



The workplace: Paths for renewal



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Editorial

Diana Rus & Angela Carter

We are delighted to publish this first 2022 issue of InPractice, featuring a collection of articles centred around renewal in the world of work and within our profession. This issue contains an exclusive interview with the EAWOP President, Dr. Annemarie Hiemstra, two papers showcasing new methodologies and a book review.

Fitting with the idea that our profession is on a path to renewal, we are happy to open with an absorbing interview with *Dr. Annemarie Hiemstra*, our EAWOP President. She graciously offers us an insightful look into her career trajectory as a work and organizational psychologist and takes us on a journey describing her involvement with the EAWOP over the years. As the incoming President, she also outlines her vision for making the EAWOP future-proof in the upcoming years. Moreover, she invites work and organizational psychology (WOP) practitioners and academics to collaborate more (by highlighting specific initiatives supported by EAWOP) to increase the societal impact of our profession.

We continue with a fascinating *Tools* feature authored by *Dr. Dieter Veldsman* and *Marna van der Merwe*. The authors address the shifting dynamics in the relationship between employers and employees and highlight the importance of designing human resource practices geared at creating more human-centric working environments. To this end, they first propose that the psychological contract between employers and employees represents the central lever for aligning employer brand, employee value propositions and employee experience. Second, they put forward an employee-centric design methodology for human resources practices and illustrate its relevance by applying it to the off-boarding process of a global organization.

Following the theme of renewal in our work, we continue with our second *Tools* feature authored by *Dr. Roman Soucek* and *Amanda Voss*. The authors address a practitioner need for shorter and more inviting, yet valid, scales to measure important concepts in the workplace. To this end, they describe the development of a short pictorial scale for the measurement of workplace intensity, which can be used by practitioners in interviews, workshops or when assessing workplace intensity more frequently via diary studies. Roman and Amanda offer you the entire scale so that you can try this simple and innovative tool out for yourself.

Our final article begins another format to our papers introducing a new feature, namely *Book Reviews*. *Elena Martinescu* graciously reviewed a recent book by Kathryn Waddington on a timely topic, namely gossip in organizations. Elena highlights some of the topics covered in the book and outlines some ideas for future research on gossip in organizations. We look forward to publishing further reviews and seek your suggestions for books that offer strong applied content.

We are excited to see how InPractice has grown over the years and our team is committed to expand our collaboration with practitioners as well as grow our practitioner audience. To this end, we have introduced new formats relevant for practitioners such as the Tools feature, the *Research Spotlight* and the *Book Reviews* that we have inaugurated in this issue. This being said, we are open to suggestions regarding new formats that would be attractive to you, our readers.

We are also happy to announce that our editorial team will hold two separate sessions for those interested in writing for us at the upcoming EAWOP Practitioner Skills WorkLab. The WorkLab will be held on the beautiful island of Mallorca, November 10-12, 2022 and the workshop will focus on how to organise and manage work to improve employee health and well-being. More information about the WorkLab and the programme can be found here: <http://www.eawop.org/worklab-2022>. We are looking forward to meeting you in Mallorca and discuss how you can publish with us.

We invite your contributions that might further our current understanding of the application of WOP. We especially welcome contributions that present case studies and practice-oriented tools used in WOP. These could include the presentation of new tools used in WOP practice as well as material showing how certain tools have been used in WOP interventions. Please contact us (InPractice@eawop.org) with your ideas and a short plan of the paper and we will be delighted to work with you to bring this material into publication.

Last but not least, if you are interested in the changing world of work, join us at the 21st EAWOP Congress in Katowice in 2023. The theme of the Congress is: “The Future is Now: the changing world of work” and submissions are open until October 15, 2022. There will be many activities aimed at fostering collaborations between practitioners and academics, including a number of interactive sessions during our Science + Practice stream.



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The present and future of EAWOP

Interview with Annemarie Hiemstra, President of EAWOP

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About the interviewee

Dr Annemarie Hiemstra has been the President of the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) since January 2022. She is an Associate Professor in Work and Organizational Psychology at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam with corporate experience in personnel selection.

Annemarie is an expert in technology-mediated personnel assessment and selection. Throughout her career she has worked at the interface between science and practice and her work primarily centres around issues of fairness in selection procedures. With her research she wants to contribute to a more inclusive society in which every student and job seeker is seen and can therefore develop their talents. This is especially important for people with a migration background. These employees more often have a disadvantaged position on the labour market (e.g., higher unemployment rate, more often working below their own education level and on temporary contracts), which may be due to differences in human capital and discrimination. Thus, Annemarie's research focuses on understanding the conditions under which there is discrimination in the personnel selection phase. In particular, she investigates the (im)possibilities of technological applications, such as video-applications and machine learning-based algorithms, to reduce discrimination and bias in personnel decisions. She recently published several peer-reviewed articles on the increasing use of artificial intelligence in selection procedures and their potential to reduce bias and discrimination. In addition, as the educational director of the Psychology programme she is currently involved in research on the admission and development of students, particularly those from underrepresented groups, such as students with a migration background and first-generation students (i.e., students who are the first in their family to attend higher education).

She frequently publishes her work in peer-reviewed journals and serves on the Editorial Board of the European Journal of Psychological Assessment and the International Journal on Selection and Assessment. Her qualities as a researcher and teacher have been recognised through various research and education grants. For example, Annemarie recently received a grant with two colleagues from the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment for a series of laboratory studies into equal opportunities for diverse applicants in recruitment and selection. In addition, she was awarded a learning and innovation grant for a PhD project on the admission into higher education of diverse students, particularly those with a migration background and first-generation

students. Moreover, the successful collaboration with scientists and professionals from various disciplines was recently marked by an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership grant fund, for an interdisciplinary project on Big Data in Psychological Assessment. Since 2017, Annemarie has served as an Executive Committee (EC) member of the EAWOP, and she is also actively involved with the Dutch Psychological Association (NIP).

Keywords: work and organizational psychology, history of EAWOP, future of EAWOP, career path

The interview

Diana: *Annemarie, congratulations on your election as EAWOP President this year! Thank you for taking the time to talk to InPractice and share some of your experiences with our readers. In this interview, I would like to talk a little bit about your career path as a work and organizational (WO) psychologist and, of course, about your thoughts regarding the future of EAWOP and our field overall.*

First, I would be interested in hearing about how you became a WO psychologist.

Annemarie: When I was younger, I did not really know what I wanted to do with my career. While I was studying psychology, I wasn't even sure whether I wanted to be a WO psychologist or not. That all changed when I did my internship as a master's student in Vietnam. This experience taught me that work and organizational psychology (WOP) matters and can contribute uniquely to improving the work and lives of people. And that was the beginning of my journey into WOP.

After graduation, I had the opportunity to pursue a PhD, but at that point I was much more eager to start working and apply what I had learned in practice. In my first job, I ended up working for the TNO, the Netherlands Organization for applied scientific research whose mission is to enable business and government to apply knowledge. As you can see, I did not completely stray away from a scientific career, but rather ended up working for an applied research institute. At the TNO I worked on some interesting projects developing and providing team training for the Royal Netherlands Navy, the Armed Forces and some large corporations. I really enjoyed these projects and noticed that I was keeping in touch with the latest scientific insights and applying them in practice.

Later I became a registered WO psychologist with the NIP and started working for GITP, one of the largest Human Resource (HR) consultancy firms in The Netherlands. Here I

became fascinated with working with new technologies for recruitment and selection, especially as they relate to fairness in the selection process. One thing I started thinking about was that people have a basic need to be seen and heard and that this is essential in the selection and recruitment process. I started wondering about the ways in which using technology (such as video resume screenings) would help or hinder a fair selection process, especially when it comes to minorities, such as immigrants. This fascination with understanding the (im)possibilities offered by new technological developments in promoting a fair selection process and inclusiveness in organizations, led me to start a PhD with Marise Born, Eva Derous and Alec Serlie at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. Mind you, I was still working as a practitioner for four days a week and working on my PhD research for one day a week. I started realising that this is a perfect combination for me: I could do research that is practically relevant and still work as a practitioner.

Diana: *This is a fascinating career trajectory that is rather uncommon in our field. Could you explain a little bit how you ended up navigating between these two worlds (the academic and practitioner one) and how you ended up in your current position?*

Annemarie: Indeed, it is rather uncommon and, of course, it brought both opportunities and challenges. For me, it was the perfect opportunity to combine research with practice. Working in the field enabled me to ask the ‘right’ questions and I could also apply my research insights in the field. But of course, there was a lot going on at the same time and I also had a young family. I was lucky to have a very supportive employer and to work with wonderful people. During this period, I realised that I was feeling more and more at home in academia, so I started taking on more academic responsibilities like teaching and supervising students. Slowly, the one ‘academic’ day became two, then three and finally, after finishing my PhD I started working full-time at the Erasmus University Rotterdam as an Assistant Professor.

Clearly, my path is not a typical one, but it worked out really well for me. I crafted myself a position that makes me really happy in academia and my practitioner experience enriches and informs a lot of the things I do, such as my research. For example, these days I am working on a number of projects assessing the fairness of technological solutions in the selection process. We know that the labour market is still plagued by social inequality with some social groups being discriminated against. In addition, over the past few years, there has been an explosion of data-driven selection methods based on artificial intelligence or machine learning algorithms which claim to provide more ‘objective’ ways to select candidates. Yet, there is little research into whether these

innovative technological solutions indeed increase fairness in the selection process or not. Gaining a better understanding of this is not only important from a scientific point of view, but it can help develop and implement practical technological solutions that increase the diversity of the labour force. And, of course, it can have policy implications when it comes to promoting more inclusive workplaces and the integration of socially disadvantaged groups in the labour force.

Diana: *Thank you for your candour! I will come back to some of the issues you touched upon a little bit later. For now, I would like to move on and talk a little bit about your involvement with the EAWOP. I know you have been involved with the EAWOP for quite some time in different roles. I would be very interested in hearing how you became involved with the EAWOP and how things have progressed over the years.*

Annemarie: My first experience with the EAWOP was as a congress participant in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. This was my first congress as a PhD student, and it felt like a warm bath. Everyone was so welcoming, and it felt like a real community that embraces you. Plus, after having worked in practice for so long, it was refreshing to be able to exchange ideas so freely with others. My next experience was as a participant in a Small Group Meeting (SGM) in 2010 on Selection and Assessment in Europe. That is, of course, a very different format, but the sense of community is there even more strongly. I still remember that SGM, because those few days with a small group of like-minded colleagues were a powerful experience. It is amazing how easy it is to speak to everyone and how intense and deep the conversations about research can get. This experience made me realise the strength of this format: people get to actually know each other and develop future collaborations. And I think that these SGMs are particularly fruitful for young academics in helping them develop their ideas and build their networks. This inspired me to organise an SGM on Applicant Behaviour with two colleagues – Marise Born and Janneke Oostrom – a few years later. It was a very successful meeting that resulted in a number of interesting collaborations and a network that is still active (www.eneser.eu).

In 2017, there was a call for new EAWOP Executive Committee (EC) members, and I decided to stand for election. I was elected in Dublin and first, I was in charge of the SGM grant programme and communications. Then in 2019 in Turin I became General Secretary, which is a much more central role with more responsibility. It has been a privilege to be part of EAWOP for many years now and to serve as an EC member for the past four years

To me, EAWOP is all about connection. You get to work with a great group of people who are all passionate about WOP. And it is such an enriching experience: you get to meet so many WO psychologists from different countries and to learn about how WOP is organised and practiced across Europe. And, of course, there is the added bonus that you get to visit different European countries and sample different cuisines. In 2021 I was asked to stand for President, since Frederik Anseel's term was ending. It was a very big honour to be asked to be the face of our community and to move it forward. Of course, I did have some doubts, but I saw it as a great opportunity and decided to go for it.

Diana: *And you won in the January General Assembly with a large majority. Again, congratulations! This brings us into my next question. I am wondering about what your vision for the future of EAWOP looks like. These are challenging times in the world and for our profession.*

Annemarie: I am honoured to be given the opportunity to continue my activities for EAWOP as incoming president. I am very grateful for the trust that the EC has given by nominating me and by the EAWOP community for electing me.

The mission of EAWOP is more important and relevant than ever before. For over 30 years now, we have been connecting WO psychologists from across Europe to contribute to meaningful and decent work, to improve management and organizations. It is such a thrill, and comfort too in these times, to know that there are psychologists across Europe who are aiming for this, to improve work and working conditions. There are 'professional soulmates' from over 27 European countries. This matters, especially now that there is a war in one of our member states, in Ukraine.

