The Impact of Hybrid Working on access to career opportunities

Dr Nalayini Thambar
NICEC Fellow

Director of Planning, Performance and Strategic Change,

University of Nottingham

- Context
- The challenge of Hybrid Working for student, graduate and early career stages
- Workplace evolution
- The role of Careers Professionals

Further Reading

- Hybrid Working:
  - As a hybrid worker
  - As someone 100% 'on site' alongside hybrid workers
- A range of responsibilities:
  - Programme Director for Agile Working at the University of Nottingham
  - Leadership of a Careers and Employability Service through the crisis phase of the pandemic and return to campus
  - Leadership of two internally focussed professional services working in a hybrid way.
- Research into the student experience through the pandemic and the implications of hybrid (screen-based) working for effective, relevant careers and employability service delivery.

Context

A long time ago in a galaxy far far away…

4/24/2024

Nottingham Students in 2022

1. Students still conceptualised a "good" student experience as that which they were expecting pre-pandemic

2. Students were susceptible to the same Covid-related concerns that we (staff) have had

3. High levels of online engagement only, were not helpful from a social, and therefore developmental, perspective.

4. The flexibility, accessibility and convenience of online engagement was valued, and now expected, but students also wanted the social and practical benefits of in-person engagement.

5. Each year of entry was distinctly impacted by Covid which has shaped the nature of the Student Experience for that cohort, despite the positives and best efforts of the University:

   - 2018 + 2019 :   Disrupted
   - 2020:   Disappointing
   - 2021:   Dispersed

Online compared with in-person?

In-Person Engagement - Pros	Online Engagement - Pros
• You meet more people and get to know more people – less feelings of isolation. "Lectures and seminars are a social event". • It is better for mental health • It's easier to ask questions in person • Easier to connect with people e.g. with lecturers, for Careers and Counselling appointments and meeting prospective employers	• Useful to be able to watch lectures back to make fuller notes • It can be easier to concentrate • Accessibility is greater for those with particular needs • Easier to ask a question than in a lecture theatre • Can track other people's questions and answers in the chat • "Online it is easier to hide behind your little picture" – some people are embarrassed by their looks • Skills workshops e.g. CV writing can be delivered as well online as in person.
In-Person Engagement - Cons	**Online Engagement Cons**
• *"Sometimes the lectures are two hours long and the windows are open, you can hear all the traffic and it's SO COLD and people don't turn up and you can understand why because you don't want to be cold!"* • Accessibility is harder for those with particular needs • It can feel inconvenient to have to travel onto campus depending on the rest of the day's schedule or *"if you just don't feel like it"*.	• Sometimes online lectures are longer than usual • It can be harder to concentrate– easy to get distracted. • Can't get to know people on the course or the lecturers/staff • Asking a question "feels performative" – it is nerve-wracking and if you are misunderstood it will be harder to correct that. • Sometimes having a camera on feels like an invasion of privacy –. *"If I've done my washing, then I don't want everyone to see my pants!"*

The Challenge of Hybrid Working for Student and Graduate Careers

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

74 expert interviews

Stakeholder interviews

Interviewed experts in the design, provision and operation of offices, together with leaders and managers involved in making decisions about their offices and staff work patterns (e.g. voices from Estates, HR, IT, Health & Safety, Finance, ExCo) and subject matter specialists (e.g. inclusive design, EDI, sustainability, ergonomics)
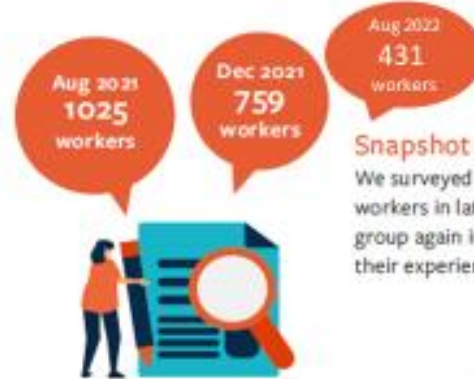
Aug 2021 1025 workers

Dec 2021 759 workers

Aug 2022 431 workers

Snapshot surveys

We surveyed a cross-industry group of UK office workers in late August 2021 and contacted the same group again in December 2021 to understand how their experience of hybrid working had changed.

Industry workshops,

including socio-technical scenarios workshops with organisations to create and evaluate different models of "the future office".

4471 observations

346 employees

Apr-May 2022 471 employees

5786 observations

Employee diary study

to examine a variety of case study offices in-depth to understand how employees use, behave and feel in different types of hybrid workplaces.

91 employee interviews

41 In August 2022

Employee interviews

Sampling employees with different job roles, demographics, tenure, working pattern and preference to understand their office experience (during COVID-19) and to understand how they work and interact in different locations, types of spaces and hybrid arrangements.

