collected and by intense monitoring of all activity within the building. During the first Covid-19 lockdown, employees transited from this highly controlled workplace to the relative freedom of home working. Many welcomed this move because some systems of control were absent, such as timed toilet breaks and blocking of mobile phones. Colleagues would work with Netflix on in the background or paint pictures while talking to customers, while those affected by poor relationships with managers thrived in the newly distant relationship. The ongoing stage explores the hybrid working system where previous tools of control in the office have been dropped as they can't be replicated at home. However despite this, autonomy remains illusory as performance monitoring persists around KPIs. This study is developing a nuanced picture of developing perceptions of autonomy set against the backdrop of ubiquitous KPI monitoring.

The Moderating Role of Employee Voice on the Relationship Between Technology Usage at Work and Employee Well-being

Ioulia Bessa, Abbie Winton, Charles Umney, Esme Terry

(University of Leeds)

The rapid expansion of workplace technologies—including digital tools, artificial intelligence (AI), and robotics—has intensified scholarly and policy debates regarding their implications for employee well-being. While existing research provides mixed evidence on the relationship between technology use and well-being, considerably less attention has been paid to the role of employee voice in shaping these outcomes. This paper addresses this gap by examining whether and how employee voice moderates the relationship between workplace technology use and employee well-being and job satisfaction.

The study integrates three strands of research: technology and well-being; technology and worker representation, and unions/voice and well-being. Earlier studies suggest that technology can simultaneously enhance flexibility and efficiency while also intensifying work and increasing stress.

More recent research highlights that outcomes depend heavily on contextual factors such as job design, skill requirements, and organizational practices. At the same time, a growing body of work points to the importance of unions and voice mechanisms—such as direct consultation and collective representation—in shaping how technologies are implemented and experienced at work. However, large-scale quantitative analyses combining all three dimensions remain limited.

To address this, the paper develops a conceptual model in which employee voice mediates the relationship between technology use and well-being outcomes, while also being influenced by technology adoption and, in turn, affecting well-being and job satisfaction. The analysis draws on a dataset of 2,414 employees collected by the CIPD (via YouGov) between June 2019 and June 2020. Key variables include frequency of technology use (computers and handheld devices), forms of employee voice (direct consultation and representative voice), and measures of affective well-being and overall job satisfaction. In addition, the team is awaiting the Skills and Employment dataset, scheduled for release in end of March 2026, which includes comparable variables.

Initial findings suggest a nuanced relationship between technology use and well-being. Moderate use of computers and handheld devices is positively associated with both well-being and job satisfaction, whereas more intensive use—particularly of handheld devices—is linked to declines in these outcomes, pointing to potential work intensification effects. Technology use is also systematically associated with the presence and type of voice mechanisms: workplaces with direct employee consultation tend to exhibit higher levels of technology use, while patterns differ for representative forms of voice.

Importantly, employee voice is positively associated with well-being and job satisfaction across measures. Both direct involvement and representation by employee or trade union representatives are linked to improved outcomes. When considering all variables together, the results indicate that voice mechanisms can shape how technology use translates into well-being, although effects vary depending on the type of technology and form of voice.

These findings provide early evidence that employee voice plays a mediating role in the technology–well-being relationship, highlighting the importance of participatory practices and social dialogue in technologically changing workplaces. Ongoing work will extend the analysis using additional datasets and more refined measures, with particular attention to different forms of voice and technology use.

Beyond Location: Slow and Fast Nomading as Temporal Work Practices

Dimitrinka Stoyanova Russell, Christopher Russell

(Cardiff University)

Scholarship and popular imagery typically situate digital nomads spatially (Prengler et al 2025) or in terms of work boundaries (Aeroles et al 2023; Stich et al 2025) but far less attention is given to the temporal dimensions through which nomads organise their lives. This paper foregrounds time as a lens through which nomadic work becomes intelligible. We demonstrate that temporal self management – rather than mobility alone – is central to sustaining nomadic work. Recognising nomadism as a temporally organised mode of labour reframes autonomy, productivity and wellbeing in ways essential for understanding contemporary location-independent work regimes.

We draw upon ongoing fieldwork in Bansko, Bulgaria, a digital nomad hotspot and site of the world's largest digital nomad (physical) meeting place, Bansko Nomad Fest, where we captured digital nomads' career (hi)stories and reflections. This paper shares initial findings from 40 semi-structured interviews and two visits to Bansko Nomad Fest that show how nomads modify, manage, manipulate and “steer” their temporal patterns of movement in order to:

1. Create a more settled life. Participants described intentionally reducing travel frequency after periods of exhaustion, stress or loneliness, using slowness to rebuild routines, relationships and wellbeing. In contrast, speeding up was sometimes tied to major life transitions – post-divorce reorientation and escaping unfavourable contexts – before participants re stabilised through slower rhythms.
2. Progress business or work. Entrepreneurs repeatedly slowed or paused movement (“parking” themselves in Bansko or another nomad hotspot) to launch new ventures, scale web shops, or integrate AI into operations. Employed nomads slowed travel to maintain visibility and reduce

logistical disruptions that impede performance. Slower rhythms increased deep work capacity and facilitated career advancement.

3. Connect to community. Temporal adjustments were used to sync with community calendars—spending entire seasons in Bansko to join structured social rhythms, or aligning with itinerant communities like Nomad Cruise. Such rhythms provided belonging, emotional support, peer learning, and informal recruitment channels.

“Slow” and “fast” nomading are recognisable terms, concepts and practices in the community, denoting different (if not contrasting) patterns of movement which are purposeful and considered. Slow nomading typically involves longer stays, stable routines, and a deliberate reduction in movement, while fast nomading refers to frequent relocation, short stays, and a more accelerated mobility tempo. These contrasting patterns can be strategic, as when nomads develop, set up or scale a business, or prepare for a more settled phase of life; or they may be responsive, for example when nomads slow down to cope with stress, disconnection, loneliness or physical exhaustion. Such adjustments were not incidental but integral to sustaining work, health and identity. These temporal manoeuvres underscore that digital nomadism is not only about where one is, but when, for how long, and at what pace. We argue that examining nomadism through a temporal lens reveals it as a form of “temporal labour choreography”: a continual, deliberate modulation of movement rhythms to sustain work, careers, relationships and wellbeing across the life course.

Worker subjectivities, experience and agency - Room 0.11 PhD Showcase

The Rise of Student Employment and Working University Students' Experiences of Work in Türkiye

Ozlem Ilyas Savk

(University of Warwick, Department of Sociology)

This paper investigates how university students engaged in regular term-time employment in non-graduate jobs experience work in the context of an ongoing dramatic cost-of-living crisis and the declining graduate prospects in Türkiye. The Higher Education system expanded rapidly in the country over the last two decades, which was distinctively publicly funded in its initial stages. It involved not only the expansion of HEIs across the country, but also the abolishing of tuition fees at public universities and the expansion of student loans and dormitories vital for the reproduction of low-income student's livelihoods. However, such policy instruments used to increase youth demand for HE substantially shrank with a shift from a populist towards an austerity-ridden authoritarian form of neoliberalism since mid-2010s, which propelled a rapid rise in student employment. The shift was also accompanied by a substantial rise in graduate unemployment which led Türkiye to become one of the few countries where pursuing a degree could increase the risk of unemployment or underemployment. The paper examines how students experience term-time employment in this context whereby bearing with financial struggles to earn a degree in the present may not yield very promising results in the future. It is based on the PhD fieldwork of the author which investigates how student-workers uphold or reconfigure their degree and work-related aspirations under these circumstances. The fieldwork was conducted between September 2025 and June 2026 based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with student-workers studying at various public and private HEIs in Istanbul, Türkiye. The findings suggest that students often experience work both as a source of exhaustion and enjoyment in this context, impelling them to sideline study commitments to a significant extent yet also providing them with the means to relish the semblance of a student life centred on consuming certain goods, services and cultural activities. The paper discusses how the immediate pecuniary and affective rewards of work promote an exhausting attachment to it for this group of young workers, with potentially crippling effects on their future prospects. While trying to manage multiple obligations and commitments, student-workers often come to have quite protracted and fragmented work and study trajectories, which renders their future aspirations non-linear and ambiguous. However, the findings suggest that relishing the immediate rewards of work and some of the privileges of the student status appears to provide student-workers some relief from longer term

concerns regarding employability. The paper draws upon and contributes to the literatures on affect at work and the Marxist-feminist social reproduction theory in discussing the implications of the relevant shifts in student livelihoods, experiences and subjectivities for the reproduction of capitalist production. It concludes that exhausting forms of attachment to work shaped by embodied, affective and anticipatory experiences of it could prove profitable for capital yet detrimental for young people's experiences of both the present and the future.

The Crisis of Technological Unemployment Driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI) on Future Work: How AI May Undermine Meaningful Work and Core Identity?

Shiqi Wang

(University of Manchester)

This talk addresses a question about the crisis of AI for future work: How will technological unemployment driven by AI impact the meaningfulness of future work? I argue that AI will undermine meaningful work by destabilizing the structure of job choices, leading to the disappearance of certain types of work that once allowed individuals to express their core identities. This erosion undermines workers' choices of the meaningful work that affirms the integration with their core identities.

To clarify this claim, I first define two key concepts: core identity and meaningful work. Core identity, such as the opposition to injustice and cruelty, refers to the relatively stable values and purposes that provides individuals with a sense of self and directions during one's lifetime, contributing to the meaningfulness of their lives.

Meaningful work, under this framework, is the work that enables individuals to maintain integrity with their core identity, thus contributing to the meaningfulness of their lives. For instance, someone whose core identity is anti-biochemical warfare would find work developing such biochemical warfare meaningless. Rather, he could be a researcher in environmental safety, or an anti-biochemical warfare activist in an ordinary job. Such works integrate his actions with his core identity, preserving his integrity and meaningfulness of his work. To realize such meaningful work, individuals should have access to an adequate range of job options that allow them to make genuine choices about the work that affirms integration with their core identity.

However, the technological unemployment driven by AI poses crisis to maintaining the structure of adequate job options, as AI not only reduces the number of jobs but also eliminates specific types of meaningful work that individuals have devoted their entire lives and have built their identities around. For example, for traditional craftspeople, their core identity may be the pursuit of aesthetics and the promotion of art to others. However, craftsmanship may find their roles displaced by AI, as AI has more efficient workflows and lower costs compared with human craft workers.

Even alternative jobs exist, the current structure of job choices has been destabilized by AI. This results in eliminating specific types of work that once expressed identity, undermining the ability of workers to realize the meaningful work that affirms the integration with their core identities.

To address the crisis of technological unemployment driven by AI, I would like to defend a perfectionist approach: the state has a duty to create the conditions that enable individuals to exercise autonomy in choosing meaningful work that maintains integrity with their core identity. Specifically, the state should implement regulations that preserve and even enhance the current structure of job options against the AI-driven technological unemployment. Rather than allowing AI to simply replace human workers, the state should redirect AI towards assisting people in completing repetitive and boring parts of their work, while preserving the key aspects of each work that directly integrates with the core identity that make the work meaningful, ultimately contributing to a meaningful life.

Weaving a Safety Net: Healthcare-seeking among Domestic Workers in Mexico

Maria Jose Jimenez Guzman

(Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies)

Current concerns in the sociology of work include the increasing informality of work globally and the progressive degradation of employment conditions. Central to this scholarship is the question of how

workers' structural constraints frame the exercise of their agency. The myriad barriers to formalizing and securing labor and welfare protections pinpoint the importance of understanding workers' leverage, creative, and survivalist approaches. In this study, I examine how women domestic workers exercise agency in the context of seeking healthcare solutions under informal employment conditions and inadequacy of government provisions in Mexico. I show that weaving a safety net by drawing together threads from different sources is a manifestation of a particular form of agency that responds to the barriers to healthcare access.

I draw on recent debates that call for attention to examine how informal work reflects workers' agency (Tilly, 2025), and shows how agency is exercised, individually and collectively, at the margins of precarious and informal employment (Lee et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2019; Cohen & Hjalmarsen, 2020; Silverman & Acciari, 2022; Tilly & Rojas-Garcia, 2021; Agarwala & Saha, 2018; Fish, 2017; Yi & Chun, 2019; Rosaldo 2025). However, research pays little attention to informal workers' quest to find health solutions, particularly in the Global South, and more broadly in the context of paid domestic work. This study shows that weaving a safety net is constitutive of a complex triad between the (informal) employment, the worker, and the state. It shows how weaving mechanisms enable workers to find solutions to their health problems, but sustain pervasive vulnerability that is concomitant with informal work cultures.

Drawing on 10 months of qualitative interviews and ethnographic observation with women domestic workers in Mexico City, I find that workers weave a safety net that often takes long and strenuous labour, pulling diverse threads from different sources, and usually offer poor or partial solutions. It entails a twofold dimension. One reflects a process where health solutions are met based on opportunities, mediations and negotiations, showing how workers simultaneously resort to multiple points of entry to healthcare providers, ranging from public hospital facilities to public clinics, private medical clinics, churches, private foundations and civil associations, pharmacies, underground economies like street markets, and even employers become providers, and obtain different resources from each. These tolls operate under 'temporal injustices' (Andaya, 2024) and uneven work patterns that interfere with their chances of finding solutions. The other one tells a story of social solidarity, one that shows workers engaging in everyday solidaristic actions of circulating and exchanging prescription and non-prescription medications and sharing 'personal pharmacies' with peers at the workplace, community contacts, or through online community groups, outside the healthcare system.

This work explores workers' agency in weaving a safety net against systematic disadvantages produced by labor informality and deficient healthcare safety nets. This has important implications for how we think of the underlying value systems on the margins of precarity that individuals develop to find health solutions and the structural factors that shape these experiences.

PAPER SESSION 6

13:30-15:00

Algorithmic work and data justice - Room 0.23

(In)Efficiency of Welfare Delivery and the Digitalisation Fix: Case of Community Health Work(ers) in India

Shiva Singh

(Indian Institutes of Information Technology Delhi)

In the push towards 'smart cities' and digital governance that have become the buzz words of the 'Digital India' dream, an often overlooked category is the frontline workers that carry the outcomes of governance to people and communities. Much of the discourse around digitalization of urban infrastructure is built around the imagination of efficient and transparent governance, yet often the platforms employed to this end hide much more than they reveal. What happens to the working lives of frontline workers when digitalisation is proposed as a fix to the assumed inefficiency of older systems of welfare delivery?

This paper zooms into the digitalization of welfare entitlements implemented through an extensive cadre of 'Community Health Workers' (CHWs) in India and engages with the utopia of efficient welfare mechanisms through technological fixes of apps and dashboards. It builds on the working lives of Anganwadi workers and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), employed as community-based 'volunteers' in government schemes for improvement in child and maternal health outcomes, prevention of diseases, disbursement of welfare entitlements (like ration, pensions, allowances), health data collection, referrals and community-based outreach. The digitalization of these services alters both how the services are rendered and received, calling into question the stated logic of these developments and their manifestation on ground.

