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Rianne Appel-Meulenbroek

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## Transdisciplinary workplace research; an essential network of disciplines

Rianne Appel-Meulenbroek 

Eindhoven University of Technology, Eindhoven, Netherlands

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Corporate real estate and workplace management is receiving more and more attention in large companies and public organization, slowly showing more strategic decision making about workplace design and (change) management in practice. However, in academia most management and finance programs still consider it to be a practical matter only and pay none or very little attention to it, both in teaching and in research. Nonetheless, (a small amount of) workplace related research is performed within many different disciplinary fields both in academia and in practice. The most attention to the management of the (physical) workplace appears to be given by hospitality/facility management and broader architecture, building and planning programs. The first are often based in a university of applied sciences, where the latter are generally allocated to design focused programs of technical universities and also address building physics and its effects on people. Additionally, (environmental) psychology programs have been studying effects of workplace aspects on workplace users for many years (see Appel-Meulenbroek, Clippard, and Pfnür 2018 for a more detailed description of the disciplines behind workplace research and their focus).

The broadness of the disciplines embracing workplace research has the advantage that it is studied from many different angles with many different methodologies, which is helpful to get a grip on such a diverse and multi-disciplinary topic. However, a disadvantage is the fragmentation that has resulted from this, especially regarding academic workplace research and its transfer to practitioners. Workplace academics present their work at many different conferences, where they generally consider their work to be at the side-line of the main topic of the conference. Also, they tend to publish in the journals that represent the disciplinary field of their department. Therefore, workplace research appears in very many different journals, with only very few journals having a full focus on it. As the university and the department that researchers work for also determines which journals they have access to, this is likely to hamper knowledge transfer between disciplinary fields, strengthened by their own preference for specific research methodologies.

Besides this breach in knowledge transfer between academics, the transfer of academic knowledge to practitioners generally is also troublesome and limited. The increased workload of academics, combined with the pressure in universities to publish in the best scientific journals only, is further confining the conversion of scientific knowledge into tools that are ready to use in practice. In a time where the question how to manage the workplace is discussed in more board rooms than ever before, this is very undesirable. Now that workplace has the attention it deserves, it needs to show its strategic and academic value once and for all. Unfortunately, several common struggles of workplace managers in creating a positive business case have remained unchanged over the past decades. What does an integral business case comprise on the short and long term, with a

**CONTACT** Rianne Appel-Meulenbroek  [h.a.j.a.appel@tue.nl](mailto:h.a.j.a.appel@tue.nl)  Eindhoven University of Technology, PO Box 513, 5600 MB Eindhoven, The Netherlands

balanced interest of different stakeholders? How exactly can the workplace increase productivity of knowledge workers and better support their health and wellbeing? How can the use of the increasingly flexible office environment be steered towards both employee effectiveness and a positive attitude toward the offered workplace? These topics are not new on many agendas, but so far have not received enough attention from academics from any discipline. Brainstorms with academic workplace researchers from different disciplines showed that the reason is likely to be that multiple disciplines are necessary to tackle such topics, plus the inclusion of living labs for research embedded in practice to identify how workplace mechanisms work and can be triggered.

As breaking boundaries is not always easy or self-evident for researchers (nor is the valorization of their findings towards practice), I felt the necessity to make them meet face-to-face in order to exchange thoughts and experiences and to be able to form new alliances. Therefore, I created the Transdisciplinary Workplace Research (TWR) network (see [www.twrnetwork.org](http://www.twrnetwork.org)), which organizes transdisciplinary conferences dedicated entirely to workplace research. Transdisciplinary means that researchers must become 'sufficiently familiar' with concepts/ approaches of other disciplines, both researchers and non-academic groups must be involved (through participatory action research), and there needs to be a constant flow between knowledge and practical application (Smith 2007). Therefore, the TWR board (see list of names below) holds academics with backgrounds from real estate, FM, health, psychology, sociology, business administration, management, and architecture from several different continents and practitioners and aims to bring together workplace researchers and professionals from all relevant disciplines to share their insights and ideas.

The first TWR conference was hosted by the Tampere University of Technology in Finland in 2018 and created a unique feeling of community among the over 60 delegates. They presented their research about physical, social and/or digital work environment aspects and how to manage the work environment, which led to many interesting discussions and new connections between people. This special issue of INBI holds a selection of the works presented in Tampere. The next bi-annual TWR conference will be held in September 2020 in Weimar, Germany. Everybody is invited!

## TWR board

- Rianne Appel–Meulenbroek, Eindhoven University of Technology (NL) – Network chair
- Suvi Nenonen, Tampere University of Technology (Finland) – Host 2018 conference
- Remi Ayoko, The University of Queensland (Australia)
- Derek Clements-Croome, Reading University (UK)
- Cheuk Fan Ng, Athabasca University (Canada)
- Jan Gerard Hoendervanger, Hanze University of Applied Sciences (NL)
- Annette Kämpf-Dern, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar (Germany) - Host 2020 conference
- Rachel Morrison, Auckland University of Technology (New Zealand)
- Ingrid Nappi, Essec Business School (France)
- Kerstin Sailer, UCL (UK)
- Usha Satish, Upstate Medical University (USA)
- Sara Wilkinson, University of Technology Sydney (Australia)
- Mascha Will-Zocholl, Goethe Universität (Germany)

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## ORCID

Rianne Appel-Meulenbroek  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3877-4004>

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