

Work, Employment and Society Annual Conference 2026



**Abstract Book
Wednesday 9 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*

IMPORTANT DELEGATE INFORMATION

Arrival and Registration

To help everything run smoothly, please collect your badge promptly on arrival and then step away from the desk to allow others to register. Feel free to grab some refreshments, visit the exhibitors or take a moment to familiarise yourself with the programme.

Your badge must be worn at all times for security and meal access. It also indicates whether you have booked the conference buffet dinner.

Registration will take place in the Pavilion, School of Management (10E):

- Wednesday 9 September from 09:30
- Thursday 10 September from 08:00
- Friday 11 September from 08:00

Venue Details

Venue address:

10 East, School of Management
University of Bath
Convocation Avenue, Claverton Down
Bath
BA2 7AY

What3Words: ///exam.rent.elaborate

Directions:

- [University of Bath – Travel Advice](#)
- [Travelling to the School of Management](#)

Sessions will take place in various rooms at the School of Management (10E).

Refreshments and **exhibitors** will be based in the Pavilion.

Chairing

We are extremely grateful to all those who have agreed to chair one or more sessions. Chairing guidelines will be available in each room and a copy is also available [here](#).

If you can no longer fulfil this role, please let us know at the registration desk so we can make alternative arrangements.

If you are interested in chairing a session, or notice a session without a chair allocated, we would be very grateful if you could volunteer – please let a member of staff know at the registration desk.

If you do find yourself in a session without a chair, we would be grateful if someone in the audience could volunteer to take this role.

Meals and Refreshments

Tea and coffee will be served in the Pavilion at various points throughout the conference. Please use all service points to avoid queues.

Lunch will be served in the Lime Tree restaurant from 12:30-13:30 each day (Wed-Fri).

Dessert, served after lunch, will be served in the Pavilion, School of Management.

Your badge must be worn to access lunch.

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

Breakfast and evening meals are **not** included in your conference registration. If you have booked the on-site student accommodation, breakfast is included. Bath offers a wide range of local dining options nearby.

Cloakroom

A free cloakroom is available in the reception area of the School of Management. Please note items are left at your own risk. Opening hours are:

Wednesday: 09:00 – 19:00

Thursday: 08:00 – 17:00

Friday: 08:00 – 16:30

Wellbeing and Reflection Spaces

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

Quiet Room

We have allocated a room for those seeking quiet time at the conference and this can be found in Room 2.55.

Prayer Room

Dedicated prayer rooms can be found on campus. Further information can be found via the links below:

- <https://www.bath.ac.uk/professional-services/chaplaincy/>
- <https://www.bath.ac.uk/locations/chaplaincy-centre/>
- <https://www.bath.ac.uk/locations/muslim-prayer-room/>
- <https://www.bath.ac.uk/locations/hindu-prayer-room/>

If you require access to any of these spaces, please speak to a member of BSA or Bath staff who will provide information.

Mothering Room

A mothering room will be provided in Room 3.54.

Green space

There is plenty of green space to enjoy around the conference site.

WES Welcome Breakfast for First-Time Attendees: Meet, Connect and Navigate the Conference

Join us for an informal welcome breakfast, taking place on **Wednesday 9 September 10:00-11:00** in the Pavilion, School of Management, designed specifically for delegates attending WES for the first time. This relaxed meet-up will offer first-time attendees the opportunity to connect with one another, meet members of the organising/academic committee, and receive informal guidance on how to navigate the conference programme, sessions, and networking opportunities. The session might be particularly helpful for PhD students and early-career researchers attending WES for the first time.

Drinks Reception

A drinks reception will be held on **Wednesday 9 September at 18:00-19:00** in the Pavilion, School of Management. Delegates are invited to visit the poster presentations and join us for an evening of conversation and connection with fellow attendees, presenters, and exhibitors. Complimentary alcoholic and soft drinks will be provided, offering a relaxed setting to meet colleagues on the first evening of the conference and speak with poster presenters. Attendance is open to all delegates and no registration is required.

Bath Walking Tour: How Bath Has Adapted Through Upheaval

Discover the history of Bath through the lens of adaptation and change on this guided walking tour, specially designed to complement the conference theme. Beginning at **19:00** on **Wednesday 9 September** from Abbey Churchyard, the tour will explore how Bath and its communities have responded to social, environmental, and economic upheaval over the past 2000 years, from its Roman origins to its transition from a wool and cloth industry centre to a world-renowned tourism destination.

The tour lasts up to two hours and tickets are £11.25 per person. Spaces are very limited and advanced booking is required. You can register [here](#). Registrations will close on Tuesday 1 September.

Please note that delegates joining the walking tour are likely to miss the majority of the drinks reception taking place at 18:00 on the same evening.

For any questions, please visit the registration desk.

Conference Buffet Dinner

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. Limited tickets are available, and you can register [here](#). Registrations will close on Tuesday 1 September. If you are registered, your badge will display a ticket symbol.

For any questions, please visit the registration desk.

Publicity

Share your experience using [#wesconf26](#) on social media!

SPONSORS

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

Main Conference Sponsor

Sage Publications



Sage is a global academic publisher of books, journals, and library resources with a growing range of technologies to enable discovery, access, and engagement.

Sponsors and Exhibitors

Bristol University Press



Bristol University Press is dedicated to publishing the highest-quality social science research that drives real world impact. Meet us at WES to explore our latest publications, get a conference discount on books and discuss your publishing projects, including open access options.

WELCOME BREAKFAST

10:00-11:00

Pavilion, School of Management

WES Welcome Breakfast for First-Time Attendees: Meet, Connect and Navigate the Conference

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PAPER SESSION 1

11:00-12:30

WES Special Event – Room 0.18

Writing a Great WES Article: Publishing Insights from the Editors

Marek Korczynski, Laurie Cohen

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

In this interactive workshop, WES Editors-in-Chief, Laurie Cohen and Marek Korczynski, will talk about publishing in WES, share their experience of what makes a great WES paper and tell you how you might want to get involved in the journal. There will be opportunities for participants to consider papers they think have made the most significant impact on their work, and that have made them think about things in new ways.

Hybrid work, organisational restructuring and emerging workplace forms – Room 0.19

Making Space for Nothing: The Social Organization of Absence in Hybrid Workplaces

Jonathan Schunnesson, Katja Einola, Emma Nordbäck

(Stockholm School of Economics)

Hybrid work arrangements are reconfiguring how professional organizations negotiate social presence and design office space. Amid unsettled norms around remote work, many organizations are calling employees back to the office and experimenting with initiatives to reassert the workplace as a social environment. These initiatives tend to be framed as efforts to restore what is presumed to have been lost under pandemic-era remote work: everyday sociality, spontaneous encounters and a sense of shared organizational life. Yet, despite these efforts, offices often remain curiously empty – both physically and socially. Employees return to redesigned workplaces that promise connection but regularly encounter quiet spaces, anonymous co-presence and fleeting interactions.

Reporting from a research project spanning three years at a large technology firm navigating the transition to hybrid work, comprising around 90 in-depth interviews and three months of ethnographic fieldwork, we trace how absence becomes a salient feature of organizational life. As the project nears completion, this paper draws on findings from its full arc to analyse what makes hybrid workplaces feel empty even when physically full. Informed by Scott's (2018) sociology of nothing – which foregrounds absences, silences and non-events across social life – we identify three processes that come to organize absence: social thinning, nostalgic remembering and spatial flexibilization.

Social thinning describes how work relations hollow out as social encounters become briefer, more instrumental and increasingly mediated through technology, palpable in silent coffee queues and the normalized practice of attending multiple meetings simultaneously. Nostalgic remembering captures how actors draw on an idealized past of office life – whether rooted in lived experience or inherited as collective myth – to make sense of present disconnections, rendering absence visible through ideals no longer enacted in practice. Spatial flexibilization refers to how office space is rearranged to accommodate hybrid work, reshaping patterns of co-presence to the extent that, as one employee put it, the office becomes a space people share rather than a shared space. Together, these processes show how absence emerges not merely as a byproduct but as a socially sustained pattern of hybrid work.

By tracing these mundane practices, shared narratives and emerging arrangements, our analysis makes unmarked dimensions of hybrid work visible and defamiliarizes ordinary experiences of (non-)sociality that tend to be backgrounded as natural or incidental. Situated in scholarship on depopulated offices (Rockmann and Pratt, 2015) and building on the sociology of nothing (Scott, 2018), the analysis sharpens debates on hybrid work by reframing what is at stake: more than just an issue of restoring office presence, it foregrounds how absence is increasingly produced, rendered normal and enacted in everyday work.

Competing Notions of Work in the Hybrid Office

Torkild Thanem

(Stockholm University)

With the COVID pandemic, remote work and hybrid office arrangements became reality for the majority of office workers worldwide. But whereas the costs and consequences of remote work have attracted considerable scholarly interest for some time, few studies have explored what the hybrid office means for our understanding of work, and the office as a place of work. Since much of the work we do continues to be done remotely, it is therefore timely to reconsider some old questions: What is the office for? What work is best done from the office? And how does the hybrid office reshape our understanding of work?

In October 2024 I began ethnographic fieldwork in a big tech company whose employees had recently been required to spend at least three days a week in the office. While most of my research participants agreed that culture and community were best created through on-site face-to-face interaction, they had different conceptions of work. Managers were adamant that their team members spend more time in the office, not so much because they were concerned about the individual output of remote team members but more so because they found it difficult to collaborate and be creative with team members that worked from home. Moreover, some managers worried about the wellbeing of certain team members because they had no idea if the person got enough sleep or spent enough time with friends. On the other hand, many of the team members were reluctant to spend more time in the office, arguing that it not only made it harder to balance work and life but that it made them less efficient and less productive at work.

No doubt, the effort and efficiency of workers remains a contested issue in modern organizations. Question is, if the hybrid office accentuates the matter to such an extent that it changes how we understand work, and the office as a place of work? For one thing, the managers I met justified increased office presence while appealing to a broad conception of work, insisting that people do their best work in the office because that is where they are most likely to bump into colleagues, socialize, and have creative face-to-face meetings. In contrast, many of the non-managerial staff I talked to mobilized a narrow conception, limiting work to the kind of skilled tasks they were primarily hired to do, be it software developers writing code or HR people preparing annual appraisals and training materials.

Baldamus (1961) showed that industrial workers entertained subjective notions of effort and efficiency that, contradicting the formalistic notions assumed by employers and economists, enabled them to balance the impairments and inurements of work. To conclude my talk, I will therefore discuss how far the hybrid office workers in my study reverse the relationship by assuming a more formalistic notion of work than their managers, a notion of work which turns the home rather than the office into the primary place for work.

"Others are the problem": Narratives, Legitimation and Informal Control in Hybrid Work

Jens Doms, Christophe Vanroelen, Karen Van Aerden

(Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, hybrid working has become institutionalised across many sectors. A substantial body of quantitative research has examined its effects on productivity and well-being, yet a more fundamental sociological question remains under-explored: how is hybrid work governed beyond formal policy — through the everyday justifications, stories and expectations that make particular norms appear self-evident?

This paper approaches that question through approximately 30 semi-structured interviews conducted across four sectors in Belgium: the public sector, public transport, the financial sector, and the pharmaceutical industry. Interviews were conducted with employees at different organisational levels, enabling analysis of how norms around hybrid work are articulated and experienced across hierarchical positions.

The analytical framework draws on scholarship concerning informal social control and the discursive legitimisation of workplace expectations. Of particular interest are the narratives through which employees and managers account for hybrid work arrangements: stories about trust, availability, reliability and the risk of "abuse." These narratives raise several questions that the analysis seeks to address. Whose experiences ground these stories — and whose do not? How do individuals frame their own behaviour relative to that of colleagues? And what work do vague, difficult-to-verify claims perform in regulating expectations without recourse to explicit monitoring?

Together, these questions point toward a mode of workplace governance that may operate not only through managerial intervention or formal rules, but through the horizontal reproduction of norms among employees themselves — a process in which workers participate in defining the legitimate hybrid worker without necessarily recognising this as control.

The paper aims to contribute both empirically, through qualitative evidence from a Belgian context on hybrid work governance, and theoretically, by bringing informal discursive processes into conversation with organisational sociology and the study of workplace control.

Seen to Be Working: How Visibility Regimes Undermine the Promise of Hybrid Work

Yin Liang, Jeremy Aroles, Jiexuan Zhang, Zongbo Li

(Newcastle University)

Hybrid work arrangements grant knowledge workers greater spatial and temporal autonomy, yet many choose to remain tethered to the office even when remote work is formally permitted. We investigate this puzzle through a qualitative study of 50 academics across 18 Chinese universities – a context where hybrid work policies are pervasive yet deliberately ambiguous. We develop a process model of what we term the visibility labour trap: a self-reinforcing cycle through which institutional ambiguity generates escalating demands for performative presence. We identify four phases – legitimacy seeking, normative internalisation, disciplinary performativity and autonomy entrapment – through which workers' efforts to manage reputational risk collectively raise expectations of visibility, rendering absence increasingly suspect and prompting renewed efforts to signal commitment through presence. Our model shows that as these practices accumulate, they reproduce the very legitimacy pressures that make physical presence appear necessary, thereby foreclosing the flexibility that hybrid arrangements were designed to provide. We further identify a boundary condition – explicit decoupling of evaluation from presence by institutional leaders – under which the cycle may be disrupted. Our study reconceptualises visibility not as an individual impression-management tactic but as an emergent regime of labour operating across individual, normative and institutional levels.

Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification – Room 0.09

Unequal Reshuffles: Intersectional Inequalities, Relative Deprivation, and Immigrant Labour in a Polycrisis Context

Paraskevi-Viviane Galata

(Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences)

The "Great Reshuffle" has been widely framed as a reconfiguration of labour markets characterised by enhanced worker mobility and renegotiated employment relations. This paper challenges such interpretations by situating labour-market change within a broader context of "polycrisis" and by foregrounding the structurally unequal conditions under which workers engage with these transformations. Focusing on immigrant labour in Greece, it examines how inter-sectoral inequalities

and socially embedded labour-market segmentation constrain mobility and reproduce relations of precarity.

Theoretically, the paper adopts an intersectional framework (Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1989; Patricia Hill Collins, 2000) to analyse how class, gender, and migration status co-constitute differentiated positions within labour markets. This is combined with the theory of relative deprivation (W. G. Runciman, 1966) and reference group theory (Robert K. Merton; Alice S. Rossi, 1953), which are reinterpreted here through a critical lens to show how expectations are socially produced and adapt to structurally constrained horizons. Rather than signalling satisfaction, the attenuation of relative deprivation is understood as an effect of limited alternatives and the normalisation of downgraded expectations.

Empirically, the study draws on 30 in-depth qualitative interviews with immigrant workers in platform work, care work, and service industries in the region of East Attica in Greece. These sectors represent key sites of labour-market restructuring, marked by informality, flexibilisation, and the intensification of labour under conditions of weak regulation. Data are analysed through an intersectional comparative approach to identify how structural constraints are differentially experienced and negotiated.

Findings show that the capacity to benefit from labour-market restructuring is systematically stratified. Segmented labour markets, mediated by social networks and employer practices, operate to channel immigrant workers into specific sectors while limiting transitions beyond them. In this context, the apparent absence of strong relative deprivation reflects not improved conditions but the recalibration of expectations within restricted reference groups. This process contributes to the stabilisation of occupational entrapment and the reproduction of a subordinated labour force.

The paper argues that the “Great Reshuffle” is better understood not as an expansion of worker agency but as a reorganisation of labour that sustains existing inequalities while redistributing risk onto workers. By linking intersectional inequalities with the social production of expectations, the study contributes to critical debates on precarity, labour-market segmentation, and the restructuring of labour–capital relations under conditions of multiple crises. The research is at an advanced stage of analysis.

Body, Migrant Domestic Labour Market and Recruitment in the UAE

Amal Latif

(SRM University)

The work attempts to interrogate the deeply embedded violation of dignity during a woman's journey to become a Khaddama (a colloquial term for a domestic worker in Arabic) in the Gulf. The recruitment process involves 'assessing, diagnosing, handling, and manipulating bodies that become the object of the worker's labour' (Twigg, 2011). In the process, women are trained on how they should present themselves when a sponsor turns up at the reception of a recruitment cabin. In my interaction with a recruitment agent, he played a few videos of Khaddamas introducing themselves and the kind of food they can cook. Migrants themselves may adopt the role of ideal migrants to promote themselves in the labour market (Liang, 2011). This is done by presenting their identity and ethnicity to gain a foothold in specific niches of the global labour market. Migrant women domestic workers in the labour market of the UAE are also trained by recruitment agencies to 'perform the ethnicity' they belong to and to serve the labour needs of the same ethnic diaspora in the destination country. Chandra Mohanty (2003) discusses how these discourses are used to legitimise the capitalist exploitation of Third World women. Women's bodies are also subject to 'ethnicising' to be considered the 'ideal maid' for the same ethnic diaspora. The work also further explores the theoretical concept of body work (Kang 2010; Shilling, 2003). The women are constantly asked to manage the way they display their body, emotions and ethnicity, thereby modifying one's own body for work through 'body work'

Beyond the Workplace: Actually Existing Precarity of Food Delivery Drivers in Urban China

Yu Feng

(Fudan University)

This article examines the actually existing precarity of food delivery drivers in China. Ethnographic research with 51 app-based food delivery drivers in Shanghai revealed how their precarious conditions are influenced by specific political, cultural, and economic contexts in China resulting in a multi-layered

precarity. It argues firstly that the precarity of platform workers in urban China is a result of entanglements between government and capital, with the state actively or passively participating in the process of precarization through policy acquiescence and regulatory absence. We argue that the key drivers of precarity lie not only in the dominance of three monopolistic platform companies, but also in specific institutional factors that diverge from Western regulatory models, such as the entrenched urban–rural divide, shifting regulatory approaches toward platform firms, and the stringent monitoring of labour unrest. Secondly it focuses on the discriminatory treatment meted out to delivery drivers as a result of their exclusion from housing, health and other social welfare benefits. These factors greatly exacerbate the dimensions of precarity faced by so many platform workers around the world: the individualized and isolated context of gig work, their informal living conditions and exclusion from welfare systems, and the instability of online groups and scarce opportunities for resistance. Precarity in China's gig economy extends beyond traditional workplace exploitation, embedding itself in drivers' spatial, social and digital lives. Platform workers' precarity in urban China is highly personalized, fragmented, atomized and exclusionary. The study calls for contextualizing precarity within China's specific political-economic contexts—marked by state-platform collaboration in algorithmic governance and post-socialist informalization—to challenge universalist assumptions in labour studies. By foregrounding the need to analyse precarity beyond formal workplace settings, this research contributes to broader debates on platform labour in the Global South.

