

Editorial

Pasts, Present and Futures

Richard Ennals
Editor-in-Chief

The European Journal of Workplace Innovation (EJWI) was launched in 2013, in support of the European Workplace Innovation Network (EUWIN). Hosted by the University of Agder in Norway, and publishing from 2015, EJWI is free, open access and online at www.ejwi.eu. Past issues are freely available at the website. After a decade, it is a good time to reflect on the journey so far.

We have drawn on traditions of past pioneering work by a generation of researchers, including Björn Gustavsen, Morten Levin and Olav Eikeland from Norway. Obituaries of Morten Levin (by Olav Eikeland, Davydd Greenwood, Roger Klev, Ann Martin and Johan Ravn) and Olav Eikeland (by Hans Christian Garmann Johnsen and Richard Ennals) are published in this issue of EJWI. Our thoughts must now turn to successor generations.

EUWIN and EJWI, in combination, have created a fresh present space for ongoing dialogue between previously separate traditions of research and practice. The editorial strategy for EJWI has been pluralist from the start, when it was set out by the first Editor in Chief, Øyvind Pålshaugen. Over the decade we have developed a common language with which to describe diverse experiences. See the paper by Peter Totterdill in EJWI 1.1, introducing “The Fifth Element”, and review articles by Richard Ennals in this issue on books on Workplace Innovation and Gender Inequality.

EJWI has provided a context for publishing a diverse range of current research, including Shruti Raghuraman, Susan Reh, Asa Lundqvist, Emma Jeanes, Laura Trigg and Victoria Tischler, on the experience of older female workers in the European labour market; and Abdulqadir Mohamad Suleiman on work environment development using cognitive work analysis decision ladders.

EUWIN has been created as a ready-made institutional platform to facilitate funded support for collaboration between members. Workplace Innovation has now achieved recognition, for example from the European Commission, with a series of funded collaborative projects, as reported by Frank Pot in this issue. This has culminated in the Bridges 5.0 project, led by Steven Dhondt of TNO: four years of funding began at the start of 2023.

Industry 4.0, a concept first developed based on theory and practice in Germany, provides a suitable focus point for comparing and contrasting alternative converging approaches, with experimental work now being conducted beyond Europe, around the world. See the papers

reflecting on experience in Finland (the evaluation paper by Tuomo Alasoini and Kirsikka Selander) and China (the paper by Yuxin Li, Jiang Yang and Chris Warhurst on measuring innovation in China). See also Peter Totterdill's account of his visit to Korea with Peter Oeij, building on long collaboration, and with a focus on "Learning from Differences: Workplace Innovation, Digitalisation and Working Life".

Current discussion of Industry 5.0 may be a precursor to renewed diversity, as "a hundred flowers bloom". We may expect "several futures". The Swedish tradition of Working Life Research has been strong and cohesive for many decades, and, within a broader European context, provides the framework for a future EJWI special issue on "Green Skills, Workplace Innovation and Just Transition": see the Call for Papers from Kenneth Abrahamsson, Denis Coelho, Steven Dhondt, Ulrika Harlin, Chris Mathieu and Richard Ennals. Following a decade of EUWIN and EJWI, the special issue seeks to be European rather than narrowly Swedish.

Workplace Innovation has been taken up more widely, both in industrialised and developing countries. Thomas Carey, Anahita Baregheh, Felix Nobis and Mathias Stevenson have taken on the important challenge of mainstreaming Workplace Innovation in Business Education, with an account of collaboration between Canadian and Australian universities.

In summary, Workplace Innovation is now a strong focal theme when considering business development and business education. It offers a way forward from the previous orthodoxies based on "seeking competitive advantage", with a unifying vocabulary. The literature has achieved a critical mass, linking academic theory and business practice. There has been a period when the discourse of Workplace Innovation, linked to the orthodoxy of Industry 4.0, has enabled new discussions and collaborations across traditional boundaries in the "present". It may be that we will now need to think in terms of "futures" rather than a single future. New initiatives, such as the special issue on "Green Skills, Workplace Innovation and Just Transition", and possible special issues based on "Bridges 5.0", draw on previous distinctive traditions, from several "pasts".