Through a multi-sited ethnography with the Anganwadi and ASHA workers, program officials and beneficiaries in Delhi, over a period of 14 months, the paper analyses the transformations in the world of work and relatedly in welfare delivery as it gets shaped by app-based monitoring, algorithmic management of workers and datafication of services.

The paper argues that this development entrenches control and discipline over community health workers through the operationalisation of a strictly capitalist logic of efficiency and productivity, altering the character of welfare provisioning and community engagement. The logic of efficiency operates in a 'black box' with data only serving monitoring purposes. Digitalisation as it stands alongside the ambivalent categorization of women between state-employed workers and 'volunteers' aids in the creation of an extractivist regime of care and social reproduction. The paper posits that digitalization of welfare programs without a fundamental restructuring of their voluntary model and increased resource allocation, is shrinking the space of welfare for people and further entrenching precarity in the workers' lives.

From Genuine Creators to Content Assembly Line: How Identity-monetisation Alignment Shaped Platform Work on Social Media Platforms

Xiaotian Li

(University of Nottingham Ningbo China)

Previous studies using a relational work approach have argued that content creators on social media platforms need to match their public identities with their monetisation models to successfully commercialise their accounts. Creators make efforts in their interactions with followers to establish and maintain this match. This could be termed the relational aspect of their relational work. This article advances the research on creators' content production by examining how the need to maintain this match shapes creators' labour process, which I term the productive aspect of creators' relational work.

Drawing on interviews with a variety of content producers with different monetisation models on China's social media platforms, this article reveals three divergent modes of content production among creators.

Passionate content creators (e.g., vloggers, personal life sharers, documentary makers, etc.) construct their identities as genuine creators who share their authentic thoughts, life experiences, and opinions. Their relations with followers are based on a sense of fondness and/or relatability. Thus, they rely on a monetisation model of brand sponsorship to provide positive publicity for brands. Their labour process is characterised by a high schedule and creative autonomy, precarious income, and the tension between creativity and commerce when producing sponsored content. This results from their efforts to appear to be authentic in content creation and achieve a genuine connection with followers.

Niche content creators (e.g., fashion and beauty influencers, mom & baby creators, skill training creators, etc.) construct their identities based on their passion and/or expertise in specific niche categories (e.g., sharing parenting tips and knowledge and teaching makeup techniques). Their relations with followers are primarily pragmatic, although sometimes a genuine sense of connection also emerges. They receive sponsorship from advertisers in a niche market (e.g., beauty products, baby products) or sell niche products (e.g., the above products, training courses) to monetise. The labour process of niche creators resembles that of commercial media content production. Creators gradually develop a formula of content generation that could be used to produce a large amount of content with similar styles and aesthetics. This results from the need to niche down their content creation while attracting a niche group of followers.

Commercial creators (e.g., business owners and brand accounts) aim to display the products and services they provide on their accounts. Their relations with followers are predominantly based on economic transactions between vendors and customers. The labour process in their content production is routinised and standardised, gradually forming an assembly line of content production. Their commercialisation model also heavily relies on a substantial amount of online customer service work that facilitates sales of products and services.

This article enriches empirical understanding of content creation work on social media platforms by showcasing different modes of content production and monetisation models. Theoretically, it advances a labour process analysis of platform creative work by revealing how the productive side of content creation is shaped by the relational work in matching creator identities with monetisation models.

From Zoom Fatigue to AI Fatigue: On Changing Sociomaterial Configurations of Algorithmic Working Life and Related Exhaustion(s)

Seppo Poutanen

(University of Turku)

Since Skype was first released in 2003, digital communication applications and platforms have rapidly become central and ubiquitous parts of our (working) lives. One of the turning points in this progression was the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. If Skype and Zoom, for example, had until that point been largely voluntary options for enabling communication and collaboration at different workplaces, the global lockdowns imposed to suppress the pandemic typically forced organizations to relocate their operations to such digital platforms as much as possible. The consequences of this major displacement, particularly for work and workplaces, have attracted considerable social scientific attention in the last few years.

My point of departure is the so-called Zoom fatigue, or video conferencing fatigue, a special kind of exhaustion that, as identified by many psychological, social psychological and sociological studies, tends to ensue from long and intensive work with Zoom, Teams, etc. Partly based on my earlier study of European doctoral researchers' mandatory teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic, I first analyse structural sociomaterial features of the Zoom fatigue condition.

Digital assistants (e.g., Microsoft Copilot, ChatGPT) and generative AI, for example, are rapidly becoming unavoidable elements of much work and working life, and studies on "AI fatigue" have started to emerge in growing numbers. It is therefore interesting to apply the same theoretical lens to the changing sociomaterial bases of (supposedly) different kinds of work-related exhaustion. Some theoretical lessons for studying "lived sociomateriality" are outlined in the end of the presentation.

Care infrastructures, social reproduction and the crisis of care - Room 0.19

"More Time to Create and to Care": The Life Beyond Work Movement in Brazil and the Demand for Social Reproduction

Flavia Uchoa De Oliveira, Mary Zhang, Lucas De Oliveira

(Fluminense Federal University, University of Birmingham, Sao Paulo University)

The length of the working day has been a socially crucial issue for centuries. More recently, following the brutal erosion of working-class living conditions, particularly from the 2010s onward and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the debate over working hours has gained new momentum globally. Phenomena such as the antiwork movement, quiet quitting, and workers trading higher salaries for more free time or flexibility have emerged in social media discussions and entered public debate. It is within this broader global context of questioning both working conditions and the amount of lifetime devoted to work that the "Life Beyond Work – For the End of the 6x1 Shift" movement emerged and gained significant traction in Brazil over the past two years. Since 2023, this social movement has mobilized Brazilian workers in the fight for a reduction in working hours without a reduction in pay, advocating specifically for the end of the six-workdays-for-one-day-off schedule that comprises a 44-hour workweek. This abstract draws on two years of institutional research at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF) on the movement, including survey data from over 500 respondents. Preliminary findings reveal that the core of the movement comprises young Black women with monthly incomes of up to R\$2,000, working in commerce and services. The impacts of the 6x1 shift are severe: 97% report harm to their physical health, 94% to their mental health, and 94% state an extreme impact on their personal and family life. Our partial findings highlight a central contradiction experienced by these workers: the combination of insufficient income with an exhausting work schedule that deprives them of the time needed for unpaid domestic and care work —activities essential to the reproduction of life. This lack of time forces workers to outsource part of life's reproduction, further straining their already limited budgets and deepening cycles of poverty and debt. Grounded in Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) and engaging with studies such as those of the Argentine political scientist Paula Varela, we argue that the Life Beyond Work Movement can be understood as one of those struggles that demand "the possibility of reproducing life, even when not framed explicitly as a demand for social reproduction." For Varela, this type of struggle emerges from the daily distress that cuts across the heterogeneous working class. The Movement articulates a transversal demand that transforms both the point of production and social reproduction. Fewer working hours mean more time outside the totalizing order of production: more time to create and to care, more time for a life that extends beyond work. Investigating this dynamic is crucial to understanding how the struggle for free time can lead to new forms of political action, potentially redistribute reproductive labor between genders, and mitigate the phenomenon of "feminized work." By centering the lived experiences of workers for whom precarious work, gender, and race are inseparable moments of a single contradictory reality, these findings contribute to ongoing debates within Social Reproduction Theory, labor studies, care studies, and feminist political economy.

Unpacking How Employers Allocate Care towards Workers Experiencing Domestic Violence

Alison Pullen, Senia Kalfa, Steve Brammer, Layla Branicki

(University of Bath, School of Management)

Domestic violence (DV) is a grand societal challenge that disproportionately affects women and reinforces broader patterns of gender inequity. Research is increasingly recognising DV as an issue of significance for workplaces. The deleterious effects of DV on individuals, their co-workers, and organisations is well documented. Experiencing DV impedes people's ability to work, which consequently limits their ability to leave the violent partner. DV also has a detrimental impact on a person's job performance (Tolentino et al., 2017), with scholars reporting higher levels of withdrawal from and at work (LeBlanc, Barling and Turner, 2014). In Australia, the cost of gender-based violence is estimated to be 26 billion dollars a year (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2023), and domestic and family violence is recognised as a Work Health and Safety issue.

This paper extends existing scholarship at the intersection of DV, the workplace, and society. Employers have a critical role to play in responding to DV, not simply through policy compliance but through relational and sustained forms of employment support. Drawing on ethics of care, we analyse primary data from human resource (HR) managers and DEI practitioners with a background in accommodating women with lived experience of DV. Our findings reveal three dimensions of care: namely architectures of care, care as boundary work and the temporal fragility of care. These dimensions reveal how HR and DEI practitioners navigate blurred professional and moral terrains, often exceeding the formal limits of their roles, and how initial organisational responses to DV diminish over time, leading to fragmented support. We highlight the tensions HRM and DEI professionals face and the judgments they make when handling DV disclosures, to demonstrate how these professionals operate at the boundary between policy-driven responses and caring approaches that prioritise employee well-being, safety, and dignity.

We argue that organisations must commit to long-term support for workers experiencing DV, extending beyond immediate crisis responses. Crucially, such support should be part of a broader commitment to gender equity, one that actively safeguards women's career progression. This requires a willingness to challenge gendered assumptions, such as expectations around constant availability, linear career progression, or ideal worker norms, which can inadvertently disadvantage women experiencing violence (Karam et al., 2023). Addressing these assumptions is not only a matter of effective DV response, but a marker of an organisation's genuine commitment to gender equity.

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Understanding Employer Engagement and Organisational Responses to Supporting Working Carers

Chandrima Roy, Katharine Venter

(University of Leicester)

More than two million people in the UK combine paid employment with unpaid caring (about one in seven employees) (Carers UK). Unpaid care (also referred to as 'informal care'), a fundamental component of social reproduction, supports the overall functioning of society, yet this work is often undervalued in terms of its economic necessity and the support available to the providers of care. This research, a work in progress, examines working carers as a mainstream, structural feature of the UK workforce and aims to study how UK employers approach support for working carers amid persistent strain in adult social care and elevated economic inactivity. The aim is to understand employer engagement in supporting working carers and conceptualise organisational responses to supporting carers in the workplace. The neoliberal responsibilisation reframes care as a private matter and shifts risk onto individuals and households but in doing so overlooks the important role employer organisations can play in supporting working carers. As working carers are predicted to become an ever-growing share of the workforce (JRF, 2024), understanding from employers in this regard is crucial for shaping future workplace support for working carers. Research suggests that "organisations should be explicit about their concern for informal caregivers" Plaisier et al., 2015, p. 267) "foster a carer-friendly culture that encourages caregiving disclosure and enables informal, locally negotiated, flexible working arrangements" (Fahy and Dowling-Hetherington et al., 2025, p. 303).

We aim to develop a sociologically embedded way to analyse organisational responses and use the conceptualisation of care framed through Ungerson's (2005) distinction between 'caring for' (embodied, crisis prone, hands-on tasks) and 'caring about' (affective, relational concern). Much of the generic flexibility in the workplace (e.g. variable hours or remote working) often recognises 'caring about' but is not as attentive to issues of 'caring for' presuming that care can be scheduled and light touch. While organisations might readily valorise empathy and supportive culture (the 'caring about'), they may

overlook the material and time critical needs of 'caring for' or embodied care. Our preliminary discussions with employers so far reveal that meaningful differences between employers exists from how they recognise carers, implement support, and shape cultures of disclosure and use. Based on further research interviews with working carers (to capture lived experience in workplaces) and focus groups with HR managers, line managers and carer-network leads (to examine motivations, policy design and implementation), we aim to map employer support on a continuum, ranging from minimum compliance and low-interest configurations to 'Carer Friendly' and ultimately 'Carer Inclusive' workplaces. The value of our continuum lies in its capacity to capture variation in policy architecture, practice capabilities, and cultural norms and connect these configurations to potential outcomes for organisations and for individual working carers. The continuum will help differentiate workplaces by how far they move beyond empathy talk to the material support that embodied care requires, which offer of generic flexibility in the workplace alone might not reliably cover and thus help to improve the support carers receive from their employers.

Global Mobility and Family Separation: The Socio-economic Consequences of Split-family Expatriation in Chinese Multinational Corporations

Muhao Du

(University of Bristol)

International labour mobility has become a defining feature of contemporary employment systems. Multinational corporations (MNCs) increasingly rely on internationally mobile professionals to coordinate global operations, transfer knowledge and manage overseas subsidiaries. Existing research on expatriation has largely focused on organisational outcomes such as adjustment, performance and assignment success (Takeuchi, 2010; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). While this literature acknowledges the role of family dynamics in shaping expatriate adjustment (Black and Stephens, 1989), the broader socio-economic consequences of expatriation for household life remain under-examined. In particular, limited attention has been paid to split-family expatriation, a form of international mobility in which workers undertake overseas assignments while spouses and children remain in the home country.

This paper examines how split-family expatriation reshapes family life, care arrangements and social reproduction within contemporary transnational employment systems. The study focuses on expatriates employed by two world leading Chinese high-technology MNCs that have expanded rapidly into global markets over the past three decades. Within these organisations, overseas assignments are often undertaken by employees whose families remain in China for extended periods, frequently due to schooling, housing and care arrangements. While such mobility enables firms to deploy labour flexibly across borders, it also produces new pressures on family life and the organisation of social reproduction.

Drawing on qualitative interviews with expatriates and members of their households, the paper explores the relational processes through which split-family expatriation reorganises everyday family practices. The analysis examines three interrelated dynamics. First, it considers how organisational expectations of international mobility influence household decision-making regarding overseas assignments. Second, it analyses how geographical separation reshapes patterns of communication, emotional labour and parental involvement across distance. Third, it investigates how the redistribution of care responsibilities within households affects spouses' labour market participation, career opportunities and longer-term family trajectories.

The paper aims to contribute to the sociology of work and employment in three ways. First, it extends research on expatriation by shifting attention from organisational performance outcomes to the broader socio-economic consequences of global labour mobility. Second, it connects expatriation research with sociological debates on social reproduction, highlighting how international labour mobility redistributes unpaid care work and family responsibilities across borders (Bhattacharya, 2017). Third, it demonstrates how corporate mobility regimes depend upon household strategies that reconcile organisational demands for flexibility with family obligations.

By conceptualising expatriation as a socio-economic process rather than solely a managerial practice, the paper reveals how contemporary employment systems extend beyond the workplace into the organisation of family life. The findings suggest that split-family expatriation may reinforce gendered divisions of labour, reshape parental relationships and contribute to new forms of inequality within

internationally mobile professional households. In doing so, the study advances understanding of how global employment systems reorganise the relationship between work, family life and social reproduction in the contemporary global economy.