EAWOP really matters to me personally and to our field. The core of EAWOP's mission has remained the same: connecting WO psychologists and promoting the application of WOP. And I am very much looking forward to contributing towards this mission. To put things in perspective: EAWOP has grown substantially since it was founded. With growth, of course, we faced new challenges, such as how to manage growth that is sustainable while also staying true to our core, which is all about community and connection. But a lot has changed over the past two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the blink of an eye, our focus shifted from sustainable growth to crisis management. Face-to-face activities were no longer possible and the implications for our activities were tremendous. For example, we first had to postpone the May 2021 Congress in Glasgow to January 2022. Unfortunately, due to travel restrictions, we were forced to cancel the Congress entirely and this was a big disappointment to us all. We had 1400 delegates who had signed up to attend and present, so I am sure that it wasn't only us who were disappointed.

So yes, these are difficult times for us all. Right now, EAWOP has to recover from this, and I feel that it is my job to create stability and to ensure that EAWOP is future-proof. This idea also carries over into the theme of the next EAWOP Congress in 2023, to be held in Katowice, Poland, 24-27 May (<https://www.eawop2023.org>), which is “*The future is now: The changing world of work.*”

Diana: *Indeed, the cancellation of Glasgow was a big blow to us all and I am very much looking forward to seeing everyone again in person in Katowice. That being said, the last two years have not been all doom and gloom. I get the impression that we have an active and engaged community and that the pandemic has not exactly stopped us in our tracks. Perhaps you can tell us a little bit more about what has happened over the past two years and how you are planning to capitalise on these changes to make the EAWOP future-proof.*

Annemarie: Yes, it is indeed not all doom and gloom. I am happy to see that our community is resilient. After the cancellation of the Glasgow Congress, members organized EAWOP Ninja mini-conferences to share research and insights. And luckily some of the contributions are still accessible via the legacy website (<http://www.eawop.org/legacy-of-eawop-2022-glasgow-conference>). Also, our journals and activities are thriving, SGMs and the WorkLab have continued to be organised as online or hybrid events and we are currently busy organising our next Congress.

I think in terms of the future, our focus should really be on how we can increase our broader societal impact and maintain our member base. The core of EAWOP is its members and we need to engage them and show them the value that EAWOP provides.

In this respect, I am very proud of the launch of the EAWOP Impact Incubator (<https://www.eawopimpact.org/about-eawopii>). The Impact Incubator (II) really resulted from discussions in the General Assembly about how we can increase our broader impact. It is the mission of the II to engage, inform, and influence policymakers and policy-making across Europe on the basis of evidence and insights generated by WOP research and practice. This initiative is very dear to me because all of our aims converge here: translating evidence-based WOP insights into usable resources for policymakers and practitioners. So far, they have had several successful events with practitioners and policymakers (e.g., on living wages, good youth employment, decent work).

These are the types of initiatives that help us as an association move forward and become more visible and impactful within society. They connect academics with practitioners and policymakers and help spread evidence-based practice. Of course, it is not easy, and we

depend on our members and local constituents to facilitate these types of connections. EAWOP's effectiveness really depends on close relationships with our constituents and on close personal relationships.

Diana: *You have touched here upon a very important point: that impact can only be achieved via our members. If we look at the EAWOP membership, we seem to have more academic than practitioner members. I also know that there has been a lot of focus within the EAWOP, especially recently, on facilitating a better integration between science and practice. Could you share some ideas on how we can facilitate more cross-pollination and collaboration between academics and practitioners?*

Annemarie: The facilitation of discourse between scientists and practitioners has been one of the core aims of EAWOP since its founding. We have indeed, perhaps managed to attract more academic members than practitioners, but we are working very hard at increasing our reach. Clearly the II is one such recent initiative. But we do have numerous others and are planning more initiatives in the future.

For example, the EAWOP WorkLab (<http://www.eawop.org/past-worklabs>) has been going strong for ten years now. It has built a community by bringing together leading-edge academics with expert practitioners to explore different topics and innovations in practice. Also, at the 2019 Congress in Turin we dedicated a whole day of the programme to spurring collaborations between science and practice and we will continue this tradition at the 2023 Congress in Katowice. That being said, we do need to strengthen our collaborations with local psychological associations (our constituents) to increase our reach, especially among practitioners. We have over 30 national associations that are a member of EAWOP. These associations often represent many practitioners, and the active involvement of these constituents can help. Many of these practitioners work locally and in their local language. For this reason, a set of policy papers of the II has been translated by some of our members, for instance in the Romanian language. I feel that this is essential for us as an association to increase our relevance and to facilitate exchange and discussion.

We have also introduced other practitioner-oriented initiatives such as a grant programme (<http://eawop.org/practitioner-initiatives>). EAWOP desires academic-practitioner cooperation on topics that emerge in the field of practice. We are strongly encouraging practitioners to apply for these types of grants aimed at facilitating the enhancement and dissemination of WOP knowledge, the development of new professional competencies and the strengthening of existing ones.

All these events bring connections and insights that matter, inspire, and improve our work as practitioners and scientists. Still, I feel that EAWOP could be more effective, and I therefore would like to invite our members to share ideas and initiatives, please contact me or the EC any time.

Diana: *I was also wondering about a related topic that ties into the theme of the 2023 Congress as well as into what we were just discussing. What do you see as the core challenges for WOP as a profession and what role can EAWOP play in overcoming some of these challenges? For instance, how can WOP stay and/or become more relevant in the future of work?*

Annemarie: A lot of great work is done in WOP, but too often it stays within our own field. I am a strong proponent of interdisciplinary approaches to increase our reach and relevance as a science. For instance, we have witnessed an increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in personnel selection over the past few years. As WO psychologists, we should be more involved in projects that involve the use of AI in the workplace. In this respect, I have been involved in a project together with academics and practitioners from psychology and computer sciences to evaluate and improve the development and application of automated assessment, such as algorithms based on machine learning, for recruitment and selection (see also König et al., 2020; Liem et al., 2018).

Also, the theme of our next Congress in Katowice reflects this idea that, we as a community need to be at the forefront when it comes to understanding and shaping what the future world of work will look like. We want the Congress to be a call for action in collectively finding a way to answer these questions: “*Where is our voice? What must we say? How should we say it?*”. Together, we can make this happen. Furthermore, to be effective and relevant we need to reach out and make sure that WOP has a seat at the table, for instance with policymakers. This is why the II is so important and dear to me.

Diana: *Earlier on we had discussed your own career trajectory and I was fascinated to hear about your path – which is not the norm these days. If you think about careers in WOP, what advice would you give to your younger self?*

Annemarie: The first thing I would tell myself is: *Don't worry about a thing! Everything is going to be OK!* You do not have to constrain yourself to a ‘linear’ path just because everyone else tells you to do so. Dare to find out what you enjoy doing and what gives you meaning. Then you can craft your own path.

Also, as I mentioned before, at some point, I was juggling pursuing a PhD, working and taking care of a young family. These were difficult times, but I was lucky to have a very supportive partner as well as a supportive employer. GTP provided me the opportunity and freedom to pursue my PhD and combine all these roles. So, it worked out for me. I am sometimes asked how I managed to combine all of this and what advice I would give to women. I think that we are all part of a society that facilitates gendered roles, such as by considering women as the primary caregiver and men as career oriented. Women and men who do not adhere to these norms are penalised, for instance by being considered less competent or cold. We are all part of this system and I think that men are just as much stuck sometimes in these social norms as women are. Therefore, I would like to encourage both men and women to strive for more balance in the workplace and at home. It's not just the women who need advice and need to be 'fixed' to have a successful career. For instance, men can be important allies to women at work, by actively advocating for them in decision making processes. Furthermore, men can contribute to a better work-family balance by taking on caregiving tasks at home. I believe that by creating more equality, both men and women can make choices based on their strengths and interests and thrive and experience meaning in the various roles that we have in life.

Diana: *Thank you so much Annemarie! It was a pleasure talking to you and I appreciate that you took the time to share some of your thoughts.*

Annemarie: Likewise. It was a pleasure.

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Promises in action: The role of employer brand, employee value proposition and employee experience in delivering on psychological contract expectations

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Marna van der Merwe is an Organizational Psychologist and Senior Professional Services Consultant at SHL. She has over 12 years of experience within the Human Resources domain, focusing on Organizational Effectiveness and Strategic Talent Management. Her research areas of interest are in the field of talent management, specifically the evolution of talent management within the fourth industrial revolution, experience design, as well as the changing nature of careers within this context. Marna holds a Master's degree in Organizational Psychology and is currently completing her Ph.D. at the University of Johannesburg.

Abstract

The shifting world of work and the resultant impact on organizations has fundamentally changed the relationship between employees and employers. With the reality of changing workforce demographics, gig-workers, nomad work and evolving talent marketplaces placing organizational talent supply processes under pressure, there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of people management practices to access talent pools. In particular, the impact of employer branding, the employee value proposition, and the employee experience on attracting and retaining talent has to be re-evaluated in light of shifting expectations. We propose that traditional human resource (HR)

practices, which have predominantly been focused on procedural elements of the employee lifecycle, have to evolve to intentionally create more human-centric working environments. This implies incorporating principles from design thinking and service-based design, which positions the human being as the focal point. A shift towards a more human-centric perspective should not be disconnected from the contextual realities of the organization and its objectives while also taking the dynamic nature of the evolving psychological contract into account. The purpose of this article can be described as follows. First, we aim to discuss the psychological contract as the focal point for aligning employer brand, employee value propositions and employee experience. Second, we propose an employee-centric design methodology for human resource practices and third, we illustrate the use and application of this method by applying it to the off-boarding process in a global organization.

Keywords: design thinking, psychological contract, human-centric HR, employee experience

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the (in)effectiveness of modern talent attraction and engagement approaches (Tomcikova et al., 2021). With the rise of hybrid and remote working models, the ability for organizations to attract talent beyond traditional geographical borders has provided an opportunity to redefine how, where, when and by who work should be performed. These changes have also led towards a redefinition of employee expectations regarding flexibility and organizational support, as well as a revised focus on work/life boundaries (Tiry et al., 2021). In response, many organizations have started to explore non-traditional approaches to accessing talent, such as talent exchange programs, gig-workers and crowdsourcing, to tap into talent pools that were previously out of reach. Even though these talent pools provide new opportunities for both the organization and employees, they also lead to increased competition between organizations to attract and retain talent. With talent being more mobile than ever before, within an economy of skills scarcity, organizations need to intentionally shape and construct their value proposition to potential and current employees, to remain competitive and sustainable (Myhill et al., 2021) and more importantly, be able to deliver an aligned employee experience.

In this paper, we propose a more human-centric design approach toward people practices that aligns the employee value proposition, experience and employer brand with the

changing needs of the psychological contract. The authors believe that by adopting a different perspective when designing people practices, this will have a positive impact on the authenticity of the promised employee experience while also bringing organizational impact and value. This article builds upon the work done by Veldsman and Van der Merwe (2022) that positioned a more consumerist-driven approach towards people practices and shifted from the employee's perspective as a customer of people services to the employee as a consumer of people solutions.

The rise of the employee experience movement

As employees experience their careers as being more fluid and self-directed, organizations are expected to provide the transactional elements (e.g., rewards, growth opportunities, and learning) of the employment relationship and an environment that enables and supports the broader career experiences of employees. The ability of the organization to provide authentic, holistic employee experiences is becoming a differentiating factor when it comes to the employer brand and employee value proposition (Yacine, 2021). Authentic lived experiences are essential in balancing the new demands of the psychological contract and the mutual expectations of employees and organizations. Organizations expect an agile and available workforce that delivers sustainable impact, whilst employees increasingly seek career experiences that are meaningful, enhance employability and diversify their skill sets.

The employee experience movement has gained traction over the past decade in response to a need for organizations to build and deliver on their talent brand and to set themselves apart from the competition (Plaskoff, 2017). Employees are now seen as consumers, with choice and a voice. By utilising approaches traditionally reserved for marketing, organizations have adopted a different approach in managing the employee expectations associated with the psychological contract (Yacine, 2021). Even though the intention was noble, most of these initiatives created unattainable expectations of what the experience of an employee should be in relation to a specific employer brand and promise, which has left some employees disappointed after making the decision to join a new employer (Mahadevan & Schmitz, 2020).

Organizations have aimed to compensate by designing stronger employee value propositions, rethinking flexibility and benefits as part of the employee experience and incorporating realistic experience previews of what it is like to work for the organization.

