

Work.Futures - an ethical assessment for service workplaces

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Abstract

Work and its context, the workplace, are new objects under the realm of service design. In fact, new interactions between knowledge or gig workers and service organizations are adding complexity to traditional relationships between employers, employees, operators, and users in the context of decentralized and remote work management, to maintain service ecosystems and digital platform models.

While organizations are often focused on operational efficiency, we propose a thematic workshop on "Reimagining work: service or servitude" to articulate ethical worker-centric factors for workplaces in service contexts. The workshop focuses on testing a method to ethically assess service organizations' workplace experiences around factors of cognitive well-being, social and economic inclusiveness, diversity, and sustainability, to prevent new forms of knowledge, financial, or operational servitude.

The workshop is based on the preliminary results of a study we conducted to identify key workplace elements to assess. The study was made up of three streams:

1. A comparative analysis of ten workplace design frameworks from Design Thinking, Organizational Design, and Environmental Psychology literature;
2. A research workshop with ten medium-sized workplace design agencies globally to explore emerging organizational needs;
3. 20+ expert interviews with workplace strategy and innovation leaders from large service organizations.

Our study recognized that organizations focused on creating worker-centric workplace experiences prioritize the holistic design of four key dimensions:

- Physical - This includes the user experience (UX) and accessibility of work settings, as well as their cultural and functional fit for teams.
- Digital - This includes the UX of digital workplaces and tools for communication and remote work facilitation.
- Operational - This includes inclusivity and participation in organizational and product-service governance.

- Cognitive - This includes inclusivity and participation in processes design and capacity development.

The workshop employs an open-source deck of cards designed for the ideation and assessment of worker-centric experiences across the four workplace dimensions. These cards enable participants to create speculative scenarios based on Future of Work signals, allowing them to ideate and assess potential worker-centric experiences.

This workshop contributes to refining the principles underlying our open-source ethical workplace assessments method and cards tool. By testing the workshop methodology we will improve the tool's usability and effectiveness.

Keywords: ethical workplace, work design, hybrid work, employee experience

Workshop description

The Service Design community has traditionally followed an "outside-in" approach to designing services, with deep empathy for user needs being a foundational practice. However, this workshop focuses on an emerging need for organizational maturity where high degrees of customer-centricity has been reached: expanding towards worker-centricity to allow for ethical adoption of design-driven methodologies that are sustainable for all actors.

It is in fact essential to reimagine the impact of designers' work under a systemic lens, as the impact of service design extends beyond the user experience to the well-being of workers and the broader ecosystem.

This important stage of service design advancement requires further reflection on new design elements and disciplinary language that this workshop addresses.

This workshop aims to test a tool for ideating and assessing worker experiences. By doing so, it will contribute to the transdisciplinary discourse on the convergence of workplace and service design and the sustainability of customer-centric approaches. Participant perspectives will further define the impact of the dimensions identified in our study on worker-centric and ethical workplaces. The results will converge into a research paper in 2023 to ground and enrich our open-source assessment framework for worker-centric service environments.

Session set-up

This reflective workshop will involve groups of 4 to 6 participants. Each group will receive a deck of cards with printed prompts, along with a canvas to organize ideas and produce insights during the facilitated activities. The cards are designed and produced by Studio Wé.



Workshop agenda		
5 mins	Icebreaking	Ice-breaking to playfully map the 'likes' and 'dislikes' of participants' workplaces. This helps contextualize the subject of the workshop within personal experiences to stimulate creativity.
15 mins	Context intro	Facilitators share preliminary results of their research and workshop activities.
5 mins	Activity intro	Facilitators explain the deck of cards and canvas available on the tables and use it to introduce the speculative case studies to assess.
25 mins	Activity One: Generate	Participants discuss the speculative case studies chosen and use the card to shape describe a possible workplace experience Facilitators go around tables to support the activity.
30 mins	Activity Two: Reflect & analyze	Participants identify a specific pattern in the workplace experience generated and use prompts for its ethical assessment
10 mins	Conclusions	Facilitators guide sharing of insights that emerged from Activity Two and gather actionable guidelines for new principles to include in the method.

Space requirements

- Room or open space with movable tables and chairs
- Laptop and projector
- Walls or movable boards to present activity prompts and case studies (optional)

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Convenors bio

Convenor 1: Antonio Cesare Iadarola is a service and workplace designer at Studio Wé, which he co-founded in 2014. Antonio specializes in designing work processes and physical-digital spaces for collaboration. In 2018 he co-initiated the Service Design Network in NYC and regularly collaborates with Livework in North America.

Convenor 2: Antonio Starnino is a facilitator, coach, consultant, and designer whose practice focuses on process design and group facilitation, participatory design, organizational development and leadership coaching. With 15 years of experience across the fields of service design and organizational consulting, he applied his abilities to a variety of private and public sectors.