609 employees

May-Jun 2022 845 employees

Social network analysis

with employees to capture social interaction patterns and to assess information flow, relationship formation and explore differences between employee groups across different office configurations, occupancies, and work arrangements.

https://futureworkplace.leeds.ac.uk/

Davis, Hughes et al., 2022

COMMALUNICATION

"Almost every conversation I have now is planned. I'm coming to this conversation with something to inform you or I need something from you [...] Whereas, If I see you at the coffee machine, if I see you down the corridor [...] then you're able to speak freely [...] We can just have a conversation about the football or whatever."

ACCESS

Infrequent access to senior colleagues and teams

SOCIAL CUES

Lacking cues from the work environment about how, when and who to speak to

CASUAL CONVERSATION

Missing impromptu conversations which might lead to opportunities

CONFLICT

Miscommunication more likely, and conflict and misunderstanding harder to resolve when remote

PRESENTING

Perceived difference between in-person and online presenting

PROACTIVITY

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

"It is sometimes difficult to learn new things remotely... It's also a lot harder to ask small questions.
In an office environment its simply the case you ask them as they're next to you, whereas online there's the whole hassle of finding out if they are free, then calling them."
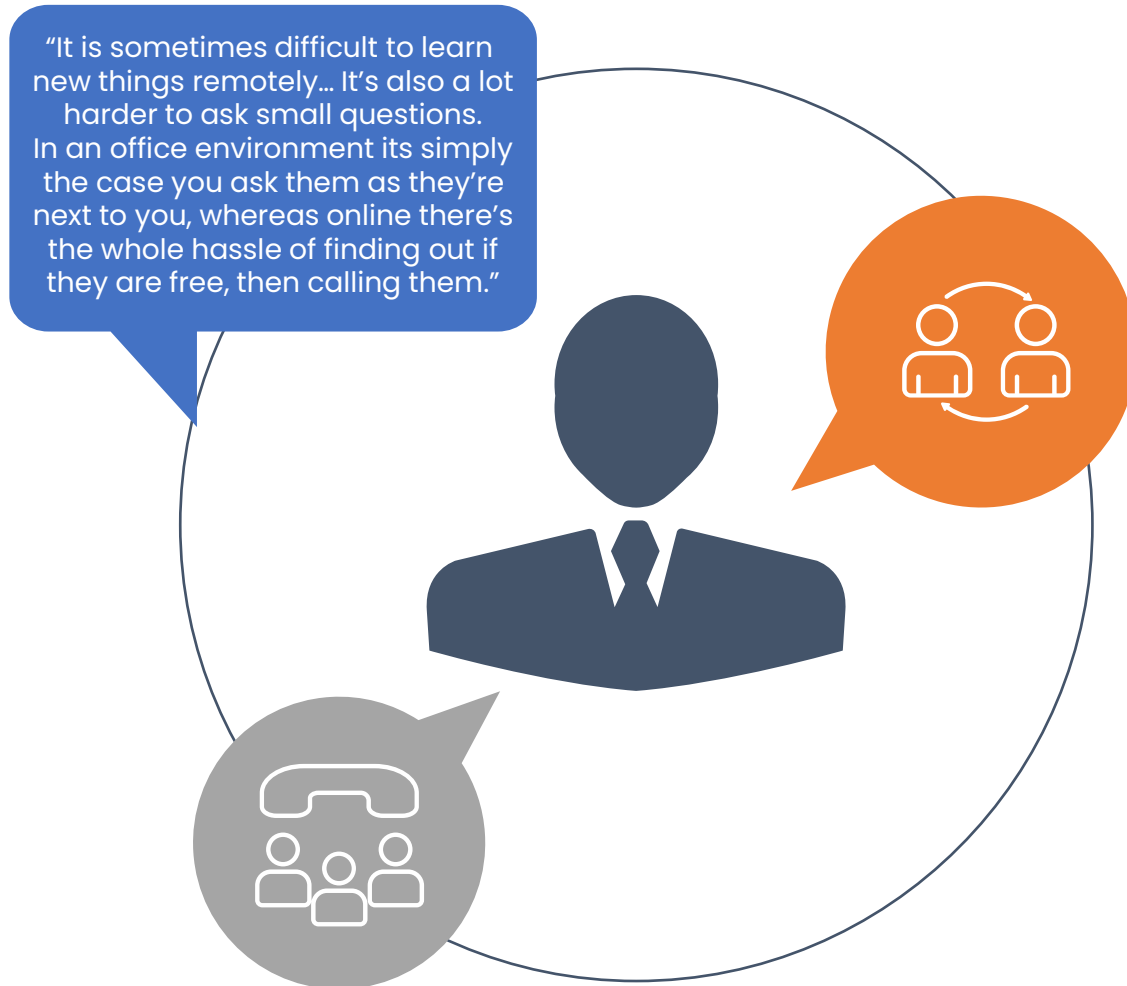
MANAGING LEARNING

