



**EAWOP SGM "The "great rethink"  
Understanding work engagement, performance,  
and well-being in the new work normal**

**Activity Report**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**1. Meeting overview**

The SGM titled "The "great rethink" Understanding work engagement, performance, and well-being in the new work normal was held in Ljubljana (Slovenia) on September 21st – 22nd, 2023. It was organized by Sara Tement (University of Maribor), Katja Kerman (University of Maribor), Eva Boštjančič (University of Ljubljana), Katarina Babnik (University of Ljubljana) and hosted by the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

The meeting was attended by 33 participants from various countries representing academia and practice (i.e., professional organizations, HRM consultancies). As such, the meeting was targeting both audiences. On the one hand, it aimed at bringing together different researchers, exploring joint interests and future collaboration possibilities. Additionally, the SGM strived to expand understanding of current organizational realities. A critical consideration of the organizers was to involve practitioners, to better understand the challenges they face and jointly develop a new research agenda as well as provide evidence-based recommendations.

**2. Key Highlights**

The SGM was organized around the focal talks/keynotes and several thematic sections. Organizational insights (i.e., practitioner keynote) were presented by Maja Fesel Kamenik (PhD, CEO and Founder of Beep Institute & HRM One) who stressed that "employees are taken care of better than even" in organizations. Organizations are increasing their investments in employees, their concern for employee well-being is growing. However, she pointed out that this concern is mainly grounded in the underlying assumption that this will boost performance. In her consulting activities, she, therefore, strives to change this mindset by helping managers in how to make employee well-being a critical priority in its own right.

The academic keynote lectures were given by Professors Kristen Shockley (Auburn University) and Evangelia Demerouti (Eindhoven University of Technology). Dr. Shockley presented her studies on work-home balance issues involved in transitioning to remote work during the COVID-19 crisis. More precisely, she talked about how dual-couples managed the transition to remote work, the adjustment to remote work during COVID, the role of the supervisors for the belongingness of remote workers and Zoom fatigue. Implications for future work arrangements and transitions in general were discussed as well. Dr. Demerouti talked about the importance of employee self-regulation in the new work normal. She made the premise that COVID-induced workplace changes moved the responsibility for healthy and effective functioning from the employer to the employee. In her talk she introduced and discussed several strategies that help employees in that regard, specifically self-recognition, job/leisure crafting, boundary management and recovery.

The program additionally included individual presentations on four thematic sections: (1) work-life issues, (2) remote and hybrid work, (3) Leadership, job design and HRM practices, and (4) stress and well-being each tailored to the context of changes and transitions. As the SGM was attended by many PhD students, the program was complemented by a meet-the-editor section (Kristen Shockley, JAP; Bettina Kubicek, EJWOP, Evangelia Demerouti, JOHP; Charles Calderwood, JOB) and a final panel debate where the general themes were discussed by Arnold Bakker (Erasmus University Rotterdam), Charles Calderwood (Virginia Tech), Ines Gergorić (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia) and Tadeja Trojar Jan (Klin, business consulting; head of WOP unit, Slovenian Psychologists' Association).

### **3. Meeting Outcomes**

The SGM opened interesting new avenues for research and practice which could help to bridge the academic-practitioner divide. In terms of future research, the following themes emerged: (1) leisure crafting as a job resource providing activity, (2) job demands, needs and well-being of leaders of hybrid teams (as they also faced major changes during the pandemic), (3) communication aspects in hybrid teams (knowledge sharing/hiding, deviant communication behaviors), (4) a closer look at organizational changes and transitions including theory testing and building as well as new methodological approaches.