Nevertheless, despite all these efforts, there seems to be a significant lack of practical research that promotes an integrated and realistic approach towards designing employee experiences that are authentic and sustainable for the organization (Gheidar & ShamiZanjani, 2021).

The employee experience movement originated from three distinct domains of thought. The first school of thought saw the employee experience as a natural evolution of the candidate experience. In alignment with the employee engagement literature, this stream focused on creating intentional experiences and memorable moments along the end-to-end employee lifecycle (Bester & Stander, 2021). The second influential school of thought originated from the technology and digital user perspective and the rise of digital HR solutions (Kristoff et al., 2018). This approach focused on the user experience when interacting with HR platforms and services and naturally extended this thinking beyond the technological interaction to incorporate process and physical engagements. The third school of thought was influenced by marketing principles when starting to build employer and talent brands as a method to attract and retain the right employees (Lowenstein, 2020). Table 1 below demonstrates these differing perspectives and how employee experience is defined within these schools of thought.

Table 1
Defining employee experience (Gheidar & ShamiZanjani, 2021)

| Origin Domain | Definition | Reference |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Technology and User | A combination of people, process and technology interactions | VMware, 2019 |
| Candidate Experience | The workforce experience as a result of the interactions between the organization and its people | Sage People, 2018 |
| Candidate Experience | The journey that the employee takes within the organization is expressed as the sum of all interactions that the employee has with the organization | Gallup, 2018 |
| Candidate Experience and Marketing | The employees holistic perceptions of the relationship with the employer derived from the touchpoints along their journey | Plaskoff, 2017 |
| Marketing | A personalised set of interactions, processes and content that the employee has with the employer enables them to achieve success | Hamerman & Schooley, 2017 |

Even though distinctly different in origin, all three schools of thought agree that there is value in personalising employee experiences. A great experience leads towards improved employee attraction and retention, and a good robust experience can lead to higher levels of employee engagement and ultimately, retention (Shenoy & Uchil, 2018). There

is however, disagreement in terms of how the experience should be designed, what the factors are that should form part of the desired employee experience and how experiences should be put into practice to gain maximum impact. As such, the employee value proposition has become a key element that informs the expectations embedded in the employee experience.

The employee value proposition as a conduit to a good experience

The employee value proposition (EVP) has become an important contributor towards the attractiveness of employer brands to the external market. Various definitions of the employee value proposition exist, yet there is agreement among scholars that the employee value proposition refers to:

- characteristics or appeal of working for a particular organization and being associated with the brand;
- the offerings, and set of experiences that an organization promises to employees as part of the relationship which could be either tangible or intangible; and
- the perceived and real value derived by the employee from the value provided by the organization (Veldsman & Pauw, 2018).

The employee value proposition has been shown to have strong links to the employer brand, identity and to social exchange theory (Kumar et al., 2021). Traditionally, it has been based upon the more transactional elements of the employment relationship, such as tangible rewards, benefits and learning. However, for the past few years the importance of the intangible factors such as culture, values and meaningful work has increased. Organizations have aimed to verbalize the promise and benefits of their employee value propositions in comparison to other competitors and various employer brand strategies have flaunted the benefits employees could expect if they decide to join. Programs such as “best company to work for” and social media platforms have given employees a voice within this domain and HR departments' success has often been measured against these criteria.

Employees' experience of both the tangible and intangible aspects of the EVP have become crucial and organizations have spent a significant amount of time to better understand whether the promised EVP has lived up to expectations (Raj, 2020). The challenge,

however, has been strong disagreement on the role that individual employee expectations should play in defining what a “good experience” should entail and the criteria that inform employee opinion. The psychological contract and how it is evolving, constitutes the underlying basis for both the employee value proposition and employee experience and we will expand more on this below.

The psychological contract as the basis of the employee experience

The 1990s saw an increased interest in understanding the psychological contract and its influence on employment relationships. Even though the term was coined by Argyris (1960) and further developed by Levinson (1962), it was not until Rousseau's (1989) research that the concept gained traction and became the focus of contemporary research. Even though various definitions exist, it is accepted that the psychological contract refers to the perceived mutual expectations that exist due to the nature of a relationship between employer and employee (Coetzee & Deas, 2021). Whilst some expectations are more transactional and articulated, e.g., salary or working hours, other expectations are implicit, often relational and for the most part remain unexpressed. The dynamic and evolving nature of the employment relationship has had a significant impact on the psychological contract (Scheepers & Shuping, 2011). With the rise of gig-workers and other fluid employment arrangements, traditional boundaries no longer seem suitable to describe the nature of the relationship and even less so to articulate the expectations between parties (Sivarajan et al., 2021). This, however, does not diminish the importance of the psychological contract but rather highlights a need to better understand how the expectations contained within the psychological contract are translated to the actual lived employee experience. In this respect, Rousseau and colleagues (2016) highlight the ever-changing and evolving nature of the psychological contract and how various experiences influence the movement from creation (what do we want from each other), to maintenance (are we delivering what we promised), to disruption (lived experiences that contribute or detract value). In turn, this disruption can lead to either renegotiation (what does this look like going forward) or repair (do we want to continue this relationship and if so, on what terms).

In particular, the timeframe of the employment relationship (short-term versus open-ended) and the performance requirements of the employment relationship (specific

outcomes versus general/non-specific outcomes) are two contractual factors that are impacted most as the world of work evolves (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994). This results in four distinct types of psychological contracts that impact the parameters of the employee/employer relationship and the associated expectations to be met.

Transactional psychological contract

The transactional psychological contract typically exists where the employment relationship is shorter-term, with clear expectations of delivery (Scheepers & Shuping, 2011). Whilst no longer-term or implied expectations exist, the mutual expectations of both employees and employers are made explicit and therefore are prone to criticism and negative consequences when either party does not deliver on expectations. When managed well, transactional psychological contracts effectively manage gig-workers and other non-traditional workforce arrangements by fostering trust through explicit expectations and aligned lived experiences. Where the transactional psychological contract predominantly exists, people management practices that are focused on the transactional elements of the employment relationship (e.g., contract workers' onboarding and management, etc.) are critical to ensure clarity around mutual expectations (Liu et al., 2020).

Transitional psychological contract

Where shorter-term employment relationships exist, with less specific associated outcomes, a transitional psychological contract may be in place. Without longer-term employment expectations and clarity on deliverables, there may be a lack of commitment to the organization or a continued psychological contract. The transitional psychological contract is primarily a cognitive state and prevalent where the employer/employee relationship is transitioning or breaking down (e.g., in the case of organizational downsizing, mergers and acquisitions) and is still prevalent in turbulent economies and tough organizational realities. In employment arrangements where this psychological contract is prevalent, a focus on people practices that manage the transition and associated mutual expectations (e.g., exit management) is important to maintain the psychological contract and deliver on expectations that may stretch beyond transactional elements (Ma et al., 2019).

Balanced psychological contract

Balanced psychological contracts are prevalent where longer-term, open-ended employment relationships exist, with clearly defined expectations. Expectations are usually dependent on or linked to the existence and sustainability of the organization in the longer term and employees and organizations benefit greatly from employees who manage their careers in the context of the organization. The rewards and benefits that employees receive are usually linked to the organization's competitive advantage and revenue gain, which encourages sustained learning, development and contribution from employees. People management practices focused on the expected benefits derived from employment arrangements play an important role in managing the balanced psychological contract (e.g., employee value proposition, benefits, rewards and recognition; cf. Tekleab et al., 2020).

Relational psychological contract

Relational psychological contracts are relevant when the employment relationship is open-ended, however, no clear performance expectations exist. This type of psychological contract involves the provision of employment on the organizational end, with employees committing to the organization's needs and interests through a display of loyalty. Management of the relational psychological contract where no formalized employment arrangement exist may be more important when considering people management practices that involve prospective or past employees (e.g., talent acquisition and alumni talent).

Assumptions pertaining to the employer-employee relationship

In existing research, a number of the factors that impact psychological contract expectations are based on the assumption of a permanent employment arrangement. This assumption has to be reviewed with the rise of gig-workers and other fluid employment arrangements, to fully understand how these employment arrangements impact the psychological contract. In particular, as organizations grapple with access to talent, they reposition their employee value proposition to attract scarce and critical skills to the organization, openly advertising and offering benefits to prospective and internal talent. Whilst the employee value proposition remains a critical lever to attract and retain talent, it has become more than simply a transactional articulation of what employees can expect of employers. It has evolved into an explicit promise that includes transactional

and non-transactional factors to current and future employees, which is critical in managing the mutual expectations which emanate from the psychological contract.

Often, the psychological contract translation is driven through the employer brand as the initial promise made and sold to the employee, with the employee value proposition as an articulation of employee benefits flowing from the employment relationship. Both the employer brand and the employee value proposition, therefore, play a critical role in articulating and delivering the desired employee experience, in line with psychological contract expectations.

The role of the employer brand and employee value proposition in employee experience manifestation: The E-cubed model

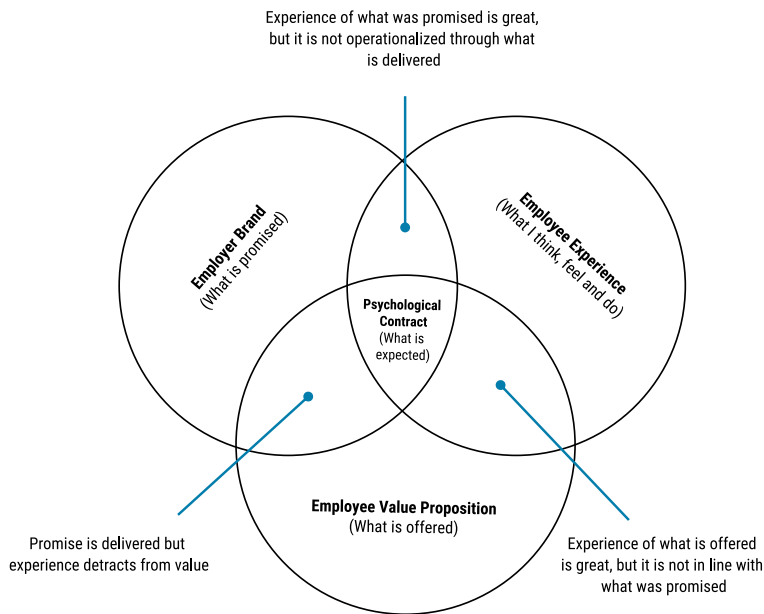
Employer branding is defined as a long-term organizational strategy that aims to manage the awareness of the brand within the external market to attract the right type of talent, whilst also serving the purpose of retaining internal employees (Benraiss-Noailles & Viot, 2021). The employer brand is closely related to the employee value proposition (Browne, 2021); however, the employer brand concept is based upon traditional marketing principles. Instead of targeting the commercial consumer, it is based on positioning the organization as an employer of choice for specific talent segments. Given the changing nature of the workforce, employer branding strategies have become more popular to leverage the organization's consumer brand and reputation in its talent attraction strategies. Internally, the employer brand is utilized to enhance employee engagement and retention by building organizational ambassadorship. When the internal experience of the employee is not in line with the perceived employer brand that was positioned during the attraction phase or that is showcased externally, employer branding loses its potential value to engage and retain talent. One of the most prominent challenges of the employer brand has often been associated with the inability of the internal employee experience to deliver on the promise that the employer brand either sets out upfront at the acquisition stage or proclaims externally. This mismatch between the promised experience and expected value proposition and the actual lived experience has been identified as a contributing factor to employee disengagement and difficulty in retention (Mascarenhas, 2019). Organizations that can provide an appealing brand operationalized through an engaging employee value proposition and delivered through authentic

experiences, have a distinct competitive advantage over their peers. Whilst a compelling EVP is consistently cited in the literature as a core differentiator for organizations and there is some agreement on its definition, in practice, this concept is still largely fragmented and various definitions of the terms exist (Veldsman & Pauw, 2018). In most organizations, the EVP has primarily been diluted to either an unarticulated concept that occurs by “accident” or a “best practice” HR initiative that is mechanistically put in place because it is the “right thing to do.” An EVP removed from the organizational and people strategy and disjointed from employee needs and experience is not a sustainable or worthwhile endeavour.