"Business or Pleasure?": The Future of Working Conditions in Spain's Post-COVID Tourism Industry

Juan Vega

(Sciences Po Paris)

Since the end of the 20th century, tourism has developed in tandem with a process labour market segmentation across many Western European countries, being perfectly compatible with the non-standard work schemes that proliferated under post-Fordist capitalism – namely temporary and part-time work – and promoting gender, migrant and age-based labour market segregation. The COVID-19 pandemic represented a breaking point of the industry's expansion, causing tourism value chains to plummet and further exposing the weaknesses and limitations of the sector. While tourism flows have recovered since then, the pandemic has forced policymakers to reconsider the position of tourism in the context of the many changes taking place in post-industrial Western societies.

The case of Spain is particularly well-positioned to shed some light onto these issues. While it is one of the largest economies in Western Europe, it largely relies on mass tourism, and from the 90's until the financial crisis held the highest rate of temporality in the EU. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the destruction of employment that ensued, both of these trends were massively distorted. Since then, there have been two main reforms with far-reaching implications for the Spanish Labour Market: first, the 2020 Labour Reform which encouraged the use of indefinite seasonal contracts; and more recently, the migrant regularisation process announced in February 2026. While both were praised for their socially progressive aims, their affinity to tourism-led growth cannot be overlooked and raises questions on the role played by the sector in the country's post-COVID economy.

This presentation focuses on the relationship between tourism and employment in the context of the polycrisis. First, we conduct a literature review on the working conditions of the tourism industry in Spain, with special focus on those of traditional "outsiders", namely women, migrants and young workers. Second, we look at the impact that Spain's tourism led-growth strategy had on "non-standard" work before and after the COVID-19 pandemic (covering the periods 2009-2019 and 2021-2025), with the 2020 reform as the point of reference and considering the differences across "outsiders". We rely on quantitative methods, namely Linear Probability Models with province and time fixed effects, and control variables for social characteristics. These calculations make use of data from the Spanish Statistics Institute (INE) and are in an advanced stage by the conference's deadline. Finally, in light of the evidence, we discuss the potential evolution of the industry's conditions. The aim is to both determine the effectiveness of the 2020 reform in reducing temporality and part-time work, and to evaluate tourism's potential and limitations in improving working standards for traditional "outsiders".

Migration, mobility and labour reconfigurations - Room 0.23

Shadow Economies of Work and Identity: Iraqi Diaspora Labour in London

Hamied Mahwies

(International Colleges of Islamic Science, London)

This paper examines the shadow economy within the Iraqi diaspora in London as a critical site for understanding work and employment under conditions of polycrisis. In contrast to dominant approaches that frame informal labour primarily as precarious survival or regulatory evasion, this study conceptualises informal economic activity as a space where work, identity, and cultural reproduction intersect. Among Iraqi migrants, practices such as tailoring traditional clothing, religious recitation, language instruction, and ritual services constitute forms of labour that are simultaneously economically marginal and socially central.

Situating these practices within the broader transformations of the “Great Reshuffle,” the paper argues that the expansion of informal and hybrid work reflects not only labour market exclusion and career insecurity but also active strategies of autonomy, resistance, and identity preservation. These forms of work emerge in response to intersecting crises, including displacement, fragmented labour markets, and shifting migration regimes reconfiguring conventional distinctions between formal and informal employment.

Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, theories of ethnic economies, and transnationalism, the study introduces the notion of a “cultural parallel economy” to capture how informal work operates as both livelihood and symbolic practice. Methodologically, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and survey data within the Iraqi community.

The paper contributes to debates on migration and work by demonstrating how informal labour can function as a site of agency and meaning-making, rather than merely as a site of precarity. It highlights how migrant workers navigate unstable labour conditions by embedding economic practices within cultural and transnational networks, thereby reshaping worker subjectivities, social belonging, and the very definition of work in an era of global polycrisis.

Trends, Indicators of Success, and Stepwise Migration amongst Internationally Recruited Allied Health Professionals in the NHS (2020-2025)

Nicola Gillin, David Smith, Yasmin Mei

(Anglia Ruskin University)

While there is a significant academic literature on various aspects of the role of international doctors and nurses working in the NHS there is much less on Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) from overseas. This paper will address this deficit by reporting on an ongoing study funded by the NIHR into the recruitment and retention of international AHPs in the context of the NHS Long Term Plan which continues to see international recruitment as an essential pillar of NHS workforce planning (NHSE 2019).

Little is known about how overseas recruitment trends vary across different AHPs/ nationality groups, their geographical/ regional characteristics, and the reasons for this. Using data sourced from the HCPC register, we will firstly outline the main trends in AHP recruitment nationally between 2020 and 2025; the national and geographic contours of these trends and examine some of the main factors which may be driving them. Having outlined the national picture, we will then draw on qualitative data from interviews with senior NHS staff to explore the key issues facing those who have used, and continue to use, international recruitment as a core part of their AHP workforce strategy.

Participants indicated a preference for international recruits who were able to adapt quickly and successfully to avoid placing undue strain on the existing workforce through the additional support that internationally recruited staff inevitably required. Related to this was the need for recruits to adapt to,

or align well with, several factors: life in the UK, culture, the region/area they're being recruited into, the unique requirements and scope of practice of their own profession (compared to their source countries) and systems and processes of the NHS. Consequently, AHPs who were most well aligned on these fronts were viewed most favourably (Johnson, 2018). The support infrastructure offered by the Trust was also regarded as one of main components of a successful international recruitment drive, having often been built upon the learning and infrastructure that had been developed by colleagues with previous experience of supporting internationally recruited nurses.

There was also evidence that coastal and rural areas, where demand is often greatest, were also at risk of international AHP attrition through an internal form of 'stepwise migration', whereby international AHPs would accept these harder to recruit roles as a means of entering the UK, prior to an eventual onwards move to urban areas in proximity to their own diaspora communities and relatives (Bourgeault et al, 2023). Finally and in regards to the previous two issues, Trusts saw it essential to set the requirements of who they interviewed. NHS staff responsible for overseas recruitment stressed the importance of Trusts conducting the interviews themselves, with limited interference from the recruitment agencies who had sourced the candidates, in order to assess their communicative skills, gauge their familial connections within the UK and their career aspirations, to assess the likelihood of them being a good and long-term fit for the area and profession they are being recruited into.

Navigating the Polycrisis in the NHS Workforce: Precarity, Responsibilisation, and Relational Agency of International Medical Graduates

Hussein Lubbad

(University of Leicester)

The contemporary polycrisis, marked by austerity, demographic changes, and immense pressures on healthcare infrastructures, has accelerated the reconfiguration of the global healthcare labour market. In the UK, the National Health Service (NHS) has increasingly relied on International Medical Graduates (IMGs) to stabilise chronically understaffed systems (NHS, 2023). However, despite their valuable contributions to the UK healthcare system, IMGs are less likely to experience career progression and face systemic barriers that hinder their career advancement (Oikelome and Healy, 2007; Tyrrell et al., 2016; Schut, 2022; Woodhams et al., 2022), historically positioning them as 'second-class' doctors and a 'lost tribe' (Oikelome and Healy, 2007; Noaman et al., 2021).

Theoretically grounded in critical migration studies and the sociology of work, this research draws on a mixed-methods study, combining a cross-sectional survey of 305 IMGs with 31 in-depth qualitative interviews, to critically examine how IMGs navigate their professional trajectories within the NHS and how organisational structures, workplace relationships, and inclusion climates shape their ability to advance and speak up.

Contrary to dominant human capital and meritocratic assumptions, the quantitative models demonstrate that IMGs' proactive career behaviours and upward voice have no direct statistical association with upward career mobility. The qualitative analysis unpacks this contradiction, revealing a segmented labour market where IMGs are predominantly channelled into precarious, non-training service roles. Bound by a "double lock" of short-term contracts and employer-dependent visas, IMGs face a culture of silence, shaped by fear of being problematised, organisational deafness, and the perceived risks of speaking up under renewal uncertainty. Furthermore, the NHS's institutionalisation of "responsibilisation" reframes structural barriers as personal deficits in resilience or cultural fit. Consequently, IMGs pay an invisible "tax" normalising overwork and compliance as rational survival strategies.

Crucially, however, the research highlights that IMGs are not passive subjects. While the institution structurally neutralises individual agency, quantitative mediation models indicate that agency operates effectively when it is relationally constructed through supportive workplace relationships. Faced with an institutional gap, IMGs actively engage in building peer-led support networks, cultivate lateral solidarity, and construct informal infrastructures of guidance and belonging.

This research contributes to sociological debates on the future of work by exposing the contradiction of "institutional individualism" in the polycrisis, where institutions ideologically promote individual responsibility while structurally neutralising its effectiveness. By repositioning IMG career stagnation from a matter of individual performance to an issue of global labour commodification and migration

governance, the research argues that the NHS should move beyond extractive migrant labour models and invest in structurally inclusive pathways that recognise prior expertise, protect worker voice, and formally support relational infrastructures.

Worker subjectivities, experience and agency - Room 0.13

Post-Prison Working Lives: Flexible Imaginaries and Labour Market Navigation

Jenna Pandeli, Selen Kars-Unluoglu, Richard Longman

(University of the West of England)

This paper examines how people with criminal convictions (PwCs) navigate post prison work and employment. We argue that carcerality extends beyond release through administrative disclosure regimes that keep PwCs persistently visible and subject to moral scrutiny (Haslewood-Pócsik et al., 2008; Ciptono et al., 2023). Criminal records operate not merely as barriers but as anticipatory devices that organise post-prison labour markets: hiring decisions are shaped less by skills than by suspicion, risk aversion, and judgements of moral worth (Batastini et al., 2017; Fletcher, 2001; Holzer et al, 2003; Pandeli and O'Regan, 2020; Varghese et al., 2010; Varghese, 2023). This narrows access to secure employment, channelling many PwCs into precarious or informal work. Some turn to enterprise and entrepreneurship as a pragmatic response to these constraints (Pandeli and Longman, 2024). However, dominant accounts that frame entrepreneurship as an emancipatory route around employer discrimination obscure lived realities marked by ongoing stigma, economic precarity, and continual evaluation (Fletcher, 2005; Hwang, 2022).

To account for how PwCs navigate work and identity, we introduce the concept of flexible imaginaries: modes of future-making through which individuals engage in the ongoing governance of possibility itself, holding multiple working selves and trajectories in play simultaneously, foregrounding provisionality, adaptability, and reversibility where commitment itself carries risk. Based on a longitudinal qualitative study (45 interviews across three waves) with PwCs enrolled in an enterprise education programme, we trace shifting orientations to employment and self-employment over time. We show how participants actively straddle formal and informal labour markets, balancing growth-oriented aspirations with survival-driven practices to distribute risk, manage visibility, and sustain fragile claims to legitimacy. Straddling, we argue, is not indecision but an enactment of flexible imaginaries in practice: a way of inhabiting uncertain labour markets while sustaining both livelihood and possibility.

The study advances scholarship on precarious work and labour market exclusion by shifting attention from linear models of reintegration to reflexive labour market wayfinding under persistent moral scrutiny. It reframes straddling as an active, morally-charged labour and recasts entrepreneurial emancipation as an ongoing, unstable practice of maintaining livelihood, legitimacy, and agency rather than a pathway out of stigma.

The Vulnerable Middle-class: Understanding Medium-High Educated Atypical Workers in Canada

Elizabeth Bowker

(University of British Columbia)

Since 2000, there has been a significant rise in atypical employment in OECD countries, specifically non-permanent work, part-time work and multiple job holding. This has been true for much longer in the Global South. With predictions for significant growth in underemployment, this is a trend that is likely to grow.

Atypical work often places workers in a vulnerable position with less pay and fewer benefits than those tied to a full-time permanent employer. While the causes of this phenomenon have been well studied, there is much to be done to give voice to these workers. This study seeks to gain insight into the working lives of atypical workers by asking the question, "How do medium-high educated people in atypical work experience their employment?"

This paper evaluates two separate study groups: non-permanent workers and multiple job holders. The aim is to understand how atypical workers can achieve 'success' and how they experience the ongoing insecurity that comes with their work. Both studies use semi-structured interviews. The first half of the study is complete while the second is underway. The first half considers the experience of six non-permanent workers employed on full-time contracts of two years or less. The second set of interviews will be conducted this Spring and will examine the experience of multiple job holders. The paper will highlight commonalities and points of difference between participants and between the two study groups. It will also consider how these workers value qualities including autonomy, security, flexibility and social support.

The classification of "medium-high" distinguishes the study participants as more likely to secure decent work, from lower educated workers who often have more complex needs. While these workers are not among the most vulnerable, we will struggle to serve those who are if we do not also understand those who are more skilled and more highly remunerated. Atypical work can create serious limitations for job quality and employment development, especially over the course of a career. Furthermore, with very limited job security, these workers are part of the vulnerable middle-class.

Both studies use the same methodology of interviews digitally recorded and accompanied by field notes. These responses will be anonymized, recorded, coded, grouped, then shaped into themes using NVivo. A thematic analysis is used to identify and assess factors of success and vulnerability. This work is guided by Social Network Theory. It is anticipated that this theory may not account for some aspects that characterize multiple job holders. This presents an opportunity to propose a framework that extends it, thus contributing to the available literature.

The results of the first half of the study assessing non-permanent workers, show that when the work is non-permanent, success requires a disposition marked by three inter-connected qualities: 1) entrepreneurial personality traits or characteristics; 2) a willingness for continued learning; and 3) an ability to develop and maintain a strong social network. Each of these qualities influences the others. The results also indicate that when one of these characteristics is absent, repeatedly securing work is particularly challenging.

Serving the Citizen and Occupational Identity in Swedish Police Work: Exploring Restructuring as a Transition in the Life Course

Joel Nilsson

(Lund University)

In the contemporary era, marked by geopolitical uncertainty and shifting socio-political interests, the nature of police work has undergone notable transformation. Large-scale reform initiatives are reshaping police organisations by shifting control from local authorities to more centralised administrations, with the United Kingdom becoming the most recent example of this type of restructuring initiatives (NPCC, 2026). This study draws on more than 80 work-life biographical accounts from police officers in Sweden, capturing long-term recollections a decade after extensive restructuring. These reflections outline how restructuring has reshaped the nature of service towards citizens, reconfigured occupational identities, and, for some, even altered the trajectory of their life course.

This study examines police officers as an archetypical occupational community. The members of an occupational community share a set of values born out of shared experiences and histories, thereby highlighting a sense of distinctiveness from non-members (Salaman, 1974) and emotional attachment to work (MacKenzie and Marks, 2019). The study revisits the classical study of Goode (1957) and the normative orientation of serving others. Goode highlights how certain occupational groups cultivate a collective identity by socialising members into a shared value base rooted in service to recipients. In certain vocations like the police, the occupational value system profoundly shapes workers experience of the labour process (Salaman, 1974). This study extends this line of reasoning by suggesting that during extensive restructuring, conditions required to enact core occupational values within the labour process are weakened. During such tenancies, a tightly congealed identification with occupational values can have detrimental outcomes, as workers may be struggling to detach themselves from what they perceive to be the very *raison d'être* of their occupation.

The findings show that serving the citizen is the guiding principle and the bedrock of police officers' occupational identity. This signified a common set of values (Goode, 1957; Salaman, 1974) that united

all respondents, regardless of when they entered employment. The police identity underpins the occupational community that are shaped by collective memories that, over time, have helped define its character and ethos. It is in this context that restructuring, a tenure in which structural reorganising and dismantling of organisational units caused considerable turbulence, marked a critical transition in the participant's life course. The study outlines three categories in which police officers biographically recollected on how aspects of their labour process that were fundamental to their occupational identity had been taken away by restructuring. Within these classifications we find those who viewed adaptation to the new organisational reality as the only path to avoid cynicism and bitterness, while others chose to leave the police to maintain their occupational identity. The most profound harm to self-worth appears among those for whom the vocation's values have become an anchor, who are paying a considerable price in their efforts to keep the past alive and re-embodiment what they regard as the core of their work.

The Resilience Sieve: Professional Formation and the Labour Process in the Great Reshuffle

Caroline Barrett

(University of York)

The contemporary 'polycrisis' in professional work is defined by a volatile convergence of AI-driven displacement of graduate-entry roles, a national productivity gap, and the erosion of the traditional 'graduate premium.' In response, the UK state and elite employers have pivoted toward degree apprenticeships as a strategic fix for managing these structural shocks. This paper critically examines this shift through the lens of the Solicitor Degree Apprenticeship (SDA), theorising it as a 'Resilience Sieve' - a structural apparatus designed to filter and extract value while perpetually deferring professional maturity.

Drawing on Labour Process Theory and Burawoy's 'manufactured consent,' this research investigates the lived experience of the 'worker-student' within the financialised law firm. The study utilises a qualitative approach and longitudinal methodology comprising two phases of qualitative interviews with 12 Solicitor Apprentices, participant diary entries, and a concluding focus group. The findings reveal how firms leverage this hybrid status to facilitate a protracted extraction of high-utility, discounted labour, resulting in a 'temporal squeeze' and a significant 'physio-psychological debt'. To theorise these lived experiences, a novel typology, comprising the Subjective Winner, Veteran Apprentice, and Survivalist, is proposed to illustrate how class and gendered intersections navigate and contest these elongated pathways. The paper argues that the 'Sieve' further entrenches an 'Almost Permanent Junior Status'. The SDA is thus presented as a template for a broader professional reshuffle that stabilises the employer-led labour process by institutionalising precarity within the architecture of professional formation.

PLENARY PANEL

13:30-14:30

Lecture Theatre 0.17

AI, DIGITALISATION, AND LABOUR IN THE POLYCRISIS: GLOBAL AND INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Mohammed Amir Anwar, *University of Edinburgh*

Valeria Pulignano, *Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven*

Chaired by Vivek Soundararajan, *University of Bath*

Labour in the Age of AI: Writing from the Global South

Contemporary debates on AI and work often present diverse forms of digital labour as unprecedented. This talk problematises that assumption. From the slave plantations of the eighteenth century to the farms and mines of the twentieth, and now to the data work underpinning AI value chains, the Global South has consistently sustained the accumulation imperatives of European colonialism and global capitalism. Yet theories of work and employment remain disproportionately shaped by the historical experiences of the Global North, relegating the Majority World to a site of mere empirical observation. Drawing on fifteen years of research on digital transformation across Africa, South America, and India, I argue that the political economy of AI is best understood as a continuation—not a rupture—of colonial and racialised labour regimes, extractive relations, and uneven development. I contend that theorising labour from the Global South is essential not only for understanding the contemporary reorganisation of work under capitalism, but also for rethinking the conceptual foundations of labour scholarship.



Mohammad Amir Anwar is Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) at the University of Edinburgh and a Senior Research Associate, University of Johannesburg. He is an expert on work, labour markets, livelihoods and economic change within the context of digital revolutions in the Global South. Particularly, his work examines value chains of AI and their implications on labour markets, inequalities, and precarity in an AI-centred world. He is the co-author of 'The Digital Continent' (Oxford University Press, 2022), a co-editor of 'African Labour Studies' (edited volume, Bristol University Press, 2026), and a co-editor of 'Datafied Development' (special issue, Big Data and Society, 2026).