From the practical perspective following recommendations were repeatedly discussed: (1) training of employees in self-regulatory practices and job/leisure crafting as this can prevent burnout and help with engagement; (2) people do not only transition between work and family roles, but also other roles (side hustles, coaching a sport etc.) – HR managers should take that into account when preparing organizational measures supportive of well-being; (3) up to 40% of jobs are “teleworkable” – employers still need support in the process of transitioning to hybrid work; (4) when implementing hybrid or remote work arrangements, attention should be given to task-location fit (where individual flexibly chooses different work locations that match the characteristics of their task), (5) implementation of HR practices (and the communication processes associated with them) is more important than their content; (6) attention should be given to more complex “employee surveys” (i.e., longitudinal, diary surveys) which would be beneficial for both practitioners and researchers (“What gets measured, gets improved” – Peter Drucker).

In general, the meeting was well-received and perceived as helpful in establishing new connections. Some comments of the final evaluation survey are: “Thanks very much for a wonderful experience. It was a perfect conference and the team deserve all the credit for making it an enjoyable experience.” and “Honestly, it was amazing. A stellar group of people you managed to attract. Wonderful discussions, content-wise, as well as of friendly nature.”

## ACTIVITY REPORT

### 1. Event General Information

The SGM titled “The "great rethink" Understanding work engagement, performance, and well-being in the new work normal was held in Ljubljana (Slovenia) on September 21st – 22nd, 2023. It was organized by Sara Tement (University of Maribor, Slovenia), Katja Kerman (University of Maribor, Slovenia), Eva Boštjančič (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia), Katarina Babnik (University of Ljubljana) and hosted by the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

The meeting was attended by 33 participants from various countries (Austria, Belgium, Slovenia, Croatia, The Netherlands, United States; UK, Switzerland, Portugal) representing academia and practice (i.e., professional organizations, HRM consultancies). As such, the meeting was targeting both audiences. On the one hand, it aimed at bringing together different researchers, exploring joint interests and future collaboration possibilities. Additionally, it strived to expand understanding of current organizational realities. A critical consideration of the organizers was to involve practitioners, to better understand the challenges they face and jointly develop a new research agenda as well as provide evidence-based recommendations. See Annex 1 for a complete list of participants and their affiliations.



### 2. Program Overview and Course of the meeting

The SGM strived to (1) chart a new research agenda by suggestions, insights, and challenges identified by practitioners and (2) provide evidence-based recommendations that will be widely accessible, easily readable, brief, and supported with application examples.

The central theme of the SGM was the “great rethink”. This phrase was used by different media outlets to stress that employees are increasingly reevaluating their work and lives in general in light of unimaginable large-scale crises such as Covid, war in Ukraine, worsening economic outlook, and climate-related disasters. We are witnessing very high turnover rates in several industries and an increasing general discontent with the workplace and the way we

work. Work-life balance, as well as well-being have also become decisive factors in job transitions. Additionally, the organizers used this expression (i.e., “great rethink”) to describe the changes organizations and industries must adopt to respond the challenges of managing employees’ work engagement, performance, and well-being in the current context of crises, changes, and transitions.

The SGM was mainly academically-oriented and included 19 short oral presentations which tackled the main theme from a variety of different perspectives. The ways “the new work normal” and “the great rethink” were covered by the presentations was left up to the authors/participants. We intentionally kept the main theme broad, because we believe that we have to look beyond our own research “perspectives and approaches” and borrow theories and methodology from research groups with other research foci to tackle the different challenges of research and practice in the new work normal. In order to inspire our own “rethink” we have curated a program bringing together research focusing on work-life issues, remote and flexible work, leadership, job design, HRM practices, stress and well-being. Presentations by three keynote speakers (one practitioner, two academic keynote speakers) complemented the main themes of the SGM:

Keynote speakers:

- Insights from practice - Maja Fesl Kamenik (HRM One & Beep Institute): Not just a resource: Empowered people in future organizations
- Academic keynote – Kristen M. Shockley (Auburn University): A glimpse into worker effectiveness and well-being during COVID-19-induced remote work: Evidence from three studies
- Academic keynote – Evangelia Demerouti (Eindhoven University of Technology): Dealing with the challenges of self-regulation in the new work normal

Although the SGM was intended to have an academic focus, it additionally strived to bridge the “academic-practitioner” divide by actively involving practitioners in the discussion and presentations (a keynote speaker, discussants in the final panel debate, short oral presentations given by PhD students how are also practitioners).

