

Editorial: Reframing Work, Identity, and Support in the Complex World of Employment

Editorial

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Received: 22 September, 2025; Accepted: 02 October, 2025

This issue of the journal (first issue of 2025, Vol 44 issue 1) brings together five innovative and methodologically diverse papers that collectively engage with some of the most pressing themes in contemporary organisational and occupational research: stress and support in intimate relationships, employability and public service efficacy, gendered experiences of flexible work, the design of collaborative apprenticeship frameworks linking higher education and industry, and the career capital of globally mobile professionals. While each paper stands on its own with distinct contributions to specific fields, taken together they offer a rich, multifaceted portrait of how individuals and institutions navigate the evolving terrain of contemporary work.

In *Love Under Duress: How Burnout Mediates the Relationship Between Partner Stress and the Perception of Romantic Partner Support*, Matthew J. Aplin-Houtz, Ifeyimika O. Ajaiyeoba, and Stephanie Merrit offer a compelling analysis of the dual role of romantic partners as both sources of support and stress. Grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, their study draws attention to the interpersonal dynamics that surround workplace burnout, often overlooked in organisational research that focuses narrowly on the professional domain. Through a robust structural equation modelling approach, the authors illuminate how partner stress may be a critical antecedent of burnout, with implications for the perceived effectiveness of partner support. This research deepens our understanding of the relational costs of high-stress work environments and invites organisations to broaden their conceptualisation of employee wellness.

In a related exploration of the personal and professional interface, Lauren Bari's *Flexible Working in Freelance Self-Employment During COVID-19* examines gendered patterns in flexible work, particularly during the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using Irish Labour Force Survey data, Bari reveals how the crisis blurred distinctions between freelance and salaried employment in terms of flexible working arrangements, while still preserving underlying gendered disparities in self-employment. Women, especially mothers, continue to gravitate toward freelance roles for autonomy and caregiving compatibility, even as the broader workforce adopts more hybrid models. Her findings underscore the persistence of gendered labour divisions despite structural shifts and suggest that flexible work remains a gendered tool for reconciling domestic and professional responsibilities.

A different institutional and geographic lens is applied in *Nexus of Employability, Work Climate, and Service Charter's Effectiveness*, where Theophilus Gyepi-Garbrah and Alexander Preko interrogate how employability traits influence public sector performance in Ghana. Anchoring their study in the USEM model and self-determination theory, the authors demonstrate how skills, efficacy beliefs, and metacognition significantly shape the effectiveness of service charters—public commitments to service quality and responsiveness. Importantly, the paper positions the work climate as a moderating factor, highlighting the importance of environmental enablers in activating individual

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competencies. This research speaks not only to public sector reform but also to wider debates on how individuals contribute to institutional trust and performance in contexts often underrepresented in mainstream literature.

Building on the theme of institutional collaboration and systemic change, *Proposing a Consortium-Led Financial Services Apprenticeship Education Framework* by Deirdre Giblin, Patricia Bowe, and Felicity Kelliher advances an important conversation about higher education–industry collaboration (HE-IC). This paper introduces a research-informed process for developing, implementing, and enacting a consortium-led apprenticeship education framework in the financial services sector. Drawing on boundary organisation theory and a single interpretive case study of an International Financial Services apprenticeship initiative in Ireland, the authors highlight how HE-IC can be leveraged as a mechanism for co-creating responsive, employer-led education programmes. Their findings extend theoretical understanding of boundary-spanning collaboration and offer a practical model for other sectors seeking to align talent development with industry needs.

Finally, *An Intelligent Career Perspective on Repatriated SIEs in Born Global Animation Companies* by Edward P. O'Connor and Adele Smith-Auchmuty provides a rare and timely investigation of repatriated Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) in the creative industries. Through rich qualitative case studies of Irish animation firms, the authors explore how 22 returning global professionals leverage their “intelligent career capital”—their motivations, skills, and networks—to shape and sustain Born Global enterprises. The paper not only fills a gap in the SIE literature but also contributes to our understanding of talent mobility in niche, innovation-driven sectors. It suggests that SIEs are not merely knowledge returnees but active agents of organisational development and transnational knowledge circulation.

Taken together, these five contributions invite readers to consider how individuals manage and respond to the competing demands of personal relationships, flexibility, institutional expectations, collaborative education initiatives, and global mobility. The insights presented here challenge simplistic binaries of work and life, employee and freelancer, education and industry, home and abroad. Instead, they point toward a more integrated, human-centred view of work that recognises the entanglement of professional roles with social identities, personal aspirations, and structural constraints.

I hope that this issue inspires further interdisciplinary inquiry into the lived realities of contemporary workers and the systems in which they operate. These papers collectively highlight the value of combining theoretical innovation with methodological rigor and contextual sensitivity. Enjoy!