Knowing when to ask questions and who to ask
Understanding requirements and norms
Reading the room

VISIBILITY

Getting the right level of visibility and exposure

ACCESSING OPPORTUNITIES

Developing skills to ask for new opportunities once a job is done

NETWORKING
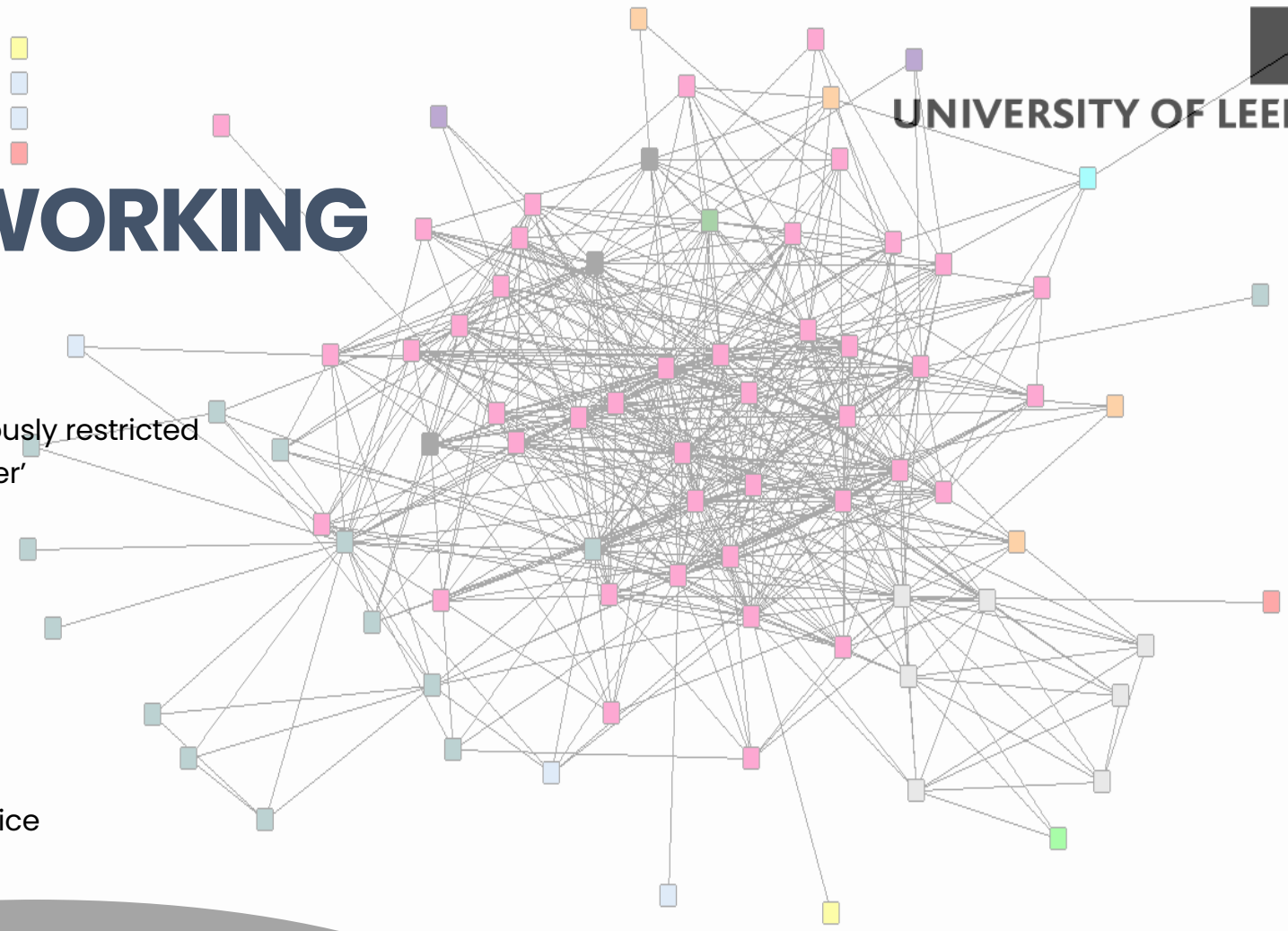
MEETINGS

Can attend meetings that were previously restricted
Remote meetings considered a 'leveller'

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Building relationships or a network?
Remote harder than in-person
Networking considered a formal practice
Easier to meet people 'like me'

"I want to achieve as best I can, and I won't go about achieving that having willy-nilly conversations here and there."