Hybrid work, organisational restructuring and emerging workplace forms - Room 0.18

Hybrid Labour Regimes in the Platform Economy: Labour Process Reconfiguration among Web-based Platform Workers in South Korea

Somin Lee

(Yonsei University)

Platform labour has often been conceptualised as a distinct and self-contained form of work. However, this study extends labour process theory by conceptualising platform work not as a singular form of labour, but as a 'hybrid labour regime'. Labour process theory examines how labour is organised, controlled, and deskilled within capitalist production (Braverman, 1974), yet it has largely focused on firm-based organisational settings. In the platform economy, however, labour is dispersed across multiple domains, requiring a reconceptualisation of labour processes beyond formal employment structures. Building on this shift, this study conceptualises platform work as embedded within broader socio-economic relations rather than as a discrete employment form.

This study draws on in-depth qualitative interviews with nine web-based platform workers in South Korea. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the data were analysed using framework analysis. To capture these dynamics, this study adopts a labour process perspective focusing on three key dimensions: (1) forms of control, (2) the separation between conception and execution, and (3) processes of deskilling (Braverman, 1974; Thompson, 2010). These dimensions are examined across different sources of work, enabling a comparative analysis of how labour processes are configured differently within hybrid labour regimes.

The findings show that workers combine platform-mediated work with personal networks, repeat clients, and offline contracts, constructing fragmented and multi-sourced livelihoods. More importantly, the labour process is not uniformly organised across these sources of work but varies significantly between platform-mediated and non-platform arrangements. In platform-based work, control is exerted through market mechanisms and platform rules, where clients determine task scope and evaluation, limiting workers' authority over pricing and decision-making. This intensifies the separation between conception and execution and contributes to forms of deskilling, as workers' expertise is subordinated to client satisfaction and platform logics. By contrast, work obtained through personal networks or repeat clients involves more negotiated forms of control, where workers retain greater autonomy over task design and execution, and their skills are more directly recognised. Workers actively move between these arrangements, often transitioning from platform-based transactions to direct client relationships.

These findings suggest that hybrid labour is not merely the combination of multiple income sources but a coexistence of distinct labour process regimes. This study extends labour process theory beyond firm-centred analysis by showing that labour processes are distributed across multiple regimes rather than contained within a single organisational structure, and reconceptualises platform labour as one component within a broader hybrid labour regime.

Employer Perceptions of Platform Work and Eldercare Signals in an East Asian Labor Market

Bo-Yi Lee, Chen Dai

(National Tsing Hua University)

As platform work becomes increasingly prevalent, employers more frequently encounter non-standard employment histories during applicant screening. However, research in the platform economy has largely prioritized worker motivations, identities, and labor processes, leaving evidence on how hiring decision-makers interpret platform and hybrid career signals relatively limited. Building on stigma and

signaling theories, this study employs semi-structured interviews with HR professionals and hiring managers to unpack their decision-making processes underlying their selection outcomes.

As many developed nations grapple with aging populations, workers increasingly face the dual demand of caring for both children and elderly family members. The caregiving responsibility, particularly for elderly, is salient in East Asian contexts, which prize filial piety rooted in Confucian tradition. Accordingly, this study explores whether disclosing that platform work was undertaken for family caregiving responsibilities (i.e., chose platform work due to eldercare responsibility) attenuates or triggers the “flexibility stigma.” By incorporating this cultural dimension, we aim to shed light on how employment history intersects with caregiving duties, specifically examining the signaling effect of eldercare disclosure.

Our methodology will utilize a qualitative vignette-based approach. Interviewees are presented with mock CVs featuring two distinct work histories: (1) exclusive platform experience and (2) hybrid experience (transitioning from full-time employment to platform work). These profiles are further varied by the presence or absence of explicit eldercare disclosures (i.e., chose platform work due to eldercare responsibility). By analyzing how evaluators interpret these combinations, this research clarifies how cultural values and employment norms intersect to shape hiring intentions and the broader legitimization of non-standard careers.

Logistics of Labour: Ethnographic Insights from Quick Commerce Staffing in India

Lakshmi Parvathy, Rajalaxmi Kamath

(Indian Institute of Management Sirmaur)

The labour contracting landscape in India has historically relied on the informal labour contractor variously known as jobbers, thekedaars, maistries, and kangaanies to source labour. These individual intermediaries operated in their little geographies and have been recognized as pivotal brokers between capital and labour, embedding labour relations around social axes. This practice altered with the entry and rise of manpower supply companies, temping companies, flexi-staffing industry, or human resource companies (HRC) in globally liberalized labour markets. The formally registered counterparts of the thekedaars emerged and grew in liberalized India over the past three decades. These staffing firms have formalized and scaled the functions of recruitment—sourcing, verifying, minimizing skill mismatch in a semi-skilled workforce—and handle post-recruitment functions such as payroll management, training, ensuring labour law compliance, and managing exits. In doing so, they smoothen the volatility of labour markets in service industries while maturing into a broader staffing ecosystem. Given their growing prominence across multiple sectors and geographies, and their role in a fundamental reconfiguration of employment relations warrants a critical reassessment of their operational logics and processes. This paper critically analyses these shifts as studied through an intensive eight-month workplace ethnography conducted in 2023 with a Bengaluru-based HRC (hereafter referred to as Wergo). Using methods such as participant observation, interviews, and document analysis, the study dives deep into the operational logics of a labour market intermediary that enables organizational flexibility to gain insights into the macro societal phenomena around labour.

The study focuses on Wergo’s quick-commerce vertical—a sector that emerged during COVID-19 alongside the boom of tech businesses and urban unemployment—exemplifying India’s evolving labour market needs. The role of picker-packers working at the backend of quick commerce companies’ hyperlocal dark stores, under tight time schedules, is crucial in ensuring timely delivery. This invisible workforce, unlike delivery workers, remains its backbone, yet faces constant high attrition, making the role of the HRC crucial in ensuring a steady flow of labour for uninterrupted operations. In the process, large sections of the labour force are deployed into a “grey workforce” and controlled by double layers of capitalist management enabled by the neoliberal state signalling capital friendliness. We argue that, by evolving discrete, standardized, and replicable labour management processes, the staffing firms render the labour force a tractable, “on-tap” vector, liquifying labour. Thus, under liquid capitalism, the labour markets too, are made flexible, fungible, and expendable to match liquid capital. The study further distinguishes the “liquification” of the workforce undertaken by staffing companies as an enabler of broader forms of precarity that extend beyond platform-mediated algorithmic management. It shows that, beyond responding to calls for labour market flexibility, these intermediaries actively produce and legitimise labour liquidity through hybrid bureaucratic systems that incorporate traces of informal labour contracting, thereby shaping labour control and worker agency under liquid capitalism. The findings

address a key academic gap in theorising labour market intermediation in developing country contexts, particularly where such intermediation remains deeply embedded in informal labour relations while fuelling India's emerging industries.

Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification 1 - Room 0.08

Why Employers Change (or Don't): Demand-side Practice Change to Increase Youth Pathways to Employment

Qian Yi Lee, Jo Ingold

(Australian Catholic University)

Young people remain structurally marginalised in labour markets, experiencing higher unemployment and underemployment, age-based discrimination, and concentration in precarious or low-quality work. Many are in transitional phases, heightening their vulnerability (Dhakal et al., 2018); even when employment is secured, young workers are disproportionately represented in informal or lower-quality positions, with early unemployment and job mismatch associated with scarring effects on later earnings, job stability, and leadership prospects (Filomena et al., 2025).

While supply-side accounts emphasise deficits such as limited work experience or divergent career attitudes (Nankervis et al., 2017), demand-side constraints are equally consequential. In parallel, evidence of a decline in standard employment relationships has increased job insecurity (St-Denis & Hollister, 2023). This paper relocates the analytical focus to employers as gatekeepers of youth employment entry, asking why organisations - and actors - choose to obtain, retain, and build resources in order to create quality job and career pathways for young people, and why they sometimes do not. Related research shows that employer embeddedness in employer association as social networks can shape their participation in ALMP initiatives, underscoring the institutional nature of demand-side action (Valizade et al, 2022).

The study draws on longitudinal qualitative dataset of 62 semi-structured interviews with employers participating in a demand-side programme delivered by a social enterprise funded by philanthropy that worked intensively with organisations to strengthen their capability to create career pathways for unemployed young people from low socio-economic backgrounds. Analysis proceeded in two phases: first, inductive coding in NVivo; second, natural language processing in Python using bespoke software to gain a semantic understanding of the latent themes within the textual data. Triangulation was achieved by comparing results from both analyses.

In order to explain why some organisations enacted long-term change while others stalled, we deploy Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. External forces such as government social procurement legislation were important initiators of change. However, intentions could be thwarted by threats or actual loss of resources available both within and outside the organisation. A number of dimensions were important to sustaining commitment and practice change:

1. Leadership support and internal commitment and communication provided resource caravan passageways (i.e. time, legitimacy, and tools)
2. Flexibility and adaptation to organisational contexts and constraints reduced the perceived loss of resources by adapting change to local constraints.
3. Pilot success and scalability triggered gain spirals that justify embedding and scale. Organisations defer or abandon change when confronted with actual or anticipated resource loss (e.g. hiring freezes, restructures, budget cycles, risk-averse compliance regimes, or supervisory resource constraints).

The paper reframes youth employment, not as a problem of individual work-readiness, but as an outcome of organisational and institutional structures that can — under the right conditions — be deliberately reorganised. By offering a sociologically grounded account of how organisational actors reproduce or disrupt the structural conditions that marginalise young workers, the paper contributes to

debates on the social organisation of work, the institutional reproduction of precarity, and the conditions under which workplace change agents can challenge entrenched hiring logics.

Race, Migrant Positioning and 'Organisational Slowing': Career Progression among Ethnic Minority Nurses in the NHS

Precious Reuben, Wen Wang, Gregory Maniatopoulos

(University of Leicester)

Despite decades of equality policy, ethnic minority nurses in the NHS remain underrepresented in senior roles and often experience slower career progression. While this pattern is well established, existing research has more often treated ethnic minority staff as a homogeneous category than examined how disadvantage is differentiated within racialised workforces. This can obscure how migration-related positioning may intensify career disadvantage within the racialised workforce.

Drawing on national survey data from 503 ethnic minority nurses in England, collected as part of a broader mixed-methods study, this paper adopts a within-group design based on an analytically derived distinction between UK-socialised and migrant-positioned nurses. In the NHS, where ethnicity and migration are often closely intertwined, the paper argues that career disadvantage cannot be fully understood through ethnicity alone.

Conceptually, the paper reframes career inequality as a process of organisational slowing rather than only endpoint underrepresentation. Disadvantage may not mean that progression never occurs; rather, it may involve a slower, more effortful path marked by repeated attempts, greater uncertainty, and a more adverse subjective experience of career movement.

To capture this, the analysis focuses on two process-oriented indicators: progression friction, measured through the number of attempts required to secure progression, and subjective progression, measured through nurses' assessments of whether their career progression had been faster or slower than expected. Across ordinal regression models, migrant-positioned nurses reported greater progression friction and more adverse subjective progression than their UK-socialised peers. These differences remained significant after adjustment for age, qualification, and NHS experience, none of which showed stable independent effects across models.

The paper contributes to work and employment research in three ways. First, it highlights migrant positioning as an important but neglected dimension of inequality within racialised workforces. Second, it reconceptualises career disadvantage as a process of organisational slowing rather than only endpoint exclusion. Third, it demonstrates the value of within-group analysis for identifying layered disadvantage within aggregate ethnic categories. In doing so, the paper responds to calls for more nuanced and intersectionally sensitive analyses of inequality within racialised workforces.

Navigating the Silence: Workplace Mistreatment, Career Precarity, and the Clinical Negligence Crisis in Health Care

Wen Wang, Roger Seifert, Jennifer Creese, Zhenduo Zhang

(University of Leicester)

The financial burden of clinical negligence compensation within the National Health Service (England) has escalated from £14 billion in 2014 to £60 billion in 2025. This surge is increasingly linked to a breakdown in patient safety voice, typically among underrepresented groups (ethnic minority groups). However, the Lucy Letby case, an NHS nurse involving the deaths of seven children, reveals a systemic negligence of voices even from permanently contracted consultants. There are approximately 75,000 resident doctors currently serving in the NHS (nearly half of the total medical workforce, NHS England, 2025). As the "backbone" of the health service, these professionals are essential to patient care, acting as senior decision-makers and the primary clinicians responsible for hospital admissions and specialized inpatient and outpatient advice (Royal College of Physicians, 2024). Their willingness to speak up has both financial and life-death consequences.

Despite the critically important role of resident doctors, they face a pervasive culture of mistreatment. Data shows that over 25% reported bullying, undermining, or harassment in the last year, yet only 60%

feel confident that they could raise a concern (GMC, 2025). Extant research either framed reluctance to speak-up as an individual level problem rooted in avoiding conflict within the immediate working environment (Kirkner et al. 2022; Tseng 2014), or an action shaped by workplace settings (Hershcovis et al. 2021), dominated by line manager accountability (Serafin et al., 2023; De Cieri et al., 2019). Both perspectives have overlooked systemic changes in employment and work derived from the penetration of New Public Management (NPM) since the 1990s. For example, more than 30,000 doctors apply for around 10,000 training places in 2025 and 52% doctors at the end of their foundation year had no substantive employment secured (British Medical Association, 2025). Job insecurity emerges as one pillar of the unprecedented NHS resident doctors strikes since 2023 (Iacobucci, 2026). Adopting a multi-level, interdisciplinary lens, this study investigates the systemic forces sustaining mistreatment, leading to career precarity among doctors and its consequences on public service workplace power relations.

This research utilizes a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative data from 35 in-depth interviews with quantitative data from a survey of 1,355 resident doctors across 25 NHS Trusts (75 hospitals). The qualitative analysis reveals: disenchantment with careers; disconnection from tasks with over work; disengagement from the system due to bullying and poor mentoring; and disillusion with the job itself, driven by a fragmented national coordinated training system, all feed into safety issues. Our Structural Equation Modelling results show that workplace mistreatment inhibits "speaking up" through a dual pathway: self-serving career silence and burnout.

These findings suggest that traditional HRM "anti-violence" toolkits are insufficient if they do not address the structural precarity of medical training. Policy must shift toward fostering accountable staff-centred leadership and systemic workload reform to break the cycle of silence and reduce the staggering costs of clinical negligence.

Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification 2 - Room 0.09

PhD Showcase

Mapping Intersectional Inequalities in Academic Careers in UK Higher Education

Yuqi Ji

(Leeds University Business School)

Despite sustained commitments to equality, diversity, and inclusion, inequalities continue to shape academic careers in UK higher education. While existing research has shown persistent disparities in representation, progression, and access to senior roles (e.g., Bhopal, 2020; Advance HE, 2024), much of this literature has examined categories such as gender, race, or class separately (Gould et al., 2025). Limited intersectional research in higher education focuses on how disadvantage is experienced and managed within particular higher education settings, rather than on large-scale cross-institutional analyses of academic careers (Coleman et al., 2025). As a result, we still know relatively little about how academic career trajectories are shaped by intersecting identities across institutional contexts.