A final panel debate was scheduled in order to provide an integrated and reflective summary. Some of the questions that were covered during the debate were: (1) How well does the current WOP/I-OP research (presented at the SGM or elsewhere) respond to workforce issues highlighted by the conference theme (“The great rethink”)? What is needed in terms of future research (new topics, methodology, etc.)? (academics) (2) In what ways can the presented research be applied in organizations? Is the current research in line with organizational/employers’/employees’ needs? On what topics should future research focus on? What do we need more of? (practitioners); (3) What professional challenges do you think organizational psychologists/HRM specialists are currently facing? (practitioners); (4) Did you come up with any novel link between topics/fields which can be investigated in future research? New ideas? (academics); (5) What are some of your personal take home messages of this meeting? (practitioners and academics)

Panelists:

- Arnold Bakker (Erasmus University Rotterdam)
- Charles Calderwood (Virginia Tech)
- Ines Gergorić (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia)
- Tadeja Trojar Jan (Klin, business consulting; Slovenian Psychologists' Association)



The meeting lasted for two days and was complemented by an interesting social program to foster networking. See Annex 2 (pages 3-4) for the full program.

### **3. Short description of the SGM topic discussion**

The practitioner keynote held by Maja Fesl Kamenik provided insights into employers' and managers' mindsets which could be potentially linked to poor employee well-being. She stressed that a typical manager's mindset is "getting better and better". To achieve this, they are willing to offer a wide range of benefits to their employees; the investment in employee training and other benefits has never been greater. They also often hold an ownership-based attitude toward their employees (e.g., "How do I get my employees to work better? How can I get the best people into my company?") and do not see them as independent decisions makers in the work process. She stressed that investments into employee well-being are likely to backfire if the basis of these investments is solely performance-based. In the future managers should recognize their mindsets are unreal and not sustainable and should strive to understand well-being at work as a multifaceted construct consisting of psychological, physical and social well-being which should be targeted at work in its own right. Her consulting activities are grounded on these premises.

The first academic keynote was held by Kristen M. Shockley. She presented her studies on work-home balance issues involved in transitioning to remote work during the COVID-19 crisis. More precisely, she talked about how dual-couples managed the transition to remote work, the adjustment to remote work during COVID, the role of the supervisors for the belongingness of remote workers and Zoom fatigue. Several implications for the future work arrangement and work transitions in general were discussed as well. The main take-home message from her studies is that in order to be satisfied and productive remote workers need to feel connected, need to have a good workspace ("the right information and tools") and need to be able to rest.

The keynote by Evangelia Demerouti focused on the importance of employee self-regulation

in the new work normal. She made the premise that COVID-induced workplace changes moved the responsibility for healthy and effective functioning from the employer to the employee. In her talk she introduced and discussed several strategies that help employees in that regard, specifically self-recognition, job/leisure crafting, boundary management and recovery. She specifically stressed that employees will remain healthy and function effectively in work and home domains if they have the right strategies to do so (self-control strategies, crafting, boundary management) and if they use them in the right context. Both keynotes inspired an interesting discussion on why organizational characteristics did not emerge as important predictors of remote workers' satisfaction and performance (Shockley) and on what other self-regulation strategies could be important and investigated in future studies (Demerouti).

In the paper presentations related to work-life issues the authors presented novel research on emerging constructs such as off-job/leisure crafting and expanded their view on the antipode of work by discussing multiple role configurations and their relevance to employee well-being. Work-life boundary management issues were tackled by comparing preferences and enactment pre- and post-Covid crisis. Additionally, this section included several interesting ways (from a theoretical and methodological viewpoint) on how to study crisis situations and their effects on work and private life.

