



# What Makes a Good Workplace? Tasks, Trust, Time-Off and Differences

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## Abstract

This conversation highlights the role of tasks, trust, and time-off in fostering a good workplace, while also emphasizing the need to understand differences among users and communities. The speakers, experts in organizations and work, bring in knowledge from different fields (psychology, HCI, managerial economics), methods (quantitative, qualitative), and research domains (mobility, organizational decision-making, higher education, socio-technological work). Whilst much attention has been paid in the CHIWORK community to the importance of designing technology to optimize performance on the job, other organizational factors are just as crucial, if not more, to creating an effective workplace. Moreover, designing technology that truly works for everyone requires acknowledging and accommodating differences between users and communities.

## CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → HCI theory, concepts and models; Collaborative interaction; • **Applied computing** → Law, social and behavioral sciences.

## Keywords

work, HCI, trust, future of work

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## 1 Motivation

It is increasingly clear that designing an effective workplace is a necessary condition for enhancing performance. However, the

workplace and work environment are ever evolving. The challenge for organizations lies in reevaluating factors traditionally seen as counterproductive—such as social interactions with colleagues and time away from work—which are now understood as essential for performance. Moreover, technological systems (e.g., AI) that work for one set of users may be misaligned with the needs of a different community. How can one design for this evolving context? This conversation revolves around the central question “*What makes a good workplace?*”. It further explores four themes: “*Why study tasks in detail if they keep changing?*”, “*What drives trust in AI versus trust in people?*”, “*How to design for time-off, through a deeper understanding of work?*”, and “*How can we create designs that serve different communities?*”. Each theme is explained below; each speaker will represent one perspective. This discussion is intended for (academic and industry) researchers interested in interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and designing future workplaces. Early career researchers will particularly benefit from the diverse perspectives of the speakers.

**Tasks** HCI research has a long tradition of how a detailed understanding of tasks can inform both theories of human behavior and the practical design of tasks [3]. For example, careful understanding of what ‘subtasks’ are, can provide insights into how ‘interruptible’ workers are [2]. Today’s rapidly evolving automation [7] makes it harder to predict the required details of those future tasks. Dr. Janssen’s position is that this uncertainty makes it even more critical to understand the fundamental features of human behavior and cognition, and to specify them in detailed models. In his own research he has for example done this in the context of understanding in-car alert handling [4, 8, 13].

**Trust** Algorithmic management may negatively affect workers’ well-being and trust in the organization via e.g. massive performance benchmarking against algorithmic standards (e.g., [6]). Such type of trust is a necessary condition through which organizations may enhance learning, and thus competitive advantage. Prof. Murtinu argues that organizations should develop ‘recursive’ learning algorithms that incorporate and are assessed (also) on the basis of worker wellbeing. This mutually co-constructed dialogue fosters trust in algorithms, and thus in the organization. Moreover, to foster trust among employees, algorithm design must focus on more comprehensive measures of interactions and task dependencies among workers to improve cooperation, particularly in underperforming teams.



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**Time-off** Research on boundary management (e.g., [9, 10]) has shown that the extent to which individuals detach from work plays a critical role in long-term productivity and well-being via e.g. improved focus, lower burnout risk, and greater overall job satisfaction. Prof. Cox argues that organizations and technology designers must move beyond simplistic notions of work-life balance and instead consider how systems and cultures can actively support time-off as a critical component of sustainable productivity. Just as organizations invest in productivity tools, they should equally prioritize supporting employees in protecting their recovery time, ensuring that workplace policies and digital infrastructures enable—not undermine—healthy boundaries.

**Differences** There is no one size-fits-all to any task. Dr. O'Neill emphasizes the importance of understanding and designing for different users and communities. She has done extensive ethnographic and design research across different communities (e.g., China, India, and Kenya). Most recently, she led the 'AI and the Future of work in Africa' white paper [12], which highlights the persistent gap between technological advances and the needs of individuals and communities in Africa. For example, large language models are inadequately trained on African language and lack a deep understanding of African cultures, limiting their effectiveness in these contexts.

## 2 About the speakers

**Dr. Christian Janssen** is an Associate Professor at Utrecht University, experimental psychology. He is co-coordinator of Utrecht's Future of Work platform and of the Dutch National lab on AI & Mobility. He is a.o. founding co-chair of the online CHIWORK conversations (2021 [5]), steering group member of ACM Automotive-UI, and senior editor for IJHCS.

**Prof. Dr. Samuele Murtinu** is Full Professor of International Business and Head of Section (Entrepreneurship) at the Utrecht University School of Economics. His research [11] investigates algorithmic management of learning in organizations, AI-driven employee behaviors, and collaborative intelligence in workplaces.

**Prof. Dr. Anna L. Cox** is Professor of HCI at the UCL Interaction Centre. She investigates the interactions between technology, work, and wellbeing. She has served as GC and/or TPC for CHI, CHIPLAY, and CHIWORK. She is or was a member of the CHI, CHIPLAY and CHIWORK steering committees, and was elected to the SIGCHI Academy in 2024.

**Dr. Jacki O'Neill** is the founding Lab Director of Microsoft Research Africa, Nairobi. Her focus is primarily on technologies for work. She is a British Computer Society fellow and has served on the program and organising committees of major conferences such as CHI, CSCW, ICTD and ECSCW for many years.

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