This PhD research addresses that gap by examining how inequalities in academic careers are patterned across intersections of race and gender in UK higher education, and the extent to which these patterns are shaped by institutional and disciplinary context. It adopts an intersectionality perspective, understanding inequality as produced through the interaction of multiple social categories within wider structures of power, rather than as the additive effect of separate categories (Collins and Bilge, 2020). More specifically, this research draws on an inter-categorical approach (McCall, 2005) to compare patterns of representation and career progression across groups.

Empirically, the study draws on a large-scale dataset constructed from ORCID employment histories and OpenAlex-linked records, covering scholars affiliated with 24 Russell Group universities. The dataset includes employment timelines, role titles, institutional affiliations, and demographic proxies for race and gender. Methodologically, the research combines descriptive mapping with longitudinal modelling. It first examines how race-gender groups are distributed across academic roles and

disciplinary fields, and then uses event-history approaches to investigate progression to senior academic positions over time.

The research has completed data construction and variable development, and has generated initial findings from descriptive and longitudinal analyses. Early results show inequalities not only in overall representation, but also in the uneven distribution of groups across disciplines, roles, and stages of career advancement. Preliminary models suggest that differences in progression towards senior positions are partly associated with institutional and disciplinary context, but are not fully explained by them. This points to the importance of further examining how intersecting identities shape academic careers within, as well as across, institutional settings.

Overall, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of academic career inequalities in UK higher education and to show the value of large-scale digital career data for extending intersectional analysis in the study of academic careers.

Gendered Workplace Discrimination in the Context of China's Three-child Policy: An Intersectional Analysis

Xiaoqi Huang

(University of Southampton)

China introduces a three-child policy to address demographic decline and population ageing, but its consequences are not experienced evenly across women. This paper examines the different impact of this policy on migrant and non-migrant women, and therefore argues that its labour-market consequences cannot be understood through gender alone, but through the intersection of gender, age, marital status, hukou status, and socioeconomic class. Existing research on China's gender inequality shows that women often face discrimination in hiring, promotion and pay, especially when employers see marriage, pregnancy, or childcare as potential "risks". Relevant studies also stress motherhood penalties and the persisting traditional gender norms in national discourse and workplace practices. Moreover, studies on migrant workers and the hukou system also show that rural-to-urban migrants face additional challenges in the urban labour market, such as insecure employment, restricted access to welfare and childcare, and uneven forms of social citizenship. However, these literatures are rarely integrated to examine how pronatalist policy, gendered care expectations, and hukou-based exclusion interact in shaping women's workplace experiences.

This paper is based on an intersectionality framework, and is guided by an interpretivist perspective. Qualitative semi-structured interviews are carried with migrant and non-migrant women across different age groups, to compare their experiences in hiring, promotion, caring responsibilities, fertility decisions and workplace discrimination. This comparison aims to distinguish migrant-specific disadvantages from general gender labour-market inequalities. The initial analysis shows that while women in general experience workplace discrimination, migrant women are facing intensified discrimination due to hukou status, restricted access to local welfare and childcare, and employer assumptions about their mobility, care, and employment risk. The cross-age comparison also indicates that these pressures are experienced differently across life stages, especially in marriage, childbirth and caring responsibilities.

By comparing migrant women of different age groups with non-migrant women, this paper distinguishes migrant-specific disadvantages and the broader gendered workplace inequality patterns. In doing so, it shows how population policy can become consequential in working lives through its interactions with labour-market segmentation, care responsibilities, and unequal access to social support.

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Intersecting Inequalities and Constrained Voice among Female Migrant Workers in the Irish Hotel Sector

Olaiwola Ogunpaimo, Aine Ni Leime, Deirdre Curran

(University of Galway)

Employee voice is widely positioned as central to the fair and decent work agenda and is increasingly promoted as a mechanism through which organisations can identify problems, improve job quality, and enhance worker wellbeing. However, much of the existing literature implicitly assumes that workers are equally able to speak up, overlooking how structural inequalities shape whose voices are heard, constrained, or silenced in practice. This study examines employee voice among female migrant workers in the Irish three- and four-star hotel sector, drawing on an intersectional lens to explore how gender, migrant status, race, and caring responsibilities interact to shape experiences of voice, silence, and exit in hospitality employment.

Intersectionality, as conceptualised by Crenshaw (1989), refers to the way in which systems of oppression, such as racism and sexism, intersect to create distinct experiences of marginalisation that cannot be understood by examining race or gender in isolation.

The study draws on qualitative data collected from 27 female migrant workers employed across housekeeping, food and beverage, reception, kitchen operations, and, in a small number of cases, supervisory or human resource roles. Data were generated through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face or via videoconferencing, depending on participants' preferences. Interviews explored employment conditions, management practices, representation, job satisfaction, and retention intentions. Purposive sampling ensured variation across roles and departments, followed by snowball sampling to reach more participants. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis in NVivo 20, following Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase approach.

Preliminary findings demonstrate that employee voice is neither absent nor uniformly exercised. Instead, voice emerges in multiple, uneven, and constrained forms. Participants, particularly those from South American and African backgrounds, described a bounded, conditional voice, in which speaking up was contingent on labour shortages, perceived managerial goodwill, or reputations for reliability and hard work. Voice was often strategic and defensive, carefully managed to minimise risks such as retaliation, reduced hours, or exclusion from work rosters.

Fear-based silence was pervasive and reflected not passivity but a rational survival strategy shaped by economic dependence, immigration-related insecurity, and caring responsibilities. Where formal voice mechanisms were distrusted or ineffective, informal peer solidarity and collective coping practices emerged, often along shared linguistic or national lines. While these informal networks provided emotional and practical support, they rarely translated into sustained collective representation, reinforcing fragmented and individualised responses in contexts characterised by weak union presence and limited regulatory enforcement. Several participants also framed exit as a form of voice, signalling withdrawal following prolonged managerial inaction, bullying, or unmet expectations of fair treatment.

The study contributes to employee voice and fair-work scholarship by demonstrating that voice in hospitality is deeply intersectional, contingent, and unequally distributed. It challenges normative and managerialist assumptions that treat voice as a neutral organisational practice, arguing instead for a relational and power-sensitive understanding of voice that foregrounds inequality, precarity, and the lived realities of migrant women in service work.

Prejudice or Incapability: Analysing Employment of Visually Impaired People in China through the Lens of Stigma

Yanan Yu, Gabriella Cioce, Pauline Dibben, Andrew Smith

(University of Sheffield)

This paper critically examines how stigma and prejudice shape the employment experiences of visually impaired individuals in China. Drawing on stigma theory, the study conceptualises disability not merely as an individual condition but as a socially constructed and relational process embedded in power, culture, norms, and labour market structures. While existing research has acknowledged various forms of stigma against disabled people, much of literature are situated in Western contexts. Limited attention has been paid to how stigma operates in everyday employment settings, particularly in relation to visual impairment in China.

The employment rate of visually impaired people is lower than that of other disabled groups (Leonard, 2002), and is significantly lower in China (Hu, 2018). In China, visually impaired individuals are largely confined to the massage industry (Ju et al., 2023; Yu, 2021), which is not only the primary occupation available to them but is also officially designated as the most suitable career (Yao et al., 2017). However, stigma theory has not been applied to explain this vocational segregation and the employment difficulties faced by visually impaired people in China. This study addresses these gaps by asking: what forms of stigma and prejudice are associated with the employment of visually impaired people, and how do these shape their labour market experiences?

This paper draws on qualitative interview data from 50 visually impaired individuals from diverse backgrounds and 10 employers or potential employers across various industries in China. All data were collected between February and May 2025 through a combination of face-to-face and online interviews conducted in China. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis (Saldana, 2010). The findings identify multiple, interrelated forms of stigma. External stigma is manifested through disability being framed as shame, as well as through the idealisation of disability, where individuals are positioned as inspirational or heroic figures. Self-stigma emerges in practices such as concealing impairment and overcompensating for disability. Benevolence stigma embodies through preferential treatment and the instrumental use of disability, which further reinforces inequality. In addition, persistent prejudices around low efficiency and limited capability continue to shape employer expectations and hiring decisions.

Importantly, the findings show that stigma is not only expressed through overt discrimination but is also embedded in everyday interactions, organisational practices, and cultural norms. In the Chinese context, stigma is closely tied to social relationships, moral expectations, and feelings of shame, which intensify its impact on employment.

By applying stigma theory to the study of visual impairment and work, this study calls for a rethinking of inclusion beyond formal policy towards a deeper transformation of workplace norms and assumptions.

Open Stream - Room 0.24

International Year of Women Farmers: Fighting Pesticides, Plastics and Prejudice in Flowers

Jill Timms

(University of Surrey)

Flowers matter. How they are grown and used is a justice issue as well as a production problem, with the UN's year of women farmers used as a focus to demonstrate transformational work in action.

The twin challenges of working towards net zero and pursuing just transitions for regions suffering most from climate crisis, require radical change to the organisation of production and work at the global level. On one hand, just transition addresses the need to address power imbalances that have caused structural inequalities and to develop strategies so those most responsible, make reparation. On the other hand, the pressing need to transform carbon emission for net zero, necessitates new ways of structuring networks of production and supply to ensure workers, materials and goods are more locally based and move around the world less.

The twin crises of global capitalism - ecological disaster and class polarization (Sklair, 2002), can be seen reflected in the case of sustainable horticulture. The global flower market is worth \$36 billion, with countries like Britain importing nearly 90% of their blooms. This paper identifies key environmental and labour rights impacts from flowers and highlights the dilemmas faced when global supply chains have created dependency and structural inequalities where workers and natural resources are devalued. The work is precarious and thirsty flowers need water in production and transportation. Many are grown in hot, drought-prone regions, such as Ethiopia and Kenya, where food production is the priority for communities. The flying of flowers also brings 'sky-high' carbon footprints that consumers are still often unaware of.

In the UN's International Year of Women Farmers, this paper draws on empirical work with women in the cut flower sector who have been fighting against the use of single-use plastics, those developing small scale local growing and those advocating for workers exposed to prejudice and discrimination. A two year study with the Flower Growing Collective provides a case of how the reorganisation of supply chain could contribute towards net zero, offer opportunities for just transition and the valuing of workers, as well as raising the structural challenges faced. It also celebrates remarkable workers leading the way.

Protector Turns Oppressor? 'Hidden Work' and the Dark Side of Codes of Conduct

Divya Jyoti

(Lancaster University)

Codes of conduct (CoC) have been increasingly adopted as a key expression of the international corporate social responsibility (CSR) of multinational corporations, particularly towards the people engaged in their manufacturing operations. Specifying ethical norms and values that firms claim to hold and apply to trade partners and vendors, CoC aim to ensure that the conditions under which manufacturing takes place is not exploitative and meets basic minimum internationally agreed employment and working standards. While the extent to which such protections are afforded to workers remain suspect and hugely debated, the intent and potential of CoC to protect factory workers' interests and human rights has become entrenched in the international CSR toolkit. Both research and practice literature repeatedly insist on improved 'implementation' including calls for adopting mandatory approaches. Might such overwhelming faith in prospects of CoC, however, be misplaced? Drawing on an ethnographic study over two years with garment factory workers, this paper draws attention to the dark side of CoC – the hidden work that is generated and ultimately passed onto the factory workers not only limits but, instead, inverts the very intentions of CoC. Unless such hidden work is acknowledged and accounted for, the promise of the potential of CoC based approaches for workers remains questionable.

Support2Work: Emerging Qualitative Evidence on the Impact of Employment Advisers in NHS Talking Therapies

Levana Magnus, Annie Irvine, Jane Suter

(University of York)

In the UK, concerns about economic inactivity fuelled by mental health challenges have seen the Labour government set out plans to both 'Keep Britain Working' (retention) and 'Get Britain Working' (entry). Integrated services and partnership working sit at the centre of these proposals, which have been a growing feature of OECD countries in recent years (Arends et al. 2014). The evidence base on integrated services suggests positive employment and wellbeing outcomes. However, further research on the mechanisms of service delivery and the experiences of staff and service users is needed to explore how services work, what works well, for whom, and why.

Building on pilots in 2009 and 2018, over the past 8 years the UK government has invested in the roll out of employment advice embedded in NHS Talking Therapies services, with every area in England now benefitting from this provision (Loveless 2019). Employment Advisers in Talking Therapies work collaboratively with psychological therapists to support patients to remain in, return to, or regain employment.

This paper will present early qualitative findings from a 3-year mixed-methods evaluation of the impact of Employment Advisers (EAs) in NHS Talking Therapies. Funded by NIHR, the Support2Work project is the first major independent evaluation of the EAs service. In-depth interviews are taking place throughout 2026, with service users, Employment Advisers, and therapists across 12 sites in England. Our qualitative inquiry is uncovering the mechanisms through which Employment Advisers influence service users' trajectories of absenteeism, presenteeism, and entry/maintaining/return to work. Emerging themes highlight the importance of integrated and collaborative practices, and demonstrate the challenges of tailoring support to meet the needs of service users. As well as making a direct empirical contribution to policy evidence, our findings contribute to wider sociological debates on the role of work in mental wellbeing and vice versa (World Health Organization, 2022), workplace relationships in the context of mental ill health (Kelloway et al., 2023), and the lived experiences of frontline workers who span practical and emotional support for vulnerable individuals (Bakkeli, 2022; Irvine et al. 2024).

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Worker subjectivities, experience and agency 1 - Room 0.11

The Imaginary of Balance: Work, Subjectivity and the Governance of Crisis

Athina Karatza

(Independent researcher and Panteion University)

This paper examines the growing prominence of work–life balance as a dominant discourse in contemporary work, within the broader context of the current 'polycrisis' and the reconfiguration of work associated with the 'Great Reshuffle'. It asks how this discourse operates under conditions of overlapping socio-economic, technological and care-related pressures. Rather than treating work–life balance as a measurable outcome or individual goal, the paper approaches it as a regulatory social imaginary: a normative and regulatory framework that shapes how individuals understand, evaluate and govern their everyday lives. In an era characterised by work intensification, permanent connectivity and the blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries, the pursuit of "balance" emerges not simply as a response to these pressures, but as a mechanism through which they are normalised, internalised and reproduced in everyday practice.

The paper draws on sociological approaches to work and subjectivity, combining Bourdieu's concept of socio-analysis with perspectives on social imaginaries and critical accounts of contemporary individualisation. It argues that work–life balance functions as a form of self-governance, shifting responsibility for structural contradictions onto individuals, who are expected to continuously manage time, emotions and performance across multiple domains of life. Empirically, the paper draws on 52 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with employees in Greece, complemented by interviews with occupational physicians. Participants were selected to reflect variation across sectors, age groups and family situations. Reflexive tools were used to explore how intersecting identities shape participants'

experiences and interpretations. The data are analysed using a thematic and interpretive approach focusing on narratives of work, care and self-regulation. The study is at an advanced stage of analysis.