Aligning the employer brand, employee value proposition and employee experience, cannot be done through the use of traditional process-driven design methodologies (Durai et al., 2018) and requires a more human-centric approach. Human-centric design refers to the application of design thinking principles to place the user at the centre of the approach (Gonen, 2020). The method is based upon the premise of empathizing with the human being, understanding their wants, needs and desires and experimenting with various possibilities to craft a solution. Techniques borrowed from consumer psychology become important perspectives in applying this type of approach, as the focus is no longer only on the process and the “what” but rather to also consider the “why” and the “who” (Veldsman & Van der Merwe, 2022). This approach has been successfully adopted in product and software design and has more recently entered other areas such as customer service, retail and marketing. Durai and colleagues (2018) have also linked design thinking with employee experience and engagement, with a specific focus on the start-up environment. As a result of the changing psychological contract, a more humanistic approach is called for when approaching the employee experience, brand and value proposition.

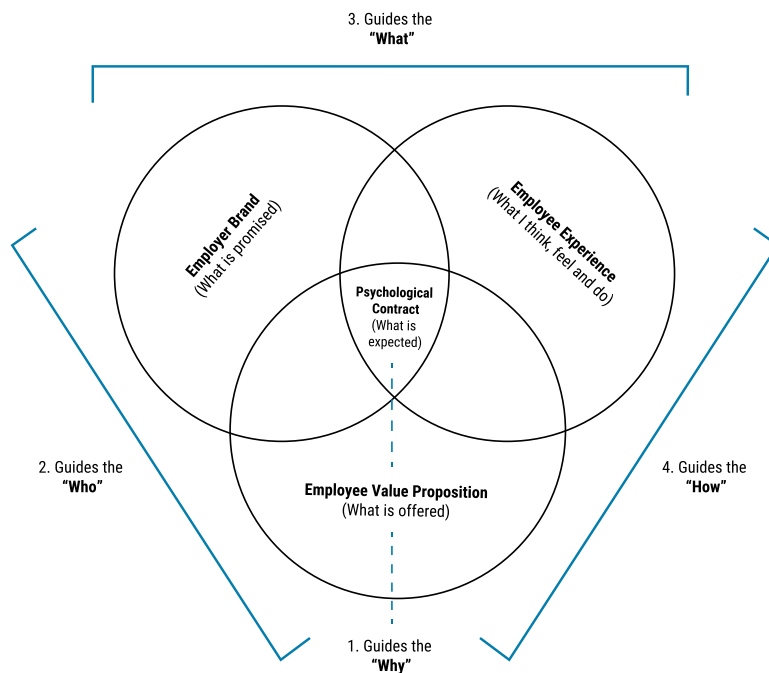
Based upon this theoretical background, the authors propose an integrated model that demonstrates the need to balance the employer brand (what is promised), the employee value proposition (what is offered), the employee experience (what I think, feel and do) and the psychological contract (what is expected) by applying a human-centred perspective. The balance of these different but related concepts is the key criterion for authentic employee experiences. A golden thread or coherent storyline that flows from one to the other will be crucial to ensure an authentic and optimal employee experience. Misalignment could have significant consequences on employee/employer trust, engagement, and talent attraction or retention (Swanepoel & Saurombe, 2022). Figure 1 below provides an overview of how the alignment of these concepts needs to be balanced.

Figure 1
The E-cubed model (Authors' own work)



Practically, the intersections between the employer brand, employee experience and employee value proposition can be used to guide human-centred practice design, as a mechanism for delivering coherent and authentic experiences in line with employee expectations. Figure 2 below, illustrates the intersections and how they can be used to create a golden thread in practice design.

Figure 2
The E-cubed model and practice design implications (Authors' own work)



The intersections illustrated in Figure 2 provide important underpinnings of the human-centred design methodology and we will elaborate on each by using practical examples:

- 1** The psychological contract guides and aligns the “*why*” of people management practice design. It articulates why it is important from both the perspective of the employee and the organization (mutual expectations) and provides clarity on how these expectations are managed as a result of the existing or resultant type of psychological contract. This could relate to an employee expecting an organization to care and provide them with family benefits, while the organization expects employee loyalty and productivity in return (where a balanced psychological contract exists).
- 2** The intersection between the employer brand (EB) and employee value proposition (EVP) guides “*who*” people practices are designed for. It articulates who the end user or consumer is at the receiving end of the process or interaction and what they want from the organization, based on what is promised and offered both externally and internally and the associated needs that should be met. This could relate to employee personas that are based on the unique needs of groups of employees and the alignment of the EVP to these needs. For example, where the “young family” persona joins the organization based on its family-orientated employer brand, the EVP delivers on these needs and expectations by providing broad “family benefits”.
- 3** The intersection between the employer brand (EB) and employee experience (EX) guides “*what*” we should focus on when designing people practices. It aligns what we advertise, promise and sell with what we need to subsequently deliver, which will have the biggest impact on the end user. This alignment should highlight the moments that matter that have the biggest potential to impact the lived experience of the articulated promise. For example, this could refer to the experience related to maternity and paternity leave, as a significant life event for the employee which is based on the organization’s reputation of “care”.
- 4** The intersection between the employee experience (EX) and the employee value proposition (EVP) guides “*how*” experiences are authentically delivered through either physical or digital touchpoints. It aligns what is offered through the EVP, to the mechanisms through which this is delivered within the organization through intentionally crafted experiences. This could include the tangible leave application processes, availability of benefit information or

engagements with the benefits provider offered by the organization, during these interactions.

The intersections described above provide practical guidance on how people management practice design should be intentionally designed to place the human being, and, in turn, their set of expectations, at the heart of people practices.

Implications of this model for people management practice design

Traditional human resource (HR) practices are primarily based on process-oriented design methodologies (Shafagatova & Van Looy, 2021) aimed at answering the questions around the what, where and how. These practices often view the employee lifecycle as a siloed process, based on the boundaries of functional HR activities that the employee engages in as part of their employment relationship within the organization that leads to increased efficiency, cost-effectiveness and scalability (Carlson & Kavanagh, 2011).

Veldsman and Van der Merwe (2022) argue that while these questions and outcomes are still crucial for HR, adopting a truly experience-based design methodology allows organizations to deliver on the expectations of the psychological contract, by placing the employee expectations at the core of the design process and intentionally aligning what is promised and offered, to the experiences of employees. An experience-based design methodology seeks to answer the following questions (Veldsman & Van der Merwe, 2022):

- Why is this experience significant?
- Who is the consumer of this experience?
- What do they want to achieve from this experience?
- How do we deliver this experience?
- What should we improve based on their feedback?

Including these questions in the design process creates a deeper understanding of the employee's needs, wants and desires as a consumer. It implies an outside-in approach, focused on continuous listening and feedback from the employee as end-user. Consistency of the process becomes less important unless it creates the experiences that are important for the employee. Techniques originating in the domains of design-thinking and consumer psychology become important perspectives in applying this type of approach, as the focus is no longer only on the process and the "what" but also on the "why" and the "who" (Buchanan, 2004; Pande & Bharathi, 2020). While this approach focuses on

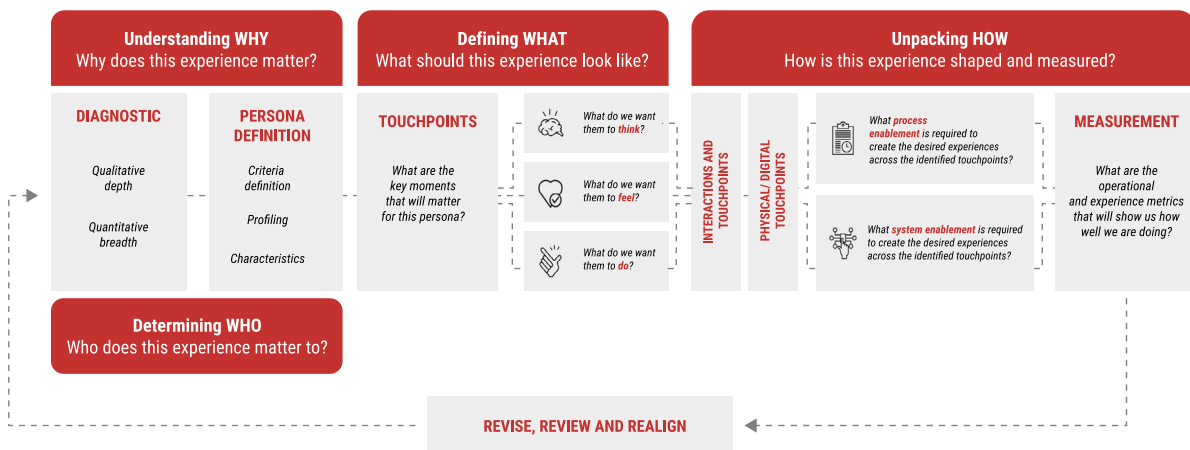
the employee, it effectively delivers the organizational outcomes associated with positive employee experiences by deliberately crafting authentic experiences aligned to employee expectations. This becomes the golden thread or coherent storyline from the employee’s perspective, which directs authentic lived experiences in line with expectations.

The employee experience-based practice design methodology

Based on these findings, Veldsman and Van der Merwe (2022) designed a methodology to intentionally design experience-based practices. The methodology is presented below in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Employee-experience methodology (adapted from Veldsman & Van der Merwe, 2022)



The methodology consists of four questions that have to be explored as part of practice design, based on the theoretical understanding of the EB, EVP, EX intersects and the resultant psychological contract (PC) expectations.

Step 1: Defining the “why”

The first phase of the approach focuses on defining the “why” for both the organization and the individual. Articulating why the specific experience is important is a critical first step during this phase. This means creating an understanding of the experience and its impact on the individual level and organizational level. During this phase, insight is gathered into the psychological contract (which may be implicit or explicit), the

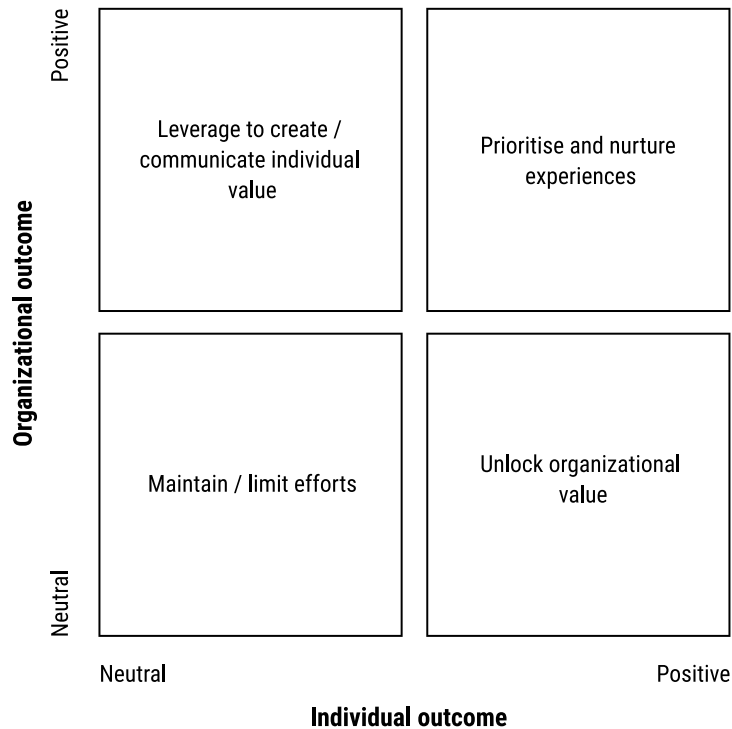
mutual expectations that may exist between the organization and the employee and the interactions that shape the reciprocity of the experience. During this phase, data-driven insights need to be gathered to dispel any assumptions regarding the importance and value of the experience to be designed. Importantly, this has to be approached from two perspectives:

- **Organization:** Does optimising this experience deliver any value for the organization? For example, optimising a workplace experience might be positive for the employee but not lead towards any additional benefit to the organization in terms of employee engagement or productivity. Or alternatively, an optimised experience might lead to benefits for the organization, but not any direct benefit for the employee. An example of such an experience may be the interaction that an employee has with their benefits (e.g., capturing a leave transaction).
- **Individual:** Does optimising this experience deliver value for the individual and in what manner? For example, an experience which leads to positive individual outcomes may not always lead to organizational value, and may therefore not require a differentiated focus. However, it may be leveraged to gain organizational value which leads to mutually beneficial outcomes. An example of such an experience may be the exit process of an employee, which does not hold particular value for the organization but can be leveraged to create organizational value indirectly, through the individual experience.

