

Sustainability – despair and a call for renewed hope

Welcome to the first issue of volume 12, which brings us into 2020. Entering a new decade seems to spark conversations about leap changes or transitions into new spaces and lives with hope and renewed hope for something different. Yet it seems like many of us have entered 2020 with despair rather than hope. In the first half of 2020, we have seen violence and destruction on the global stage – the assassination of military leaders by American troops, the further destabilisation of the European bloc with retrograde steps of human rights and the horrific bushfires ravaging communities across Australia: and as this issue goes to print the world is dealing with the unprecedented implications of trying to manage the Covid-19 pandemic. There remains a lot of pain from such events, and it is important to acknowledge this with compassion. We know of *Journal of Work-Applied Management (JWAM)* editorial board and panel, reviewers and readers who have been affected by such events and want to extend our love and compassion in ways to support you. We encourage readers to help where they can in their respective communities to share their talents to help recovery.

Closer to home, as you may have heard, previous Editor-in-Chief of the *JWAM* Professor Ruth Helyer passed away suddenly a few months ago, leaving her loving husband, children and grandchildren and an international network of friends who have been collectively saddened by a great loss. Please read the beautiful words of respect here: the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (<https://www.uallworkandlearning.org/in-memory-of-ruth-helyer/>), the University Vocational Awards Council (<https://uvac.ac.uk/professor-ruth-helyer/>) and Professor Jonathan Garnett's words in the *Work-Based Learning eJournal* (http://wblearning-ejournal.com/uploads/text_with_images/workbasedlearningejournalvolume8n220191576140611.pdf). The editorial team and Emerald have been incredible in providing compassion to each other, and we will of course continue and support others in the *JWAM* family. A number of us have already committed to continuing the exemplary work that Ruth contributed over decades and the love she shared in the world.

The first issue of *JWAM* this year focusses on sustainability; an issue which remains significant, with public, private and third sector organisations declaring Climate Emergency across the globe (see <https://climateemergencydeclaration.org/>). The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>) provide a wide ranging framework to structure our thinking and action about such developments and include priorities such as tackling hunger (SDG 2), enhancing the health and wellbeing of people in organisations or disadvantaged communities (SDG 3), ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education (SDG 4), promoting gender equality (SDG 5), ensuring access to water and energy for all (SDG 6&7), enhancing the quality of work (SDG 8), creating sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG 12), tackling climate change (SDG 13), building accountable and inclusive institutions (SDG 16) or strengthening global partnership for sustainable development (SDG 17). Yet despite some empirical work (see [Wall et al., 2017b, c](#); [Rossetti and Wall, 2017](#)), the empirical and practical evidence suggests that sustainability has not been a significant driver in the workplace ([Wall, 2017](#); [Wall et al.,](#)



2017a). Please see the largest publishing project on the SDGs: The Encyclopedia of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (<https://www.springer.com/series/15893>).

We are not sure how much hope was with us when we entered 2020, but we do want to hold onto the possibility of hope as a way of dealing with events. It is neither realistic nor helpful to assume that work-applied methods such as action research, action learning and work-based learning work most generatively when hope is part of the recipe. Such approaches have been used to directly tackle interpersonal or institutional conflicts and individual or collective trauma, even in some horrific or harrowing scenarios. But we do know that having some modicum of hope – or even some positive emotion that the people involved in change efforts can assert and describe for themselves – can really mobilise change (see [Wall et al., 2017c](#); [Rossetti and Wall, 2017](#)). Part of the task here is to be able to appreciate – or value – what that glimmer of hope can be. This is no mean feat and can include noticing, for example, that single, innocent voice asking us to care for the planet, in a room crowded with loud, political giants seeking economic growth. Here, I am of course referring to Greta Thunberg. Hope means different things for different people, and we hope that this special issue curated by Scott Foster, Prikshat Verma, Mohsen Varsei and myself brings different glimpses of hope for more sustainable development in a broad sense.

In the first article, “Developing 21st Century Leaders, a Complete New Process” by John Knights, Danielle Grant and Greg Young ([Knights et al., 2020](#)), we learn about how ethics is being embedded into leadership development. Here, granular descriptors of behaviour ([Wall and Knights, 2013](#)) are used alongside forms of action learning to decentre self-serving behaviours and heighten awareness of impact on others and the world around us. The authors refer to this as moving from *rational, ego-based, as usual leadership* to *radical, ethically authentic leadership*. It seems to me that “leading beyond the ego” reorients us to consider the needs of others (including our communities, our planet and the co-inhabitants of our planet).