Connecting AI to Work: Implications for Employment Relations and the Reconfiguration of Work

Artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies are often framed as external technological forces producing uniform effects on work, including automation, efficiency gains, and organisational transformation. This framing obscures a more fundamental process, such as AI does not act on work from the outside but becomes embedded in it through situated organisational and political processes that shape how it is designed, procured, and used.

The central analytical challenge is therefore not to determine whether AI changes work, but to explain how it reorganises the conditions under which employment relations, the division of labour, and workplace authority are governed, enforced, and contested. This requires tracing how AI becomes connected to work in practice and how this connection reshapes employment relations and labour processes. To address this, a framework is developed that links production regimes and production

logics. Production logics refer to the control- or autonomy-oriented principles embedded in technologies and managerial practices that structure how work is organised, allocated, and evaluated. Production regimes refer to the distribution of power between labour, management, and other actors that determines how such logics are implemented, resisted, or reshaped in practice.

The argument is that AI has no stable or universal effects. Instead, its implications are produced through the interaction between production logics and production regimes. Through this interaction, AI becomes a mechanism that reorganises labour processes and employment relations within specific configurations of power: in management-dominated regimes it tends to reinforce hierarchical control through task decomposition, standardisation, and intensified monitoring, while in more balanced regimes its implementation is more contested, opening negotiated space for autonomy, constraint-setting, and worker participation.

Valeria Pulignano, Professor of Sociology and Francqui Research Professor at KU Leuven's Centre for Sociological Research (CESO), member of KU Leuven.AI Institute and Associate Fellow at the ESRC Digital Futures at Work Research Centre (Digit), Weizenbaum Institute (Germany), LISER (Luxembourg), and IRRU at Warwick University (UK). Valeria is Coordinator of RN17 Work, Employment and Industrial Relations at the European Sociological Association (ESA), Editor of Work, Employment and Society, Associate Editor at Journal of Industrial Relations. Her research focuses on work, employment, industrial relations, labour markets, with emphasis on dualization, inequality, unpaid labour, precarious work, workers' voice, and job quality. Valeria is awarded Research Excellence through two ERC Grants, AdG ResPecTMe and PoC ResTLess on inequality, class and unpaid labour.



PAPER SESSION 2

14:40-16:10

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

PhD Showcase

Beyond the Hospital Gates: Crises of Social Reproduction, Illness and the Labouring Body in England's NHS from 2022-2025

Ish Tominey-Nevado

(University of Manchester)

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Britain, crises of capitalist reproduction have increasingly been framed as biopolitical crises, the prevalence of illness in the working-age population leading to a revived interest in the relationship between health, work and economic growth in the context of national economic stagnation. This has been accompanied with an increased scrutiny of the health, energy and efficiency of the National Health Service (NHS) workforce, where sickness rates are high. Existing analyses of NHS workforce sickness suffer from a bias toward waged work in the institution, however, neglecting unwaged work and the broader conditions of households and contemporary capitalist life which distribute work and health outcomes unevenly. In response, this project advances a feminist political economy approach to the production of illness through work in the post-pandemic conjuncture in Britain through investigating the everyday lives of low-income NHS workers.

This paper draws on twenty interviews conducted across 2025 which explored the experiences of low-income NHS workers in the North West of England undertaking two distinct forms of undervalued work essential for the social reproduction of British capitalism: the unpaid labour of reproducing themselves and their households on one hand, and the underpaid and poorly remunerated work within the NHS supporting the reproduction of the British population on the other. The interviews explored how waged and unwaged work was organised, embodied and interpreted by participants, shedding light on how illness was produced through the integrated spaces of life's work. Staff encountered crises of social reproduction in their everyday lives not just as health workers, but as parents, unpaid carers, and patients themselves.

Crises of social reproduction are articulated with financial, epidemiological, ecological and geopolitical crises to form the polycrisis which structures everyday life. The polycrisis manifested itself most clearly in the working lives of interview participants through cost of living crises and strains exerted on the NHS in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The rising cost of living driven by the conjunction of increased price of food, housing, childcare and utilities and below-inflation wage increases has sharpened the crisis-ridden reproduction of households, affecting the conditions of unwaged work: of parenting, carework and housework. In the NHS, processes of neoliberalisation and austerity had already depleted service capacity before 2020, but the systemic shocks inflicted by the pandemic have increased the quantity and complexity of demand and reshaped working conditions. After the pandemic's peak, NHS Trusts have come under pressure to eliminate burgeoning financial deficits and implemented further budget cuts, exacerbating staffing shortages and intensifying work processes. Going forward in the PhD research, a multi-method case study approach integrating interviews, document and historical analysis will locate these material and institutional processes producing illness in their broader political-economic context. In doing so, it will contribute a richer understanding of how work in this conjuncture is lived and felt, elucidating the embodied experiences of the polycrisis in a concrete setting.

Exploring the Lived Experiences of West African Mothers in the Adult Care Sector of the UK: A Review

Juliet Agyapong

(Queen Mary University of London)

The UK adult care sector increasingly relies on female migrant labour (Skills for Care, 2025b), yet the everyday realities of Black migrant women who are mostly engaged in direct care roles remain significantly underexplored. While existing studies focus on these women as workers or migrants, there is a dearth of research that centres their specific identities as mothers. This presents a significant analytical gap, as mothers must navigate often-conflicting demands of paid caregiving and motherwork. This research attempts to examine this conflict within a sector characterised by low pay, poor working conditions and racism, alongside increasingly restrictive policies that inhibit childcare support (Devi et al., 2021; Skills for Care 2025b). Specifically, new immigration rules prevent health and care worker visa holders from bringing dependants into the country, while proposed fifteen-year residency requirements further reduce mothers' chances of reconciling permanently with their families (Skills for Care 2025b; Skills for Care 2025c, Migration Observatory, 2026).

In this PhD showcase presentation, I will present a critical literature review guided by the following research question: How do Ghanaian mothers in the adult care sector navigate employment and mothering within a new cultural context and differing understandings of motherhood? Ghanaian mothers emerge as a key focus of this study due to Ghana's position among the top four Black migrant nationalities employed in the adult social care sector of the UK (Skills for Care, 2025b). In addition, the UK 2021 census revealed that Ghanaians represent the third largest Black migrant group in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2022), and evidence suggests that Ghanaians are densely populated in the UK as compared to other parts of Europe (Caarls et al., 2018). This paper therefore situates the lived experiences of Ghanaian migrant mothers working in England's adult care sector within the broader "polycrisis" shaping work, migration and care. The aim of this paper is therefore to explore how Ghanaian migrant women navigate the demands of motherhood and paid caregiving in a sector that demands majority of their care time, under constrained legal frameworks (Skills for Care, 2025b, Migration Observatory, 2026).

Finally, I will outline a qualitative research design to study this question empirically. Positioned within a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology, this study proposes a utilises data gathered through semi-structured interviews to enable in-depth exploration of participants lived experiences (Bryman, 2016). Drawing on matricentric feminism (O'Reilly, 2016) and Black Feminist thought (Collins, 2022), this paper examines how motherhood is experienced in transnational contexts, while foregrounding intersecting identities of gender, race, class and migration. By centring the voices of Ghanaian migrant mothers, this paper contributes to debates on the crisis of care, migration and labour, as well as systemic inequalities that affect individuals with intersectional identities.

The Health & Care Worker Visa Scheme, 2021-2025: 'A recipe for exploitation'

Kezia Pugh

(University of Brighton, South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership)

In May 2025, the UK Government's Immigration White Paper put forward plans to 'restore control' to the country's immigration system, announcing an end international recruitment in social care. New overseas applications for care worker roles were deemed no longer eligible under the Health & Care Worker Visa (H&CWV), a scheme that brought 177,938 workers to the UK to undertake 'caring personal services' between 2021 and 2025 (UK Government, 2025). In its short lifespan, the scheme has been dubbed 'a recipe for exploitation' by Citizens Advice, with cases of severe labour abuse and exploitation among migrant workers becoming commonplace in the sector (Ahlberg, 2024; Thiemann et al., 2024). Legislation designed to control international migration is by no means a new phenomenon, and many scholars have highlighted a direct causal link between restrictive visas and labour exploitation in various global contexts (Albin, 2014; Fudge & Strauss, 2014; Green & Ayalon, 2017; Mantouvalou, 2018; Niezna, 2022). However, the speed with which the H&CWV was utilised as a vehicle to exploit migrant workers at a sector-wide scale warrants specific academic attention. Further to this, while there is considerable research that examines the complex socio-legal structures contributing to labour exploitation among migrant care workers, academic engagement with the role of community and union

actors remains underdeveloped in the UK context. The significance of this role should not be underestimated; community organisers, caseworkers, trade union officials and campaigners provide vital frontline services like legal advice, support, signposting, referrals, and representation. This paper addresses two related research questions:

- a. Why did the H&CWV scheme give rise to labour exploitation among migrant care workers at such a rapid pace and sector-wide scale?
- b. How do community-union actors navigate the limitations of the H&CWV when seeking redress for migrant care workers who have experienced labour exploitation?

The paper argues that the H&CWV requires advisers and caseworkers to navigate a 'catch-22' state of legal jeopardy for their migrant care worker clients: stay silent about abuse or face deportation. Consequently, there is a significant disjuncture between rights at work that exist in theory and their practical realisation, leaving migrant care workers effectively without any enforceable protection. By engineering a sustained collision between labour law and migration control, the H&CWV positions the Home Office as a de facto labour market institution in social care, shaping working conditions while simultaneously mediating migrant care workers' access to advice, redress, and justice.

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

Hybrid Work, Institutional Culture and Academic Visibility: Black Women Academics in Post-Pandemic UK Higher Education

Tinkuma Edafioghor, Ifoema Dan-Ogosi
(University of the West of England)

Hybrid working has become a normal feature of UK higher education and is often presented as a flexible and efficient way of organising academic work. Yet less attention has been paid to how hybrid arrangements reshape institutional practices, expectations, and visibility within academic workplaces. Drawing on an intersectional lens, this paper explores how Black women academics navigate hybrid work in relation to institutional culture, academic visibility, and career progression.

The paper draws on findings from a qualitative study based on two focus groups and sixteen semi-structured interviews with Black women academics in UK universities. The data are analysed using thematic analysis. The findings suggest that hybrid work does not simply alter where academic labour takes place, but reshapes how it is seen, valued, and negotiated within institutions. Participants described workload imbalances alongside pressures to remain composed, dependable, and productive. They also highlighted the importance of mentoring and informal guidance in interpreting vague promotion criteria and navigating institutional expectations that are not always made explicit. Hybrid work could offer flexibility, but it could also deepen unequal access to visibility, support, and insider knowledge, particularly for those also managing migration pressures, care responsibilities, and wider emotional burdens.

The paper argues that hybrid working interacts with existing organisational norms rather than replacing them. Its contribution is to show how academic visibility and progression continue to depend on access to informal knowledge, support, and recognition, even within new workplace arrangements. The paper contributes to debates on hybrid work, workplace restructuring, and inequality by showing how emerging workplace forms can reproduce longstanding hierarchies within academic labour.

The Shifting Architecture of Workplace Relationships: Reconceptualising Social Capital in the Hybrid Era

Ritesh Kumar, Dharma Raju Bathini
(Indian Institute of Management Calcutta)

In many organisational settings, professional relationships have historically formed through incidental proximity, corridor conversations, shared routines, and habitual co-presence, thereby generating trust,

visibility, and mentoring opportunities. The rapid diffusion of hybrid working has disrupted this tacit architecture, reconstituting how relational resources are created, sustained, and converted into career advantage. This paper examines how that disruption operates in practice and its implications for emerging forms of inequality within organisations.

The analysis is grounded in Social Capital Theory, which distinguishes between bonding ties within teams, bridging ties across functional boundaries, and linking ties to actors holding authority and resources. We argue that hybrid work does not simply attenuate these networks; it transforms the generative logic through which ties form and are activated. Where connection once emerged from shared physical space, it now requires deliberate coordination and sustained intentionality. We introduce the concept of interaction effort to capture this shift: the increasing costs of sustaining ties that previously arose organically. As interaction effort rises, employees consolidate around familiar, low-cost contacts, while the weak, boundary-spanning ties most critical for mobility and resource access progressively erode.

The paper adopts a qualitative, network-informed design. Empirical materials comprise fifteen semi-structured interviews with knowledge workers across information technology, management consulting, and human resources, spanning early-career professionals through to mid-level managers. Each interview was complemented by a participant-generated network mapping exercise, in which respondents drew and annotated their professional ties. This approach proved analytically generative: participants who described themselves as well-connected consistently produced maps marked by significant structural absences, particularly the omission of remote colleagues and junior staff. Interview data were analysed through inductive thematic coding, alongside descriptive structural analysis of network maps examining clustering patterns and tie directionality.

Three interrelated findings emerge. First, relationship-building has become increasingly transactional: elevated interaction effort encourages consolidation around trusted contacts, producing a systematic decline in weak ties that historically facilitated information diffusion, sponsorship, and lateral mobility. Second, the physical office has been repurposed for its intended purpose. Attendance is now driven by visibility, conflict resolution, and proximity to decision-makers, rather than by task requirements. The office operates as a site for the production of informal influence rather than routine collaboration. Third, these dynamics are generating a structural divide. Employees co-located with organisational centres accumulate visibility, mentorship, and sponsorship, while remote and peripheral workers experience progressive exclusion. We further identify a pattern, termed the Hollow Middle, in which mid-level managers disproportionately invest in upward-linking ties at the expense of downward relational support, leaving early-career employees without sustained guidance.

The paper makes two contributions. Theoretically, it extends Social Capital Theory by conceptualising interaction effort as a mechanism that conditions both tie formation and the capacity to mobilise relational resources under hybrid conditions. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of combining participant-generated network visualisations with interview data to reveal structural absences not captured through narrative accounts alone. More broadly, the findings challenge the assumption that hybrid arrangements are organisationally neutral, showing instead that spatial proximity risks becoming a consequential and institutionalised axis of workplace inequality.

Hybrid Workers' Productivity: A Diary Study of Young People's Adaptations Balancing Job Demands and Individual Needs

Jane Parry, Beigi Mina, Melika Shirmohammadi, Wee Chan Au, Yafan Yu
(University of Southampton)

As the UK has settled into hybrid and flexible working as a routine part of formerly office-based work, hybrid working is an evolving model, with multiple formats in operation (Hopkins and Bardoel, 2023). Hybrid working can pose a particular challenge for young people, at a career phase when they benefit from experiential learning, and whose home-based working resources may be more limited (Parry et al., 2021), at the same time as they value agency in organising their working practice (Osorio and Madero, 2025). Organisational assumptions on productivity have remained rooted in earlier work models that presuppose single locations and traditional office spaces (Zhang et al., 2020), and have made little adaptation to diverse hybrid environments, other than taking the opportunity to make estate savings, leaving employees to manage additional cognitive load. This is complex since in hybrid work contexts, productivity can be a fluctuating, situated experience that depends on individual perceptions

and decisions, in addition to workspace features. For young people, at the start of their careers, there can be additional pressure to perform and sustain productivity in order to achieve economic security and career progression.

Using a three-stage qualitative research process of interviewing, sandwiched by a diary study that captured hybrid working decisions and experiences across three organisations, this paper adopts person-environment fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998) to explore the alignment between hybrid working decisions, well-being, and productivity. Through mapping how individual needs and job demands are affected by working facilities, built environment, and work culture, the paper provides insight into how young people are negotiating their occupation of different hybrid workspaces (offices, home, and third spaces) to align with their expectations about productivity and job satisfaction, as well as how they adapt to complicating factors. The research has revealed the complexity and nuance of everyday decision-making in a hybrid environment, and the additional challenge of negotiating job alignment in open-plan offices, which are often in conflict with the needs of hybrid workers, which vary around job type, individual needs, and over time, including across the space of a single day.

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Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification - Room 0.09

Navigating the Job-market Employing the Lens of Precarity through Lived Experiences of Oneself and Gig-workers

Aditi Dey Sarkar

(School of Business Management, Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies)

Teaching a course titled 'Sociology of Work' to students pursuing an MBA in Human Resources at a management institute in India, has provided an opportunity to study the gig workers as a part of their evaluative assignment. The basic framework of this assignment requires the students to conduct qualitative research with their respondents to understand the socio-political and economic conditions that drive the decision-making process in working in platform economy, through organizations like Blink-it, Swiggy, Zomato. Young people like the MBA students themselves are entering a market which is fragile. The recent report, 'State of Working India 2026' by Azim Premji University reveals a persistent crisis where nearly 40% of Indian graduates under 25 are employed. Through this paper I intend to understand the researcher's positionality, i.e, the MBA students as they conduct the research for their projects and how do they understand the precarity of the labor market. I would be analyzing Qualitative data obtained through 25 interviews and use the assignments submitted by these students as an object of analysis. Moreover, I would also be employing an understanding of emotional well-being tools accessible to the students in University spaces and its role in addressing the career insecurity arising through competitive market trends. I will be using theoretical perspectives (Kalleberg and Vallas 2018) advancing an understanding of precarious work in order to build a perspective on the role of Sociology in addressing the questions of our times.

Measuring Gender Gaps in Credential Inflation and Overeducation

Michael Smith

(Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences)

Educational expansion in the developed world has renewed sociological debate over credential inflation, defined as the increase in educational credentials required or found in occupations over time. Despite the widespread use of this concept, sociologists rarely distinguish educational upgrading driven by structural labor-market change from upgrading occurring within occupations themselves. This presentation develops an analytical framework for measuring credential inflation and decomposing it into within-occupation and structural components, thereby identifying “net” credential inflation, i.e. within-occupation educational upgrading beyond what change in the occupational structure would predict. Using employer-based administrative data from the Czech Ministry of Labor (2011–2024), encompassing complete data of 6.9 million employees in medium and large enterprises across 126 ISCO 3-digit occupations, I present a simple but novel approach to measuring, operationalizing, and indexing credential inflation for future research in social stratification. I show that credential inflation is not an overall characteristic of a labor market but is occupationally specific and highly stratified by gender. Female-dominated occupations exhibit disproportionately high within-occupation upgrading relative to structural change; by contrast, men’s upgrading is more strongly linked to occupational restructuring toward technical and professional work. The female-dominated service occupations with the most credential inflation are also similar to the occupations at greatest risk of AI disruption that is anticipated for the coming years. In addition, I show, in the most recent data, how “overeducated” workers (i.e. those workers who have more education than the mode of their occupation) are distributed across occupations with varying credential inflation and stratified by gender and cohort. The methodological approach of my presentation can be replicated by sociologists in other countries, above all in the United Kingdom, to further research on this core but under-examined dimension of social stratification. Since my work is very empirical, I would benefit from the theoretical and social-justice orientation of this conference; and similarly, I can show how research on gender inequality and other forms of social stratification can be empirically grounded in new methodological approaches.