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Framework highlighting the tensions emerging within the graduate career ecosystem.

From:
Hughes & Thambar, 2023

Factors	Areas of Focus		Areas of Tension
	Students and Graduates	**Hybrid Organizations**	
Experience of Socialization	Rapid move to hybrid learning, creating a disrupted and isolating experience. Greater awareness of wellbeing (personal, social, and economic). Limited opportunities to build networks and understand hybrid work settings.	A desire for greater flexibility across the workforce. Managing changing expectations. Configuring remote and on-site working to foster belonging. Leadership and management behavior that sustains organizational effectiveness.	Facilitating organizational networks and social learning mechanisms. Ensuring accessibility of peers and seniors. Cultivating a sense of organizational belonging and commitment. Developing hybrid engagement so that activities attract potential talent.
Competencies	Understanding and articulating hybrid learning competencies. Demonstrating socio-digital competencies in the workplace.	Identifying the socio-digital skills required to achieve organizational outcomes. Expressing these new competency requirements.	Explicating work to contextualize and identify the competencies that are essential or desirable at entry, and those that can be developed from the workplace. Clarifying assumptions around talent pipeline competencies.
Values	Understanding and expressing personal and career values. Developing expectations of how those values might be lived in the workplace.	Understanding new and evolving career values and expectations. Developing leadership and management practices that enable the alignment of individual and organizational values.	Balancing the career values of graduates against organizational expectations and requirements.
Expectations and Fit	Developing self-awareness, contextualized by own pandemic experience. Developing informed decision-making. Developing preparedness for transition.	Expectation and expression of required values and competencies. Representing the culture of the organization. Promoting opportunities within the organization.	Ensuring hybrid attraction activities reflect espoused values and competencies. Developing satisfactory remote selection procedures. Ensuring induction activities cover appropriate scope and depth.

AGCAS

Pull and push activities within the ecosystem:

← Employability Development, Careers Guidance, Talent Engagement, Attraction, Recruitment, Retention →

The Role of Careers Professionals

Name, Department

2024 – the story so far…

Boots to end hybrid working for office workers

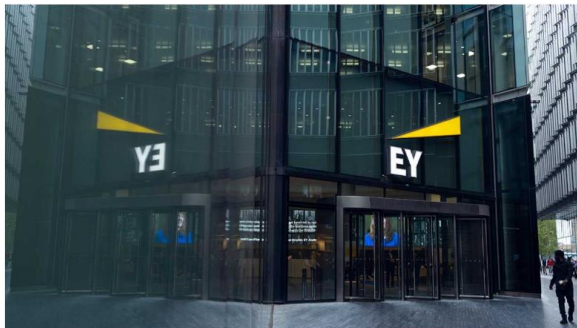by Adam McCulloch | 7 Mar 2024

A Boots store in Oxford St, London.
Alamy

Boots has told head office employees that they should return to the office five days a week, in a bid to improve engagement and collaboration.

EY monitoring office entry data in hybrid working crackdown

by Ashleigh Webber | 30 Jan 2024

Sergio Rojo / Shutterstock.com

Accountancy firm EY has become the latest employer to use staff turnstile data to monitor office attendance in a crackdown on breaches of its hybrid working policy.

It has been reported that swipe card entry data is being circulated among senior managers in the UK, showing how frequently staff are attending its offices.

Regardless, re-configuring decades-long working practices will require time. Oldman says we're still in the early stages of a live global experiment: there are issues with hybrid working that will inevitably arise over time, and it's largely too early to say which ones are truly unsolvable.

"We're only a year into post-pandemic life in real terms, but hybrid working will have to be running decades before we're able to learn the real impact it has on organisational culture, learning and career development," he says. "The reality is that the work we do has advanced so much in less than five years – we're all still playing catch-up."

https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20231207-the-permanently-imperfect-reality-of-hybrid-work

17

Enduring Principles

- Integrating employability within careers education
- Equipping clients to develop their own career trajectories
- Creating opportunities to experience work
- Enabling decision making
- Maintaining insights
- Fostering wellbeing

Questions to help facilitate discussion within and across ecosystem stakeholder groups.