The next article is “Work, Resilience and Sustainable Futures” ([Fergusson et al., 2020](#)) by Lee Fergusson, Luke van der Laan, Bradley Shallies and Matthew Baird. This research team, using cases from Australasia and Asia, help explicate the linkages and relationships between workplace environments, the nature and conception of work-related problems, capacities and resources for resilience and finally, sustainable futures. Part of the originality of this article is how such linkages implicate work-based research and so should be interesting to those designing and facilitating programmes which aim to do this.

Uzoечи Nwagbara presents the third article, “Institutions and Organisational Work-Life Balance (WLB) Policies and Practices” ([Nwagbara, 2020](#)). Whilst we know how poignant sociocultural forces can shape institutional practices, this study helps how these manifest females working in Nigeria. Gender equality remains a global sustainable development issue, and more applied research is needed to help tackle such persisting challenges.

Dieu Hack-Polay, John Opute and Mahfuzur Rahman echo some of these same issues in the next article, “Resisting Global Universalistic Practices: the Endurance of Culture and Particularism in African HRM” ([Hack-Polay et al., 2020](#)). Here, the research team investigate “the extent to which factors rooted in the cultural and institutional framework in Sub-Saharan African organisational contexts challenge and resist the penetration of global practices and how these dynamics impact on human resource management”. The study considers universalistic perspectives and associated tensions and challenges. Interestingly, they find that such people practices are “still profoundly embedded in the African cultural fabric... such aspects include collectivism and paternalism, which persistently resist change”. Understanding cultural difference and cultural mechanisms are key factors in understanding how work-applied learning and management practices are resisted or help move organisations into more sustainable positions.

The fifth paper, “Innovation Management Processes and Sustainable Iterative Circles: an Applied Integrative Approach” ([Miller et al., 2020](#)) is by Christopher Miller, Brychan Celfyn

Thomas and Michael Roeller. This paper explores how iterative cycles in a manufacturing environment can help drive new innovation practices, an important process in delivering commitments to sustainable development especially when customer-driven. The research team found that “sustainable iterative development circles overcame the inherent path-dependency of traditional linear development approaches”, in other words, provide more flexible and adaptive approaches to change. The conceptual dimensions of this approach align closely with work-applied management approaches to delivering change, but have not yet been explicitly explored.

The sixth paper brings us to the sustainable development theme related to peace and justice in communities. In the sixth paper “Evidence Based Policing: A View on its Development Within the Police Service”, Ian Pepper, Colin Rogers and Helen Martin explore the rise of “Evidence-Based Policing (EBP) as a pillar of the evolution of the police service as a profession” (Pepper *et al.*, 2020). Their reflective piece helps acknowledge some of the challenges of realising the benefits of such approaches in practice. Those involved in work-based approaches to research will find some important connections with work-applied management but also some common concerns, such as the potential for powerful approaches to be used further to deepen regimes of austerity.

The final main article in this issue returns – in an unconventional way – to the nature of leaders and their own capabilities to transform by considering contemporary efforts to embed ethical and sustainable development in the fabric of society through education (Ravenscroft and Margarison, 2020). In the final article “Coordinating Character and Curriculum for Learning and Development”, Charles J. Margerison and Michelle D. Ravenscroft outline some of the details of their own action learning with school leaders and managers to embed such capacities in schools. Specifically, this takes the form of encouraging such leaders and managers to mobilise stories at the local level to help appreciate and value cultural capital and heritage, a topic that has been reported within the *JWAM* previously (Rossetti and Wall, 2017). Being and acting local – but at the same time as appreciating global challenges – is a key concept in delivering sustainable development.

The final contribution in this issue is by Jon Talbot and Paula McIver Nottingham: “Work and Learning Conference, University of Chester, 29 May 2020” (Talbot and Nottingham, 2020). This is a call to continue the discussions sparked in this issue, and this is an opportunity to meet some of the editorial team. Specifically, I will be delivering a keynote on forms of work-applied learning and their role in driving and restraining national industrial strategies towards tackling clean growth, ageing, mobility and the growth of data analytics and artificial intelligence. You are most welcome to attend.

Once again we would like to thank the incredible work and generosity of our international panel of reviewers. We invite you to visit Emerald’s Literati Awards for Excellence where you will find details of last year’s outstanding papers and reviewers as well as highly commended papers. We hope 2020 is a compassionate year for you, your family and your local network.

Tony Wall

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