Balancing Career and Family: Gendered Differences in Domestic Responsibilities and Their Impact on UK Medical Career Progression

Joanne Lawrence

(University College London)

Women are significantly underrepresented in senior medical roles within the UK, despite outnumbering men as medical students since the early 1990s.

It has been suggested that this disparity relates more to working patterns than to sex, as studies identified minimal gendered differences in progression for doctors who worked full-time throughout their career. However, as women are overrepresented in the part-time medical workforce, it could be argued that a doctor’s sex may indeed influence their career prospects.

Employing the framework of Giddens’ structuration theory, my research acknowledged the contribution of structural factors inherent in the androcentric design of medical institutions as well as physical constraints relating to motherhood, to the degree of agency available to doctors in developing their careers. Referring to these, and to gendered societal expectations, I explored the degree to which women doctors’ agency in balancing their personal and professional lives might be influenced by their domestic environment and family relationships, and to which their decisions might amend or perpetuate any structural barriers.

The research drew on longitudinal data from the NCDS birth cohort study, which follows the lives of all UK children born during a specific week in 1958. I employed SOC codes to extract records for every cohort member (CM) who had identified as a medical doctor in at least one survey sweep (roughly one sweep per decade). Key parameters included age, sex, partnership status and parenthood. Some questions were repeated over several sweeps facilitating an exploration of correlations between sex, work pattern, and division of domestic responsibilities. Then, interviews with six women doctors considered their perceptions of agentic decisions, career influencing factors, and the balance between them.

Data analysis showed clear, sex-based differences: on average, 60% of female doctors reported working full-time (from mid-twenties to fifty), compared with 90% of their male peers. Their partners' work patterns revealed an even greater divide. During their 30s and 40s, 80-90% of women CMs' partners worked full-time, whereas a similar percentage of male CMs were supported by partners working part-time or wholly in the home.

Questions regarding domestic responsibilities revealed that female CMs typically did most cooking, shopping, cleaning, childcare, compared to over two thirds of male CMs whose partners did most.

Interviews with 6 women doctors reinforced these findings, noting that societal expectations and precedents set during maternity leave, reinforced in some cases by different interpretations of family life, frequently resulted in male careers taking priority.

Considering findings through the lens of Giddens' structuration theory, I argue that the distinctive and enduring gendered patterns observed in working hours and domestic responsibilities, among CMs and interviewees alike, can be interpreted as an outcome of the continuing interdependence of individual agency and entrenched social structures. Whilst women doctors may exercise agency in choosing to work part-time, such choices are influenced, and frequently restricted, by structural norms around gender, caregiving, and career management. These iterative forces contribute to a system which prioritises male careers, thus women's reduced working hours result less from preference than from navigating structurally unequal domestic responsibilities.

Disconnected Professionalism: Locum Doctors and the Limits of Connectivity in the Reconfiguration of Medical Work

Jane Ferguson, Gemma Stringer, Kieran Walshe, Justin Waring, Thomas Allen, Christos Grigoroglou, Darren Ashcroft, Evan Kontopantelis

(University of Birmingham)

The changing nature of the medical profession has been well documented in the sociological literature. Changes include a decline of the traditional vocational model, reduced pay and autonomy, chronic excessive workload and increased oversight and managerial and organisational control. The profession has responded in a number of ways including resistance, adaptation, subversion, reframing, rejection and exit. The tendency for some doctors to move away from conventional employment relationships, training and career pathways, towards non-standard employment, such as temporary work, usually known as locum work, has been noted but not much researched. A neglected effect of locum working are the threats and opportunities for professionalism for those engaging in locum work. Using qualitative interview data collected between 2021 and 2022 from 88 participants including locums, people who worked with locums and people with governance and recruitment responsibilities for locums, we explore expressed and perceived motivations for locum working and draw contemporary debates of protective and connective professionalism to understand these choices and their implications. Our findings show that doctors work as locums to have enhanced autonomy over when, where and how they worked and to be paid more for doing so than substantive employees. Locum working enabled doctors to avoid burn out, refocus on clinical practice and relinquish responsibilities for administration and leadership; reflecting a protectionist model of professionalism. However, disconnecting from professional and organisational norms could come at a cost to professional identity and potentially represents a threat from within. Fragmenting the full jurisdiction of the doctors' role could leave space for other occupations to expand, and their high pay and autonomy, framed as self-serving, challenged the selfless professional ideal. Focused at the intersect of the profession and professionalism, our exploration of approaches to and perceptions of locum work offers new insights into the on-going development of the medical profession and professionalism and how these might be shaped by evolving approaches to careers. The paper contributes to contemporary debates on public professionalism and shows that protective and connective forms of professionalism are far from binary positions but in close connection across different work contexts.

Open Stream - Room 0.24

How Labour Market Institutions Shape Policy Responses to the Future of Work: The UK, Sweden and Iceland

Hrafnhildur Ragnarsdottir

(University of Warwick)

This paper examines how labour market institutions, and in particular trade unions, shape policy responses to the future of work across different welfare regimes. As technological change, digitalisation and shifting employment relations transform labour markets, governments face increasing pressure to address emerging risks related to job quality, worker wellbeing and labour market insecurity. While much of the literature on the future of work focuses on technological drivers, this paper argues that institutional contexts, especially welfare regimes and the role of social partners, play a decisive role in mediating these transformations.

The study adopts a comparative approach, analysing three country-based cases: Sweden, the United Kingdom and Iceland. These cases represent distinct welfare regime types, drawing on the framework developed by Esping-Andersen (1990), while also allowing for analytical exploration of a hybrid or less clearly classified case in Iceland. Sweden represents a social democratic regime characterised by high levels of decommodification, strong labour market institutions, and institutionalised tripartite cooperation between the government, employer association and trade unions. The UK exemplifies a liberal welfare regime, marked by lower levels of state intervention, weaker collective institutions and a greater reliance on market mechanisms. Iceland presents a more ambiguous case, often associated with the Nordic model but exhibiting characteristics that diverge from both social democratic and liberal regimes.

This paper focuses on the policy development stage of the policy process, examining how governments and social partners interpret and respond to the challenges associated with the future of work. It draws on qualitative methods, including policy and document analysis, to investigate how key actors frame issues such as automation, digitalisation, and changing employment relations. Attention is paid to how trade unions articulate concerns about worker wellbeing, job quality, and labour market security considering the impact of new technologies, and how these concerns are reflected in policy debates and proposals.

The findings demonstrate that the influence of trade unions varies considerably across welfare regimes. In Sweden, unions are deeply embedded within institutional structures of social dialogue and play a proactive role in shaping policy agendas, emphasising collective solutions and the protection of worker wellbeing. In contrast, unions in the UK operate in a more fragmented and market-oriented context, where their influence on policy development is more limited. Iceland occupies an intermediate position, where unions retain a degree of influence but operate within a less institutionalised and more conflict-prone labour market environment.

These differences can be understood through theories on path-dependencies and how existing institutional arrangements and welfare regime types shape how labour market actors interpret technological change and define appropriate policy responses. As a result, the future of work is not a uniform process but is mediated by national institutional environments that produce divergent policy responses.

Public Versus Private Sector Wage Leadership: Incorporating the Role of Asymmetry

Martin O'Brien

(University of Wollongong)

Until recently the analysis of private and public sector wages was focused on the estimation of public sector wage premiums using microeconomic data. Approximately a decade ago a new line of enquiry emerged, analysing the co-movements, dynamics and spillovers between private and public sector wages using macroeconomic time series data. Such analyses typically employed vector error correction models (VECMs) to identify and quantify aspects of the interrelationship between private and public sector wages. While the Scandinavian model asserted that the private sector should be the wage leader, empirical analyses of European economies provided mixed results, with the public sector often identified

as the wage leading sector. However, results varied across studies, seemingly dependent upon both the model specification as well as time period analysed. In order to obtain a more thorough and nuanced understanding of wage setting patterns and the dynamics between private and public sector wage time series, the current study analyses the role of asymmetry and non-linear adjustment to wage shocks using a threshold vector error correction model (TVECM) specification. Using quarterly data from 1998 to 2025 for Australia as a whole, as well as for eight individual States and Territories, results show that the dynamic adjustment of private and public wages to wage shocks are dependent upon both the sign and size of such shocks. These findings provide important insights into why wage adjustments between private and public sectors vary over time in response to different economic conditions and in response to the nature of different wage shocks. These findings provide insights into understanding of wage dynamics and the relationship between private and public wages, providing important policy implications for public wage setting as a macroeconomic management tool.

On the Front Line

Bringing Political Economy Back into Trade Union Education: Based on Workers' Survey in Britain and Ireland

Hwanhee Bae

(General Federation of Trade Unions Educational Trust & Department of Economics, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London)

What kind of education do workers want from trade unions? Political economy was once central to the trade union movement providing education that grounded worker understanding of material conditions and supported collective action in the workplace and beyond. Over recent decades this has largely disappeared, replaced by predominantly functional training focused on representation, compliance, and workplace procedure. This research tests whether that shift reflects worker demand, or whether it has been imposed from above.

The analysis draws on original research conducted through a Knowledge Transfer Partnership between the Department of Economics at SOAS University of London and the General Federation of Trade Unions Educational Trust. Data were collected in two stages. First, semi-structured interviews with education officers from the NEU, PCS, and NAPO mapped current provision, including course design, delivery, and funding. These findings informed the design of a survey of education officers across 16 unions. Second, a broader survey of workers across Britain and Ireland, regardless of union membership, nationality, immigration status, or employment status, examined awareness of union education, participation, and interest in political economy topics. The survey generated 879 responses.

The findings point to a clear mismatch between provision and demand. Among union members, 58 per cent report having taken courses, while 45 per cent of non-participants were unaware that courses were available, indicating that non-participation is driven in large part by communication failure rather than lack of interest. Existing provision is dominated by functional courses, particularly workplace representation, health and safety, and employment law. However, across all respondent groups, the most popular area of interest is political economy, specifically socialism, communism, and alternatives to capitalism. This is not a marginal preference but a central area of interest. The results suggest that the current model of union education is supply-driven and narrowly functional, while worker demand extends beyond workplace skills to include understanding of the wider economic system. The decline of political economy within union education therefore does not reflect diminished worker interest, but a shift in institutional priorities. This misalignment means that unions are failing to provide the education their members are actively asking for, at a moment when the demand for systemic alternatives is clearly present.

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

Reconstructing Meaning and Value under AI-driven Transformations: Worker Subjectivities in the Polycrisis

Xinyan Yong

(University of Manchester)

Artificial intelligence (AI) is now widely embedded in contemporary organisations, continuing to evolve and reshape how work is organised and evaluated. These ongoing developments are generating growing uncertainty and unease among workers, as they challenge established understandings of value, contribution, and professional identity. At the same time, these transformations caused by AI intersect with broader processes of economic restructuring, labour market uncertainty, and shifting expectations of work associated with the Great Reshuffle, and are increasingly framed within academic debates as part of the contemporary polycrisis. While existing research has extensively examined the implications of AI for efficiency and job displacement, less attention has been paid to how AI-driven transformations reshape worker subjectivities, particularly in relation to meaning, value, and the experience of work.

This study seeks to examine how employees make sense of their roles and contributions in organisational contexts undergoing AI-driven change. Rather than treating AI as a purely technical intervention, the research conceptualises it as part of evolving socio-technical arrangements that may redefine what counts as valuable work. Drawing on an integrative theoretical framework combining Socio-Technical Systems (STS) theory and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the study situates employees' experiences within broader organisational and institutional contexts. STS highlights how technological systems can reshape authority, coordination, and evaluation practices, while SDT provides a lens for understanding how these changes may affect autonomy, competence, and relatedness—key dimensions underpinning meaningful work.

By bringing these perspectives together, the study aims to foreground worker subjectivities and explore how employees interpret, negotiate, and exercise agency in relation to shifting definitions of value under AI-driven transformations. In doing so, it moves beyond individualised accounts of meaning to consider how experiences of meaningful work are socially produced and potentially contested within organisational settings.

Empirically, the study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist case study approach focusing on organisations in AI-intensive sectors such as technology and finance. The research is expected to involve approximately 40–50 semi-structured interviews with employees, managers, and HR professionals, enabling the exploration of multiple perspectives on how AI-related changes are experienced in everyday work. Data collection is currently being prepared, and pilot interviews are planned to refine the interview protocol and ensure conceptual clarity.

The study aims to contribute to the sociology of work and employment in three ways. First, it seeks to reconceptualise changes in meaningful work under AI not simply as individual responses, but as outcomes of broader socio-technical transformations within the polycrisis. Second, it aims to contribute to debates on contemporary work by examining how shifting systems of evaluation may reshape what is recognised as valuable human contribution. Third, it explores the role of organisational practices, including HRM, as sites where tensions between technological change and human value may be mediated and potentially contested.

Overall, the study will offer a sociologically grounded account of how meaning and value are being reconfigured in work under AI-driven transformations, contributing to ongoing debates on worker subjectivities, agency, and the future of work.

From Femininity to Femininities: Women's Crafting of a Feminine, Authentic, and Professional Self in Higher Education

Elisabeth Neugebauer

(Lancaster University)

This research aims to explore how female employees in Higher Education (HE) use their understanding of femininity to construct a self that is 'feminine', 'authentic' and 'professional' in the workplace, and, in doing so, capitalise on and/or resist gendered norms in organisations. It argues for the importance of an understanding of 'femininities' rather than 'femininity', emphasises the role gender capital plays in navigating the workplace, and how gender can also be perceived as an advantage.

Although the significance of intersectionality in understanding gender has shaped our understanding of the existence of multiple 'masculinities', and how men construct their 'authentic' and 'professional' selves in the workplace, women's expression of their gender tends to be centred around the singular term 'femininity' rather than 'femininities'. This focus on 'femininity' creates a narrowly defined understanding of what it means to be 'feminine'; therefore constricting women's ability to be perceived as 'authentic', 'feminine' and 'professional'. Through the existence of multiple and changing ideas of 'femininities', women are able to navigate the challenges of the workplace and the idea of the 'ideal' worker, as well as capitalise on and resist gendered norms in organisations.

Building on 29 semi-structured interviews with female staff members (professional services, faculty, research) of one UK university, which were concerned with women's experiences of working in HE, their experience with the university's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policies and its impact on their experiences working at the university, as well as their understanding of womanhood and femininity, the ongoing thematic analysis emphasises a need for an understanding of 'femininities' rather than 'femininity'. Women perceive 'femininity' as something personal and subjective, as well as something that is contextually dependent. Although 'stereotypical' understandings of 'femininity' were mentioned, women also explicitly expressed dislike of this understanding and the term 'femininity' as a whole. Some women resisted against 'stereotypical' expectations of gender norms in the workplace to remain 'authentic', 'feminine' and 'professional' for themselves, and others expressed an association between 'femininity' and 'power'.

Drawing on work by Collinson & Hearn (1994), Martin (2001), Bridges (2003), and Connell (2005) it engages with their ideas on 'masculinities'. This research further engages with Fleming's (2009) work on 'authenticity' and Kaplan's (2022) research on bringing your 'full self' to work. Lovell's (2000) analysis of Bourdieu's work in which she highlights his perception of women as capital-bearing objects and gender capital as a form of embodied cultural capital is also drawn upon to understand how an idea of 'femininities' enables women to also derive an advantage from their gender rather than for it to only be a disadvantage.

Finally, central to this research are Judith Butler's theory on gender performativity, Luce Irigaray's ideas of masculine subjectivity, and Acker's (1990) theory of the gendered organisation.

Calibrated Feelings: Emotional Labour and the Reconfiguration of Subjectivity in China's Live Streaming Economy

Yao Wang

(University of Bristol)

This paper examines how emotional labour is transformed in China's rapidly expanding e-commerce live streaming industry. As live commerce has become a major form of platform-mediated work, streamers are expected not only to sell products but also to sustain attention, interaction, and trust in real time. In this setting, emotional expression is no longer simply a matter of meeting organisational expectations. It is continuously shaped by audience feedback, platform visibility, and commercial performance. The paper asks how these conditions reshape emotional labour and what this means for streamers' sense of self at work. It argues that platformisation turns emotional labour into an ongoing process of self-calibration, as workers adjust their feelings and performances in response to shifting and often opaque evaluative demands.

The analysis draws on six months of qualitative fieldwork conducted across multiple e-commerce hubs in China, including Yiwu and Hangzhou. The study combines 42 semi-structured interviews with e-commerce live streamers and observations of live streaming practices, including studio-based production and platform-based audience interaction. Participants include full-time and part-time streamers, workers affiliated with Multi-Channel Networks (MCNs), and independent sellers across different organisational forms and market positions.

Theoretically, the paper brings emotional labour theory into dialogue with platform labour scholarship to examine how digital infrastructures reshape the production and governance of emotion at work. Extending Hochschild's framework, it argues that emotional labour is no longer regulated primarily through interpersonal expectations or direct managerial supervision, but increasingly through diffuse, metric-oriented, and platform-mediated forms of evaluation.

Empirically, the paper identifies three interrelated dynamics. First, emotional labour becomes highly performative and anticipatory. Streamers describe the need to "create interaction out of nothing", address imagined audiences, and sustain enthusiasm even when audience response is limited, in order to remain visible. Second, this work generates significant emotional strain. Participants report persistent emotional dissonance when promoting products they do not believe in, along with burnout resulting from repetitive performances, prolonged visibility, and the pressure to remain constantly "on". Third, emotional labour is shaped by the combined influence of organisational training, commercial targets, and platform metrics. These mechanisms standardise emotional expression and demand authenticity, producing an enduring tension between spontaneity and control.

Despite these constraints, streamers actively seek to stabilise their emotions through self-regulation, boundary-setting, and cognitive reframing. However, such forms of agency are deeply ambivalent. Rather than simply resisting external pressures, they often involve the internalisation of evaluative logics and the intensification of self-discipline. Emotional adjustment thus becomes not only a response to work demands but also a condition of continued participation.

This paper concludes that emotional labour in platformised work has become a continuous process of self-calibration, in which workers are compelled to align their feelings with shifting regimes of visibility and value. Foregrounding workers' lived experiences, it contributes to debates on worker subjectivity and digital labour by showing how platformised work reshapes what workers do and how they experience, regulate, and understand themselves.

Worker subjectivities, experience and agency 2 - Room 0.13

Shaping Initiative in the Age of Algorithmic Management: Autonomy, Resistance, and Worker Agency

Mariachiara Barzotto

(University of Bath)

How does algorithmic management (AM) reshape proactive work behaviour (PWB) in contemporary workplaces? This paper addresses that question through a critical narrative review that places proactivity theory in dialogue with the sociology of work and with sociotechnical, sociomaterial, and critical scholarship on algorithmic governance. The paper argues that AM should not be understood simply as a new managerial tool, but as a socio-technical regime that reorganises the conditions under which workers can exercise initiative. By allocating work, monitoring activity, evaluating performance, and triggering rewards or sanctions through data-driven models, AM reshapes what becomes visible, knowable, and contestable at work. In doing so, it unsettles a core assumption of much proactivity scholarship: that self-initiated, future-oriented action takes place under relatively intelligible, negotiable, and socially mediated evaluative conditions. Under AM, initiative is increasingly filtered through system-mediated visibility, classification, scoring, and feedback loops, with important implications for autonomy, control, and worker agency.