The above understanding of organizational versus individual outcomes is important to guide the prioritisation of the people management practices, which may have the biggest experience outcomes for both individuals and organizations, whilst delivering on psychological contract expectations. The prioritisation matrix below (Figure 4) is a useful tool to distinguish where value is unlocked for the organization and the individual:

Figure 4

Organizational versus individual experience outcomes and aligned focus of people management practice design (Authors' own work)



Practices and processes which have positive organizational and individual outcomes should be prioritised and nurtured, to ensure that experiences are intentionally designed to deliver on expectations. These are experiences which create mutual benefit, for example, the recruitment or onboarding process. Where the experience of a particular practice or process predominantly has a positive outcome for the organization, there is an opportunity to leverage this to either create or communicate the potential individual value that can be derived from it. An example of this can be the individual's interaction with their benefits and the broader EVP, which holds clear organizational value that can be unlocked at the individual level. Where a practice or a process predominantly leads to positive individual outcomes only, this presents an opportunity to unlock potential organizational value. This could include experiences with HR systems and processes which, if streamlined, provide a positive user experience but might also be leveraged in a variety of ways to guide other interactions. Where a practice or process is neutral in the organizational or individual outcomes that it leads to, it might only need to be maintained in the longer term, or monitored to ensure that it does not deteriorate into negative outcomes over time. An example of this may be "hygiene" factors such as contractual arrangements.

Step 2: Understanding the “who”

Once clarity exists around why the particular experience is important, the next phase focuses on understanding the consumer or “end-user” of the experience. This is a data-driven and insights-informed step in the sense-making process. It relies on qualitative and quantitative data to define user personas that shape the experience requirements. User persona design is a method that has been applied extensively within the domains of marketing, product design and user experience design. The approach can be linked back to the early 1980s when software designer Alan Cooper developed user stories to empathise with the technology users (Duda, 2018). A persona describes the mentality, behaviour and mindset of a particular clustering of consumers that helps the designer of products and solutions target a specific need for the consumer (Guo et al., 2011). These initial approaches towards personas have later developed into more sophisticated methods, described as design thinking. Design thinking is an iterative and explorative process to empathise with the end consumer of products and solutions in an attempt to experiment, iterate and evolve consumer experience (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). Traditionally used in product and service-design, this same type of thinking is required to develop consumer-based employee experiences. Over time, the use of various research methodologies, such as ethnographic research, demographic analysis, interviews, focus groups and other data collection techniques have made the persona approach more robust and scientific (Salminen et al., 2020). Importantly, however, personas do not describe an individual but rather a grouping of consumers that share similar needs. Personas should be created for a specific purpose and, within the context of employee experience design, be used within the intended purpose (Salminen et al., 2020). Therefore, rather than simply describing the general workforce, personas will differ based on the relevant people management practice, the associated experiences and expectations that exist as a result of the psychological contract. As an example, personas used within the benefit design process might be focused on broader needs related to biographical differentiators (e.g., age, gender, race, etc.), whereas personas used to define the end user of a recruitment process might use particular career needs as differentiators in the process.

Step 3: Articulating the “what”

Once the “end-user” or consumer has been defined, the next phase has to consider what the experience entails. This phase focuses on defining the touchpoints that shape the experience and the desired experiences of each interaction. This phase typically entails the creation of employee experience maps that articulate what the ideal experience of the

end user should be at each interaction touchpoint, by considering cognitive, emotive and behavioural reactions:

- **Think (Cognitive):** What do we want the consumer to think during this interaction?
- **Feel (Emotive):** What do we want them to feel?
- **Do (Behaviour):** How does this translate into a desired action or behaviour?

Employee experience maps help understand these touchpoints in relation to the desired experience and the resulting action that needs to be created. Practically, the experience maps use the desired reaction (think, feel and do) as the foundation for describing the desired experiences for a particular persona, across a particular process, product or practice. They detail the touchpoints that the end user will go through and can be broken down into specifically described phases. Desired experiences can contain many cognitive, emotive and behavioural reactions and could describe the desired experience either in terms of an “at its best” scenario or an “at its worst” scenario.

This also provides the blueprint for testing whether lived experiences are aligned to desired experiences. Measuring the lived experiences of employees across the various touchpoints provides valuable input into how successful the design of a particular process, product or practice has been in driving the desired experiences. Measurement data provides iterative input into the design process and highlights where adjustments need to be made in order to lead to the desired experiences.

Step 4: Determining the “how”

The desired experiences are brought to life through defined interactions, either digital (technology-based interaction) or physical (human interaction) or a combination of both. By clearly outlining these interactions, decisions around the required processes and system capabilities are directly aligned to the touchpoints and the articulated desired experiences. This phase entails the storyboarding or mapping of the actual experience to understand where and when these interactions occur and how the interaction is best facilitated. Using the touchpoints as a basis, the interactions are specified in more detail, often considering process steps, interaction outlines or step-by-step walk-throughs. Regardless of how the interactions are detailed, they should provide an overview of the parts that make up the whole from an experience perspective. Highlighting which interactions are digital or physical also provides data to support decisions around the technology, process or human enablement that is required and should be invested in, to bring the experience to life.

As a last step, designated feedback mechanisms are identified and put in place to continuously improve, adapt and change the experiences based upon collected data. The modes and mechanisms for gathering feedback should be aligned to the experience touchpoints and should provide real-time feedback from the interaction in a continuous and interactive manner.

Applying this methodology to people management practices: Creating a positive offboarding experience for departing talent

The practical human-centred experience design methodology is applicable to any people management practice, where a particular experience is shaped through interactions and touchpoints. The method has successfully been applied to the talent attraction experience (Veldsman & Van der Merwe, 2022) and to a lesser extent to the design of employee-centric well-being practices (Veldsman & Van Aarde, 2021). Although in practice the methodology is not always applied as a linear and step-wise process, it does prompt and facilitate consideration of the consumer or “end user” in a structured manner, based on psychological contract expectations.

For the purpose of this article, the offboarding experience within a global insurance organization ($N = 16,432$) operating across 3 continents will be utilized to demonstrate how the methodology can be applied in practice. Within this organization, the offboarding process was identified as a particularly negative experience for departing employees, to the extent that they indicated (through post-exit surveys) that they would not recommend the organization, would not consider returning to the organization and would not want to keep in contact post-exit. This posed challenges in retaining a positive employer brand as well as access to potential clients and alumni talent as a viable talent pool.

The human-centred design methodology was applied, to ensure that the needs of the departing employee are clearly understood (what interactions have the biggest impact on the experience) and to balance what is important for the employee with what is required by the organization.

Table 2 below summarizes the application of the different steps to the offboarding experience which will be discussed below.

Table 2

Applying the human-centred design methodology to the offboarding experience (Authors' own work)

| Steps | Application in the offboarding practice design process |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Defining the "why" | Departing employees remain potential clients, a viable future talent pool, as well as brand ambassadors for the business. It is therefore critical to ensure that the exit process creates a positive lasting experience, that keeps departing employees connected to the brand and provides access to alumni talent as a talent pool. The current exit process was not conducive to these outcomes, based on exit interview and exit survey data. |
| 2. Understanding the "who" | Three personas were identified based on their shared needs and characteristics |
| 3. Articulating the "what" | Three broad touchpoints were identified as moments that matter during the exit process (pre-exit, day of departure, post-exit) |
| 4. Determining the "how" | The end-to-end exit experience was mapped based on the three identified touchpoints. Based on these touchpoints, detailed process enablement was developed across all role players who play a part in the process and system enablement to manage workflows and communication. |

The step-by-step application of the experience design methodology to the offboarding practice is detailed below, to showcase considerations as well as example outputs from the process.

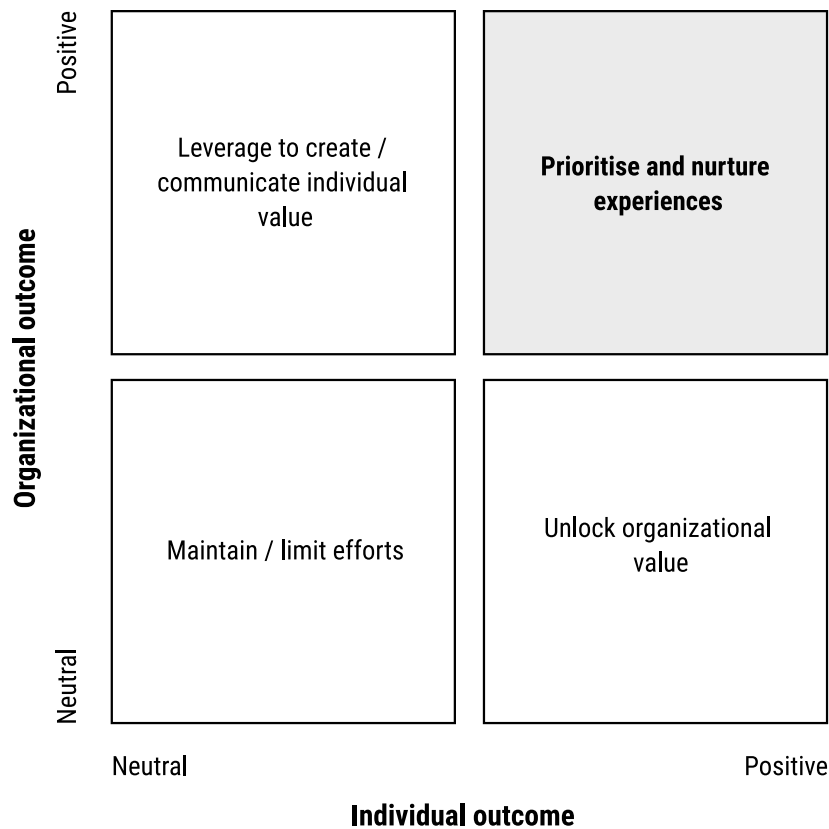
Step 1: Defining the "why"

Feedback from departing employees during exit surveys consistently indicated that their exit process did not live up to expectations. Employees indicated that the offboarding process negatively impacted their perception of the organization and the extent of care shown. This was also driven by the complexity and uncertainty related to benefit withdrawals and logistical arrangements, which was further emphasised during the pandemic.

This was highlighted as an experience which, if managed well, could result in significant positive outcomes for the organization to build brand ambassadorship and an alumni talent and referral pool, whilst creating positive lasting experiences for departing employees. Using various available data sources such as exit surveys, anecdotal employee feedback and exit interview data, the human resources team determined that the current off-boarding experience for individuals was complicated and frustrating which resulted in a negative lasting perception of the organization as an employer. Based on the prioritisation matrix drawn up (see Figure 5), it became clear that the offboarding process could have both positive organizational and individual outcomes. From an organizational perspective, it was deemed to be an important experience based on the importance of

building alumni talent pools and brand ambassadorship, which were both strategic people priorities for the business. For the individual, the experience could be optimized to create value within the experience itself and further support the employee during a period of transition and change. Based on these inputs and the understanding of why the experience is important, the necessary process was deemed to fall in the top right-hand quadrant of the prioritization matrix, which focuses on prioritising and nurturing experiences aimed to maximize both individual and organizational outcomes (see Figure 5).

Figure 5
Positioning the offboarding experience to guide the “why” (Authors’ own work)



Step 2: Understanding the “who”

A workgroup of HR practitioners was established, to participate in the practice design process and represent different perspectives from different business areas and employee types. Other data sources were also utilized, where available, to gather input with regards to current employee departures, reasons and numbers through the use of employee headcount and trend data.

The first task in the design process was to establish who the team should be designing the practice for, or who the end-user or consumer is. To define personas that are representative of the end user, the different types of exits from the organization guided the various needs that departing employees might have, and how these may be different. Based on a grouping of needs (fairness in the process, benefit withdrawal support or career transition support), three personas were identified and broadly described (see Table 3).

Table 3
Identification of the personas related to the offboarding experience (Authors' own work)

| Persona | Example | Individual needs and outcomes | Organizational needs and outcomes |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The employee that is asked to leave | Dismissals Terminations | Exiting the employee in a fair and respectful manner regardless of circumstances | Fairness, transparency and consistency of process aligned to organizational values |
| The employee who leaves due to unforeseen circumstances | Disability Death | Transitioning into a new phase requiring support (disability) or focus on loved ones left behind (death) | Managing the untimely exit process which extends to the beneficiaries and family's needs |
| The employee that decides to leave | Resignations | | Creating a positive offboarding experience to maintain the relationship and ensure longer term contact |

Considering the exit data that was gathered as part of the sense-making process, the majority of exits were “career departures” or “resignations” and this was therefore the persona that guided the first phase of the practice design. The output from this design process acted as a blueprint for the other personas. This acts as a minimum viable experience that can then be further expanded based on the specific needs and nuances of the other personas (e.g., further interactions associated with disciplinary processes or – in the case of a permanent disability departure – would not be reflected in a resignation process).