AGCAS

	Careers and Employability Professionals	Graduate Recruiters and Developers
Experience of Socialization	How are students being supported to understand the impact that disruption and rapid and experimental moves to hybrid learning have had on their social habits, preferences, and wellbeing? How is this shaping their expectations of wellbeing (personal, social, and economic)? How are students being supported to build networks and learn about culture, value, and fit in hybrid settings? What has their experience taught them about the types of environments to which they might be suited?	How is remote and on-site working configured to foster belonging amongst work experience and early graduate career candidates? How are entrants, established, experienced, and senior colleagues, brought together to enable workplace enculturation and shared experiences that support social learning? How are leaders and managers supported and encouraged to articulate and model expectations of behavior and performance, particular for new and early career entrants?
Competencies	To what extent do students understand, and can articulate the skills and competencies they have developed through hybrid learning? What experiences could help students to develop, and be confident in a level of socio-digital competency that equips them for the workplace?	Are the skills and qualities required for roles clearly defined so that students can see what they have to offer? How are socio-digital skills outlined in the context of role, organization and sector to help entrants to understand what they can offer and what is required in a hybrid setting? How does induction, initial training and CPD support the full and evolving range of competencies required?
Values	(How) are the student's career values expressed and understood? What is influencing those values? Are they personally owned and felt? And, how have they been socialized? (i.e., what assumptions are these values based on?) What will 'living' those values look and feel like to them?	How clearly are organizational career values defined and shared? How are leaders and managers supported to have conversations about career values in response to changing circumstances? Are there available examples that encourage and support all to realize their career values remotely and in-person?
Expectations and Fit	How strong and grounded is the student's awareness of self? Is the influence of their personal pandemic experience being contextualized? How full and current is their opportunity awareness? How might the factors affecting decision-making be supporting or limiting their choices? To what extent are students equipped for transition? What experiences could help?	To what extent are early engagement and recruitment activities balanced between the virtual and in-person, and student expectations and work-life realities? How are candidates helped to understand expectations on site and remotely and see themselves at work, so they can assess their potential fit, and the way that their career will fit into their wider lives?

The Hybrid Working Perspective

- **Integrating employability within careers education**
  - Do syllabi and pedagogy include preparation (skills, knowledge) for hybrid and on-site working?

- **Equipping clients to develop their own career trajectories**
  - Does that include navigating disruption and change?
  - Can they anticipate/practice social dynamics that can help them to learn and progress?

- **Creating opportunities to experience work**
  - Is there opportunity to get used to an environment before having to adapt?

Contemporary perspectives

- **Enabling decision making**
  - Does that include compensation for diminished social learning opportunities?
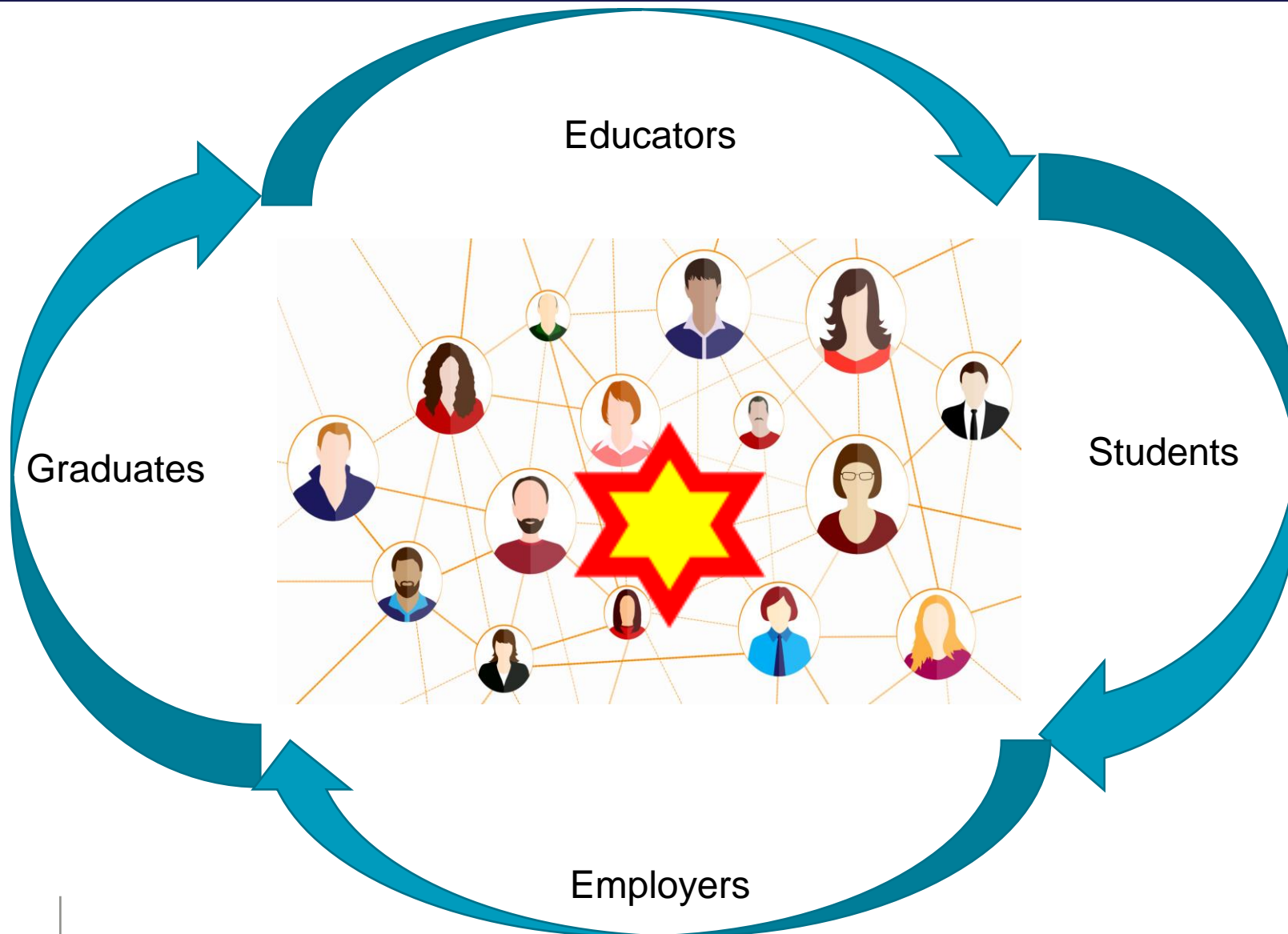
- **Maintaining insights**
  - How do we foster shared understanding of evolving workplaces, and learning environments?

