

Welcome to the first issue of the *Journal of Work-Applied Management* of 2021 and this special issue on “The nexus of work-applied skills and learning: comparative approaches across sectors”.

When we created this call for papers, we were considering the juxtaposition and role of skills and knowledge learnt in the workplace with that of academic learning (Bravenboer and Lester, 2016). The packaging up of learning into formal structures has been evident for some time, for example, in highly technical knowledge fields and sectors such as information technology. For instance, the integration of manufacturer-based training has been common practice for a number of years (Helyer, 2011). Yet such dynamics also appear in systems where work-based or workplace learning is understood through units and modules, especially where the aim of policy reform can deepen such technocratic and instrumental structures (Wall and Perrin, 2015). More recently, there has been a growing level of sophistication in the way that work-based learning and academic learning has converged. In part, this is due to the increased emphasis that policymakers have placed on, for example, apprenticeships in the United Kingdom.

This has provided a range of possibilities for developing academic programmes that integrate work-based academic learning. It has also challenged the orthodoxies around the way that work-based learning is being theorised and facilitated in higher education and blurred the boundaries between work-based and academic learning. But do such dynamics act as provocative mechanisms for workplace impact; as Ramsey (2011, 2014) and Wall (2016) suggest, do they constrain and dampen impact and innovation at work, or are we seeing new pathways of learning and impact at work?

We believe that conventions can be challenged, and novel approaches considered in order to bridge the gap between these forms of learning. When we created the call for papers for this special issue, we did not anticipate contributors would be writing, and we would be editing, in the course of a pandemic. The editors of the previous edition of the journal noted that any reference to the coronavirus would be of passing concern and most workers may be working in their familiar, physical workplace again, having worked remotely for some months (Scott *et al.*, 2020). Yet here we are, still navigating the tightrope of the pandemic, trying to maintain the balance between our work and family lives.

We can be in no doubt about the devastation caused by the pandemic has forced us to reconsider how we work and how we learn and the integration between the two. For some, learning was needed as we aimed to work remotely and effectively in very different circumstances. In so much as needing the ability to adapt to the changing physical and virtual worlds. It seems essential for work-applied learning to offer the tools to support change. New practices in how we work have become commonplace, a renewed emphasis on well-being as we work and learn in different physical and digital environments.

So, please read these articles, thinking of the context in which we now operate and what they have to offer to work-applied learning and management in this period of uncertainty and change. How do we bridge the gap between academic learning and the workplace?



The first article, by [Konstantinou and Miller \(2021\)](#), uses a case study to focus on the use of problem-based learning can be used to develop apprentices' skills between classroom learning and the workplace. The paper argues that there is an overlap in learning which is problematised by its location, either in the workplace or the educational institution ([Bound et al., 2018](#)) and calls for a reconceptualising of this as learning crosses both spheres.

In the second article, "Moving Critical Management Education to Praxis: Integrating professional services within the critical classroom" ([Dyer et al., 2021](#)) we learn how Suzette Dyer, Heather Lowery-Kappes and Fiona Hurd have used their career management and development course to address an identified gap in their students learning at both practical and theoretical levels. Helpful to ensure that they maintain a relevance to their curriculum. We then move onto the study by [Dadze-Arthur and Mörth \(2021\)](#) on the implementation of the ZELPH ['self], a self-assessment instrument that enables practitioners developing the pedagogy of work-integrating study programmes, to systematically consider the intended and unintended outcomes of their programme's approach to integrating professional practice into an academic course. It is fascinating to read about the outcomes of this study.

[Falletta and Combs \(2021\)](#) then discuss the notion of HR analytics. They explore the lack of agreed definition and their use. They consider how the data provided from HR analytic systems can be used in decision-making and in ensuring that organisations capitalise on the existing talent they have within their workforce and make smarter people decisions.

The case study by [Hoffmann \(2021\)](#) argues that existing models of pedagogy in entrepreneurship focus on established theory with descriptive, explanatory notion of practice linking the two and points to [Berglund et al. \(2018\)](#), ideas that is a third body of knowledge, which is pragmatically oriented and cannot be reduced to either theoretical principles or the situated expertise ([Dimov, 2010](#)). [Hoffmann \(2021\)](#) provides an example of how we need to go beyond the tradition of simply encouraging closer collaboration and more intimate involvement of practitioners.

[Leong et al. \(2021\)](#) then take us through a meta-analysis relating to microlearning. They explore how these bite-sizes learning topics help to more effectively commit learning into one's long-term memory. They found increasing interest in microlearning and advocate the important of such an appropriate when planning learning programme. A point which is particularly pertinent if we are to successfully reduce the gap between learning in academic institutions and the workplace.

While [Leong et al.](#) looked at learning for those employed, the article by [Daubney \(2021\)](#) takes a look at the important issue of employability and making this meaningful and relevant for pre-18 learners. Pointing to an assumption that individuals will know what employability means as they transition to either higher education or work. However, there is only a cursory mention of it in the guidance for schools and colleges ([Department for Education, 2018](#)). Never has this been so important than in a coronavirus disease (COVID) world that we are currently in which makes entry to work more challenging than ever. The paper by [Vasconcelos \(2021\)](#) focusses on capital, and how various forms of capital have emerged, such as intellectual and social. However, Vasconcelos argues that there is another form of capital that should be considered, spiritual capital. Given the prolonged period of the pandemic maybe it is time to reconsider the values and beliefs that we hold true. We then move onto the paper by [Dorr and Feuerhelm \(2021\)](#) which considers the ongoing organisational development needs, through the lens of accountancy companies. What is important is that while the focus of the paper is on accountancy companies, the ideas presented in this paper are equally as applicable to other types of organisations. Simply having a recruitment strategy or succession plan is now no longer sufficient. We need to be considering a more sustainable approach to developing the next generation of individuals ([Lambert, 2011](#)).

This links nicely to our final paper by [Paaske et al. \(2021\)](#) who consider how Education for Sustainable Development can play an important role in reconfiguring the “disconnectedness” in the Danish education system. The argument being that a greater focus is needed on social, cultural and environmental sustainability in their curricula rather than standardised testing in order to move towards a more sustainable lifestyle ([Breiting et al., 2009](#)). This will be particularly insightful for organisations and policymakers across a range of countries wanting to move to a more sustainable way of life and how education can help facilitate this.

As you can see a diverse and interesting collection of papers for this special edition, which we hope you enjoy.

As always, we wish to thank all of the reviewers who supported the publication process. The editorial team of the special issue hopes you are safe and well when the special issue reaches you.

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