Step 3: Articulating the “what”

Based on the “career departures” persona, the next step was to identify the typical touchpoints that would be part of this consumer’s offboarding experience. The touchpoints were identified that demarcate the moments that matter during the exit process. To identify the touchpoints, the team considered existing offboarding processes, input from human resources, compliance representatives and payroll and benefits employees. At a high-level, three major touchpoints were identified (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Touchpoints and “moments that matter” during the offboarding process (Authors’ own work)



Throughout the design sessions it became clear that the employment type (e.g., permanent vs. temporary) and contractual agreements might impact the notice period and time span of the touchpoints. Despite varying timelines, the touchpoints remain relevant for employees regardless of their employment types and these nuances were catered for in the interactions that shape the experience (step 4).

For each of these touchpoints, the desired experiences were mapped out. For the purpose of this design process, the focus was on describing the desired experience that the organization was trying to create, as opposed to looking at isolated incidents or worst case scenarios. When facilitating the design session, this approach was much more conducive to coming up with solutions, than following a detailed and critical evaluative approach. This led to describing the experience at its best, without focusing the design process only on what is not working or the most salient pain points. This also led to robust discussions around what is most important for the relevant persona, having participants represent this employee type and articulating their needs.

For each of the touchpoints, the cognitive (think), emotive (feel) and action (do) responses were debated and unpacked by the human resources task team, which represented most of the business areas. An overview of the desired experience statements are included in Table 4 below.

Table 4
Articulating the desired experiences at each touchpoint of the offboarding experience (Authors' own work)

| Desired Experience | Before Exit | Point of Departure | After Exit |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Think | This is an organization that cares for their employees, future, past and present | I believe my experience at the organization has been a positive career experience | I think that the organization is a place I will return to in the future or recommend to friends and family |
| Feel | I feel cared for, equipped and supported through this transition | I feel valued, recognised and am attached to the brand, although I am departing | I feel a sense of pride when thinking about my organizational experience |
| Do | I am clear on what is required of me through the exit process, knowing that the organization is there to support me | I retain my organizational pride, relationships with colleagues and engage with the brand outside of my role as an employee | I refer others to the organization for career opportunities or as clients |

Writing the desired experiences in the first person or using “I” statements, resulted in a relatable experience for the human resources task team participants, shifting the design process from highly aspirational “want to” statements to specific statements that can be translated into interactions. These statements were later used as the basis for the employee experience feedback at the different touchpoints to determine whether the experience lived up to the desired experience design.

Step 4: Determining the “how”

After the desired experiences were mapped out, the next step was to determine how these experiences across the various touchpoints are executed. With a highly administrative practice, such as offboarding, this step can easily turn into a process mapping exercise that simply documents the as-is. To avoid this pitfall, as a first step, the interactions were documented through a storytelling approach, where participants of the human resources task team would walk through the phases of the experience (based on their insights of working with the practice) and document their interactions. This formed the basis of interactions, which were then further detailed and enhanced through the process. Table 5 below shows an output from this step in the process, which was then used as a basis for further detailing the interactions.

Table 5

Interactions that shape the desired employee experience during the offboarding process (Authors' own work)

| Touchpoints | Before Exit | Point of Departure | After Exit |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Description | Starts from notice of exit, through applicable notice period, until the last day | Point of departure (actual last day) | Starts after last day into the future, 60 days + longer term "maintenance" |
| Desired Employee Experience (EX) (Think, Feel, Do) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is an organization that cares for their employees, future, past and present I feel cared for, equipped and supported through this transition I do what is required of me through the exit process, knowing that the organization is there to support me | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I believe my organizational experience has been a positive career experience I feel valued, recognised and am attached to the brand, although I am departing I retain my organizational pride, relationships with colleagues and engage with the brand outside of my role as an employee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think that this organization is a place I will return to in the future or recommend to friends and family I feel a sense of pride when thinking about my organizational experience I refer others to the organization for career opportunities or as clients |
| Interactions (How do we create the EX) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding of exit process even before I resign Line manager reaction / conversation at notice of resignation My understanding of what will happen next My understanding of my benefits and what will happen once I leave How my exit interview is conducted - acting with care and type of information asked How my exit is communicated to broader teams & stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing that my legacy will live on and the knowledge that I have is transferred The actual goodbye, feeling appreciated and acknowledged for my contribution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How smooth the actual transition is to wrap up my benefits Post-exit communication to check how I am doing Providing input, knowing it is valuable in making things better How I am treated when I engage with the organization in the future (do they recognise that I am an ex-employee?) |

During this phase, it became clear that a number of steps or processes have to be included, to ensure either legislative compliance (e.g., specific tax forms) or to mitigate risks (e.g., revoking system and building access). To ensure that these interactions (which do not necessarily form part of the desired experience, but are important to the organization) were considered and incorporated, subject matter experts in information technology, forensics, payroll and benefits were consulted, to ensure that these elements were sufficiently documented in the interactions. After the interactions were documented, these were then further defined as either digital (technology-based interaction) or physical (human interaction) touchpoints or a combination of both. During this step, the administrative components of the exit experience were highlighted as significant potential stumbling blocks or hindrances in creating the desired experiences. This meant that process and system enablement would be critical to ensure that the interactions that are dependent on human interactions are meaningful and standardised, whilst

technology is utilised to enable efficiency and also relieve some of the burden from the departing employee (i.e., relieve some of the frustration in the process). This led to the documentation and mapping of an end-to-end exit process which would form the basis of the human interactions required. The system enablement requirements were detailed through a functional specification. This included enhancements of the current system (automation of certain interactions) and the build of a simplified user interface to initiate and drive the exit process from an employee perspective, focusing on transparency and visibility of the process and progress.

The existing employee experience surveys were also adjusted to the newly defined touchpoints and interactions, specifically to ensure that the right feedback is sought at the right touchpoints, and to ensure the timing aligns and allows for swift action where required. This formed part of a broader design of continuous feedback of employee experiences. This input would then be used to refine, optimize and review experiences in line with the desired think, do and feel experiences defined at each touchpoint.

Final reflections and conclusions

In the reality of the current talent market, distributed workforces and non-traditional employment relationships, the importance of the human experience of work (regardless of where, when and how it is performed) cannot be underestimated. This experience, which aims to ultimately deliver on the expectations of employees from the organization, is the culmination of tangible and intangible interactions, through digital and physical channels. Therefore, an intentional human-centric approach to designing people practices is critical in shaping employee experiences. This requires a shift in how people management practices and policies are designed, specifically, a shift from a primarily organizational needs and risk perspective to a perspective that focuses on the needs and expectations of the human being as the “end consumer”.

For the organization included in this case study, ensuring brand ambassadorship post-departure and having access to a viable alumni talent pool, were critical strategic people objectives. To address this need, the E-cubed model was used to guide the development of a human-centred design methodology, to design a sustainable offboarding practice that places the human being at the heart of a traditionally predominantly transactional practice.

This article adds a unique perspective to the existing body of literature on human-centric organizational practices, with a specific focus on employee experience, employee value proposition and employer brand through the exploration of the psychological contract as a conduit to shaping authentic lived experiences. By building on the theoretical foundation of the psychological contract, the experience methodology is anchored in research and provides an organizational psychology lens to what has predominantly been a client experience and product design approach to understanding experiences. The employee experience includes cognitive and emotive interactions through impactful “moments that matter”, which shape the experience regardless of the engagement channel or people practice that it forms part of. These moments occur within the balance of “moments of value” for the organization which is identified for mutual benefit. Instead of a mechanistic and one-dimensional concept, the employee experience is more than the sum of its parts. It is dynamic and shaped through interactions across the employee lifecycle while balancing the expectations of the individual and the organization.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes the following:

- It proposes that a focus on the psychological contract and clarity around expectations are critical when it comes to the employer brand, employer value proposition and employee experience
- It puts forward the E-cubed model as a framework for experience-based design
- It positions human-centric design as a valuable approach to iteratively redesign people practices, whilst also actively considering the end-user
- It describes the benefits of using a defined methodology which adds robustness and structure to the design process, by systematically answering the questions of “why?”, “who?”, “what?” and “how?”

Practically, the study provides a human-centric design methodology that can be applied to various organizational contexts and HR systems to design HR practices that are more relevant and aligned with the new psychological contract. It should also help organizations set themselves apart in a highly competitive talent market by increasing their ability to deliver authentic lived experiences that are in line with (prospective) employee expectations. For HR practitioners, the application of the methodology has the potential to usher in a new era with regards to designing consumer-driven HR practices that bring employee memorable moments and organizational moments of value to life.

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A picture is worth a thousand words: Pictorial scales for the assessment of work intensity

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Abstract

In the field of work and organizational psychology, verbal questionnaires provide a solid and valid foundation for the assessment of working conditions and employees' attitudes. In the view of practitioners, these instruments are often too long, requiring a lot of time to complete, and employees might resist the invitation to participate in frequent surveys. To address these drawbacks, we present an alternative approach and describe the development of pictorial scales for the assessment of work intensity. Pictorial scales provide a simple and inviting format for the assessment of work intensity, and therefore, are a suitable instrument for practice-oriented formats such as interviews or workshops. Moreover, pictorial scales have advantages in repeated assessments such as in diary studies.

Keywords: work intensity, work intensification, work demands, pictorial scales, interview guide, workshop material, diary studies

Introduction

Research in work and organizational psychology requires reliable psychometric instruments for the assessment of work-related constructs and employees' attitudes. Thereby, the majority of research relies on verbal questionnaires that provide a solid foundation for the assessment of psychological constructs and have proven themselves in research and practice. The development and validation of questionnaires follow established methodological criteria ensuring the psychometric quality of the instruments. However, practitioners often react less than positively when faced with implementing validated questionnaires. Typically, they say things such as: *"The questionnaire is too long! Our employees do not have the time to answer that many questions. The questionnaire contains items asking for similar things! Please remove these redundant items."* In most cases, practitioners can be swayed if one explains that the questionnaire was intentionally constructed in this particular way to ensure accuracy and validity. However, there is another potential issue with frequently asking employees to answer long questionnaires: they can lead to survey fatigue, and employees might resist following an invitation or stop answering a questionnaire prematurely. Against this background, short questionnaires are recommended, especially in the case of repeated assessments such as in diary studies (Ohly et al., 2010).

To address these practitioner concerns, we present an innovative approach to the assessment of psychological constructs in the context of work and organizational psychology. In particular, we describe the development of pictorial scales for the assessment of work intensity. These pictorial scales are meant for cases where a concise instrument is needed and are well suited for initiating discussions, for example, in workshops.

Pictorial scales in psychological assessment

Pictorial scales have been used widely in research and practice. In a recent literature review on pictorial scales, Sauer et al. (2021) reported that most of these scales assess emotional states, followed by scales for medical diagnoses. For example, scales to measure pain by showing faces which are more or less distorted by pain tend to be widespread. Interestingly, pictorial scales have been shown to be suitable for certain target groups, especially younger children who can express feelings and their intensity only to a limited extent (Sauer et al., 2021). A systematic review of face pain scales for children confirmed

that they met psychometric requirements (Tomlinson et al., 2010). Beyond that, various pictorial anxiety scales were developed especially for children (Kaur et al., 2016; Liszio et al., 2020) and there are even possibilities to measure children's personality traits with pictorial scales (Mackiewicz & Ciecuch, 2016).

Pictorial scales have also been developed for adults, many of them representing alternatives to existing verbal questionnaires for use in clinical settings. For example, Ghiassi et al. (2010) developed a pictorial version of a sleepiness scale showing a person in different situations such as sitting on the sofa or watching TV. In each situation, the sitting position represents different levels of sleepiness in four gradations. At the lowest level of sleepiness, the person sits upright, whereas at the highest level the person is shown slumped over. Ghiassi et al. (2010) were able to demonstrate that this scale provided comparable results to a corresponding verbal questionnaire. Also, the perception of pain is sometimes measured by using pictorial scales. For example, Cook et al. (2018) developed an alternative to language-based questionnaires for assessing functional interference from chronic pain. This scale shows a person in different situations such as climbing stairs or carrying shopping bags. For every situation the two extreme scores of the five-point Likert scale are anchored with pictures showing the person either exhibiting no pain or significant pain while engaging in the respective activity. The frailty scale by Theou et al. (2019) is another example showing that pictorial scales can be useful for target groups that have communication difficulties, such as older people who have difficulties answering verbal scales due to dementia. This scale shows typical situations (each described via five images which represent the answering choices) such as daytime tiredness or difficulties in memory. Other examples of pictorial scales that have been proposed as alternatives to verbal scales are scales for measuring emotions in response to an event (Bradley & Lang, 1994) or for capturing moods (Wong, 2021). Both scales use gradual sequences of images that work via metaphors, such as a volcano (representing the anger dimension; Wong, 2021) or an increasingly large image of a person (representing the dominance dimension; Bradley & Lang, 1994).