The analysis shows how workers internalise and negotiate the imperative of “balance” across multiple domains of life, reflecting intensified work rhythms, persistent gendered expectations and digitally mediated forms of control. These dynamics can be understood as the everyday lived expression of broader polycrisis conditions, where multiple structural pressures converge within individual experience. Flexibility is framed as autonomy, yet experienced as a diffuse form of regulation, while constant availability blurs the boundaries between work and non-work. These conditions are also embodied: recurring accounts of exhaustion, anxiety and stress-related symptoms indicate how contemporary work is lived within the body and cumulatively produces psychosocial deterioration. Insights from occupational physicians further show that what is often framed as individual burnout is rooted in systemic conditions. At the same time, the expectation to remain positive and resilient (“happycracy”) introduces an additional layer of emotional labour. Across accounts, imbalance is rarely interpreted as structural, but as personal failure, generating persistent feelings of insufficiency.

The paper argues that work–life balance functions less as a tangible reality and more as a regulatory ideal. It plays a central role in the governance of contemporary work by producing self-regulating subjects who interpret structural pressures through the lens of personal responsibility. By foregrounding the relationship between discourse, subjectivity, embodiment and lived experience, the paper contributes to debates on work, precarity, wellbeing and the transformation of subjectivity under conditions of polycrisis.

Outsourcing Digital Intimate Labour

Victoria Antonio

(Leeds University Business School)

Social media content publishing has enabled the monetisation of content as online gig work (Hamilton et al, 2022). Platforms like OnlyFans and Fansly blur the lines between content creation and pornography, monetising parasocial relationships and allowing adult content creators (ACC) to charge subscription fees for their content or offer pay-per-view options for custom requests. Unlike traditional full service sex work, the asynchronous communication and digital delivery of intimate content have led to new business processes, including outsourcing intimate labour. For instance, ACCs can hire contractors as Adult Chat Assistants (ACA) or “Chatters” to manage direct messages on their behalf. There is limited research on parasocial labour (Zelizer, 2012; Bonifacio et al., 2021; Hair, 2021), with no studies on the outsourcing of digital intimate labour to date.

Using qualitative methodology triangulated with secondary data, the present research has identified new types of work, business models, and labour relations resulting from asynchronous, digital, and parasocial sex work. 58 Open ended questionnaires and 21 in depth interviews were conducted with workers who outsource their intimate labour (ACA), as well as the workers hired to perform the outsourced intimate labour (ACC), as well as examining the role of intermediaries, such as agencies. This study introduces the vertical disintegration of sex work, a previously embodied form of labour, for the first time as an emergent phenomenon. It highlights the emerging digital economies being created around it, as a result of this disintegration.

This study explores the lived experiences of workers and maps the geography, markets, and labour structures. It builds on broader theories of working relations (Brouwers, 2023, Bruckert and Law, 2013) by mapping the emerging digital ecosystem and labour relations of outsourced intimate chat labour in platform-mediated sex work. The study's data reveals a parallel between the outsourcing of intimate labour and administrative tasks to the Philippines' BPO sector. It also reveals a bifurcated economic and labour market dynamic depending on the geolocation of the outsourced workers and their relationship to those outsourcing. The bifurcation is attributed to strategic choices made by the ACA when outsourcing.

The study lends support to sex work as labour, gives voice to ACC and the correspondence BPO workers of the adult content creation industry (ACA) who directly and indirectly perform intimate labour. The study concludes that stigma and the “whorierarchy” make ACA invisible and allow for exploitation and unscrupulous third parties. With a focus on working relationships, the study aims to be regarded in

terms of labour rights by Industry and policymakers. It provides a valuable new insight into emergent labour relations and digital ecosystems in the wider world of platform work.

Lives behind the Algorithm: A Narrative Inquiry into the Lived Experiences of AI Data Workers in Kenya

Philip Mong'are Achoki

(University Of Essex)

The contemporary world of work in Sub-Saharan Africa is increasingly shaped by the intersection of technological acceleration, labour precarity, and global inequality, dynamics often described as a “polycrisis” in which multiple disruptions converge and mutually reinforce one another. Within this context, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a central driver of labour market reordering, promising efficiency and innovation while simultaneously expanding regimes of algorithmic management, surveillance, and platform-mediated precarity. While a growing sociological literature has examined AI and platform work in terms of control, autonomy, and job quality, less attention has been paid to how workers themselves experience and narrate these transformations, particularly in the Global South.

This paper presents a work-in-progress narrative inquiry into the lived experiences of AI data workers in Kenya, a key node in global AI production systems. Kenya has become an important site for outsourced AI labour, including data annotation, content moderation, and verification tasks that underpin machine learning systems developed and deployed elsewhere. Existing research has shown that such work is often characterised by insecurity, emotional strain, and limited labour protections, yet workers' own accounts of how they enter, endure, and imagine futures within these arrangements remain underexplored.

The paper asks: How do AI data workers in Kenya narrate their entry into, experiences within, and imagined futures of AI data work within global AI production systems? It further explores how these narratives illuminate worker subjectivities, forms of agency, and negotiations of precarity amid the broader labour reordering associated with technological disruption and global value chain restructuring.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, drawing on 45 semi-structured interviews with AI data workers and related intermediaries conducted in Kenya. Interviews are treated not simply as accounts of tasks or conditions, but as storied representations of working lives, through which participants connect past aspirations, present labour experiences, and anticipated futures. Analysis focuses on narrative structure, temporal ordering, evaluative language, and recurring storylines, rather than on thematic frequency or causal explanation. This approach allows attention to how meanings of “opportunity,” “skill,” and “progress” are constructed and contested within workers' own accounts.

Conceptually, the paper situates AI data work within debates on algorithmic management, global labour precarity, and transnational inequalities, while foregrounding worker subjectivities as central to understanding how the “Great Reshuffle” is lived rather than merely observed at the structural level. By centring narratives from Kenya, the study contributes to sociological efforts to move beyond Global North-centric accounts of technological change and to examine how intersecting crises of work, development, and governance are experienced in unevenly positioned labour markets.

Between Algorithm and Street: Repairing, Negotiating, and Sustaining Gig Work

Riyaj Shaikh

(Karolinska Institutet, Institute of Environmental Medicine)

Our ethnographic study of food delivery workers in India and Sweden shows that, in gig work, workers' subjectivity, experience, and agency emerge from the dynamic interplay between algorithmic management and situated, embodied work practices.

Their subjectivity is actively produced through everyday negotiations with the gig platform's algorithmic management as well as the material conditions on the ground. Workers exercise this subjectivity through what can be understood as practical negotiation with algorithmic systems by working with, around, and sometimes against them. In practice, this appears as continuous calibration

of behavior in response to opaque algorithmic signals. Workers learn to "read" the platform—interpreting ratings, timing pressures, task allocations, and incentives—and adjust their actions accordingly. At the same time, subjectivity is exercised through embodied improvisation. Workers compensate for mismatches between algorithmic expectations and real-world conditions (traffic, customer interactions, safety concerns), effectively repairing the system in motion. This gives them a form of situated authority over how work actually unfolds, even if the platform formally dictates it. Agency also emerges in subtle acts of resistance and reconfiguration, what might be called "micro-resistances." These include selectively engaging with incentives, gaming metrics, coordinating informally with other workers, over algorithmic efficiency when possible.

Gig workers' experiences are characterized by a persistent gap between the platform's algorithmic representation of work and the realities of performing it on the ground. This disjuncture positions workers as crucial infrastructural actors who bridge system expectations with situated contingencies. Their experience (and the labor it informs) thus extends beyond task execution to include coordination, improvisation, and repair work that remains largely invisible within platform logics.

Agency in such work practices can be seen not only in overt resistance but also in subtle, ongoing adjustments, such as micro-decisions, strategic compliance or uncompliances, and embodied improvisations, that enable workers to sustain performance under conditions of uncertainty. However, such agency is exercised to ensure earnings, and it remains limited in the face of platforms' algorithmic management.

Gig work is thus sustained by workers' continuous, often invisible efforts to interpret, adapt, and fill gaps between platform logic and real-world conditions.

Worker subjectivities, experience and agency 2 - Room 0.13 PhD Showcase

Identity and Participation in UK Worker Cooperatives

Luke Nolan

(University of Leeds)

Worker cooperatives are businesses which make efforts to distribute managerial and financial control rights throughout their workforce. It is these characteristics that continue to draw attention to cooperatives as a viable solution to the social and ecological crises caused by the dominant economic model in capitalist societies. Type 2 worker cooperatives, specifically, are employee-owned businesses with an explicit ideological focus on providing tangible socio-economic alternatives. These alternatives have been shown to engender new forms of working, in which work and life are more wholly integrated, capable of producing greater socially and ecologically sustainable outcomes, made possible through a cooperative's commitment to worker autonomy and democratic participation. Paradoxically, however, this focus on worker autonomy means active worker participation in the management of cooperatives varies. Similarly, whilst worker cooperatives may possess a commitment to producing social value, they are also surplus-generating firms which trade in a capitalist marketplace, meaning that their business practices are constrained by market pressures. It has long been suggested that these structural forces will, over time, lead to the degeneration of cooperative principles in a cooperative enterprise's day-to-day operations. However, others have refuted the deterministic nature of the degeneration thesis, with studies showing that successful cooperativism is made possible through the ongoing co-construction of participation in the working practices of cooperative members. Yet, while research has explored the organisational and managerial dynamics that construct cooperative regeneration, the ways in which participation is informed by, and informs, the subjectivities of cooperative workers are less clear. Sociology of work scholarship suggests that this knowledge gap can be addressed by exploring the role identities play in the construction of participation in the working lives of cooperative members. For instance, cultural class analysis has shown that an individual's upbringing can instil embodied dispositions towards work and employment, thereby producing experiences of commitment to work. Alternatively, research on occupational communities has revealed that certain occupations favour the

production of solidaristic relationships between workers, mutually producing identities, values and norms. Similarly, social movement theorists have shown how the active participation of members in political organisations is produced through the dialectical construction of collective identities. However, despite these understandings, the exact processes which structure both identity and participation in the context of a democratised, autonomous and non-hierarchical employment relationship are unknown. This ongoing PhD research project will address this knowledge gap through a combined ethnographic and Biographical Narrative Interpretive Methodology approach, in which qualitative data on the lived experiences of cooperative workers will be collected through 20-30 semi-structured biographical interviews, and participant observation from 4-6 type 2 worker cooperatives in the UK. This data will be used to theorise how the social relations which construct individual and group identities inform participation in cooperative work, thereby extending our understanding of how worker cooperatives regenerate in the face of the “omnipresent threat of capitalist imperatives” (Garcia and McLachlan, 2025, p. 1).

Emotional Power in Cyberspace: How Does Employees' Use of TikTok Influence Their Experiences of Emotional Labour and the Dynamics of Service Power within the Retail Industry?

Johanna Turnbull

(Durham University)

Increasingly retail employees are resisting company display norms by creating emotionally uncensored TikTok content relating to the sector. Posts in which workers mock customers, badmouth employers and plead for fairer working conditions reveal the subjective fantasies and emotional realities sanctionable in managed retail spaces. However, it remains unclear whether employees can truly acquire emotional power in cyberspace. If disparaging posts about work are brought into the managed realm of employment, employees face lifelong career penalties and negative wellbeing effects (Thornthwaite 2016; Bhargava 2020). The project investigates how retail employees resist emotional labour rules on TikTok, the personal repercussions for doing so and whether offline service power dynamics have changed in an online world.

This research is positioned between three sociological concepts. Firstly, Arlie Hochschild's (1983) “emotional labour” concept explains how suppressing personal feelings for a wage drives retail employees to openly defy shopfloor display rules online. Secondly, the triadic relations between employees, employers and customers captured in several triangle configurations identified by Harvard et al, (2009) provide a template for classifying service power dynamics as they emerge from TikTok. Finally, notions of the “unmanaged organisation” established in Yiannis Gabriel's (1995) work on organisational storytelling frames TikTok as an unsupervised dreamlike terrain which lures employees into uploading spontaneous emotional displays.

Under a qualitative methodology, this study pairs elements of netnography (Kozinets 2020) with the breadth-and-depth method (Weller et al, 2020). Textual data will be manually gathered from over 5,000 work-related TikTok posts uploaded by retail employees. The captions, comments and in-video text collected shall be considered “big qualitative data”, that is, data included in a corpus with over 100 data items which proves difficult for a solo researcher to analyse in-depth (Brower et al, 2019). Thus, the project deploys BERTopic, a topic modelling technique, to structure the amassed dataset into a format suitable for manual thematic analysis. Semi-structured interviews with 15-20 content creators will explore the personal consequences of subverting emotional labour demands through TikTok.

Currently, this research is approaching the second year of development. For this reason, some preliminary observations based on several exploratory TikTok immersions are offered instead. Retail employees appear to subvert mandated emotional displays more profoundly during intense trade periods such as Christmas using hyperbole, dark humour and metaphors of war and religion. Further, the unmanaged behaviours employees exhibit on TikTok seem to reach unintended audiences through online press coverage which may indicate other parties outside the service triangle are involved in fuelling dismissal outcomes.

As for contributions to knowledge, this research unites emotional labour and social media research to extend discussions of service power by showing how technology has created new unmanaged spaces that offer retail employees reprieve from emotional commodification. Empirical evidence explicating the consequences of work-related social media disclosure will inform future changes that protect retail employees from the career and wellbeing harms unaddressed in literature. Further, the big qualitative

methodology provides researchers with an example of how to embed AI tools such as BERTopic into interpretive research without undermining human subjectivity.

Conceptualising Doctors' and Nurses' Experience of Formal and Informal Solidarity: A Meta-ethnography

Maja Dumana, Seán Ó Riain, John Paul Byrne

(Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, University of Medicine and Health Sciences)

Background: The healthcare workforce is in crisis. This global, complex (poly)crisis comprises emergent challenges to labour (recruitment, retention), mental health (anxiety, stress), education (inadequate training and development), gender equality (pay gap, sexual harassment), and resourcing (austerity, unstable economies, underfunding) in healthcare work, observed through staff shortages, burnout and poor retention. Negative healthcare professional (HCP) work experiences, consequential for health system sustainability, include chronic occupational stress, heavy workloads, suboptimal conditions, horizontal violence and moral injury. Recent research into the increased workplace pressures faced by HCPs (namely doctors and nurses) during the COVID-19 pandemic has given the concept of 'solidarity', and its importance in shaping their working experiences, a resurgence. However, evidence coherency regarding the specific mechanisms of how solidarity shapes the working experience of doctors and nurses is limited. Based on the concept of informal (peer-support, camaraderie, 'fellow-feeling') and formal solidarity (trade unionism, industrial relations, representation) described by Beck and Brook in their 2020 paper "Solidarities in and through work in an age of extremes", this paper aims to conceptualise the perceptions of both solidarity types on the working experience of doctors and nurses.