- **Fostering wellbeing**
  - Are clients equipped with the networking skills that will enable them to join and build communities in hybrid or in-person settings?
  - Are they primed to engage with workplace support?

HE Careers Professionals

Educators

Students

Employers

Graduates

Graduate Careers in a Changing Workplace:
A Fresh Challenge?

Helen P. N. Hughes
University of Leeds, UK

Nalayini Thambar
University of Nottingham, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter concludes the Handbook of Research by considering patterns and emerging trends in the global workforce, and the challenges and opportunities these features pose for graduates embarking on their career journey. In recent years, this landscape has experienced dramatic and unprecedented changes, while also continuing to evolve in incremental ways. This chapter considers the influence of this landscape alongside the multitude of other factors in the ecosystem that shape a graduate's career journey. Drawing on research exploring the experiences of students transitioning to the post-pandemic workplace, we reflect on the challenges that new graduates have reported, before considering the extent to which this new backdrop presents problems and opportunities that are truly new, and the ways that different stakeholders invested in supporting graduate careers must now work more closely together so that students and new graduates are prepared for thriving careers in this new era.
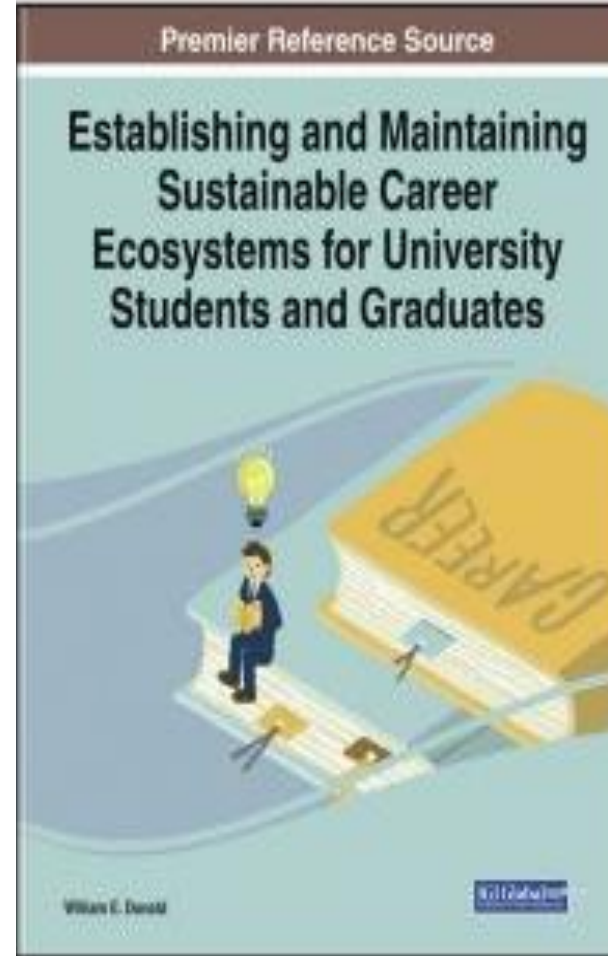
TODAY'S CAREER LANDSCAPE

Today's graduates are entering the workforce in unusual times. Born and raised in a digital era, most will be no strangers to the tech-enabled services that drive today's economy (Schroth, 2019), yet few will have truly known and experienced the pre-pandemic workplace (Donald et al., 2022a). Indeed, today's career landscape is built upon foundations that are characterized by turbulence and change. The last decade has seen pivotal developments in the growth and application of social collaboration tools and media in the workplace (Birkinshaw et al., 2021), which have enabled the emergence of global power brands such as Amazon and Apple, and the delivery of complex products and services that thrive because they have become inextricably entwined with everyday life (Birkinshaw, 2019).

