

# Editorial

## Richard Ennals

The growing field of “Workplace Innovation” now links many previously separate themes, at several levels (workplace, meso, national, European, international, global). It provides a rich context in which previously separate debates can be linked.

We can identify several consistent themes in the European Journal of Workplace Innovation since 2015. There has been an emphasis on cases based in the workplace, and on “learning from differences”. Since the first issue of the journal, several research traditions have been accommodated in a pluralist European culture of EJWI.

Today we see interest in Workplace Innovation beyond Europe: in both industrialised and developing countries. It offers a fresh conceptual framework for economic and social development, expressed in organisational terms. This does not mean imposing a new orthodoxy, but embracing variety, which is captured, for example, in Peter Totterdill’s account of “Closing the Gap: The Fifth Element and Workplace Innovation” (in EJWI 1.1 2015)

In EJWI 7.2 2022, papers consider a broad range of topics.

Khoon Seang Kang (Singapore) addresses “Digital Technology in a crisis: Role and importance of Workplace Innovation (WPI) in relation to digital company strategies”.

The global Covid pandemic has been economically and organisationally disruptive, revealing vulnerability to crisis. This paper concentrates on responses in the financial sector in Singapore, in the context of concerns for Workplace Innovation. It is based on an analysis of 200 newspaper stories April – August 2021, together with 950 journals, with a focus on the adoption of digital technologies. Are financial services companies establishing robust business plans to improve their long-term viability and resilience? A number of cases are explored. Employee engagement was shown to be important. Workplace Innovation was part of a short-term strategic approach, and there was diffusion of new techniques.

Simone Rom and Kai Roland Green (Germany), use Action Research in “Exploring Workplace Innovation in diverse and low-skill settings: reflections on using Critical Utopian Action Research”.

Unusually, this paper deals with low skilled and ethnically diverse workers and considers the strengths and weaknesses of the use of Action Research, using the Nordic approach of Critical Utopian Action Research in a short exploration of a Future Creating Workshop. The focus is

on Empowerment and Participation, in a context of Social Innovation and Workplace Innovation. The case study company is in the German textile industry, where tensions are explored, together with the importance of language skills and an emancipatory approach. Engaging the workforce revealed some unexpected priorities. The paper has implications for Small and Medium sized Enterprises internationally, and for workplaces with diverse employees.

Oskar Pakos, Tobias T Eismann, Martin Meinel and Kai-Ingo Voight (Germany) focus on creative workplaces, in *“More than meets the eye”: Unveiling the potential of creative workplaces in modern organisations”*.

The work environment is seen as influencing creative behaviour. Designing, planning and implementing changes at the level of individual employees is complex. 20 experts were interviewed, and their answers were compared to findings in the literature. There had been limited awareness of the organisational impact of changes, and how creativity enhancement could be an explicit goal. *“New Work”* involves moving flexibly between team-based and individual work, as well as concentrated work and relaxation. Often employers focus on costs and productivity. Employee satisfaction should be maintained. The literature on Physical Work Environment was reviewed. Taking corporate values into account had a culture-reinforcing effect. Employee well-being could be improved. Employee reactions were only partly anticipated. It was recommended that organisations should make creativity and innovation a strategic priority, develop a suitable workplace strategy, consider physical and social processes, and think beyond the physical design, providing separate spaces for privacy and communication.

Kristin Lebesby, Hanne Finnestrand and Ola Edvin Vie have brought together several strands of international research in *“Co-Creating New Dancefloors through a Parallel Organisation: Organisational Development through Union-Management Cooperation in the Public Sector.”*

The paper moves on from metaphors of *“boxing and dancing”*, to explore the role of a parallel organisation, alongside the operational organisation. This allows the clearing away of some bureaucratic barriers and strengthens the role of trade unions in the public sector. The project was based on Action Research for organisational development and builds on work by researchers such as Huzzard and Oeij. It echoes the approach taken by Gustavsen to development organisations. There is more dialogue and less emphasis on number crunching.

The paper brings together Norwegian work in the Industrial Democracy tradition, with a focus on communication, collaboration and the development and implementation of new technology. The Action Research project plays a vital role, with reliance on a level of trust. Future work should explore greater involvement of ordinary employees in parallel organisations.

Paul Preenen reviewed “Sustainable Work in Europe: Concepts, Conditions, Challenges” (eds. Kenneth Abrahamsson and Richard Ennals; Peter Lang, Berlin 2022).

This publishing project illustrates how collaboration can be developed, and the enabling role of EJWI. A core of Swedish research was complemented by contributions from other European traditions (Norwegian, Dutch, British and EU collaborations). With a foundation of Swedish research presented in “Work Life 2000: Quality in Work” (Yearbooks ed. Ennals; Springer, London 1999, 2000, 2001), there was a Vinnova project: “Swedish Working Life Research and Sustainable Work”, which led to EJWI special issue 6.1-2 March 2021, and then the book.

In the globalised economy, we need to consider the world beyond Europe. The debate in EJWI should now be broadened. Papers are now being submitted from around the world. We should move beyond a Euro-centric view of knowledge, science and technology.

For example, Amazon is the world’s largest technology company, with a dominant global presence, and it has been engaged in struggle with the San and Khoi indigenous peoples in South Africa, as Amazon seek to build their new African headquarters on an environmentally vulnerable floodplain, on land with a strong heritage significance, based on resistance to foreign invaders. The impact on business and society in Africa will be considerable.

Pre-colonial approaches to knowledge were different, with deep links between people and nature in their local environments. As we now seek to decolonise accounts of knowledge production and dissemination, we encounter major issues which are now, for example, being decided in the South African Supreme Court of Appeal. There are profound implications for First Nations around the world as they interact with global companies.

EJWI was founded in 2015, to work with the European Network for Workplace Innovation (EUWIN) in the context of European Commission programmes and policies. We share common assumptions and experiences. Many countries work together in the EU, NATO and the new European Political Community. We are accustomed to pooling sovereignty, drawing on common traditions, and working in the contexts of globalisation and economic instability.

The EJWI 7.1 Editorial considered the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. This EJWI 7.2 Editorial is written in the context of continuing War in Europe. What will be the impact on the “Workplace Innovation movement”? EUWIN and EJWI have been part of an optimistic view of Europe, at the end of the era of post-Cold War dialogue. We can now see concerns such as a defensive focus on cybersecurity, the energy crisis, and the cost of living. There are risks of a return of top-down management, weakening of employee driven innovation, and a challenge to benign European assumptions behind Human Centred Systems.

Future historians may suggest that we have reached the end of “the age of innocence”. We had complemented “Competitive Advantage” with “Collaborative Advantage”. We have

focused on the role of the workplace. Learning lessons from the Covid pandemic, we gained experience of remote working: a new paradigm, including exploration of “Healthy Working Centres”.

A journal such as EJWI can be seen as an active international network. Working with EUWIN, and with new collaborative projects in Europe and beyond, we can plan next steps, and engage with global agendas. We anticipate a strong and sustainable future for the journal, with contributions from beyond Europe.