Methods: The authors will use a qualitative evidence synthesis (QES) review, guided by Noblit and Hare's 7-step meta-ethnography process; chosen as a systematic method to relate, or 'translate', various types of primary, qualitative literature to or into one another, while generating novel insights. This is achieved by creating interpretations (by the research team) of interpretations (made by primary study authors) of interpretations (as expressed by the subjects of individual primary studies). Databases MEDLINE, CINAHL, Scopus, Embase and PubMed have been searched using controlled vocabulary. English language peer-reviewed articles reporting primary, conceptually rich and contextually thick qualitative data exploring informal and formal solidarity as experienced by qualified doctors and/or nurses, as well as its influence on the working experience, have been included following independent title / abstract and full-text screening by two reviewers. Results will be analysed through an appropriate theoretical framework, chosen inductively.

Results: The review is in progress (full findings will be presented). Title/abstract and full-text screening have been completed. The peer-reviewed protocol has been published via Health Research Board Ireland (<https://hrbopenresearch.org/articles/8-128/v2>). Indicative findings include the relationship between both solidarity types, the role and importance of informal solidarity in building positive multidisciplinary team dynamics and work experiences, as well as differences in solidarity perceptions across both medicine and nursing.

Conclusion: The findings of this QES will aim to inform strategies for improving workforce sustainability as well as local and international retention policies, leveraging the priorities of the WHO's 'Framework for action on the health and care workforce in the WHO European Region 2023–2030', safeguarding the stability of health systems globally.

PAPER SESSION 7

15:30-17:00

Algorithmic work and data justice - Room 0.23

Algorithmic Control and Tele-supervision: Weakened Ties of Indian Food Delivery Workers

Clive Trusson, Nidhi Bisht, Arun Tripathy

(Loughborough University)

Platform capitalism has reconfigured the social organisation of work by shifting managerial authority from 'known' supervisors to opaque algorithmic systems and distant service operations. While platform firms present this transformation as technologically neutral and efficiency enhancing, critical sociological perspectives have highlighted how digital infrastructures enable new forms of control, restricting autonomy within the labour process, and intensifying precarity. This paper examines how a major Indian food delivery company reengineered its supervisory architecture to not only place emphasis on algorithmic control that demands worker self management, but also by replacing on the ground front line managers with a centralised 'rider support' call centre provided by a Business Process Outsourcing company employing scripted processes.

Drawing on interviews with riders and managers and field observations, the study explores how this restructuring de personalises supervision and embeds managerial authority in algorithmic control buttressed by a call centre. This shift further positions the platform as a "minimal employer" while deepening workers' dependence on the app for income and access to work.

The analysis mobilises social network analysis, socio technical systems theory and labour process theory to examine the effects of the withdrawal of local supervisors. The findings report that the interpersonal relationship ties between workers and front-line supervisors (that might facilitate empathetic supervisory discretion and conversational problem solving with regard to 'real time' situational context) are dissolved and replaced by weaker ties between workers and anonymised 'tele-supervisors' with limited discretionary authority.

At each stage of the food delivery process, workers routinely encounter a range of frictions that hinder their performance and earnings: premature "order ready" signals from restaurants, geolocation errors, security gate restrictions, unpredictable customer conduct, phone failures, food spillages, and vehicle breakdowns. They also encounter issues common to the human experience (e.g. unexpected familial responsibilities and illness) that impact on their capacity to meet incentive-driven and sanction-threatening targets. The system largely encodes these multifarious issues as being their responsibility with often sharp implications for their algorithmically-calculated rankings that determine access to their preferred quantity and location of gigs. When algorithmically-imposed penalties, reduced rankings, and issues of lost earnings are raised with call centre support services, 'resolutions' of these 'incidents' are often regarded as being unsatisfactory and/or unfair. This contributes to a working culture abound with everyday acts of resistance and misbehaviour (e.g. gaming arrival times to collect food, juggling multiple platforms, tactical positioning within geographic zones) as a survival or entrepreneurial strategy rather than a moral failing.

The findings provoke questions about outsourcing of supervisory labour under platform capitalism. By transforming front line supervision into a rationalised process executed through software and a call centre, the platform reduces costs while externalising risk and eroding managerial imperatives to act ethically and caringly in relation to those they supervise. This reconfiguration undermines long-established principles of HRM practice that attention to line management effectiveness is important for organisational success. It also has implications for workers' capacity to assert claims to fairness, recognition and safety, and implicitly the expectations that organisations might have regarding rates of labour retention.

Algorithmic Management in Times of Polycrisis: A Comparative Study of Professionals' Experiences in the UK and Türkiye

Fatih Avcilar, Zafer Cakmak

(University of Bath)

Critical literature increasingly shows that algorithmic management systems establish new forms of surveillance and control over the labour process (Kellogg et al., 2020). However, studies often focus predominantly on digital labour platforms and on the individual psychological consequences of algorithmic injustice (Kadolkar et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). These approaches implicitly frame algorithmic control as a phenomenon that belongs mainly to precarious and non-standard work, obscuring how it transforms the daily work experiences of professionals within standard employment relations. Moreover, the neglect of institutional context risks portraying algorithmic management as a flat technological response- uniform in its operation-rather than a socially produced process whose form and intensity are shaped by the conditions through which it operates. Without this broader lens, it also becomes difficult to see how workers' ability to negotiate, contest, or accommodate algorithmic control differs across settings.

Therefore, in this study, we explore how professionals experience algorithmic management in contrasting institutional environments. Our central argument is that algorithmic management constitutes a common organisational reflex to polycrisis conditions, but the ways in which it operates and is lived by workers vary significantly across national contexts. In this context, drawing on Labour Process Theory, this study approaches algorithmic management not as a micro-level issue of technological design, but as a structural power relation embedded in the labour process (Briken et al., 2017). The research design focuses on two countries with distinctly different institutional architectures: the United Kingdom and Türkiye. The UK offers relatively strong data protection rules and more institutionalised channels for contesting working conditions (Gooberman et al., 2024; Wylde et al., 2022). Türkiye, by contrast, is marked by more pronounced job insecurity, more flexible surveillance practices, and more limited trade union structures (Birelma, 2022; Uslan & Değirmenci, 2023). The main aim is not to demonstrate these institutional differences, but to understand, from a labour process perspective, how algorithmic control is experienced by professionals in two settings where these differences already exist.

Methodologically, the study draws on comparative qualitative research with professionals subject to at least one algorithmic system in their workplace. Through 24 in-depth semi-structured interviews (approximately 12 for each), we examine the implications of algorithmic management for daily work experiences, perceptions of autonomy, surveillance practices, and forms of resistance. As an ongoing project, fieldwork will be completed prior to the BSA Work, Employment and Society Conference 2026.

This research aims to make two contributions. First, it moves beyond the literature's platform bias, repositioning algorithmic management as an institutionally mediated phenomenon experienced by professionals in standard employment. Second, it shifts the discussion from individual algorithmic injustice to a macro-organisational framework tied to polycrisis conditions, comparatively examining how professionals' experiences of consent, negotiation, and resistance toward algorithmic control emerge across the contrasting institutional contexts of the UK and Türkiye.

Employment Quality in the Emerging Platform Economy: A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Digital Cab Services in Two Indian Megacities

Indrajit Bairagya

(Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru)

The emergence of the technology-based platform economy in the Indian cities is seen as one of the potential sectors for generating employment for a large number of youths and is also a process of formalization of informal employment on a large scale; however, whether such a type of formalization is actually benefiting the workers or not requires a detailed empirical examination. This brings our aim for the study to examine the quality of employment generated in the Indian ride-sharing platforms by comparing the quality of employment between traditional and digital cab services in two Indian megacities with different political and economic setups, Kolkata and Bengaluru. Moreover, following Braverman's Labor Process Theory (LPT), we have examined how technology reproduces old forms of exploitation in new ways, highlighting the notion of the illusion of flexibility in the emerging ride-sharing platform economy in India.

In order to accomplish the objective, we have collected data from 650 cab drivers, out of which 400 samples are app-based cab drivers associated with the OLA/Uber platform and 250 are in conventional taxi models. Out of 650 samples, 350 drivers are interviewed from Bengaluru and 300 from Kolkata. We have adopted ILO measures of the quality of the employment index based on three dimensions: earnings, the nature of working conditions, and security and social dialogue. Moreover, we have constructed four regression equations for each of the dimensions (earnings, social security and employment conditions) and an aggregate quality of employment index, and also the potential endogeneity problem existing between our key independent variable 'Choice of Platform' and the dependent variable 'Quality of Employment' has been addressed using the fitted probabilities of the choice of platform obtained from a binary response model as an approximation.

The results show higher employment quality associated with OLA/Uber drivers in both cities compared to the drivers associated with conventional taxi models. It also shows the quality of employment is higher for Kolkata than Bengaluru. This is possible due to the higher traffic density in Bengaluru, which makes drivers have fewer rides but end up spending more hours of work for an earning. However, in general, workers are found to be deprived of social security benefits, insurance and other basic incentives in a standard work arrangement, in respect of which a policy response should be to reform the existing legal framework that incorporates the term 'independent contractors' into the legal purview. For instance, countries such as France have acts on work, modernization of social dialogue and securing of career paths that provide these workers with an economical-technical-dependent relationship with their platform that can lead to insurance benefits related to accidents and enable workers to undergo training and have the right to join or form a trade union (EU-OSHA, 2017). At the same time, it is also important to improve the employment quality generated in the conventional taxi system, by providing fair competition between business models.

Care infrastructures, social reproduction and the crisis of care - Room 0.19

How Workers Navigate the Crisis of Social Care in Britain: An Ethnographic Perspective

Lydia Hughes

(City St George's, University of London)

Social care is one of the largest employers in Britain. It is an overwhelmingly feminised workforce, marked by low wages and poor working conditions. Whilst employers struggle to recruit and retain workers, there is a growing need for social care services. The government is set to heavily intervene in the sector by establishing a sectoral collective bargaining agreement that will set minimum working conditions. As care homes fail under rising cost pressures and stagnant local government fees, private finance is seizing the opportunity to expand across the sector. Private finance has also been exploiting the move to digitise the sector in care planning, workforce management, and agency worker provision.

Whilst the intense pressure on the sector has been well documented, what is less well known is how the actual work of care has been impacted by these changes. This work takes place behind closed doors, in care homes or private homes, out of reach of public scrutiny. The impact of how care workers are currently experiencing and responding to the 'crisis' of care in the workplace is less understood, particularly in terms of how workers manage the workload, manage the emotions of care and navigate institutional neglect. The introduction of new technologies in the labour process must be further understood, as well as workers' responses and resistance to the current state of affairs.

In order to address these issues, the paper presents findings from a PhD project on care work in Britain. It uses a qualitative methodology consisting of autoethnographic data collected during the author's time working as a care assistant in care homes in England. Ethnographic data is supplemented with semi-structured interviews with care workers, care providers and experts in the sector. Drawing on this data, the paper details the labour process in care homes, the emotional and physical demands of the role, how the work is managed and mediated through technology. The paper aims to ground theoretical debates on care and emotional labour with rich ethnographic data through a materialist feminist lens.

This paper contributes to ongoing debates around social reproduction and the ethics of care, as well as discussions on low-paid and precarious work, and union organising. It contributes to understanding how body work, often in feminised and racialised workplaces, is navigated by workers and often comes into conflict with institutional structures. Whilst not being the focus of the research, the research speaks to a wider conversation on society's value of past workers.

Elder Care Responsibilities, Work-Family Conflict, and Job Burnout: The Role of Gender

Bo-Yi Lee, Ching-Ling Hung, Anthony Guo

(National Tsing Hua University)

As East Asian societies transition into “super-aged” demographics, “working family caregivers” have become a vital yet precarious segment of the labor force. While eldercare is often framed as a universal challenge, it remains a deeply gendered phenomenon. In the context of Taiwan, Confucian ethics of filial piety often dictate specific, yet differing, expectations for sons, daughters, and sons/daughters-in-law. This study investigates the impact of eldercare responsibilities—specifically for parents and parents-in-law—on job burnout, while examining how gender moderates the relationship between family demands and professional outcomes.

Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, we explore the mechanisms of Family-to-Work Conflict (FWC). We hypothesize that the gendered nature of caregiving creates a unique resource drain for women, who are often expected to provide more intensive emotional and physical labor. Crucially, we examine how gender interacts with workplace factors: whether the buffering effects of informal social support (from supervisors and coworkers) and the aggravating effects of workplace demands (role overload and conflict) differ significantly between men and women.

This research utilizes a three-wave longitudinal design. By surveying employees over time, we analyze how eldercare triggers resource depletion. This research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the “working family caregivers” by highlighting how cultural mandates of filial responsibility intersect with gendered expectations to shape the modern East Asian career.

Determinants of Labour Shortages in the Health Sector in the Aftermath of Covid-19: A Comparative Analysis across Health Workforce Regimes

Alvaro Martinez-Perez

(University of Sheffield)

This paper investigates the structural determinants of health workforce shortages across the EU-27 from 2015 to 2024. Departing from traditional neoclassical or individual behavioural models, it adopts a political economy approach to argue that labour shortages are deeply embedded in the institutional arrangements of welfare states. Using cluster analysis on Eurostat data, the study empirically identifies three distinct “Health Workforce Regimes”: Low-Resource, Staff-Intensive, and High-Investment.

The findings reveal that the European health workforce crisis is not monolithic but manifests as three specific structural failures: a crisis of investment in the Low-Resource regime, flexibility in the Staff-Intensive regime, and complexity in the High-Investment regime. While some countries like Czechia, Lithuania and Slovenia show positive convergence toward Western standards, others remain structurally trapped in a cycle of low investment and “brain drain”: Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Poland, Greece. The chapter concludes that effective policy must be regime-specific, prioritizing workforce governance over simple recruitment.

Tested but Not Transformed: Paid Work, Domestic Labour, and Relational Dynamics in Dual-earner Couples after COVID-19

Mayra Ruiz-Castro, Deborah Brewis

(Queen Mary University of London)

The COVID-19 pandemic represented an unprecedented shock to the organization of paid and unpaid work in dual-earner households, forcing the collapse of boundaries between employment and domestic

life and intensifying demands for household labour and childcare. Existing research across countries shows that this disruption was experienced in gendered ways: mothers reduced paid work hours significantly more than fathers (Collins et al., 2021), absorbed disproportionate shares of domestic and cognitive labour (McMunn et al., 2020; Offer, 2014; Reich-Stiebert et al., 2023), and bore the costs of flexible working arrangements that reinforced unequal division of domestic labour (Chung and Booker, 2023; Parry, 2025), while worsening mothers' position through self-exploitation and work intensification (Ryan et al., 2025). Evidence thus suggests that gendered arrangements tend to persist under pressure (Gush et al., 2015; Radcliffe and Cassell, 2023), with studies showing moderate re-traditionalization of breadwinning arrangements specifically during the pandemic (Dotti Sani et al., 2025; Shockley et al., 2021). However, we still know little about dual-earner household dynamics post-pandemic, including how the changes and persistence observed during the pandemic have evolved to date. This paper addresses this gap by asking: how have dual-earner couples in the UK navigated participation in paid work, the division of domestic labour, and relational dynamics in the years following the pandemic? And what processes explain the persistence or transformation of gendered arrangements across these domains?