The paper reconceptualises PWB as socio-technically mediated and distributed. Rather than residing solely in individual discretion, proactive action under AM is increasingly co-produced through interactions among workers, algorithmic systems, managers, and governance arrangements. This reframing shows how AM transforms three core assumptions underpinning proactivity theory: autonomy, control, and agency. Autonomy becomes conditional on local design and governance choices, including transparency, explainability, human oversight, and opportunities for recourse or override. Control is intensified through continuous data capture, ranking, and behavioural steering, but also made more dynamic, opaque, and difficult to challenge. Agency, in turn, becomes distributed across humans and systems, as workers must interpret, accommodate, and sometimes resist algorithmically mediated signals and decisions.

To explain these dynamics, the paper develops a mechanism-based framework centred on four elements: AM signature conditions, AM boundary conditions, AM-related antecedents of PWB, and distinct forms of proactive response. Signature conditions include datafication, opacity, adaptive learning, and data-driven feedback loops. Boundary conditions include design choices and regulatory constraints that shape whether AM is enacted as developmental infrastructure or disciplinary control. The paper also identifies three antecedents that become especially important under AM: algorithmic literacy, job power, and algorithmic governance leadership. Together, these conditions shape whether proactive action is channelled into constructive improvement, adaptive optimisation, defensive self-protection, or contested action. In this sense, AM does not simply suppress or enable proactivity; it repatterns it, while also stratifying who can safely take initiative, on what terms, and with what risks.

This framing offers a bridge between proactivity research and WES concerns with labour control, resistance, and worker subjectivities. It suggests that under AM, workers are increasingly required to become interpreters of metrics, managers of visibility, and negotiators of classification risk. Resistance may therefore emerge not outside proactivity, but through defensive, adaptive, or contested forms of initiative, including gaming, selective compliance, circumvention, or challenge. The paper concludes by calling for research that examines who is enabled to be proactive under AM, under what conditions, and with what capacity to interpret, contest, and reshape algorithmic systems in contemporary work.

Cross-national Variations in the Coping of Precarity in the Global Gig Economy

See Pok Loa

(University of Leicester)

This article offers a systematic comparison to show how the coping of precarity and workers' sources of security can vary across national contexts. Comparing interview data from online freelance workers in the gig economy in China and Japan – two cases of institutional stability that have undergone rapid labour casualisation and familial welfare regimes where state-initiated safety net is rare – this article identifies two ideological orientations of how workers draw on support resources to restore stability. Attention is particularly given to the role of family-based support and employability in the labour market as sources of welfare. Workers in both contexts were united by their self-initiated deliberate strategies to maximise employability. But in times of joblessness and heightened insecurity, their understanding of help-seeking differed, resulting in nuanced coping responses and varied composition of social welfare. In the Chinese context, precarity tended to be weathered through a combined effort by the family and the workers. Downward transfers of intergenerational resources weaved a safety net to shield workers from the detrimental consequences of precarity. In the Japanese context, taking up assisted forms of safety net was less salient. A strong sense of guilt and self-responsibility regarding career mismanagement prevailed. Strategies to compromise the symbolic reward of work to make up for employability were observed. Structural explanations regarding these cross-national variations are offered.

AI, Gender and Performativity: Reproducing the Problems of the Past

Guy Huber, David Knights

(Oxford Brookes University)

This research paper was inspired by our concern that through its tendency to reflect and reproduce prevailing identities, artificial intelligence (AI) which involves 'software that can perform tasks that typically require human intelligence' (ChatGPT, 13.10.23) reinforces the status quo whereby social

arrangements of power and inequality are further institutionalized. While there are many positive outcomes relating to AI, as well as some warnings of its dangers, this impact on social relations is often ignored if not denied. Our study interrogates how underlying masculine assumptions, once established within the rules [code] of AI, produce hegemonies that may marginalise the norms, practices and subjectivities of feminine and alternative sexualities at work. We conceptualise masculinities in terms of intersecting values, practices and identities rather than some essential personality. Masculine values are learned through socialisation. Thus, it might be said that people, and particularly men, acquire or express their sense of masculinity through practice.

Feminine voices are integral to politics. Who speaks to us, about us, with us and for us? What dominant values are being expressed? How do relations of power constitute dominant practices? What are the performative effects of masculinity? For example, within academia 'there is still a relatively narrow body of feminist scholars' whose voices appear in organization and management journals (Merilainen et al., 2023: 1199). These voices are political not least because they challenge the dominance of masculine discourse (Brewis, 2005). Without such voices, we might sink into a totalizing sea of masculine identity (Persram, 1994: 280) affecting women's lives; queer lives; male lives; ecologies, inequalities and so forth. Feminine voices counter and resist masculine hegemony.

Our contribution derives from examining the relationship between subjectification and subjectivity (Coombs et al., 1992; Costas & Grey, 2014; Greenwood & Cox, 2022; Raffnsøe et al, 2017), and in particular, a nascent stream of research focusing on the performative effects of power (Butler, 1990; 1992; 2015; Cabantous et al., 2016; Hoedemaekers & Keegan, 2010; Simpson et al., 2021) with implications for gender relations at work (Hancock & Tyler, 2007; Knights & Kerfoot, 2004; O'Shea 2020; Weiners & Weber 2020). Our analysis is based on 40 semi-structured interviews that we are organizing with a university department of predominantly white male academics, who are working to design AI in and around work. We are adopting critical discourse analysis on the transcripts of these conversations, in keeping with poststructural notions of performativity, identity and gender (Akers, 2009; Butler, 1987; Fairclough, 1993; Foucault, 1997).

A technology predominantly engineered by men, perhaps dominantly reflecting masculine values, and implemented in organisations (perhaps already dominated by masculine discourses), is likely to impact negatively the voice of feminine and alternative gender and sexual identities. How does the talk of AI engineers reflect masculine discourses (Walthur et al., 2023)? If so, how are these assumptions exercised in AI? This performativity problem has not been acknowledged in the literature examining AI and gender or analysed through poststructural notions of power and knowledge (Butler, 2015; Foucault, 1997) as relating to workplace subjectivities (Acker, 2009).

PAPER SESSION 3

16:30-18:00

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

From Breakdown to Breakthrough: Reclaiming Care Beyond Digital Systems

Paul Tainturier

(Institut de Recherche en Gestion, Université de Paris-Est Créteil)

The digitalization of healthcare systems has constituted a major trend over the past decades. While the impact of these technologies has been extensively examined - particularly with regard to quality of care and economic implications - their consequences for workers remain a contested field of research. Existing studies predominantly focus on processes of acceptance and resistance, whereas comparatively little attention has been paid to situations of “backsliding”, characterized by the sudden disappearance of information systems and their effects on work practices. This study proposes to analyse such situations through the lens of sociomateriality.

At the end of 2024, a private clinic was the target of a cyberattack that rapidly rendered its entire information system inoperative. A crisis management unit was established and faced the critical decision of whether to maintain clinical activity. Despite divergent viewpoints, it was decided to continue operations in a “degraded mode” for a period of six weeks, until the system was restored and the perpetrator—identified as a former employee—was apprehended.

Two key observations emerge from this episode. First, the maternity ward was able to sustain its activity while maintaining the quality of care delivered. Second, the working atmosphere within the ward appeared to become more serene, particularly from the perspective of healthcare professionals, who described this period as a return to the core of their profession: providing care.

This research is conducted within the maternity ward of a hospital group employing nearly 1,000 staff members, of whom approximately 200 work in the ward itself. The study is based on a retrospective investigation aimed at collecting accounts from individuals who experienced the cyberattack. Data collection is currently ongoing; at this stage, twelve semi-structured interviews have been conducted with midwives, childcare assistants, and administrative personnel (including human resources and IT staff).

Preliminary findings highlight three main dimensions. First, the cyberattack fostered increased communication and cooperation among professionals, particularly between healthcare and administrative staff. This situation can be interpreted as a form of “de-virtualization” of the organization, marked by the re-emergence of physical presence and direct verbal interaction in everyday work practices. It also contributed to a better understanding of the constraints faced by other professional groups and to a renewed recognition of their roles—elements often obscured by technological systems.

Second, healthcare professionals emphasized several features of their daily work. Many reported a sense of relief, noting that the use of digital tools and the requirement for systematic traceability tend to increase cognitive load. The return to paper-based documentation was perceived as, in some cases, a more efficient means of collecting and transmitting information, particularly during team meetings. Some respondents also stressed the opportunity to reintroduce a more human dimension into patient care.

Finally, although participants underlined several positive aspects of this experience, the absence of technical tools also revealed their importance, particularly for repetitive tasks such as sample labelling, as well as for scheduling and organizational coordination.

Contradictions of Capital and Care at the AI Conjuncture: A Workplace Ethnography of Care Home Labour

Harry Parfitt

(University of Zurich)

In our paper we will present insights from an ethnographic research project examining the role of 'AI' in care home labour. Our project adopts Burawoy's (2012) extended case method. The main researcher will work as a care assistant in a care home where AI technologies are being rolled out extensively - to address, amongst other challenges, resident monitoring, documentation burdens and worker-resident language barriers.

The project will engage ethnographic insights in "dialogue" with, and in order to "develop", existing social scientific theory (Burawoy, 2009, pp. 43, 21). Our research will contribute to growing literature examining the influence of AI on labour markets (e.g. Benanav, 2025; Humlum & Vestergaard, 2025) and the role of technology in care work (Burawoy, 2009, pp. 43; 21). We aim, further, to bridge the gap between technology sceptic and optimistic positions in debates on care and reproduction.

Many technology-sceptic leaning scholars have noted the dangers of digital technologies for degrading care work (e.g. Hamblin, 2022; Wright, 2023). Others have argued that care and reproductive work are altogether resistant to technologically driven efficiency gains (e.g. Baumol et al., 2012; Federici, 2009). From these perspectives, the deployment of AI in the care sector will probably only ever be a technological "fix" - destined to deepen care crises (Dowling, 2022, p.174).

More optimistic positions argue against drawing a dichotomy between "cold technology" and "warm care" (Marquardt, 2018). According to Gasparre and Tirabeni's "anti dualist" (2024, p. 488) analysis, human care labour and advanced technologies constitute a "dance of agency". While useful, a drawback of such perspectives is a tendency to overlook "pressures from outside" (Gasparre & Tirabeni, 2024, p. 501) – not least the financial forces of "disconnected capitalism" (Thompson, 2003).

In order to incorporate insights from both sceptic and optimistic positions in our research, we will draw on Hall's (1985) concept of "articulation". With this notion, Hall highlights how multiple contradictions contingently come together – are articulated by manifold social forces - at particular historical conjunctures. As such, our ethnography will ask how manifold contradictions of capital and care (Fraser, 2016) are being rearticulated in the care home we are researching. Doing so will help our ethnographic analysis avoid merely either dismissing technological fixes to care crises, or praising technological enhancement of care labour. By reading our ethnographic data through the framework of articulation we aim, instead, to generate a more multidimensional and politically useful analysis specific to our AI-infused (Aradau & Bunz, 2022) conjuncture.

In this conference paper we will, firstly, outline our theoretical framework, suggesting the utility of "articulation" (Hall, 1985) and 'conjunctural analysis' (Gilbert, 2019) for understanding contemporary (digital) transformations of care and reproductive labour. Secondly, we will present initial ethnographic findings, drawing on analysis of events and multimedia promoting AI in the Swiss care sector, as well as early insights from the workplace itself.

Health Care Assistants in Ireland in the Context of Polycrisis

Aine Ni Leime, Maeve O Sullivan

(University of Galway)

This presentation is based on a study of Health Care Assistants (HCAs) in Ireland at a time of intersecting crises including demographic ageing, a workforce facing chronic recruitment and retention shortages and outsourcing by the government. HCAs, face challenges arising from precarious conditions of employment and low pay, which may be exacerbated for migrant workers by restrictive immigration regulations affecting their social citizenship. The study focuses on job quality, precarity and tensions between the varying employment practices (of state, for-profit companies, NGOs and co-operatives) and carers' efforts to provide good care. It draws on data from a qualitative study funded by the Low Pay Commission in Ireland. Home Care Assistants provide a range of services for community-dwelling older people, dependent adults and children. Some HCA's are employed in nursing homes, which are predominantly privately owned. This growing sector, dominated by older females and

migrants faces a crisis in terms of staff retention and workforce well-being because of work intensification, lack of work-life balance, precarity, low pay and lack of worker voice (Ní Léime et al, 2019, O'Neill et al, 2023)

Previous international and national research focuses on the poor working conditions, low pay and precarious forms of employment experienced by health care assistants (Duffy, 2005, Behtoui et al, 2017, Ní Léime and Street, 2019). Some research focuses on specific cohorts including migrant care workers (Doyle and Timonen, 2009, Cangiano and Walsh, 2014). Other studies focus on the vocational nature of the role and the increasingly intensive time pressures care workers are faced with by employers and by neo-liberal government policies (Duffy et al, 2015, Ní Léime et al, 2019, Jenkins, 2025). There has been little investigation into how workers come to occupy HCA roles and into what might provide decent conditions of employment to decrease employee turnover, reducing discontinuities both in workers' earnings and in care provision.

In this study, a two pronged approach is adopted. First a political economy of ageing approach is used to analyse relevant government and employer policy and practice. Second, a lifecourse approach to data collection and analysis is adopted. Data from interviews with 24 HCAs in 2024-25 are analysed, providing insights into the pathways people follow into working as HCAs. Their reported experiences in these roles are analysed as are data from interviews with four managers/employers to investigate policy and practice.

Findings include that despite carrying out highly responsible and sometimes physically and emotionally demanding work, carers are typically low paid and experience precarious working hours resulting in discontinuities of earnings for workers and in care for vulnerable clients. This varies across employer types (state, NGO, for-profit and co-operatives).

This paper contributes to existing research by enhancing our understanding of the worklife trajectories that lead HCAs to work in this sector in (usually) low paid and precarious jobs. Analysis of workers' reported experiences and their suggestions for change as well as of employer and policy experts' perspectives are used as a basis for government and employer policy and practice recommendations.

From Abstract Skills to Situated Competencies: A Call for Industry-specific AI Literacy Frameworks

Matti Laukkanen, Virginia Gunn, Virpi Kalakoski
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The expanding use of artificial intelligence (AI) across contemporary workplaces is reshaping labour processes, shifting decision-making authority, and introducing new psychosocial and organizational risks for workers. In response, AI literacy has emerged as a critical competency for enabling the productive, responsible, and safe use of AI systems in the workplace (Ng et al., 2021).

However, much of the existing literature conceptualizes AI literacy in broad, generic terms and emphasizes foundational knowledge about how AI systems function, the basic principles of machine learning, or high-level ethical considerations (Benlian & Pinkski, 2025; Domínguez Figaredo & Stoyanovich, 2023). At the same time, it pays comparatively little attention to the concrete realities and requirements of specific occupations or sectors (Sidra & Mason, 2025). This creates a gap between abstract skill frameworks and the situated competencies workers actually need in their day-to-day interactions with AI.

In this presentation, we make a call for a more nuanced and contextually grounded approach to AI literacy. We propose that AI literacy must be developed through industry-specific competency frameworks that capture the distinct job demands, risk environments, and sociotechnical configurations of different sectors. Such tailored approaches are essential for strengthening worker agency and ensuring that AI adoption contributes to safe, equitable, and sustainable work environments, rather than reinforcing existing vulnerabilities or creating new ones.

Our argument draws on an ongoing research project examining the relationship between AI literacy and occupational health and safety (OHS) in Canadian health care. The project investigates how current scholarship conceptualizes the OHS implications of AI and identifies the competencies health workers require to recognize, interpret, and mitigate AI-related risks in their everyday practice. To address these

questions, we conduct an exploratory scoping review of academic and grey literature, mapping evidence on AI-related risks, emerging opportunities, and evolving skill requirements in AI-mediated work.

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

PhD Showcase

Sensemaking in Teamwork under Hybrid Arrangements

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Hybrid teamworking post COVID-19 is an under-theorised contemporary phenomenon (Lauring and Jonasson, 2025). While the profound reshuffle that organisations and individuals made to adapt work to hybrid arrangements is well documented (Wheatley et al., 2024), research on organising hybrid teams remains scarce (Teng-Calleja et al., 2024). Given the global prevalence of hybrid configurations among workgroups (Handke et al., 2024), it is timely to conceptualise hybrid teamwork and theorise its organisation with spatial and temporal distribution.

Towards this end, this paper raises the question how teams make sense of hybridity. The research is grounded theoretically on the sensemaking perspective and the social psychology mechanisms of small groups' organising (Weick, 1979; 1995). Through multiple teams' case study approach (Yin, 2018) that draws primarily on observations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019) and longitudinal semi-structured interviewing (Spradley, 1979), the study addresses this question. It captures episodes of group organising and disorganising and showcases how meanings and practices are intertwined as hybrid employees enact a typology of teams.

The contribution of this research is threefold. First, it extends the sensemaking literature on the social construction of realities (Brown et al., 2015) to hybrid organisational contexts. This contribution also enriches the workgroups' literature (Mathieu et al., 2019) by theorising contemporary hybrid teams. Second, it empirically responds to calls for observational, processual, and longitudinal methods, in teams-based research (Einola and Alvesson, 2019) through utilising technology-mediated ethnography. Finally, it offered participating teams a reflexive space to rethink hybridity, paving the way for practice and policy implications which the paper will report.

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Women, Work, and Digital Transformation in the “Great Reshuffle”: Gendered Career Inequality in Bangladesh’s Banking Sector

Naiyer Fatema Khanom

(University of Queensland)

The ongoing “Great Reshuffle” and broader polycrisis—marked by post-pandemic restructuring, economic uncertainty, and accelerated digitalisation—are reshaping work and employment globally. In Bangladesh’s banking sector, the rapid integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming skill demands, organisational practices, and career pathways. While these shifts are often framed as enabling efficiency, innovation, and inclusion, their implications for gendered career advancement remain uneven and underexplored, particularly in Global South contexts.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of field and capital, this paper conceptualises the banking sector as a hierarchical organisational field in which differential access to and mobilisation of economic, social, cultural, and digital capital shape professional advancement. Particular attention is given to digital capital, including emerging AI-related competencies, as a critical resource in the evolving workplace. The analysis is based on 31 semi-structured interviews with banking professionals across state-owned, local private, and foreign banks in Bangladesh, spanning early-career employees, mid-level managers, and senior industry experts. Using inductive thematic analysis, the study examines how organisational governance and institutional variation shape access to and utilisation of career-enhancing opportunities.