Meanwhile, innovation in the *use* of social media and collaboration tools has given a broader platform to customers and competitors, leading to new opportunities and ways of working in business (Karanasios & Allen, 2014). In some cases, these developments have created new business models for remuneration, working pattern versatility, and the notion of 'employment', while expanding opportunities for young enterprises (Cherubini et al., 2021; Karanasios & Allen, 2014; Parker & Grote, 2022; Stephens, 2021). The use of social media has also given power to the customer, forcing the hand of businesses in areas such as sustainable and ethical business practices (Minton et al., 2012), and in some cases, this has levelled playing fields by giving voice to marginalized groups (Donald, 2022; Donald & Scattergood, 2023).

Yet, even against this backdrop, the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was seismic, sudden, and unprecedented; rocking the global workplace to its core (Mockaitis et al., 2022). While many

Handbook of Research on Sustainable Career Ecosystems for University Students and Graduates: 9781668474426: Education Books | IGI Global (igi-global.com)

Graduate Careers in a Changing Workplace: A Fresh Challenge?

Helen P. N. Hughes
University of Leeds, UK

Nalayini Thambar
University of Nottingham, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter concludes the Handbook of Research by considering patterns and emerging trends in the global workforce, and the challenges and opportunities these features pose for graduates embarking on their career journey. In recent years, this landscape has experienced dramatic and unprecedented changes, while also continuing to evolve in incremental ways. This chapter considers the influence of this landscape alongside the multitude of other factors in the ecosystem that shape a graduate's career journey. Drawing on research exploring the experiences of students transitioning to the post-pandemic workplace, we reflect on the challenges that new graduates have reported, before considering the extent to which this new backdrop presents problems and opportunities that are truly new, and the ways that different stakeholders invested in supporting graduate careers must now work more closely together so that students and new graduates are prepared for thriving careers in this new era.

Keywords: Competencies, Employability, Graduate Career Ecosystem, Socialization, Socio-digital, Transition, Values, Workplace.

TODAY'S CAREER LANDSCAPE

Today's graduates are entering the workforce in unusual times. Born and raised in a digital era, most will be no strangers to the tech-enabled services that drive today's economy (Schroth, 2019), yet few will have truly known and experienced the pre-pandemic workplace (Donald et al., 2022a). Indeed, today's career landscape is built upon foundations that are characterized by turbulence and change. The last decade has seen pivotal developments in the growth and application of social collaboration tools and media in the workplace (Birkinshaw et al., 2021), which have enabled the emergence of global power brands such as Amazon and Apple, and the delivery of complex products and services that thrive because they have become inextricably entwined with everyday life (Birkinshaw, 2019).

Meanwhile, innovation in the *use* of social media and collaboration tools has given a broader platform to customers and competitors, leading to new opportunities and ways of working in business (Karanasios & Allen, 2014). In some cases, these developments have created new business models for remuneration, working pattern versatility, and the notion of 'employment', while expanding opportunities for young enterprises (Cherubini et al., 2021; Karanasios & Allen, 2014; Parker & Grote, 2022; Stephens, 2021). The use of social media has also given power to the customer, forcing the hand of businesses in areas such as sustainable and ethical business practices (Minton et al., 2012), and in some cases, this has levelled playing fields by giving voice to marginalized groups (Donald, 2022; Donald & Scattergood, 2023).

Yet, even against this backdrop, the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was seismic, sudden, and unprecedented; rocking the global workplace to its core (Mockaitis et al., 2022). While many

---

Premier Reference Source

Establishing and Maintaining Sustainable Career Ecosystems for University Students and Graduates

---

'The Robots are Coming 2 – Rise of the Screens':
The role of higher education careers professions in disrupted times

Nalayini Thambar
University of Nottingham, UK.

Helen P.N. Hughes
University of Leeds, UK.

For correspondence:
Nalayini Thambar: Nalayini.Thambar@nottingham.ac.uk

Abstract

This article reflects on the role of higher education (HE) careers professionals in the post-covid era, and how their practice might evolve in that context. First, the article considers student and graduate career preferences and social experiences during the crisis phase of the pandemic and the ways that such experiences have shaped their position and career development. It then considers studies of the hybrid workplace, highlighting the pandemic's impact on a graduate's likely early experience of work. Drawing these aspects together, the article offers recommendations to help career development professionals sustain the relevance of their practice in these disrupted times.