The main conclusion from the paper presentations on remote, flexible and hybrid work was that task-location fit should be closely explored as a potential predictor of performance and well-being of remote workers. We also need more insights into the role of communication characteristics when studying remote workers (e.g., knowledge sharing). Additionally, future research could benefit from looking at how members of work teams function in remote settings (i.e., how remote work affects team processes such as planning, coordination and communication).

Oral presentations on leadership, job design and HRM practices shifted the perspective from studying employees to studying managers. During the presentations it was repeatedly stressed that managers' work tasks and duties changed as well during the transition to remote work. In order to more fully understand remote working, this perspective needs to be taken into account as well. Additionally, the job design perspective offers interesting opportunities for future research by looking into the fit between actual and desired job characteristics. From the presentations it was also evident that the current state of research does not provide a full picture on how the ideal work setting would look like (in terms of fostering engagement, well-being and performance). Integration of theories from environmental psychology could be relevant in that regard.

The session on stress and well-being provided insights on novel methodological approaches to study well-being by looking at EEG (electroencephalogram) and ECG (electrocardiogram) data in a diary context. As both types of responses (i.e., brain and heart activity) are sensitive to short-term changes, they could be further studied when focusing on day-to-day transitions and changes. This section also highlighted several theories which could be used when studying work-related changes and stressed the importance of pre-change and change process characteristics.

The panelists in the panel debate additionally identified possible new research approaches and themes such as studying other "shock" events or employing research methodologies such as the day reconstruction method in the context of change and crisis events. The practitioners

pointed out that in order to better serve employees' needs in the future, HR managers should be better prepared for challenges yet to come. This can be done by forecasting future skills and other large-scale changes and transitions and empowering them to work more on an operational level (not just strategic). They need more information (e.g., open access publishing, short excerpts of research), which is readily available, to avoid the mistakes they made because of fast decisions in the past.

#### **4. Meeting implications/outcomes**

##### *Scientific expected outcomes*

We will propose a special issue for EJWOP. We already consulted the editor on how to streamline the special issue as the scope of the present SGM is too broad to be covered in one special issue. Most likely the issues will focus on studying on workplace changes and transition of small and large magnitude, their effect on stress, well-being and work-life balance as well as methodological and theoretical innovations in the context of change. A potential edited book is envisioned as well which could cover all other aspects around "the new work normal" characterized by frequent changes and transitions.

##### *Knowledge transference and networking development*

We created a space for sharing information among the participants (sharepoint) with all contacts and presentations. Future ideas (symposia at EAWOP and other conferences) will be communicated using information. The Slovenian psychological community already arranged future collaborative meetings. The organizers also agreed to arrange an academic-practitioner workshop (similar to Worklab) for the Slovenian WOP community in spring 2024.

#### **5. SGM Evaluation**

Overall, the feedback given by the participants of the SGM was very positive (93% of the participants evaluated the SGM in Ljubljana as excellent). More precisely, 79% of the participants rated it as useful, 86% as enjoyable and 93% rated the SGM as interesting. Among the most positively rated aspects were the social program, the keynotes, and the overall program. The participants appreciated that we were able to attract such interesting presenters. Among the more negative aspects was the limited time for discussions (the participants stressed that it would be great if more time for networking/breaks could be dedicated in the future), technical difficulties (at first no WIFI, PowerPoint slideshow freeze) and the food (more veg options during lunch). The last-minute cancellation (by a practitioner) did not negatively affect the meeting, as the participants enjoyed the replacement session (a meet-the-editors session). According to the comments to our evaluation survey, participants would also benefit from an organized pre-conference event (for all those arriving a day early to meet in an informal context) and more time for networking. We agree with this insight, and we also think that there could be a better way to organize the discussions in the future (e.g., a special section for discussion in small groups). We also regret the cancellation and believe that it would be better to replace the practitioner talk with another practitioner. Given the last-minute notice, this was unfortunately not possible.

#### **ANNEXES**

The (Annex 1) list of participants and (Annex 2) final program including book of abstracts and are submitted as separate files.