The findings reveal that while access to training, digital tools, and development opportunities has expanded, this does not translate into equal career advancement. Women’s progression is shaped by the interaction between organisational governance and sociocultural expectations, including care responsibilities and norms around availability, mobility, and workplace visibility. These dynamics constrain women’s ability to access high-visibility, technology-intensive roles and to accumulate digital capital.

Digital transformation thus operates as a stratifying mechanism embedded within existing gendered power relations, reconfiguring rather than reducing inequalities in career progression. This paper draws on findings from an empirical chapter of an ongoing PhD project, contributing to debates on work and employment by providing evidence of how technological change and AI intersect with gendered organisational and sociocultural dynamics in Global South labour market contexts.

Living Alone in a Connected World: Exploring the Process of Work-Life Intrusion and Wellbeing Issues

Ha Ngoc Nguyen

(University of Leeds)

In contemporary work settings, digital communication technologies have made it increasingly difficult to separate work from personal life, enabling after-hours responsiveness and more permeable work–life boundaries (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Gadeyne et al., 2018). Research also suggests that such connectivity has important implications for employee wellbeing, particularly through work–life conflict, availability pressure, and reduced opportunities for psychological detachment and recovery (Mellner, 2016; Baumeister et al., 2021). Yet solo-living employees remain underexplored in this literature, despite evidence that their experiences are shaped by distinct demands and resources (Wilkinson et al., 2023). This paper examines how solo-living professionals in Vietnam experienced and managed work–life boundary blurring in an increasingly connected digital environment. Drawing on qualitative interview data, it explores the lived processes through which after-hours work connectivity is maintained, negotiated, and normalised in everyday life.

The paper examines why professionals remained connected beyond formal working hours and how work–life intrusion unfolded in practice. It shows that continued availability is shaped not only by workload and digital technologies, but also by organisational culture, social expectations, and a strong sense of professional responsibility. For solo-living professionals, the absence of shared household routines does not necessarily create stronger boundaries; instead, living alone can intensify dependence on work, particularly where individuals carry sole responsibility for their finances, daily routines, and career progression.

The findings show that work–life intrusion emerges through an interaction of job demands, availability expectations, digital interruptions, and organisational norms. Importantly, the paper highlights the broader wellbeing consequences of this intrusion. Participants linked ongoing connectivity with blurred boundaries, difficulty switching off, reduced opportunities for rest and recovery, and experiences of both physical and emotional exhaustion. These consequences suggest that the effects of work–life intrusion extend beyond narrow measures of strain and should be understood as affecting everyday wellbeing more broadly. At the same time, participants described a range of strategies for managing these pressures, including digital disengagement, segmentation practices, and more adaptive forms of coping.

Overall, the paper contributes to debates on digital work, boundary management, and employee wellbeing by showing that solo-living professionals' boundary management is shaped by intersecting organisational, technological, and social forces. It argues that meaningful boundary protection requires more than individual coping strategies alone; it also depends on structural and cultural support that limits the normalisation of constant connectivity.

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

From PhD to Employment: Gender Gaps in Early Career Outcomes among Doctorates in Italy

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(Fondazione Bruno Kessler Istituto per la Ricerca VALutativa sulle Politiche Pubbliche)

The transition from doctoral studies to employment marks a critical juncture in women's attrition from academic careers. In Europe, women now earn approximately half of all doctoral degrees, achieving a level of gender parity that represents a relatively recent phenomenon. Despite this progress, significant gender disparities persist not only in the earnings of PhD holders but also in research careers, particularly within academia.

Women with doctorates are less likely than men to secure research-intensive academic positions, and their underrepresentation becomes more pronounced at higher academic ranks: they hold only about one-quarter of full professorships across Europe. Similar patterns are evident beyond academia, where women account for roughly one-third of researchers in other sectors. These trends reflect a persistent stratification in research career trajectories, with gender gaps widening at each stage of advancement.

While these patterns are evident across Europe, this paper focuses on Italy, a context that reflects similar dynamics but also presents distinct structural challenges. Participation in doctoral education remains relatively low, and employment opportunities for highly qualified individuals—especially in the social sciences and humanities—are limited. Many doctoral graduates are employed in positions that do not match their level of education, and prospects for long-term academic careers are restricted. These conditions particularly affect women, who often make career decisions alongside key life transitions, such as family formation. Parenthood—particularly motherhood—is often identified as a key factor influencing both scientific productivity and the decision to remain in academia. Early-stage academic careers typically demand high levels of scientific productivity, flexibility, and mobility, which can be difficult to reconcile with the demands of motherhood. In Italy, academic pathways are further complicated by prolonged periods in temporary positions and uncertainty regarding future employment. Early-career researchers often move through a series of fixed-term roles, including postdoctoral positions and lectureships, typically lasting up to 6 years.

This paper investigates gender differences in early-career outcomes among PhD graduates in Italy, using nationally representative cross-sectional survey data from six cohorts of doctorate holders. We develop an analytical model to examine the relationship between scientific productivity, academic employment, and parenthood. Using Linear Probability Models, we estimate the determinants of two key outcomes: publishing more than three articles and holding an academic position four to six years after PhD completion.

Controlling for pre-employment characteristics, we find that early academic employment is positively associated with productivity for both men and women. Parenthood, by contrast, is negatively associated with productivity only for mothers, and with a lower probability of academic employment for both genders. Despite these patterns, substantial gender gaps persist in both outcomes, consistently favouring men. A Kitagawa–Blinder–Oaxaca decomposition reveals that a large share of these differences remains unexplained by observable characteristics. Our study underscores the importance of transparent, gender-neutral evaluation and promotion systems to remove structural barriers to gender equality, and of developing evidence-based measures and strategies to address the gender gap in academia and beyond.

Breaking or Reproducing the Glass Ceiling? How STEM Education Shapes Women's Occupational Attainment in Japan

Hansol Lee

(University of Shiga Prefecture)

Aim of the Study: The current study investigates how gender diversifies the occupational achievement of graduates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. It especially tests the validity of the glass ceiling hypothesis in the context of Japanese society, where the conservative gender norms hinder female STEM professionals' career pursuits.

Theoretical Background: Given that the majority of STEM professionals are men, women are often excluded from internal networking opportunities (Luhr 2024). Moreover, female STEM professionals are concentrated in less technical, and thus less economically rewarding jobs (Campero 2021). Therefore, female STEM graduates may not achieve occupational attainment as highly as their male counterparts do, encountering the "glass ceiling." Namely, women may face barriers at work that prevent their vertical upward mobility, which intensifies at higher organizational hierarchies (Cotter et al. 2001).

Data and Methods: I used the Social Stratification and Social Mobility Survey (SSM) 2015 from Japan. My subsample consists of employees with a college, university, or postgraduate degree aged less than 60. The dependent variable is the Japanese Socio-Economic Index (SEI). The independent variable is the field of study, consisting of the humanities (ref.), social sciences, education, medicine, and STEM. Another independent variable, gender, is a dummy variable with 0 for men and 1 for women. The control variables are educational attainment, years of job experience, the square term of years of job experience, and workplace size.

To test the glass ceiling hypothesis, I used conditional quantile regression models. I defined the .20th quantile as low hierarchies and the .80th quantile as high hierarchies of SEI. I further examined gender differences in SEI across fields, introducing an interaction term of gender and the field of study. Then,

using mediation analysis for the .80th quantile, I estimated how STEM education contributes to gender disparities in the high distribution of occupational attainment.

Findings: Among STEM graduates, significant differences from the humanities are observed beyond the .50th quantile of the outcome variable, with SEI increasing by 2 to 3 points and no gender differences. The mediation analysis shows that the path from STEM to SEI is positive and significant at the 5% level, whereas the path from gender to STEM is negative and also significant. Thus, women's underrepresentation in STEM lowers their SEI, despite the positive impact of STEM on SEI.

The current study is based on completed statistical analyses. The study contributes to debates about gendered labor market stratification by demonstrating how unequal gender representation in STEM education contributes to women's occupational attainment.

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Working Condition and Workers' Well-being in Selected Solid Waste Management Industries in Southeast Nigeria

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Evidence from research in related sectors in Nigeria suggests that precarious working conditions have effect on the general well being of workers. This study investigated the relationship between different working conditions and well-being of workers in waste management industries using Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model as theoretical framework. Multi-stage sampling involving purposive, stratified, quota and random sampling techniques was employed. Sample size of 929 was derived using the Taro Yamana formulae from a population of 8200 from the two waste management industries under study. Structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were the major instruments for data collection. Socio-economic and working conditions was analysed using simple percentages regression analysis. The study generated comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data on the physical, ergonomic, organizational, and psychosocial conditions under which workers in solid waste management industries operate in Southeast Nigeria as well as provided insights into workers' physical, psychological, and social well-being, highlighting the relationship between work conditions and overall life satisfaction.

Halfway There? Labor-Market Equilibrium in a Sorting Model with Endogenous Discrimination

Fernando Anjos

(Nova School of Business and Economics)

Why does progress toward gender equality in labor markets often appear slow, uneven, and incomplete, even as women increasingly access high-status positions? This paper develops a formal, mechanism-based explanation for such "halfway-there" outcomes by modeling discrimination as an identity-based power relation rather than as mistaken beliefs or preferences.

I present a stylized two-sector labor-market model in which male and female workers have identical ability distributions but differ in their exposure to wage penalties. Discrimination is modeled neither as statistical discrimination nor as taste-based animus. Instead, it operates as surplus extraction enabled by group dominance: when men are numerically dominant in high-productivity positions, they can impose wage penalties ("gender taxes") on women and redistribute the surplus among themselves. The strength of discrimination depends endogenously on occupational composition, generating feedback between group representation and the capacity to extract rents.

A central result of the paper is that discrimination must be ability-dependent for persistent partial equality to arise. When higher-ability women face weaker penalties, selective inclusion becomes possible,

smoothing occupational sorting and sustaining a stable interior equilibrium characterized by partial female representation and ongoing discrimination. By contrast, when discrimination is ability-neutral, the model admits no such equilibrium: cultural change produces a sharp regime switch from segregation to a fully fair outcome. Ability-contingent discrimination is therefore a necessary condition for the existence of a stable “halfway-there” equilibrium.

The model yields several nonobvious implications: (i) Halfway-there equilibria can display reversed within-sector median wage gaps due to selection effects, even as group-level inequality persists. (ii) Some high-ability men benefit from partial inclusion as compared to segregation, creating distributional conflicts that slow transitions to full equality. (iii) Gradual cultural change can generate long periods of apparent stagnation followed by abrupt shifts once critical thresholds are crossed.

Substantively, the paper contributes to analytical sociology by formalizing a power-based, identity-driven mechanism of discrimination that renders inequality resilient through selective inclusion. Methodologically, it shows how mathematical modeling can link micro-level sorting and dominance relations to macro-level patterns of persistence, path dependence, and nonlinear social change.

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

PhD Showcase

Algorithmic Gatekeepers and Early-Career Exclusion: How Recruitment Technologies Shape Youth Employability Pathways

Lizelle Dsilva, Farooq Mughal, Juani Swart
(University of Bath)

This study examines how technology-driven recruitment systems shape youth employability and contribute to early-career exclusion. It argues that these systems do not simply evaluate employability as a pre-existing attribute but actively reproduce it by structuring how candidate value is recognised.

The study focuses on young people aged 18–24 transitioning into the workplace as they face persistent barriers, including limited work experience, weak networks, and restricted labour market knowledge, with a disappearing base for entry-level jobs (Mughal, 2025; Sheldrick, 2025). These challenges matter because early-career exclusion is associated with long-term wage scarring and fragmented employment trajectories (Arulampalam, 2001). Simultaneously, recruitment is increasingly mediated by technology, including applicant tracking systems, automated assessments, and algorithmic screening tools. While often justified as improving efficiency, these systems function as gatekeepers that structure access to employment opportunities, making them a critical site through which exclusion is enacted.

Existing research approaches youth employability through individualised frameworks such as human capital theory, which emphasises skills, adaptability and personal responsibility for labour market success (Becker, 1993; Chertkovskaya et al., 2013). This perspective assumes employability is objectively measurable and transparently recognised. Parallel HRM literature focuses on organisational benefits, particularly efficiency and prediction (Chapman & Webster, 2003; Stone et al., 2015). Although critical scholarship highlights algorithmic bias (Barocas & Selbst, 2016; Raghavan et al., 2020), these approaches still treat employability as adaptations of the ideal employable subject. As a result, the role of these systems in shaping what counts as employable remains under-theorised.

To address this gap, we draw on Bourdieu’s notion of capital to conceptualise employability as a relational outcome produced through processes of recognition. While human capital theory focuses on the possession of skills, a Bourdieusian perspective shifts attention to how different forms of capital become visible and legitimate within specific fields (Bourdieu, 1986). These systems operate as mediating structures that translate organisational expectations into algorithmic criteria, which constitute encoded rules and filters that rank, sort, and exclude candidates based on predefined signals. In doing so, they prioritise certain forms of capital, such as keyword-matched skills, continuous employment

histories, and standardised application formats, while rendering others invisible, systematically shaping who is recognised as employable.

The study adopts a qualitative design combining interviews with young job seekers and HR professionals, alongside analysis of recruitment interfaces such as application portals and automated communication systems. Preliminary findings from a pilot study highlight how these systems are experienced as exclusionary. One participant described feeling “like a datapoint”, and they characterised the process as “a one-way street” requiring effort without acknowledgement. Participants also reported attempting to “game” perceived system criteria by adapting CVs and responses. From a Bourdieusian perspective, this can be seen as an attempt to learn and play by the “rules of the game” where success depends on possessing and presenting capital in ways recognised by the field (Bourdieu, 1986).

These insights contribute to debates on digital labour markets, inequality, and early-career transitions, demonstrating how exclusion is not only a labour market outcome, but a process embedded within these systems themselves.

Beyond the Individual: Advancing a Social and Relational Perspective of Underemployment

Aditi Gupta

(University of Liverpool Management School)

Underemployment is becoming a persistent and structurally embedded feature of contemporary work, shaped by economic instability, technological disruption, and evolving labour market trajectories (Heyes et al., 2016; Verbruggen et al., 2015). Research indicates that underemployment can be experienced intermittently or persistently across careers (Beck et al., 2025a) and may serve as a more sensitive measure of labour market slack than unemployment (Bell & Blanchflower, 2018). In the UK, underemployment reached 8.1% in 2025 (ONS, 2025), reflecting pressures linked to Brexit, the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis (Torres et al., 2023). These pressures are set to intensify as AI and automation reshape labour demand, altering both job quantity and quality across sectors (Georgieva, 2024; Lábaj et al., 2025; World Economic Forum, 2025). These converging pressures make underemployment a key marker of how contemporary crises are restructuring work and labour markets.

Dominant frameworks largely treat underemployment as an individual-level mismatch between workers and jobs. Human Capital Theory frames it as underutilised skills and education (Becker, 1993), while Person-Job Fit emphasises alignment between capabilities and job requirements (Edwards, 1991; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Relative Deprivation Theory focuses on perceived gaps between expected and actual employment outcomes (Crosby, 1976). These approaches foreground personal choice, career strategies, job search behaviour, or insufficient human capital (Ressia et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2024), neglecting the social, relational, and structural processes that shape underemployment. A sociological lens is therefore essential (Beck et al., 2025b) to explore how underemployment may be a structural outcome of labour market changes, moving beyond individual-level explanations.

This article advances a social and relational perspective, positioning underemployment as constituted through social relations within and around work. Responding to calls for integrative frameworks (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021), it presents a literature review of 143 peer-reviewed studies that examine how micro-, meso-, and macro-level social and relational processes shape the emergence and experience of underemployment. Findings showed that underemployment is shaped through relational mechanisms, including social comparison (Zhou et al., 2024), social support (Geißler & Goerke, 2025; Hamjediers & Schmelzer, 2022), social evaluation (Liu et al., 2025), employer decision-making (Damelang et al., 2019), and domestic considerations (Bainbridge & Broady, 2017; Zhang et al., 2023). These mechanisms demonstrate how underemployment emerges through interactions with supervisors (Boon & Biron, 2016), colleagues (Zhang et al., 2025), team (Alfes et al., 2016), social networks (Leschke & Weiss, 2020), and broader labour market structures (Ortiz, 2010), while simultaneously reshaping these social relations and structures (Li et al., 2021; Erdogan et al., 2020).

The article contributes by conceptualising underemployment as a dynamic and reciprocal process in which social relations shape and are reshaped by underemployment experiences. It advances a multi-level framework that reconceptualises underemployment as a socially embedded phenomenon, emerging and evolving through interactions with social relations and structures across micro, meso,

and macro levels. This reveals the interplay between workers and their social, organisational, and institutional contexts. In doing so, it positions underemployment as a relational process linking everyday work experiences to broader structural transformations under intersecting crises.

Situated Pathways into AI: A Sociomaterial and Intersectional Study of Mexican Women

Zyanya Silva Mirus

(Queen Mary University of London)

Gendered, social, epistemic and geopolitical inequalities continue to shape participation in artificial intelligence (AI), a field widely presented as transformative yet deeply stratified. Although AI is attributed with the potential to foster innovation in sectors such as energy optimisation, global health, and agriculture, its development reproduces global hierarchies of power, racialisation, and capital accumulation (Ricaurte, 2019; Filgueira, 2023; United Nations, 2024). In this context, the trajectories of Mexican women in AI emerge as outcomes of sociomaterial assemblages situated within colonial configurations of knowledge, distributed intersectionally across class, race and territory. Understanding who reaches AI and how they do so requires attention to material conditions, social positions and the global validation regimes that govern participation.

The gender gap remains a persistent issue: globally, women represent around 30% of the AI workforce, dropping to 15% in senior roles (United Nations, 2024; Pal and Lazzaroni, 2024). Mexico does not yet provide official AI-specific figures. Still, national labour data indicates that women comprise 27.7% of the information technology sector and only 19.9% in engineering (Observatorio Laboral, 2025), reflecting broader STEM inequalities (UNESCO, 2023). Despite this, little is known about the conditions that enable Mexican women to enter AI, the infrastructures and networks that shape their paths, or how longstanding socioeconomic and territorial inequalities intersect with the development of high-visibility technoscientific fields (Ordóñez Barba, 2018; Vega and Rodríguez, 2022).

To conceptualise these trajectories, the project draws on three analytical lenses. A sociomaterial perspective understands AI not as a neutral technical artefact but as the entanglement of social dynamics with material infrastructures: devices, data, models, platforms, curricula, linguistic regimes and networks (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008). Intersectionality provides a framework for analysing how class, race, gender and territory interact to distribute opportunities and constraints (Crenshaw, 1989; Holvino, 2010; Cejas and Muñoz, 2021). Complementing this, the coloniality of AI situates trajectories within global hierarchies of knowledge, including the hegemony of English, Western norms of academic argumentation and the monopolisation of digital platforms, which act as infrastructures of epistemic gatekeeping (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Kwet, 2019). Together, these lenses shift attention from meritocratic narratives toward situated, material and geopolitical explanations.

Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative approach. The current phase consists of a literature review mapping gender in AI, sociomaterial approaches, intersectionality and decolonial critiques of digital technologies. Subsequent stages will involve semi-structured interviews with Mexican women working across AI-related sectors and analysis of the material and social conditions that shape their trajectories. The anticipated contribution lies in documenting understudied AI trajectories, integrating sociomaterial, intersectional and decolonial perspectives, and informing policies focused on redistributing material and epistemic conditions rather than individual motivation.

Embodied Flexibility: Female Riders' Navigation of Gendered Hostility in China's Food Delivery Sector

Xiaohan Li

(University of Southampton)

In the gig economy, flexibility is usually framed by traditional labour theories as a gender-neutral strategy focused on managing time, work efficiency and work-life balance at the algorithmic and managerial level. However, in China's male-dominated food delivery sector, female riders experience distinct challenges. Within this context, flexibility may be reframed by gendered experiences and safety concerns.

This paper aims to explore how female riders in China's food delivery sector employ flexibility as an embodied strategy to navigate the gender biases inherent in this male-dominated sector. By combining ethnographic methods with semi-structured interviews of 42 full-time and part-time female riders (2 of whom were interviewed via text chats), this study explores the following research questions:

1. How do female riders enact flexibility (e.g., adjusting schedules, routes, task selection, platform choice, and patterns of interaction) as embodied strategies to navigate gendered hostility in the food delivery sector in China
2. What are the implications of such "embodied flexibility" for sustaining women's continued participation in the labour force within male-dominated gig sectors?

The findings reveal that flexibility is not merely for work-life balance or convenience, but rather a purposeful strategy adopted to protect women's safety and well-being in gender hostility work environment. Women in this industry adjust their working patterns to ensure their physical safety, for example, by selectively choosing full-time or part-time work, and by adjusting their routes and orders preferences. Meanwhile, they minimise work-related interactions with male colleagues or customers to reduce the risk of physical and psychological harm. These embodied strategies are seen as key to their continued participation in the food delivery industry. However, this paper also highlights the trade-offs involved, such as reduced income and difficulties in securing a sufficient volume of high-quality orders. Although female riders implement embodied flexibility strategies, algorithmic and managerial controls continue to limit their effectiveness (particularly for full-time female riders), and a male-dominated workplace culture persists. Consequently, while such embodied flexibility strategies help alleviate risks, they remain largely reactive in nature, aimed at securing individual safety and well-being rather than driving collective negotiations, revealing more extensive structural gender inequalities.

Though existing literature has discussed algorithmic control over flexibility in the food delivery sector (Sun et al., 2023) and the challenges women face in balancing productive and reproductive labour (Kwan, 2022), this study expands on the multi-dimensional implications of flexibility for female workers in the gig economy. It frames flexibility as an embodied strategy for coping with structural gender inequalities, theoretically extending beyond traditional labour theories. Furthermore, this paper calls for the development of more gender-sensitive policies at the organisational, policy and technological intervention levels, aiming to reduce reliance on individual-level coping strategies.

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Migration, mobility and labour reconfigurations - Room 0.23

Understanding Pre-migration Aspirations for UAE Gig-economy Work: A Case Study of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan) to Dubai

Francis Solomantine, Bilal Ahmed

(Middle East Centre for Training and Development)

Labour migration remains a defining feature of Pakistan's socioeconomic landscape, particularly among youth navigating limited employment opportunities and sociopolitical constraints at home. As the United Arab Emirates (UAE) expands its digital service and delivery ecosystem, gig-economy roles especially in mobility, logistics, and app-based delivery services—have emerged as attractive pathways for young Pakistanis aspiring to work abroad. Migration decisions are shaped by strong economic push factors, including income insecurity, household financial obligations, and limited local employment options, alongside pull factors such as comparatively higher earnings, flexible entry requirements, and the visibility of successful migrant networks. Despite this rising interest, there remains limited evidence on

how prospective migrants understand these roles, evaluate risks prior to departure, or prepare for the legal, social, and economic realities of platform-mediated work in the UAE.

This study focuses on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) as a primary case, given its long-standing role as a major labour-sending province, high levels of youth out-migration, and the prevalence of informal employment pathways. It conceptualizes domestic participation in ride-hailing and delivery services in KP as a preparatory labour pathway that shapes migration aspirations, skill expectations, and perceptions of overseas gig-economy work.

Employing a qualitative research design by using primary survey data collected from 78 as delivery drivers in different delivery service partners in December 2025, the study draws on in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews with aspirant migrants, recruitment intermediaries, return migrants, and migration stakeholders in selected high-migration districts. The analysis examines five interconnected dimensions: (i) motivations and expectations surrounding gig-economy employment; (ii) perceived alignment between existing skills and platform-based work requirements; (iii) recruitment channels and information environments influencing migration decisions; (iv) levels of legal awareness, including knowledge of labour laws and pre-departure orientation; and (v) the implications of migration choices for families left behind, including financial literacy and wellbeing.

The analysis further indicates strong economic push factors, heavy reliance on informal recruitment channels, and limited pre-departure awareness of destination-country labour regulations. To complement this perspective, the study integrates survey evidence from Pakistani delivery workers employed in Dubai, revealing persistent gaps in legal awareness and continued dependence on employers or intermediaries for resolving workplace issues. Together, these datasets illustrate how information gaps and risk perceptions emerge pre, in-service and return with consequences for worker vulnerability and family left behind.

This study contributes timely evidence for safer-migration programming and improved pre-departure orientation, while informing policy discussions on aligning Pakistan's labour-mobility systems with the evolving demands of the UAE's gig economy. In the longer term, the findings highlight how better-prepared migrant workers can support household wellbeing in Pakistan while contributing to the sustainability and regulation of platform-based labour markets in the UAE.

Making Sense of Career Shocks: A Multilevel Exploration of Young Professionals Career Narratives

Didem Taser, Lucas Amaral

(Brunel University London)

Career shocks, defined as disruptive and extraordinary events that trigger deliberate thought about one's career (Akkermans et al., 2018), have received growing scholarly attention. Yet much of this research assumes that individuals operate in environments where structural conditions afford them room to act on their interpretations. Less is known about how individuals make sense of career shocks when macro-level instability, organisational rigidity, and weak labour market protections constrain the very possibilities for career agency. This paper addresses this gap by examining how young professionals in Turkey made sense of the COVID-19 pandemic as a career shock, and how their sensemaking evolved over time under sustained structural constraint.

Drawing on a sensemaking perspective (Weick, 1995; Vough et al., 2015), we conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with 12 young Turkish white-collar professionals. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews in two rounds: during the pandemic and after it. This design allowed us to trace how participants' career narratives shifted as the immediate disruption gave way to longer-term economic and institutional deterioration. We employed thematic narrative analysis to identify the extracted cues at the macro, meso, and micro levels through which participants constructed meaning from the shock.

Our analysis reveals three sensemaking narratives. The first, suspended agency, emerged during the pandemic. Participants did not abandon their career goals but found that the conditions for pursuing them had been withdrawn. This narrative was shaped by macro-level opportunity disorientation, meso-level career constraint, and micro-level temporary disenchantment. The second and third narratives emerged after the pandemic, when the effects of the shock had settled into participants' working lives.

Both were built on the same macro-level cue of opportunity erosion and the same meso-level cue of career stagnation. However, participants diverged at the micro level. In stalled agency, participants could not construct a believable account of a way forward, navigating their careers through short-term pragmatism. In projected escape, participants concluded that the only viable career project was to leave the country, constructing migration as the sole path through which career agency could be restored.

The paper advances career shock research by showing that deliberate reflection does not necessarily translate into adaptive action, and that in constrained contexts, shocks may reinforce structural limitations rather than stimulate reorientation. It contributes to sensemaking theory by illustrating how macro and meso-level cues shape narrative trajectories over extended periods, particularly when individuals repeatedly confront signs that their future pathways are closing down. It also shows that young professionals' agency is not fixed but takes varied forms, shaped by whether they can sustain a believable account of their career future even within the same cultural context and educational background.

The research is at an advanced stage, with the full paper currently under preparation for journal submission.

Open Stream - Room 0.24

From Subjective Age to Age-discrimination Climate: Pathways of Subgrouping and Seniority in Chinese Workplace Teams

Xingyu Chen

(University of Leeds)

Prior research sees subjective age as an important predictor of age-based subgrouping and age-discrimination climate (Kunze et al., 2021). However, the dimensionality of subjective age remains under debate (Kinjo et al., 2024). At the same time, applications and discussions of the dominant measurements of subjective age, derived from European and North American organizational contexts, are very limited in the Chinese context. More importantly, seniority, critically engaged in formation of subjective age, is often reduced to organizational tenure in the literature, with little discussion of how employees interpret the social meaning of seniority-related cues in workplace interactions. Building on these gaps, this study asks how subjective age is constructed and understood in Chinese workplace teams, how age-related subgrouping is formed, and how seniority-related cues may contribute to age-discrimination climate.

The study adopts an interpretivist methodology with a constructivist orientation. The wider project focuses on workplace teams across Chinese public-sector organisations, potentially including government departments, state-owned enterprises, higher education institutions, and other related public-sector units. However, the data reported at this stage are drawn from in-depth interviews with employees from two administrative teams within a single higher education institution in China. Through inductive thematic analysis, preliminary findings suggest that most participants were able to report a specific felt age and provide explanations for this subjective age, indicating that subjective age in this context can still be understood as a form of self-perceived age. However, the cues used to explain subjective age in these Chinese public-sector teams differed from those commonly discussed in European and North American contexts. The most salient cues concerned competence expectations linked to tenure, energy and recovery capacity, and family caregiving responsibilities, while appearance- and interest-based cues were less central. The data further suggest that age-related subgrouping was shaped by shared life-course stage, social communities, and perceived seniority, which may in turn contribute to age-discrimination climate. Overall, the findings point to a relational, team-level understanding of subjective age in Chinese workplace interactions.

Career Scripts as a Lens for Advancing More Inclusive Career Research

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Contemporary career research has generated important insights into how individuals navigate their working lives. Yet, in a transforming world of work, shaped by societal, economic, and technological changes, dominant career approaches remain limited in scope. Much existing contemporary career research draws on Western privileged contexts, leaving constrained, under-resourced, marginalized, or otherwise vulnerable career realities insufficiently examined. Further, prevailing theoretical frameworks tend to adopt either an agency-centered perspective, focusing on individual choice and outcomes, or a structure-centered perspective, emphasizing structural constraints and opportunities. This research largely ignores how careers unfold through a contextually embedded interplay between diverse individuals, who are neither passive nor fully autonomous, and the social structures that unevenly enable and constrain their career trajectories.

A nascent momentum is emerging: growing interest in underexplored populations and sociocultural contexts, non-traditional career forms, and in-depth qualitative investigations opens space for a more inclusive research agenda (e.g., Fernando & Cohen, 2013). We argue, however, that this shift requires theoretical grounding capable of systematically illuminating alternative and more inclusive career realities. We propose that the career scripts framework, initially developed by Barley (1989) and grounded in Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, offers this potential.

Situated within grand social theories (Kozhevnikov et al., 2026), career scripts mediate the structuration process, providing an analytical lens for examining careers as dynamic phenomena embedded within social diversity. Simultaneously mobilized by social structures and by individuals, career scripts are contextually construed as guides for action. They encompass three interrelated dimensions that span both the work sphere and the broader non-work social sphere: interpretive schemes, which shape diversely shared cognitive meanings of careers; resources, which unevenly distribute power in career actions; and norms, which serve to legitimize or sanction them. This multidimensional understanding of career phenomena enables scholars to capture their richness, variability, interconnectedness, and situated nature. Crucially, the framework opens up a stimulating opportunity to shed light on collectively enacted patterns in the (re)production of dominant, and often exclusionary, career norms, as well as the emergence of alternative ones. It also invites greater engagement with methodological approaches developed in diversity research, well-suited to capturing marginalized voices, multiple career identities, and contextually embedded experiences.

Reviewing the fragmented contributions of various works using the career scripts framework, we revisit its theoretical and interdisciplinary foundations, advancing a more inclusive career research agenda fit for the growing diversity of the contemporary career landscape.

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Doing Diversity and Inclusion in Male-dominated Trades: The Case of U.K. Highways Construction

*Jack Daly, Jennifer Tomlinson, Danat Valizade, Kathryn Watson
(University of Leeds)*

Implementing effective Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) initiatives continues to pose significant challenges for organisations. Although D&I discourse has evolved, they are frequently recycled in ways that fail to

address structural discrimination (Oswick & Noon, 2014). In practice, organisations often rely on standardised “best practice” approaches that prioritise symbolic legitimacy over substantive change (Ashley & Empson, 2016). Consequently, D&I programmes commonly reproduce dominant norms rather than transform them (Dobbin & Kalev, 2017).

These limitations are particularly visible within the construction sector, where longstanding inequalities remain entrenched despite repeated interventions (Fielden et al., 2020). D&I frameworks are often imported from professional service environments with little adaptation to the sector’s cultural and structural dynamics. As a result, policy discourses risk reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than challenging them. Organisational narratives increasingly locate inequality in the talent pipeline rather than institutional practices (Galea & Chappell, 2022). Many initiatives seek to assimilate women into prevailing masculine norms (Ghalebeigi et al., 2023) or assume that equality will follow increased recruitment of women (Galea et al., 2015). While strategies may lead to gains in representation, they fail to address structural conditions such as extended working hours, inflexible schedules and informal career progression (Galea et al., 2015). Consequently, increases in diversity do not necessarily yield inclusion or advancement; interventions designed to support women’s careers may instead enhance opportunities for men (French & Strachan, 2015).

Work in the construction trades continues to be shaped by a hyper masculine culture characterised by long hours, physically demanding labour and competitive individualism, reinforced through camaraderie and “lads’ banter” (Hanna et al., 2020). Although norms can negatively affect men’s wellbeing, they also create barriers for women and minority groups. Women’s presence often disrupts the idealised masculine worker archetype, prompting hostility, heightened scrutiny of competence and persistent gendered biases (Foley et al., 2022). Sexist, racist and homophobic harassment remains common and is frequently dismissed as harmless humour (Kelly et al., 2015). Cultural barriers intersect with structural constraints, including inadequate facilities, male dominated recruitment networks, limited support for apprentices from minority backgrounds and the absence of flexible working arrangements that disadvantage workers with caring responsibilities (Galea et al., 2023). Together, these conditions produce an environment that rewards assimilation into restrictive norms and leaves limited space for meaningful inclusion.

This paper draws on a four-year action research project conducted across three major UK highways construction schemes. Drawing on 95 interviews and focus groups with 42 participants, we developed a D&I toolkit tailored to the operational and cultural realities of highways construction. We outline the strategies generated, examine challenges associated with their implementation in male dominated contexts and assess their impacts on the recruitment, retention and progression of women in the trades. In doing so, we demonstrate the necessity of context specific, empirically informed approaches to D&I rather than generic, off the shelf solutions derived from cross industry trends. Finally, we propose a blueprint for the highways sector and the broader built environment aimed at supporting the development of evidence based D&I interventions capable of driving meaningful change.

Worker subjectivities, experience and agency - Room 0.13

Airline Pilots amidst a Pernicious Pluracrisis

*Paul White, Geraint Harvey, Geoff Wood
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The concept of polycrisis, coined by Morin and Kern (1999: 74), refers to multiple complex ‘interwoven and overlapping crises’ that threaten the planet (see also Tooze 2022; Cant 2025; Janzwood & Homer-Dixon, 2022). Whilst polycrisis operates at the global level and poses an existential threat to humanity and indeed the planet, it is useful to consider the confluence of crises that impact individual nations, organizations or occupational groups discretely. Our focus is the multiple, interacting crises each diminishing or amplifying another crisis that affect a particular occupational group; in this case the airline pilot. We propose the term pluracrisis to distinguish the confluence of crises that pose an existential threat to airline pilots but in so doing also jeopardise airline sustainability.

Drawing on data from a global survey of airline pilots with more than 3500 respondents and 20 interviews, the paper identifies four distinct but interdependent crises. While several of these reflect the culmination of long-standing tensions in the employment relationship between pilots and airlines, they represent crises as a consequence of their concomitance. First, there is the impending crisis of pilot health with the mental health of pilots a particular concern (see Cahill et al., 2021; Venus & Grosse Holtforth 2021; Wu et al., 2016). Second, there is a shortage of commercial airline pilots (see for example, Di Trapani, 2026). Third, the study data reveals a reluctance for pilots to seek promotion to command posts due to the workload implications and additional stress. Finally, pilots are not immune to the “Great Reshuffle” as they now face an existential threat from AI-enabled organisational technologies (Gasparre & Tirabeni, 2023), within a broader reproduction of technological determinism (Veblen, 1919 [1992]; Brette, 2003; Papageorgiou & Michaelides, 2016).

The promise (or threat) of a pilot-less flight deck became very real with proposal ‘A41-WP/99’ for reduced crew operations made to the 41st session of the International Civil Aviation Organization Assembly. Technology has supplemented the work of airline pilots, however, with advancements in AI embodied in Airbus’s Project Dragonfly there is the very real threat of technological substitution of airline pilots and occupational obsolescence for the group.

The paper draws on a large scale primary data-set in order to document the pluracrisis facing pilots. It also analyses secondary data in order to show how the International Federation of Air Line Pilots’ Associations, the European Cockpit Association and the Air Line Pilots Association have engaged in effective technocratic (Erne 2008) resistance to AI substitution of pilots.

Lost in Remotization: Aspirations and the Relationship with Work after the Covid-19 Pandemic

Francesco Gentilini

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The Covid-19 pandemic did not merely alter the spatial organization of work. It also reconfigured, for many workers, the very terms through which work was evaluated, experienced, and rendered acceptable. The large-scale expansion of remote work made alternative arrangements of everyday life both materially possible and experientially familiar, thereby reshaping workers’ aspirations and their relationship with work. From this perspective, post-pandemic disputes over remote work cannot be reduced to conflicts over a marginal benefit or a technical mode of organizing labour. Rather, they reveal a more far-reaching transformation in work-related expectations, priorities, and thresholds of acceptability. Attention to these transformations makes it possible to illuminate how remote work redefined orientations toward time, autonomy, physical presence, and everyday life, and why its restriction or withdrawal became a salient source of contention even in contexts historically characterized by low levels of labour conflict.

The analysis draws on fourteen semi-structured interviews conducted between December 2024 and March 2025 with white-collar workers and union actors in two large Italian companies - respectively in the insurance the media sector - where management significantly curtailed remote work after the emergency phase. These organizational settings are marked by comparatively favourable employment conditions, above-average wages, extensive welfare provisions, and limited traditions of overt conflict. Precisely for this reason, the emergence of mobilization around remote work is sociologically significant: what came under contestation was not simply the withdrawal of a convenient arrangement, but the redefinition of the terms under which work itself was considered livable, legitimate, and compatible with a desirable organization of life.