Keywords: Higher education career service; artificial intelligence; digital economy; career development; COVID

Introduction

In April 2018, an article by the first author, published in the NICEC Journal, reflected on the relative stability of early career graduate workplaces in the UK dating back over the previous thirty years, and suggested that the consistency of skills requirements by employers and for career progression was about to be challenged (Thambar, 2018). The prediction at the time was that a 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' would emerge from a combination of developments in artificial intelligence (AI), big data, bio and nano-technologies, transforming the ways we would live and work (Schwab, 2016). There were concerns that a rapid acceleration in the role of AI could undermine humans in society,
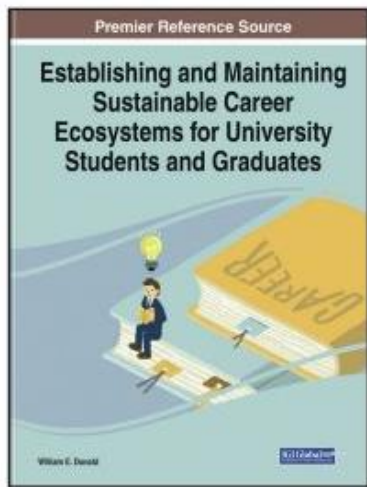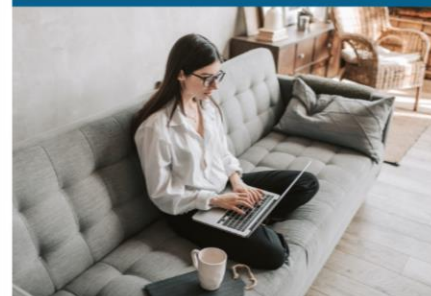
www.nicec.org | 85

Starting your career during a pandemic: The experience of remote and hybrid working

Authors: Dr Helen Hughes and Dr Matthew Davis
Leeds University Business School

October 2021

Where is Your Office Today?
A research-led guide to effective hybrid working

SOUNDCLOUD
Leeds University Business School
Starting your career during the pandemic
13:20

The challenges of remote communication for new workers
MONDAY 6 DECEMBER 2021
Dr Helen Hughes
Socio-Technical Centre, Workplace Behaviour Research Centre

How remote working can affect workplace learning
MONDAY 6 DECEMBER 2021
Dr Helen Hughes
Socio-Technical Centre, Workplace Behaviour Research Centre

Why the built work environment is so valuable to those just beginning their careers
MONDAY 6 DECEMBER 2021
Dr Helen Hughes
Socio-Technical Centre, Workplace Behaviour Research Centre

The importance of being proactive at the start of your career when remote working

---

www.bitly.com/valueofworkplacements
www.bitly.com/AdaptingOffices
http://futureworkplace.leeds.ac.uk

For Further Reading…

- Thambar, N., & Hughes, H.P.N. (2023). 'The Robots are Coming 2 – Rise of the Screens': The role of higher education careers professions in disrupted times. Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC), 50, 85-95. Available at: https://nicecjournal.co.uk/index.php/nc/article/view/432/420

- Hughes, H.P.N., & Thambar, N. (2023). Graduate Careers in a Changing Workplace: A Fresh Challenge? In W. Donald (ed.) *Establishing and Maintaining Sustainable Career Ecosystems for University Students and Graduates.* ICI Global, UK.

- Donald, W.E., & Hughes, H.P.N. (2023). How academics can play a more influential role during a year-in-industry placement: A contemporary critique and call for action. *Industry and Higher Education,* https://doi.org/10.1177/09504222231162059.

- Davis, M.C., Collis, H., Hughes, H.P.N., Rees, S., Gritt, S., Wu, C., Fang, H (2022). Adapting offices for the future of work. Stage 2 Report. A report by the Adapting Offices for the Future of Work UKRI-funded research project. Available at: https://futureworkplace.leeds.ac.uk

- Hughes, H.P.N., & Davis, M.C. (2021). Starting your career during a pandemic. Leeds University Business School. Available at: https://futureworkplace.leeds.ac.uk

- Davis, M.C., Hughes, H.P.N., Rees, S., Gritt, S., Wu, C., Collis, H., Fang, H (2021). Adapting offices for the future of work. Stage 1 Report. A report by the Adapting Offices for the Future ofWork UKRI-funded research project. Available at: https://futureworkplace.leeds.ac.uk

University of Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

The University of Nottingham
UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Thank you for listening!

Connect on **Linked in**

Dr Nalayini Thambar | LinkedIn
Dr Helen Hughes | LinkedIn