In the context of work and organizational psychology, the probably best-known pictorial scale goes back to Kunin (1955), who assessed job satisfaction using a series of smiley faces with different mouth curves ranging from the corners of the mouth turned clearly downwards to the corners of the mouth turned upwards. Another example by Maes et al. (2018) assessed women's work burdens using pictorial answering categories showing a woman carrying a sack, with the sack getting bigger and heavier in each image. Recently, Lambusch et al. (2020) published a pictorial scale to capture human energy in the

workplace based on the metaphor of batteries with different charge states. In particular, the momentary level of energy is captured by battery icons as known from smartphones with the charging level ranging from one to five bars. In concluding their review, Sauer et al. (2021) stated that pictorial scales are underrepresented in the field of work psychology and that, especially the measurement of constructs such as workload would benefit from pictorial scales. Following this call, we describe the development of a pictorial scale for the assessment of work intensity.

Work intensity in the workplace

The ongoing evolution of information and communication technologies has expanded and shaped our ways of communication and collaboration (Korunka & Kubicek, 2017). Work settings have changed due to increased flexibility both concerning work locations and working hours. Moreover, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, working from home and in the evening have become the new reality for a large proportion of the workforce. These changes may also result in a higher intensity of work (Korunka & Kubicek, 2017). Work intensity is often described as 'working hard' including working for a longer time at an intense level of effort (Burke et al., 2010). However, the notion of “work at high speed and to tight deadlines might not fully capture the complexity of work intensity in its many job-specific forms” (Piasna, 2017, p. 171).

With the objective of a broader conceptualisation of work intensity, Soucek and Voss (2022) conducted a comprehensive literature review and ran workshops with employees, employee representatives and management (e.g., work councils, occupational health management). Based on this work, Soucek and Voss (2022) developed a questionnaire on work intensity that includes 21 items and measures seven facets of work intensity. Specifically, work intensity is associated with a high quantity of tasks that occur in a certain period (*amount*), that have to be completed in parallel (*concurrency*) or occur temporarily clustered (*work peaks*). Likewise, a high degree of coordination with colleagues is another characteristic of work intensity (*interdependence*). Other facets relate to a high degree of interruptions (*interruptions*), ambiguous tasks (*lack of clarity*) and accessibility for professional matters outside regular working hours (*extended availability*).

New ways of work, characterised by digitalisation and flexibilisation, have often been associated with higher work intensity which may lead to negative consequences for employee well-being and performance. For example, Soucek and Moser (2010) have

shown email communication to be related to information overload. In particular, the characteristics of email communication such as a simplified distribution of messages to a large number of recipients are accompanied by different facets of information overload such as a large number of incoming messages or deficient communication quality. Further, Reinke and Chamorro-Premuzic (2014) have shown that email overload was related to burnout and several other studies have associated the notion of 'too much technology' with lower levels of mental health and productivity (e.g., Diaz et al., 2012; Mano & Mesch, 2010; Reinke & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2014). Moreover, Stadin et al. (2016) reported a positive relationship between demands from information and communication technology (ICT) and psychological strain. Based on data from the Swedish Longitudinal Occupational Survey of Health, 14,757 employees responded to measures of ICT demands (e.g., "too many calls and emails" or "claims to be available on work-related issues during leisure time", Stadin et al., 2016, p. 1051), which were related to job strain (e.g., "Do you have to work intensively?", p. 1051) and self-rated health ("How would you rate your general state of health?", p. 1052). Overall, previous studies seem to suggest that new ways of work are associated with higher work intensity which might have negative consequences for well-being.

However, previous research has been fuzzy in the conceptualisation and measurement of work intensity. In particular, previous measures of work intensity include their antecedents or consequences. For example, questions such as "*Due to digital technologies at the workplace, I have more work than before*" (Borle et al., 2020, p. 380) include antecedents of work intensity such as the advancing digitalisation and flexibilisation of work in the measurement of work intensity. Other questionnaires include negative consequences, such as an impairment of employees' mental health in the measurement of work intensity (e.g., "*The time intensity of my work has become more stressful*", Neirotti, 2017, p. 1970). These different operationalisations illustrate that no clear differentiation is made between causes, forms and consequences of work intensity.

For the sake of a conceptual clarification of work intensity, Soucek et al. (2022) developed a process model that explicitly distinguishes between causes, forms and consequences of work intensity (see also Soucek & Voss, 2020). Among the causes, the model included new ways of work that are characterised by, for example, digitalisation and flexibilisation. These factors are initially neither good nor bad, but can result in work intensity that is perceived as stressful, which in turn can endanger employees' psychological well-being and performance. This distinction is important because new ways of work do not necessarily lead to high work intensity, but depend on other factors, such as

organizational strategies or the decision latitude of the employees (Soucek & Voss, 2020).

This model conceptualises work intensity as including the seven facets described above and reflected in the questionnaire on work intensity (Soucek & Voss, 2022). In order to avoid double-barrelled items, the wording of the items deliberately relates neither to causes nor consequences of work intensity. In this way, Soucek and Voss (2022) addressed shortcomings of existing measures that did not differentiate between causes, forms and consequences of work intensity.

Pictorial scales on work intensity

The questionnaire on work intensity by Soucek and Voss (2022) that distinguishes between seven facets of work intensity, served as the basis for the development and validation of a pictorial scale measure of work intensity. The development and validation of the pictorial scales followed the propositions of Sauer et al. (2021) and consisted of three steps, namely, item generation, interpretation check, and scale validation. In the first step, items were generated in discussions with students and scientific experts, and several pictures were drafted for each dimension of work intensity. In the next step, employees and Human Resources professionals were asked for their interpretations of the pictures. Based on their feedback and the assessment of psychometric properties of the pictorial scales (i.e., item analysis), the pictures were revised and refined. Afterwards, 173 medical students were invited to describe the contents of the pictures to validate the intended content. Their description of the pictures partially led to another modification of the pictures. A similar study included 118 students with work experience. In the last step, the final version of the pictorial scales was validated with a study involving 335 employees who answered the verbal questionnaire and the pictorial scales on work intensity. The results of a confirmatory factor analysis showed that the seven dimensions of work intensity as assessed by the verbal questionnaire were significantly related to the assessment resulting from the pictorial scales (convergent validity). Thereby, the differentiated assessment of the seven dimensions of work intensity was not blurred by the two survey formats (discriminant validity). In summary, the pictorial scales proved as suitable as the verbal questionnaire to assess the seven dimensions of work intensity in a differentiated manner (Soucek & Voss, 2022).

The pictorial scales on work intensity consist of seven series of pictures that represent the seven dimensions of work intensity. Each scale consists of five consecutive pictures

following the idea of a Likert scale with a linear increase in content between the pictures. For example, Figure 1 shows an example of the series of pictures for the “Amount” dimension. In these pictures, yellow sticky notes are symbolizing work tasks. The increase in task quantity is illustrated by adding two tasks to each subsequent picture starting from three tasks in the first picture on the left side.

Figure 1
Pictorial scale on work intensity: Amount (Soucek & Voss, 2021)

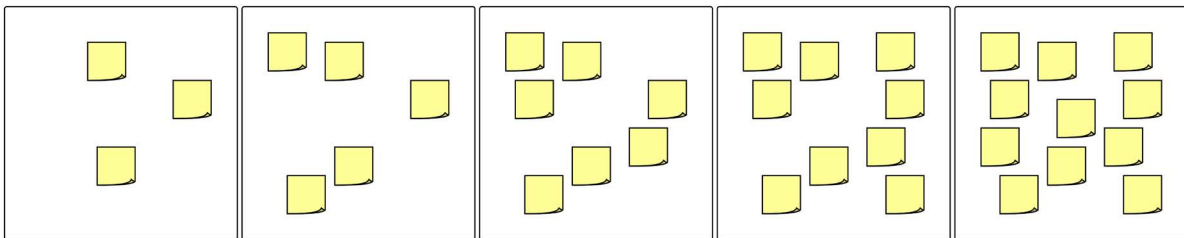
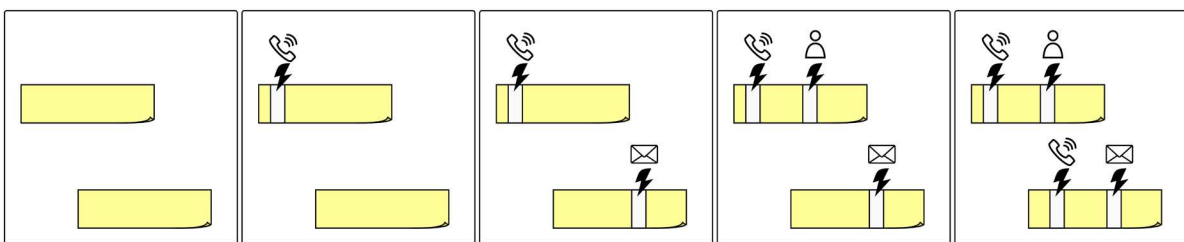


Figure 2 shows the sequence of pictures for the dimension “Interruptions”. Again, yellow sticky notes are representing work tasks that are interrupted by various events, such as telephone calls, emails or visits from colleagues. Please note that the number of interruptions increases linearly from left to right; in each picture, an additional interruption occurs.

Figure 2
Pictorial scales on work intensity: Interruptions (Soucek & Voss, 2021)



The pictorial scales on work intensity were published by Soucek and Voss (2021) under a CC BY-NC-ND license (Creative Commons: Attribution, NonCommercial, NoDerivatives; <https://creativecommons.org>). This licence permits redistribution of the pictures with attribution to the creator, but no editing or commercial use. The pictorial scales are accessible via the following link: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/93KTQ> (Soucek & Voss, 2021). The following sentence serves as an instruction for participants: “Please select

the picture that most closely matches the situation in your workplace.” The full scale, including all facets of work intensity, can be found at the end of the paper.

Application of the pictorial scales

The pictorial scales are a simple and concise instrument designed to invite employees to participate in workshops and surveys on the topic of work intensity. The instrument can be used as a diagnostic for work intensity, but it can also serve as useful input for interventions. The visual representation of several facets of work intensity is intended to stimulate discussions, and thus, contributes to an exchange of interpretations and assessments. Thus, by using the pictorial scales a discussion is initiated that can contribute to a shared understanding of work intensity and its facets. In the following, we will describe possible scenarios that can benefit from using the pictorial scales.

Interviews

The pictorial scales can be used in interview guides to provide a visual impression of the topic at hand. Instead of the interviewer just reading out a question, the pictorial scale could be printed on the interview sheet for illustrative purposes. This can benefit both the interviewer and the interviewee. For instance, the scale can help the interviewer with providing a vivid explanation of the respective facet of work intensity. In turn, the interviewee gets more inspiration from the pictorial representation, which might facilitate finding work-related examples. Explaining the question with the help of pictures is especially useful when interviewing people who speak a different language or have limited language skills. Such interview guides could be used in the context of occupational health management or by company doctors.

Workshops

Another setting where the pictorial scales are useful are workshops. The pictures could be used, for example, on pinboards as part of visual queries. For instance, the moderator of the workshop can draw one line for each dimension of work intensity on a pinboard and use the pictures as anchors for these scales. Subsequently, workshop participants are invited to assess each dimension of workplace intensity by covertly placing a dot somewhere along the respective scale. After every participant has placed their respective dots, the wall is uncovered for all to see. The workshop moderator can then compare

the variability in the participants' answers for each scale. Thereby, a low variance in the answers indicates a similar understanding of the respective dimension of work intensity. If the assessments are very different, this may be an indication of different interpretations of the pictures. By inviting workshop participants to share their interpretations of the pictures, a team could create a common understanding of the work intensity situation in their team or organization.