Particular emphasis is placed on aspirations, understood not as stable individual preferences but as socially mediated and historically revisable orientations. In this sense, remote work is significant not only because it modified the practical organization of daily life, but also because it transformed the evaluative horizon through which work arrangements came to be judged. Interviews point to a revaluation of time (increasingly experienced as recoverable resource that could be redirected toward care, domestic life, rest, and self-directed activity) and to a transformation in the meaning of workplace presence. Once work tasks had been performed remotely over extended periods without any perceived loss of effectiveness, compulsory presence increasingly appeared, for many respondents, less as an intrinsic requirement of work than as an organizational imposition whose legitimacy had become open to question.

What emerges is not a homogeneous post-pandemic orientation toward work, but a differentiated rearticulation of the relationship with it. Remote work was valued through distinct, and only partially overlapping, constellations of autonomy, work-life balance, temporal control, and resistance to forms of supervision deemed unnecessary. Yet, a common process can be identified: remote work ceased to be experienced merely as an optional advantage and came instead to form part of an emergent threshold of acceptable work. This helps to explain why its revocation could generate discontent and, under certain conditions, collective mobilization. This contribution thus contributes to broader debates on worker subjectivities, labour conflict, and the post-pandemic transformation of aspirations and work-related worldviews.

Fit for Work? Fitness Activities and the Everyday Negotiation of Working Life

Karel Musilek, Kimberly Jamie

(Cardiff University)

Fitness activities, such as strength training, running, or hiking, are increasingly part of everyday routines of working adults in the UK and across developed countries. More people voluntarily incorporate physical training into their leisure time today than in the past, and fitness has become a prominent feature of popular culture and social media. It is also an increasing sphere of intervention for governments and employers, who view it as a tool for improving the health of the working population. We may, in short, be living in an 'age of fitness' — one that has emerged alongside growing pressures on public health provision and a broader renegotiation of the boundaries between work and personal life.

This paper asks what relationship fitness activities bear to contemporary patterns of work and employment. It starts from the well-established premise that work and leisure are interconnected. Work structures possibilities for leisure — by determining disposable income, available time, and energy. Leisure frequently serves work-related functions, providing relaxation and thus reproducing labour power. Fitness is becoming an increasingly significant part of leisure routines, yet its relationship to work has not been explicitly examined by sociologists.

We explore this question from participants' own perspectives, reporting findings from qualitative interviews conducted in 2025 with UK working adults who regularly engage in fitness activities. Our findings show three main themes. First, participants frequently described fitness as a project of personal transformation — feeling healthier, but also experiencing a greater general capacity to act in the world. Second, this enhanced capacity benefits employers: participants reported that fitness makes them more alert, physically capable, and better equipped to cope with stress and its mental health impacts — what we term the 'free gifts of fitness'. Third, fitness also worked against work's demands. Participants maintained training schedules that placed practical limits on working time and drew on physical wellbeing as a source of self-worth independent of professional achievement. Fitness further served as a vantage point from which to reflect critically on work's costs — its inflexibility, overtime, and cumulative demands — in ways that went beyond simply coping with them.

These findings speak to, and complicate, established sociological accounts of fitness. Critical scholars have interpreted the fitness boom as an extension of disciplinary power into leisure time, a further individualisation of health, or the latest frontier for human capital maximisation — individuals lifting and sweating in service of production and commerce. This critique captures something real, but tells only part of the story. By focusing on what fitness does for capital, it misses what fitness does for workers. Our data suggests that the capacities and commitments fitness produces — the schedules, the boundaries, the alternative sense of self — can function as practical resources in the everyday negotiation of work demands. Fitness is not merely a product of contemporary work demands; it is also becoming a response to them, and one with genuine, if modest, critical potential that sociology has so far underestimated.



DRINKS RECEPTION AND POSTER PRESENTATIONS

**Wednesday 9 September 2026
18:00-19:00
Pavilion, School of Management**

Delegates are invited to visit the poster presentations and join us for an evening of conversation and connection with fellow attendees, presenters, and exhibitors. Complimentary alcoholic and soft drinks will be provided, offering a relaxed setting to meet colleagues on the first evening of the conference and speak with poster presenters. Attendance is open to all delegates and no registration is required.

Abstracts for all posters can be found below and in the separate document titled ['Abstract Book - Posters'](#).

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

Care infrastructures, social reproduction and the crisis of care

When Care Policy Becomes Usable: Policy Salience, Self-use and Second-birth Intentions among Employed Mothers in South Korea

Yidan Ning, Chong Hyun Park

(Sungkyunkwan University)

South Korea has expanded family-friendly policies in response to persistently low fertility, yet the link between policy provision and childbearing remains weak. A key reason may be that policy availability within employment systems does not automatically translate into support that workers can recognise as usable or mobilise in everyday care arrangements. Existing debates have focused mainly on the formal provision of parental leave, childcare services, and reduced working hours, while paying less attention to how such measures are converted into practical reproductive support. This paper examines whether the relevance of care infrastructure for second-birth intention lies less in policy availability itself than in its perceived usability and prior use, drawing on a capability-oriented distinction between provision and conversion.

Using data from the 2024 National Family and Fertility Survey, the study analyses employed mothers with one child and estimates a sequential hierarchical logistic regression model predicting second-birth intention. Four blocks are introduced: demographic controls; policy salience (whether parental leave usability and childcare-service availability are identified as important conditions for childbirth); employment and work conditions (working hours, income, employment type, workplace sector, and work-life conflict); and prior policy self-use at first birth.

The results show a clear contrast between formal conditions and policy conversion. Employment and work conditions do not significantly improve model fit as a block. By contrast, policy salience is positively associated with second-birth intention: mothers who identify parental leave usability as an important condition show about 2.2 times higher odds of intending a second birth, and those who identify childcare-service availability as important show about 2.0 times higher odds. In addition, mothers who previously used a family-friendly policy at first birth show nearly 2.8 times higher odds of second-birth intention. Although fewer than one in ten respondents identify either policy item as an important childbearing condition, these perceptions are strongly associated with reproductive intention where they are present.

The findings suggest that care infrastructure matters not only through formal provision, but through whether workers encounter it as genuinely usable and actionable support under concrete employment conditions. The paper contributes to debates on care infrastructure, social reproduction, and the crisis of care by showing that the policy-fertility link is shaped less by the formal presence of work-family measures than by their conversion into lived and usable reproductive support.

Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification

The Hidden Cost of Menstruation-related Absenteeism in the UK and Productivity Gap in a Permanent Polycrisis

Afnan Gohar

(University of Lancashire Alumna)

The UK exists in a constant state of polycrisis defined by the 'snowball' effects of post COVID-19 recovery, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, energy crisis, rising inflation (Lloyd and Blakemore, 2023), and the escalating geopolitical tensions between the US and Middle East. These crises have pushed UK's inflation levels to rise from 2.1% to 2.7% (British Chambers of Commerce, 2026), placing unexpected pressures on nationwide productivity.

There is an invisible force within the UK's labour market behind these aforementioned macro-economic shifts: the neglected reality of working women's reproductive health. The NHS Confederation (2024) reports that absenteeism related to severe menstrual pain, endometriosis, and other menstrual-related issues costs the UK economy an estimated £11 billion annually, a systemic implementation gap persists between this socio-economic evidence and national policy.

Drawing on the author's research, recently cited (Gohar, 2025) by the Women and Equalities Committee's inquiry into menstrual health (2026), this paper examines the disconnect between empirical data and statutory workplace reform. By presenting these findings, this research offers insights for the UK's labour market policy by reframing menstrual health from a purely clinical concern to a significant, yet silent, productivity issue.

A qualitative approach is used to critique the persistent use of linear productivity models that assume a static, non-cyclical, male-centric ("androcentric") prototype (Bailey et al., 2019). As a result, current flexible work policies systemically exclude women and female-fronted occupations (Jacobi et al., 2025).

Findings of this study show that employees favour formal menstrual policies, in both a 'menstrual leave' or flexible form, giving them the right to adjust work environments without the stigma of medical disclosure. It is argued that the absence of a national framework for menstrual flexibility represents a critical gap in national economic strategy. The research reframes menstrual health issues as an economic competitiveness issue, challenging the androcentric foundations of workplace productivity models.

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Open Stream

Mobile Labour Regimes: Technology, Control and Migrant Labour in European Trucking

Davide Marchi

(University of Milano-Bicocca)

Over the last decades, the occupation of long-haul truck driving has undergone significant transformations. Digital technologies and advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) have reshaped driving practices, while digital fleet management systems enable companies to monitor and coordinate drivers' activities in real time (Levy, 2023; Levy & Barocas, 2018; Gong et al., 2025). At the same time, the sector has experienced important changes in workforce composition, with an increasing recruitment of migrant workers from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa (Benedetti et al., 2025; van Gardingen & Atema, 2023). This paper asks how technological change interacts with the growing internationalisation of the workforce in the European road transport sector. More specifically, it investigates how digital technologies reshape the organisation of work, the autonomy of drivers and the living and working conditions of workers in long-haul trucking.

The paper contributes to debates on the relationship between technology and labour by connecting research on digital workplace surveillance with the literature on labour regimes. Building on the concept of dormitory labour regimes (Smith, 2003; Pun & Smith, 2010), the paper introduces the idea of "dormitories on wheels" to describe a labour regime in which the truck functions simultaneously as workplace and living space. This perspective highlights how technological coordination and spatial arrangements combine to structure labour control in transnational transport networks.

The analysis draws on academic and grey literature on the road transport sector, available statistical data, and empirical material collected within an ongoing qualitative research project. The empirical component combines ethnographic observation with thirty in-depth interviews with actors involved in the sector, including truck drivers, union officials, employers, and representatives of sectoral associations.

Preliminary findings suggest that technological innovations do not simply lead to deskilling but rather to forms of reskilling, as the skill requirements of the occupation are transformed. At the same time, these technologies facilitate new forms of labour control and workforce segmentation. Digital coordination systems reduce drivers' autonomy while enabling firms to manage geographically dispersed labour forces. At the same time, drivers are often channelled into work arrangements that require long periods spent living in trucks, effectively transforming vehicles into mobile dormitories. These dynamics contribute to the emergence of a labour regime that combines digital surveillance, spatial isolation and migrant labour recruitment.

Mapping Emergent Professional Identity in Early Career Formation: Identity Circles as a Visual Analytic Method

Catherine Mobley

(Clemson University)

Research on professional identity development is well established, but has focused disproportionately on biomedical and applied professional fields. Across disciplines, this work has relied primarily on interviews and surveys, methods that offer rich accounts of meaning-making but are limited in visualising how identities are organised, prioritised, and negotiated across disciplinary and social locations. This poster presents identity circles as a visual analytic method for examining emergent professional identities and early career orientations among undergraduate students, positioning the approach as both a methodological and analytical contribution to the sociology of work and occupations.

Identity circles are a visual elicitation technique in which participants map salient aspects of self, including disciplinary affiliation, professional aspirations, social identities, and personal commitments, around a central sense of identity. The spatial arrangement of these elements provides nuanced insight into which identities are central, marginalised, or held in tension. As an analytic tool, identity circles complement interview data by capturing hierarchies, boundaries, and relational dynamics that are difficult to surface through narrative alone, enabling systematic comparison across cases.

The poster draws on illustrative undergraduate identity circles collected as part of a multi-year research programme on student identity development. The cases, purposively selected as analytic exemplars, span engineering, bioscience, and sociology, and include students from different social locations that shape recognition and access within disciplinary and professional spaces. The cases are used comparatively to examine how disciplinary contexts and social position structure students' imagined

occupational futures and orientations to work. Three comparative dimensions are well-suited to visual analysis: (1) the relative centrality of disciplinary and professional identities within students' overall identity configurations; (2) how forms of expertise, legitimacy, and authority associated with different disciplines are positioned within those configurations; and (3) the ways social location intersects with disciplinary context to shape belonging, recognition, and future orientation. Across cases, identity circles reveal patterned contrasts in how students imagine themselves as students and emerging workers, including moments of ambivalence, partial identification, and boundary crossing that are frequently obscured in interview-only analyses.

By centering identity formation at an early, pre-employment stage, the poster contributes to sociological understandings of how expectations about work, career pathways, and professional possibility are formed. These identity configurations illuminate how disciplinary norms, social location, and institutional contexts shape confidence, coherence, and perceived opportunity. The narratives offer insight into how inequalities and stratification are reproduced or contested prior to employment. Identity circles thus make visible how students assemble understandings of future work, expertise, and belonging upstream of labour-market entry.

Theoretically, the poster advances work on emergent professional identity by conceptualising identity formation as relational, uneven, and organised across multiple domains of self. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of identity circles as a comparative visual method that enhances theory building around work identities and disciplinary boundaries. Visual methods such as identity circles offer a powerful addition to sociological research on work and employment, particularly in fields characterised by diffuse, contested, or non-linear career pathways in periods of labour-market uncertainty.

Worker subjectivities, experience and agency

A Life Course Perspective to Sustainable Employment for People Living with HIV in the UK

Wezi Thamm

(Newcastle University)

This paper examines how people living with HIV navigate employment across the life course, focusing on the structural, psychosocial, and institutional factors that shape sustainable employment in the UK. Despite biomedical advances transforming HIV into a manageable chronic condition, stigma, discrimination, and labour market inequalities persist, raising important sociological questions about work, disability, and inclusion. This study addresses problems of how individuals living with HIV experience employment disruption, negotiate workplace environments, and re-engage with work following periods of ill health or absence.

The research is theoretically grounded in a life-course perspective to sustainable employment, foregrounding temporal transitions, cumulative disadvantage, and the interaction between individual agency and structural constraints. This is further extended through Position Exchange Theory, which conceptualises how individuals move between social roles and identities over time. Together, these frameworks enable an analysis of employment not as a linear trajectory but as a dynamic, disrupted process shaped by health, stigma, and institutional responses.

Methodologically, the study adopts a phenomenological approach using a qualitative survey of 57 adults living with HIV in the UK, recruited through HIV organisations and advocacy networks. Data collection was through open-ended online questions and analysed using a hybrid of inductive, deductive and reflexive thematic analysis. This approach facilitated in-depth exploration of lived experience, while generating analytically robust themes across the dataset.

Findings reveal that employment trajectories are frequently disrupted by both physical and mental health challenges, including medication side effects, fatigue, and psychological distress following diagnosis. Work breaks are common, compounded by stigma, fear of disclosure, and workplace discrimination, which shapes career decisions, limits opportunities, and contributes to precarious employment patterns. Participants described managing a "double burden" of health and concealment, with non-disclosure generating ongoing emotional challenges and identity fragmentation. Structural misalignment between workplace practices and the episodic nature of living with HIV further exacerbates these challenges. However, supportive environments—characterised by flexible working

arrangements, informed management, reasonable adjustments—significantly enhance employment sustainability. Remote working, peer support networks, and access to digital resources also emerged as critical facilitators.

The study contributes to the sociology of work and employment by advancing a life-course conceptualization of sustainable employment for people living with chronic conditions. It frames stigma and portrays disclosure as a continuous challenge rather than a one time decision. Empirically, it provides new evidence on the interplay between health, identity, and work in contemporary employment contexts. The research is at an advanced stage: data collection is complete, thematic analysis has been conducted, and findings are being integrated into a broader doctoral research. The paper offers implications for policy and practice, particularly in relation to workplace inclusion, employer training, and the alignment of employment systems with fluctuating work capacity.

When Cognition Becomes Partially Externalised: Generative AI, Cognitive Work, and Reflexive Regulation in Knowledge-intensive Managerial Work

Virpi Kalakoski, Hilpi Kangas, Tiina Heusala, Matti Laukkarinen, Virpi Kalakoski, Heidi Lahti
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The rapid diffusion of generative artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming knowledge-intensive work by intervening directly in tasks traditionally reliant on human cognition, such as producing and revising text, synthesising information, and generating ideas. While existing research has largely focused on AI adoption and productivity gains, less attention has been paid to how AI reshapes cognitive work in everyday tasks.

This study examines how generative AI reshapes cognitive job demands and functions as a cognitive resource in knowledge-intensive managerial work, focusing on roles characterised by high autonomy in AI use. In such contexts, individuals can actively regulate when and how cognitive tasks are delegated to AI. The study asks: how is cognitive work reorganised as cognition becomes partially externalised?

The study draws on semi-structured interviews with seven managers and directors from multiple industries who use generative AI in their work. In addition to formal interview questions, the interviews included a segment where participants demonstrated their AI use in practice. Analytically, the study combines the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework with an inductive template analysis, focusing on cognitive work activities embedded in everyday managerial practice. In addition to examining changes in cognitive demands and resources, the analysis also attends to participants' reflexive regulation of AI use, understood as ongoing reflection and negotiation over when to delegate tasks to AI, how far to rely on it, and where to draw boundaries. Data were collected in December 2025 and January 2026, and analysis is ongoing.

Preliminary findings indicate that generative AI functions in three ways: 1) as a task-performing cognitive resource that often reduces cognitive demands, 2) as a capability-expanding resource, and 3) as a source of new or intensified cognitive demands. Thus, AI does not simply replace cognitive work but appears to reorganise it by shifting cognitive effort and introducing new cognitive demands. In particular, cognitive effort shifts from producing information toward evaluation, verification, and iterative guidance of AI outputs, while core activities such as prioritisation, judgement, and meaning-making remain human-centred in the accounts analysed.

Importantly, these transformations are shaped through reflexive regulation. Participants decided which cognitive tasks to delegate to AI and which to retain, while also reflecting on the reliability of AI outputs, the limits of their own expertise, and the boundaries of AI use. This included efforts to preserve cognitive skills, as well as the relational aspects of managerial work.

The study contributes to the sociology of work by conceptualising generative AI as a reconfigurator of cognitive work rather than a tool of simple substitution. It contributes to debates on expertise and cognitive labor by showing how generative AI both reduces and creates cognitive demands, performing some tasks while producing new requirements for critical oversight and direction. In addition, it foregrounds reflexive regulation as a key mechanism through which workers shape the consequences of AI use, particularly under conditions of discretion. More broadly, the findings show that AI must be understood as a technology that reorders cognitive labour, with implications for expertise, autonomy, and the social organisation of work.



BATH WALKING TOUR

How Bath Has Adapted Through Upheaval

Wednesday 9 September

19:00-21:00

Abbey Churchyard

Discover the history of Bath through the lens of adaptation and change on this guided walking tour, specially designed to complement the conference theme. Beginning at 19:00 on Wednesday 9 September from Abbey Churchyard, the tour will explore how Bath and its communities have responded to social, environmental, and economic upheaval over the past 2000 years, from its Roman origins to its transition from a wool and cloth industry centre to a world-renowned tourism destination. Along the route, you will see many of Bath's iconic landmarks, including Bath Abbey, the Roman Baths, Theatre Royal, The Circus, Royal Crescent, Assembly Rooms, and Pulteney Bridge.

The tour lasts up to two hours and tickets are £11.25 per person. Spaces are very limited and advanced booking is required.