Theoretically, the paper builds on two existing frameworks. Crawford et al.'s (2019) work-life shock events theory, which illuminates how couples make sense of disruption, and Radcliffe and Cassell's (2023) concept of work-family habits, which explains why traditional arrangements persist despite egalitarian intentions. We extend these frameworks by analysing what happens after disruption. Empirically, our analysis is based on two waves of semi-structured interviews with dual-earner couples in South West London. In Phase 1 (2021), we conducted joint interviews with 36 heterosexual couples. In Phase 2 (2025), eight couples and one partner (who split from their partner after the pandemic) have been re-interviewed, with further interviews ongoing. Both sets of interviews were conducted online and lasted between 51 and 92 minutes. Joint interviews allowed us to capture couples' shared experience and co-constructed meaning (Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014), thereby generating a rich dataset that encompasses both partners' perceptions and decisions, including agreements and tensions.

Following a thematic analytical approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006), our preliminary findings indicate that gendered arrangements have largely persisted, though not through straightforward reversion or re-traditionalization. We observe a re-stabilisation through identifiable processes (such as absorption, normalization, and exit) at the intersection of the three domains (paid work, unpaid work, and relational dynamics) and contingent on specific structural and relational conditions. Based on its unique couple-level, longitudinal, and qualitative dataset, our analysis has the potential to develop a typology of mechanisms advancing understanding of how gendered arrangements re-stabilise after disruption and to offer an analytical framework treating the three domains as mutually constitutive.

Hybrid work, organisational restructuring and emerging workplace forms - Room 0.18

PhD Showcase

Systematically Reviewing Technology in Flexible Work: Implications for Social Relations in the Digital Age

Xuening Shi

(University of Edinburgh, Business School)

This article presents a systematic review of research at the intersection of technology and flexible forms of work typically seen as desirable by workers (e.g. remote work, hybrid work, shorter workweek, etc.). Our research aim was to understand how technology shapes social relationships in flexible work contexts. To this end, we reviewed academic journal articles published between 2015-2024 which focused on technologies mediating cooperation, communication, and coordination/control in flexible work.

We started our study by identifying suitable key works to capture flexible forms of work (e.g. Flexible work, hybrid work, compressed work, etc.) as well as different terms of technologies (e.g. ICTs, Digitalization, Datafication, etc.). Underpinned by a systematic review, we argue what technology are

mostly focused on the flexible work in past 49 research (2015-2024) and explores the technology's influence on relationships of flexible workers on and off work. We entered our key words into the Web of Science databases. After title and abstract screening and full-text analysis, our final sample consisted of 49 journal articles published in highly reputable journals. We conducted thematic analysis and inductively synthesised the literature into four key themes.

We first developed a remote/virtual cooperation, online communication and technology-mediated coordination framework (ROT) which captures how work is shared, aligned and controlled through technology in flexible work. Remote/virtual cooperation was examined in 4.1% of reviewed articles; online communication was examined in 85.7% of reviewed articles; and technology-mediated coordination involving both control and more innocuous forms of work coordination was examined in 28.6% of reviewed articles.

Subsequently, we organised our findings around five key themes, each representing a dyadic social relationship: the "employee-manager relationship" (Theme 1, examined in 40.8% of reviewed articles), the "employee-employee relationship" (theme 2, examined in 26.5% of reviewed articles), the "technology-human relationship" (theme 3, examined in 10.2% of reviewed articles), the "employee-family members relationship" (theme 4, examined in 20.4% of reviewed articles), and the "employee-clients relationship" (theme 5, examined in 2% of reviewed articles).

Bringing together our ROT framework with the five dyadic relationships allowed us to synthesise our findings into a unique way which offered significant insight into how technology mediates and shapes social relations not only at the workplace but also those relationships out with work.

Our findings indicate the intensified surveillance and control over employees across work processes from managers. Furthermore, the adoption of a variety of collaboration software (e.g., emails, videoconferencing, Slack) enhanced team trust, particularly timely and meaningful responsiveness to peers, and it also enhanced feedback oriented toward task-outcomes rather than procedural compliance. However, employees were expected to respond to coworkers on collaboration platforms, which increased supplementary work, though continuous digital communications could mitigate this impact. The human-technology relationship encompasses both traditional technologies and those augmented by artificial intelligence (AI). As AI increasingly enables enhanced surveillance and control in the workplace, it is reshaping labour processes — particularly within flexible work arrangements. This evolving relationship is frequently marked by technostress. We conclude by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of our findings and future directions.

Working from Home Configurations and the Gendered Division of Unpaid Work: A Dyadic Perspective of Parents in China

Zhuo Chen

(University College London)

Although working from home (WFH) has increasingly been promoted as a family-friendly arrangement, particularly for employees with greater family responsibilities, existing research shows mixed evidence regarding its impact on the gendered division of unpaid work and remains largely focused on Western contexts. This paper examines how WFH shapes the gendered division of childcare and housework among dual-earner parents in urban China. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 34 parents across 20 households, the study adopts a dyadic approach by interviewing both mothers and fathers. This study compares three WFH configurations: only fathers working from home, both partners working from home, and only mothers working from home. The findings show that gendered divisions of unpaid work persist across all configurations. Notably, these divisions are most pronounced when only mothers work from home. Fathers' access to WFH can facilitate their selective involvement in childcare, particularly in educational and recreational activities, while routine and time-intensive childcare and housework remain concentrated on mothers. When both partners work from home, mothers tend to integrate childcare into paid work more extensively, whereas fathers prioritise maintaining boundaries between their paid work and family responsibilities. This paper argues that WFH does not challenge gendered divisions in unpaid work but instead reproduces and reconfigures gender inequality through everyday practices of "doing gender."

Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification 1 - Room 0.08

Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs): Between 'Life-first' and 'Work-first' Logics

Greg Marston

(University of Queensland)

This paper contributes both empirically and conceptually to sociological debates on work, care and employment by showing how hybrid organisations are being repositioned within 'work-first' governance of labour market disadvantage. Work integration social enterprises (WISEs) occupy a hybrid position within Australia's social economy, combining commercial activity with a social mission that centres on providing inclusive employment. WISEs do this by supporting workers' life-needs through 'wraparound' supports (Joyce et al., 2025), which we conceptualise as part of a broader 'life-first' approach. In recent years, WISEs have also attracted growing federal policy interest in incorporating them as service providers within Australia's mainstream employment services system that is based on 'work-first' principles and practices. The core of this paper examines how this integration may disrupt their 'life-first' purpose, value, and organisational identity if they converge with the system's 'work-first' orientation and 'productivist' program logic of mainstream employment services. That is, a system enveloped in a capitalist imaginary that positions one's value as deriving from paid work or from cultivating a work ethic (Weeks, 2011).

The paper also explores the risks and opportunities associated with WISEs' greater integration into the employment services system. To do this, we draw on findings from 27 key informant interviews across government, employment services, social enterprise, and the wider community sector to generate empirical and theory-building insights. Our findings suggest greater integration has brought online funding streams and led to greater acknowledgement of the additional social and relational labour WISEs undertake. However, our findings also indicate that closer alignment with the 'work-first' system and its labour market activation policies (ALMPs) risks reconfiguring WISEs' value proposition, potentially diluting their social mission in favour of government-prescribed key performance outcomes and behavioural compliance on 'job seekers.' We argue that examining these risks and opportunities illuminates an intensifying fault line: how to address and resource the needs of those most impacted by economic precarity within a political imaginary that takes the value of care-giving and care-receiving seriously in regard to identity, citizenship and rights (Nussbaum, 2003).

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Employment and the Polycrisis in Poland: A Cross-generational Perspective

Olga Czeranowska, Iga Wermińska-Wiśnicka, Agnieszka Golińska

(SWPS University)

Planning the professional future of today's youth is increasingly complex due to automation, globalisation, rising inequality, and political polarisation. Young people's trajectories are further shaped by the long-term socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has profoundly affected the so-called "lockdown generation" – those transitioning from education to the labour market (Demena et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2020; ILO, 2020; Pustulka et al., under review). As Cebulla (2024: 142) argues, "youth labour markets operate alongside the 'mainstream' adult labour market." Young people are particularly vulnerable to employment insecurity, unemployment, and precarious working conditions, and are overrepresented in temporary contracts and in sectors such as services and hospitality, which were especially affected by the pandemic (Konle-Seidl & Picarella, 2021; Cuervo et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, despite labour-market instability and numerous risks, previous studies show that young people tend to maintain an optimistic outlook on their future (Barford et al., 2021; Nikunen & Korvajärvi, 2022).

Our paper draws on quantitative data collected within the research project Ultragen: Becoming an Adult in Times of Ultra-Uncertainty: An Intergenerational Theory of 'Shaky' Transitions (funded by the National Science Centre, OPUS 2020/37/B/HS6/01685; Principal Investigator: Prof. Paulina Pustulka). Presented analysis is focused on factors shaping young Poles' expectations of achieving greater career success than their parents in a context of growing socio-economic uncertainty.

The survey (N = 2104) was conducted on a panel sample of individuals aged 18-35 using quota sampling based on the Polish national population structure data (Statistics Poland, 2022). We apply logistic regression models to examine the characteristics of young people who expect to achieve greater career success than their parents. This group is compared with respondents who express pessimistic expectations regarding their occupational future relative to the previous generation. The first model captures variables related to key sociodemographic characteristics, while the second model examines respondents' hopes and fears about the future.

Among socio-demographic, educational attainment emerged as the strongest predictor of career optimism: young people with a tertiary education diploma were significantly more likely to expect a brighter occupational future. Another important predictor was current financial independence. In the second model, career optimism was associated with confidence in one's ability to cope with crises, but also – somewhat unexpectedly – with general fears about the future. These findings contribute to debates on intergenerational mobility and youth transitions in times of polycrisis.

Labor Market Institutions and the Fixed-term Wage Gap: The Role of Insider Protection versus Outsider Regulation

Yongchao Jing

(Cardiff University)

This study examines how labor market institutions that protect insiders and those regulating outsiders shape wage inequality between fixed-term and permanent workers. It evaluates competing dualization and solidarity perspectives on the role of trade unions, as well as contrasting accounts that differ in whether they emphasize employment protection legislation (EPL) for permanent or for temporary contracts. Using multilevel models and PIAAC data from 27 OECD countries, the analysis shows that deregulation of EPL for temporary contracts is associated with a larger wage gap, particularly among younger workers, and that this relationship does not vary with the level of protection for permanent employment. By contrast, EPL for permanent workers shows no consistent association, and trade union strength does not moderate the gap. These findings challenge accounts emphasizing insider protection and instead point to the importance of institutions regulating outsiders in shaping the fixed-term wage gap and, more broadly, labor market dualization.

Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification 2 - Room 0.09

PhD Showcase

Career Progression of Ethnic Minority Allied Health Professionals in the NHS in England

Mariya Yeldhos

(University of Leicester)

Despite the National Health Service's (NHS) stated commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion, persistent disparities in representation and career advancement persist for its ethnic minority workforce. The NHS People Plan (2023, p. 23) concedes that "the treatment of our colleagues from ethnic minority groups falls short far too often," reflecting that the discrimination and unfair treatment continue to affect

this group of employees at multiple stages of their career trajectories (Johns, Green, and Powell, 2012; Kalra, Abel, and Esmail, 2009). Since the early waves of mass migration in the 1940s, ethnic minority staff have comprised a substantial proportion of the NHS workforce, yet remain disproportionately concentrated in lower-paid, less prestigious roles. This imbalance is particularly pronounced among Allied Health Professionals (AHPs)—the NHS's third largest workforce group—who are numerically significant but notably absent from senior leadership positions (Eddison et al., 2023). Historical and contemporary analyses consistently show that ethnic minority staff across the NHS experience slower career progression than their white counterparts (Gay and Bamford, 2007; Johns, 2004; Kline, 2014), yet the AHPs remain largely overlooked in the NHS workforce equality research. Also, scholarly attention has predominantly focused on doctors and nurses, leaving gaps in understanding the unique challenges faced by the AHPs (HCPC, 2024).

Emerging literature indicates that the AHPs navigate distinct career constraints, including isolated clinical career pathways, less structured progression routes, and limited organizational visibility (Chastney et al., 2024; NHS England, 2022). For ethnic minority AHPs, these structural issues intersect with racialized barriers such as stereotyping, restricted access to advancement and leadership development, limited mentorship and networking opportunities (Kline, 2014; West et al., 2015). The persistence of these disparities underscores the influence of systemic and institutional factors.

The research employs an integrated theoretical framework using the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and intersectionality theory as it will provide a comprehensive analysis of career progression disparities. SCCT will be used to explore how cognitive, personal, and environmental factors influence career development, while intersectionality theory will examine how intersecting social identities, such as ethnicity and gender, shape the career experiences of ethnic minority AHPs. The research employs mixed-methods approach such as semi-structured interview and online survey in a cross-sectional design to identify the career progression disparities. In the qualitative phase, 35 interviews were conducted and the analysis showed that the ethnic minorities feel invisible to the senior management during promotions, lack of proper trainings and mentorships for career progression, absence of role models in the senior level, lack of transparency in the interview process etc. And, the quantitative data collection is in progress. From the findings, the research aims to contribute to the development of strategies that will enhance career progression for ethnic minority AHPs, which ultimately will improve the quality of care in the NHS.

The Burden of Doing Good: Marginalised Professionals and the Reproduction of Inequality through Internal Activism

Katharina Hug, Stefanie Gustafsson, Katharina Chudzikowski

(Leuphana University, Lüneburg)

Studies of professions emphasise the persistence of structural inequalities and the exclusionary nature of elite professional organisations (Ashley & Empson, 2017; Tomlinson et al., 2013). This paper contributes to this body of literature by examining how a grassroots internal activist initiative, established to promote environmental and social change, may evolve in a way that reproduces inequalities in professional organisations. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of doxa, illusio and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), we explore how internal climate activism unfolds within an elite professional service firm (PSF), revealing how professional hierarchies and norms are sustained through everyday activism practices.