Diary studies

Finally, another scenario for the application of the pictorial scales are diary studies. In diary studies, participants repeatedly answer questionnaires, for example, at the end of every work day. Because of this frequent assessment, questionnaires have to be concise in order to avoid hampering participants' motivation and compliance over time. Due to the visual representation, pictorial scales can be processed and completed more quickly than written items. Critics could argue that the pictorial scales cannot be used meaningfully without further explanation by an interviewer or in the context of a workshop because every person differs in the interpretation of the pictures. However, the objective of diary studies is to examine changes over time as perceived by every participant. Thereby, different mean levels of participants' responses as a result of their unique interpretation of the pictures are taken into account in the statistical analyses. Technically speaking, the statistical analyses of diary studies relate to within-subject effects while statistically controlling for between-subject effects by applying person-mean centring. Nevertheless, the meaning of the pictorial scales can be briefly explained at the beginning of the diary study to ensure comparable interpretations among the participants. Overall, the pictorial scales meet the demand of a simple and concise instrument that allows for repeated assessments, such as in the context of diary studies.

Conclusions

The present work follows the call of Sauer and colleagues (2021) who stated that pictorial scales are underrepresented in the field of work and organizational psychology. The questionnaire and pictorial scales on work intensity provide an excellent starting point to follow this claim because both instruments assess the same facets of work intensity with different methods. So far, empirical studies comparing verbal questionnaires and pictorial scales are rare in work and organizational psychology and future research should compare the particular strengths and weaknesses of these different formats. Also, the

development of the pictorial scales on work intensity may inspire researchers to apply this methodological approach to other constructs in work and organizational psychology.

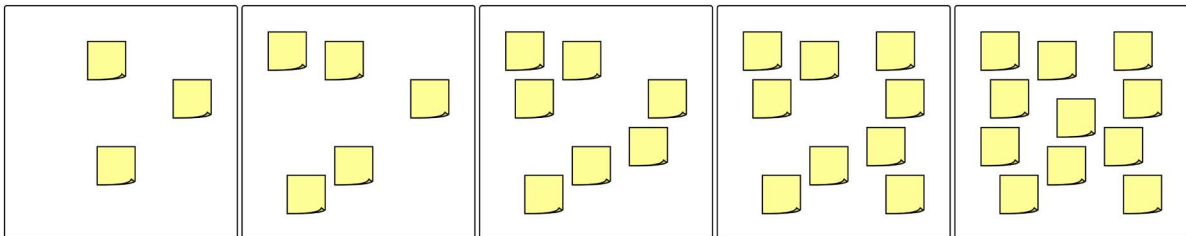
From a practitioner's perspective, pictorial scales are an innovative and important supplement to verbal questionnaires. Pictorial scales are not intended to replace verbal scales, but could compensate for some disadvantages of verbal questionnaires in certain scenarios. In line with Sauer et al. (2021), we propose that pictorial scales are particularly suitable for use in interviews and workshops where respondents may have limited language skills or situations where there is a need to measure a construct several times such as in diary studies. Overall, the pictorial scales provide a simple and inviting format for the assessment of work intensity, and therefore, are a suitable instrument for practice-oriented formats. We have reproduced the full scale below for your information.

Full pictorial scale (Soucek & Voss, 2021)

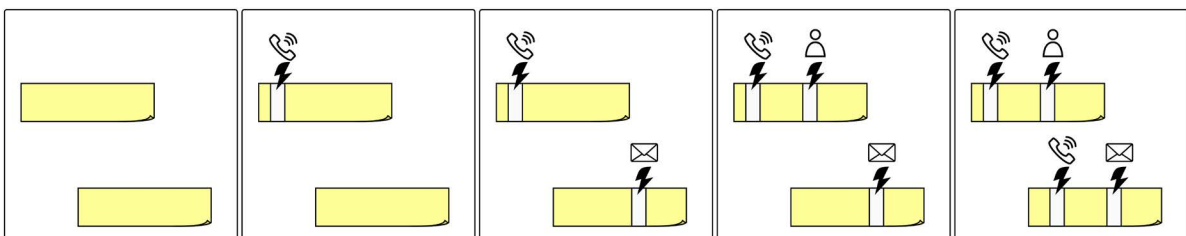
Instructions

Please select the picture that most closely matches the situation in your workplace.

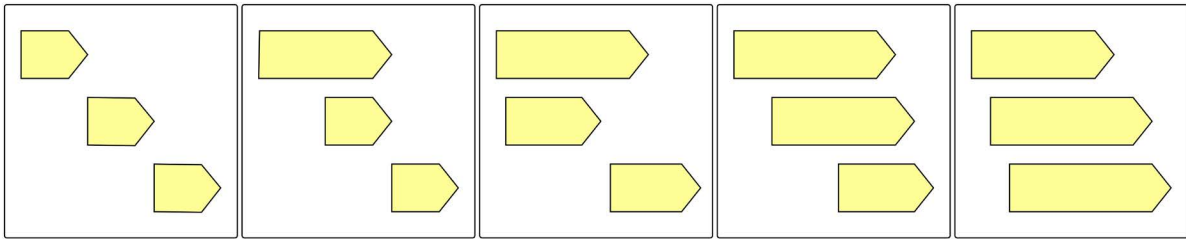
Amount



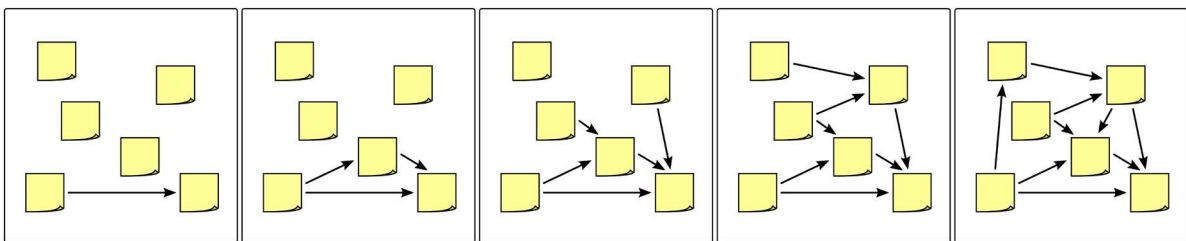
Interruptions



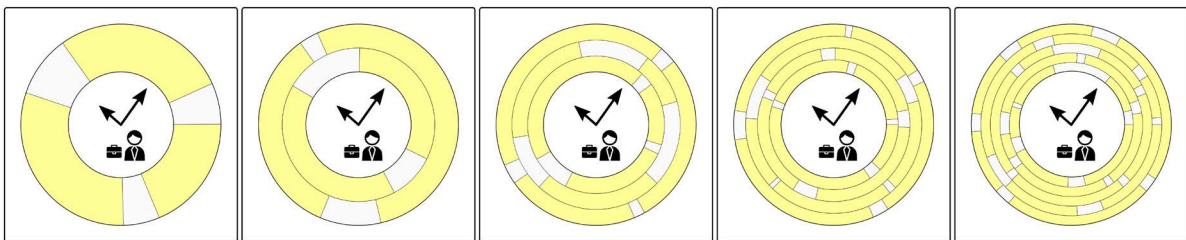
Concurrency



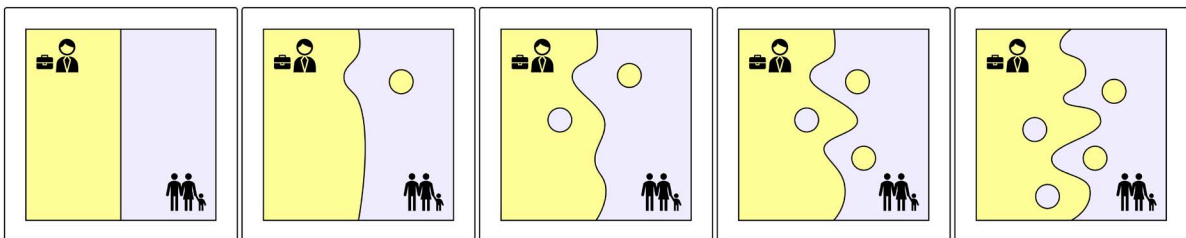
Interdependence



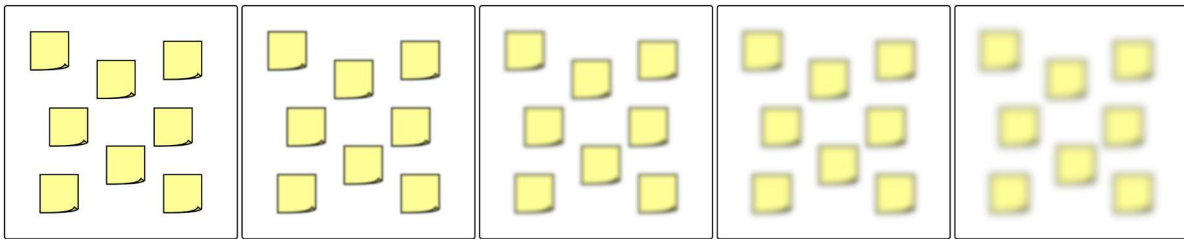
Work peaks



Extended availability



Lack of clarity



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This book offers a resource for researchers willing to embark on a journey of studying the role of gossip in organizations. As the author notes in the introduction, gossip is an idea whose time has come. Indeed gossip research has increased dramatically from its modest beginnings in the 1970s and is constantly gaining interest in both science and society at large. Throughout the book Kathryn encourages researchers to see gossip not only from the perspective of positivist quantitative science, aimed at testing various hypotheses regarding behavioural and interpersonal dimensions of gossip, but to take qualitative and arts-based approaches in studying gossip as a pathway to accessing organizational knowledge.

The author proposes that organizations and workplaces provide the content and context of gossip, which should be better regarded as a storytelling process that uncovers narratives of difference, discrimination and bias. As such, gossip is described as a process that communicates organizational knowledge. Through gossip participants may understand their context better and may even perceive early signs of organizational failure.

Kathryn advises researchers to take a reflective stance in the study of gossip and does so herself from the start of the book. The author admits to her aversion for positivist quantitative approaches, and in particular for the two-by-two design, because this sort of research is formulaic and restrictive, and dissecting gossip by testing hypotheses 'stifles scholarship' (p. 22). Furthermore, the author takes a position against narrow definitions of gossip as a process that occurs between individual senders, receivers, and targets, and prefers to think of gossip as 'language in action' (p. 22). Thus, according to this view, definitions of gossip should be flexible and include organizational myths, stories, rumor, small talk, chatting and urban legends that circulate in organizations, as well as talk about corporate events and actions, which are not reducible to the personalities of the actors.

Although as a more quantitatively oriented researcher of gossip my view on conceptual clarity and the usefulness of quantitative methods is different from the one outlined in this book, there is value in carefully considering the reflections made here. Particularly useful are the author's considerations in terms of advantages and limitations of different research approaches, and the advice to use a variety of methods and perspectives to understand a social phenomenon as complex as gossip in organizations. The field of gossip research has only to benefit from integrating insights derived from different methodological approaches. Although leveraging the advantages of different

approaches may be challenging, this is worthwhile in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of gossip in organizations. A challenge researchers may need to overcome is to transcend the school of thought in which they were trained and consider integrating research practices from a different paradigm. I believe Dyson's (2009) analogy on page 8 illustrates well this idea, which is central to the book:

"Some mathematicians are birds, flying high in the sky, surveying vistas out to the far horizon, and delighting in 'concepts that unify our thinking and bring together diverse problems from different parts of the landscape. Others are frogs, living in the mud and seeing only the flowers that grow nearby. The evolving scholarship of organizational gossip needs both frog's-eye and bird's-eye vantage points, which will involve working at the empirical intersections of qualitative and quantitative research."

Furthermore, Kathryn formulates valuable advice for researchers to reflect more deeply on the ethics of conducting gossip research, in terms of how their values, ideology, culture, or training may affect the research process. For example, how do the hierarchical relationships between researcher and participants influence the research process and the research output? How were participants selected, are all groups of interest represented in the sample? Is the researcher prioritising ethical protocols and checklists versus creating respectful and meaningful relationships with research participants?

In this short review I have highlighted some of the topics covered in this book, which ultimately sparks ideas for reflection and challenges the reader to take less established but potentially more creative approaches in studying gossip in organizations. I share Kathryn's hopefulness that these reflections will enable researchers to make innovative discoveries in the field.

About the reviewer

Dr Elena Martinescu is a postdoctoral research associate at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Her research is focused on understanding the role of gossip in work contexts as a process that helps exchange information and influences social bonds between group members.

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