The study is based on 47 qualitative interviews with professionals involved in ClimateNow, an internal climate-change initiative within a globally operating PSF. Most participants were women and professionals from minority ethnic or working-class backgrounds, who were drawn to the initiative's values of inclusion and sustainability. Initially, ClimateNow offered a community for like-minded professionals seeking meaning and belonging beyond client-driven work. However, as the initiative became institutionalised within the firm, existing power structures were reinforced. Members' activities, framed as voluntary and non-billable, were undervalued in career progression systems that reward chargeable hours and profit-oriented contributions. Climate activism was often coded as a "women's issue" and perceived as disruptive to the firm's neoliberal ethos, leaving many participants facing what one respondent called a "double whammy": being marginalised both for their identity and for their engagement in social activism.

Our analysis reveals how symbolic violence operates within internal activism. Professionals internalise the “rules of the game” by moderating or concealing their activism to fit corporate expectations, thereby reproducing doxa, the unquestioned belief in meritocracy, productivity, and client service that underpins professional cultures (Grey, 1994). Yet, we also identify instances of agency, where marginalised professionals tactically navigate power structures by aligning their activism with legitimate professional activities, gaining senior sponsorship, or creating alternative spaces within ClimateNow. These actions rarely disrupt the dynamics of the field but open sites of resistance.

This study advances theorising of professional inequality by showing how internal activist groups, even when designed to promote social and environmental change, can reproduce hierarchies of power. We demonstrate how doxa, illusio and symbolic violence operate within grassroots initiatives, as professionals internalise dominant norms around meritocracy, productivity and legitimacy. In doing so, the study extends prior work on inequality in elite professions (Ashley & Empson, 2017; Tomlinson et al., 2013) by uncovering how the “rules of the game” persist even within spaces aimed at change and reform. We further contribute to research on internal activism (Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Stöber & Girschik, 2024) by illustrating how marginalised professionals engage in alternative strategies that negotiate, rather than overthrow, structural constraints. These strategies, manifest in acts of inclusion and solidarity, reveal the different ways activists sustain agency within symbolic domination. Through this, we highlight the dual nature of internal activist groups: as constrained by neoliberal structures yet generative of emergent, transformative practices that potentially facilitate more equitable professional futures.

Understanding the Class Ceiling in UK Finance: How Class Origin Shapes Career Trajectories

Nikita Nikita, Anne Theunissen

(London School of Economics and Political Science)

Despite ongoing policy efforts and public discourse on “levelling up,” class origin continues to shape career progression in elite occupations. Social mobility research has documented a class ceiling whereby upwardly mobile professionals remain underrepresented in leadership roles despite entering elite professions (Friedman & Laurison, 2019). Yet existing studies have focused on capital deficits without showing how the interplay between capitals actively constructs the ceiling or how upwardly mobile individuals navigate it (Ashley & Empson, 2013; Friedman et al., 2017). A related body of work has explored the emotional toll of the cleft habitus, yet stopped short of connecting it to the class ceiling. Moreover, finance, a key sector of the UK economy, remains comparatively underexplored in this literature (Ashley, 2022).

This study addresses these gaps by examining the career trajectories of 25 upwardly mobile professionals in the UK financial sector. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984, 1986, 1990) concepts of capital, field, and habitus, the analysis moves beyond deficit-based models to show how the “rules of the capital game” in finance construct the class ceiling and how upwardly mobile workers navigate it. Participants were recruited through Progress Together, an organisation promoting socioeconomic diversity in UK financial services, and purposively sampled to capture diversity across gender, race, and career stage. Semi-structured interviews averaging 62 minutes were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Two key findings emerge. First, a cultural mismatch produces less convertible social capital. Career progression in finance depends primarily on social capital, yet it cannot be acquired independently: it must be built through the conversion of cultural capital. Embodied cultural capital (familiarity with elite tastes, leisure practices, and interactional styles) serves as the primary gateway to forming weak ties and, ultimately, securing the strong ties that enable career progression. Institutionalised cultural capital, such as elite educational credentials, similarly operates as ongoing conversational currency well beyond the hiring process. Where upwardly mobile workers lack these resources, the conversion pathway is foreclosed, limiting access to the networks through which opportunities circulate.

Second, lacking the right social capital means hitting the class ceiling, and habitus explains why breaking through it remains so difficult. Participants described not knowing the rules of the game and, upon discovering them, consciously modifying their speech, appearance, and mannerisms. Yet these strategies met with uneven success: some markers could be adopted (dress), while others (skiing, golfing, elite educational networks) remained out of reach. This reflects the cleft habitus: the deep tension between ingrained working-class dispositions and the dominant habitus of the finance field.

Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis captures how these dispositions persist even as individuals move upward, producing emotional strain and professional disadvantage as workers missed the informal networking opportunities critical to career progression.

Together, these findings extend Bourdieusian accounts by foregrounding capital conversion (rather than possession alone) as the key mechanism of post-entry class reproduction, and by connecting cleft habitus to the class ceiling. Focusing on finance adds a field-specific account of class reproduction in an elite sector, with implications for diversity and inclusion policy.

Rethinking Career Trajectories in Finance: Care, Gender and Agency in the Chilean Context

Camille Rieutord

(Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso)

Despite the growing participation of women in professional and managerial roles, persistent gendered inequalities continue to shape career trajectories, particularly within highly masculinised sectors such as finance. Existing research has predominantly approached career development through individualised and meritocratic frameworks, often overlooking the role of intersectional inequalities in shaping women's experiences. Consequently, the organisational and structural conditions through which trajectories are produced remain insufficiently examined.

This doctoral research in progress examines how women working in the Chilean financial sector narrate and make sense of their career trajectories, focusing on the interplay between gendered organisational dynamics, the social organisation of care, and forms of agency. The study is positioned within the field of Critical Management Studies and adopts a critical feminist perspective, drawing on Acker's concept of gendered organisations and Bourdieu's notion of trajectories. It further engages with Butler's theory of gender performativity to analyse the production of gendered subjectivities, and with Federici's theorisation of social reproduction to foreground the centrality of care in structuring labour and inequality, incorporating an intersectional lens.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative, narrative approach based on a multiple case study design. Data are generated through in-depth biographical interviews conducted in two rounds. The first round has been completed, and the second is currently in progress. In addition, the research design incorporates shadowing as a complementary method to capture organisational practices in situ. The analysis focuses on how participants narrate key turning points, constraints, and strategies within their trajectories.

The analysis examines how tensions between organisational expectations of constant availability and the demands of care are narrated and negotiated. By attending to these tensions, the study explores how career paths are reconfigured through interruptions, adjustments, and strategic decisions that are often rendered invisible within dominant organisational logics. This perspective allows trajectories to be understood not as individual achievements, but as processes shaped through ongoing negotiations within gendered structures of power, where agency is exercised within, rather than outside of, these constraints.

This research contributes to contemporary discussions on work, employment, and career trajectories by offering a theoretically grounded and empirically informed account from the Global South, challenging dominant narratives of meritocracy and individual success. It advances a critical rethinking of career trajectories by questioning their conceptualisation as individualised and linear processes, and by showing how they are shaped by social relations and structural conditions. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates within Critical Management Studies and critical feminism, opening up new ways of understanding how trajectories are shaped and sustained within contemporary labour regimes.

Worker subjectivities, experience and agency - Room 0.13

When Academic Work Does Not Fit the Mind: ADHD, Cognitive Normativity and the Experience of Academic Labour

Ying Zhao, Cheryl Sorensen

(University of Chester)

Academic work is increasingly characterised by fragmented tasks, competing demands and intensified administrative processes (Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013; Knights & Clarke, 2014). Yet it continues to be evaluated through expectations of stable attention, steady productivity and continuous self-regulation. This creates a tension between how academic labour is organised and how it is judged. This paper develops the concept of cognitive normativity to describe the institutionalised assumptions about how work should be cognitively performed, and which forms of attention and productivity are recognised as competent, building on neurodiversity scholarship on the social organisation of cognition (cf Chapman, 2020) and emerging work on neurodiversity in higher education (Selkrig, et al., 2024).

Drawing on collaborative analytic autoethnography with two academics with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) working in UK higher education, the study examines how neurodivergent cognitive regulation interacts with the organisation of academic work. Rather than treating ADHD primarily as an individual deficit requiring accommodation, the paper approaches neurodivergence as an analytical vantage point (cf. Armstrong, 2010; Doyle, 2020). Using incident-based fieldnotes across teaching, marking, administration and institutional service, the analysis develops the concept of academic task ecology to describe how different configurations of work—such as levels of fragmentation, feedback and interaction—shape attentional regulation.

The findings suggest that attentional engagement in academic work is not stable, but highly dependent on ecological conditions. Tasks organised around clear relational exchange and immediate feedback tend to support sustained engagement, while work structured through fragmented administrative systems produces disproportionate cognitive friction. More broadly, academic work generates cyclical patterns of activation and depletion that sit uneasily with institutional expectations of consistent and evenly distributed productivity.

Building on these findings, the paper proposes an ADHD Academic Ecology Model, which conceptualises academic labour as an interaction between task ecology and cognitive regulation dynamics. The model shifts the analytical focus from individual deficit to ecological alignment, suggesting that productivity and professional performance are shaped by how well cognitive styles fit the structure of work. In doing so, it makes visible the implicit cognitive norms embedded in academic labour systems.

The paper contributes to debates on worker subjectivity and labour experience by introducing neurodivergence as a lens for analysing the organisation of professional work. It argues that ADHD does not simply require accommodation, but provides a critical perspective on how universities design work, distribute tasks and define competence.

‘It gets harder when you care’: Emotion Work in Veterinary Practice

Rachel Williams

(Cardiff University)

This presentation will examine emotion work in the veterinary profession, contributing to debates on Worker subjectivities, experience and agency in emotionally intensive forms of work. While emotion work has been widely studied in service and caring occupations, it has received limited attention in veterinary practice. This is notable given the combination of clinical responsibility, client interaction, and commercial pressures that characterise the role. The presentation will focus on how veterinary surgeons experience and manage emotion work over time, with particular attention to client relationships and euthanasia.

The analysis draws on an understanding of emotion work as the active management of emotions or feelings in line with situational expectations (Bolton 2005), alongside foundational work on emotional labour (Hochschild 1983). It also engages with the concept of emotional comfort zones (Hannah and Robertson 2021) to explore how individuals navigate emotionally demanding situations. The presentation situates these experiences within the broader context of polycrisis, where labour shortages, rising client expectations, and the increasing marketisation of veterinary services are reshaping the conditions of work. In particular, the framing of clients as consumers introduces tensions between care and commercial demands, extending the scope and intensity of emotion work.

The paper is based on a longitudinal qualitative study of 25 veterinary graduates from eight UK veterinary schools, comprising around 130 interviews conducted across six waves between 2021 and 2026. This design allows for an analysis of how emotion work develops over time, responding to calls for more longitudinal approaches to the study of workplace emotions (Clarke et al. 2007).

The findings make three main contributions. First, they show that emotion work intensifies as relationships with clients develop. While routine interactions can be managed with relative detachment, long-term relationships make euthanasia particularly difficult, as vets become more emotionally invested in both animals and owners. Second, the paper demonstrates that emotion work is shaped by individual "comfort zones," which are learned and variable (Hannah and Robertson 2021). Situations that fall outside these zones, such as strong client grief or ethically challenging decisions, are experienced as significantly more demanding. Third, the findings highlight the importance of organisational context. In particular, the ability to prepare for and recover from emotionally intense events is critical to managing emotion work (Sayre et al. 2025) yet is often constrained by time pressures and workload.

Overall, the paper shows that emotion work in veterinary practice is relational and develops over time, rather than being confined to isolated encounters. It also highlights how veterinary surgeons exercise agency in managing their emotional responses, while operating within organisational and market constraints. The paper contributes to understanding how worker subjectivities are shaped in contexts where professional values of care are increasingly intertwined with commercial pressures, and where emotion work is a central, but often under-recognised, aspect of the role.

Self-preservation in the Neoliberal Squeeze: The Structural Constraints and Minimal Agency of "Lying Flat (Tangping)" Practices

Boyang Liang

(University of Leeds)

Lying flat (tangping) has become a widely circulating keyword on Chinese social media in recent years. It is commonly used to capture young white-collar workers' desire for work-life balance, and their rethinking of mainstream success narratives, in a context marked by declining returns to education, intensifying job competition, and the continued deepening of labour commodification under neoliberal conditions. Tangping may involve reducing extra involuntary (neijuan) effort, refusing endless self-intensification, maintaining only minimally acceptable work performance, and adjusting one's expectations around home ownership, marriage, childbearing, eldercare, and financial accumulation. In this sense, tangping has moved beyond being a mere buzzword, becoming an important everyday concept through which workers make sense of pressure, explain exhaustion, and negotiate the boundaries of life.

This concept has generated intense controversy in contemporary China because it unsettles the country's long-standing moral tradition surrounding labour. From the Confucian teaching on suffering mind and hungering body for great responsibility, to the state narrative since Reform and Opening that has celebrated model workers, dedication, hard struggle, and individual striving, China has long cultivated a social environment in which enduring hardship, perseverance, and upward mobility are treated as virtues. Within this historical and cultural context, tangping represents a clear disturbance to established work ethics and narratives of progress. It is therefore often framed in public discussion and some academic interpretations as a form of passive resistance, soft refusal, or an oppositional stance toward mainstream values within labouring subjectivity.

Yet such readings often overstate the resistant nature of tangping and too quickly interpret it as a clear expression of subjective awakening. For example, as China's largest IT hub, Beijing concentrates

political and economic resources, high-paying jobs, and career opportunities, while also being marked by high rents and housing prices, high living costs, intense competition, overwork culture, age anxiety, and blocked upward mobility. However, the in-depth semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observation with 30 IT professionals in Beijing shows that many IT professionals remain trapped in severe work-life imbalance, yet still cannot easily choose tangping, and some even hold deeply negative views of the term.

While examining how workers narrate, justify, and emotionally experience the process of moving from neijuan to tangping, and under what conditions such a shift becomes possible, this research finds that workers' attitudes toward tangping, and whether they can practice it at all, depend primarily on their settlement resources in Beijing, family support and eldercare obligations, gendered social expectations, and their own judgements about career risk and life rhythm. Even when workers can tangping, the bottom line of this practice would be jointly constrained by managerial demands, company culture, performance systems, and workers' assessments of their replaceability. As one participant put it, "tangping requires capital." Tangping can therefore better understood as a defensive adjustment after prolonged work-life imbalance, a form of self-preservation of minimal subjectivity and agency, and a reluctant product of the present era, rather than a romanticised and postmodern new-wave of embracing individual emancipation or a capital-backed resistance.



CONFERENCE DINNER

Thursday 10 September
18:00-23:00
The Architect, Bath City Centre

Join us for a buffet dinner at [The Architect](#) in Bath City Centre on Thursday 10 September at 18:00. The evening dinner is a great place to relax, network, and continue conversations from the day in a welcome and informal setting. Soft drinks are included, with a bar available for additional purchases. Tickets are £40 and must be booked in advance.