'Better Stop Chatting and Get Back to Work':

Knowing One's Place and Hot-Desks in Non-Clinical Areas of the NHS

Luci Attala

University of Wales, Trinity Saint David

Workplaces are designed with work in mind. According to Weeks (2011), places of work are spaces of command, obedience and obligation that make relations of power and authority tangible. This article considers the experience of moving from tethered to open-plan hot-desk offices by exploring the difference between what hot-desks signal and what they do. Using the example of hot-desks in a non-clinical NHS setting, it demonstrates how employees resist the homogeneity and equality implied by hot-desks and hold tightly to how they imagine their work identities should perform within a hierarchical habitus of work (Bourdieu 1977). Thus, it shows that workers need work to reproduce the naturalised notions of what work is thought to be, and when challenged to adopt alternative methods use moralising arguments and subtle acts of resistance (Foucault 1991; Scott 1992) to perpetuate and redeploy hierarchies. Consequently, the fundamental and dominant values and methods associated with *how and where* to work are exposed as comfortable through familiarity, and, therefore, despite irritations people not only want to know their place but also want that place to sit within a landscape that uses the conventional rules of the 'game' of work (Frayne 2015).

According to Weeks (2011: 15), 'That people should work is fundamental to the basic social contract'. Work presents as a fact of life, a *fait accompli*, a dominant incontestable inevitability and, consequently, is a key organising principle in most lives. Everyone, we are informed, works to work, and life appears almost meaningless without it (Schwartz 2015). Thus, a world without work is hard to imagine. In conjunction, analysis of work demonstrates that it is a both naturalised and a mythologised concept (see Weeks 2011; Frayne 2015; Fleming 2015; Parry 2018). The multiple processes and actions associated with work tie identity, worth, wealth, choice, skill, time and more into a complicated tangle of difficult-to-separate threads, making a successful definition hard to settle on. The word is used here to describe employment – undertakings typically completed for a wage or income – rather than other activities or tasks at which one might labour. Despite definitional difficulties, 'work' sits near to the heart of people's lives; it is what we are educated for, what we strive towards and how we spend a significant percentage of our time. Work is presented as the long path towards freedom; a process which requires us to voluntarily shackle ourselves and then hope that one day we will be freed. No longer simply associated with survival or subsistence, the invention of work means that today it is a core mechanism through which people understand each other, evaluate and establish the meaning of their lives, and explain who they are. Work, thus, is an overarching socio-coherence, a social order that organises and establishes how one can be human. Work, however, is also a place. It is where the managed and the managers are held together in a hierarchical dance, where one strives for independence whilst enduring dependency, where one accepts subjugation in the hope of sovereignty (Weeks 2011), and where bodies are connected to certain types of spaces.

The COVID pandemic delivered some seismic shifts to where bodies could work, which, despite any positives, also exposed a vigorous set of work ethic roots (Weber 2003 [1905]) continuing to feed imaginations and a stubborn, unconditional acceptance of what Frayne (2015) calls the colonising power of work. As the pandemic's influence fades and it is no longer deemed vital to work from home, concerns about where work can be done have surfaced. Increasing calls to 'get back to the office' show that home working is a contested area that swings between innovation and social issue as it rubs up against normative notions

of where work should be achieved. Uncertainties raised were concerned with surveillance and networking, but also proved and exposed the supremacy of the office or workplace in the fundamental order and logic of work (Weeks 2011); work is in part predicated upon location and, therefore, must be performed in the appropriate or proper place, rather than simply completed. Being in work ties places and people together with the 'rules and rulers' (ibid:16), a point that highlights the social significance of *going to* and *being at* work. That one is required to travel out from the home to a recognised workspace underlines how workers must – and themselves expect to – perform their characters on an appropriate stage because, as Cohen (2019) reminds us, it is these places that become the means of our performances.

> Places of employment and spaces of work [are]… supremely relevant to the very bread and butter of political science: as sites of decision making, they are structured by relations of power and authority; as hierarchical organizations, they raise issues of consent and obedience; as spaces of exclusion, they pose questions about membership and obligation (Weeks 2011:15).

However, it is not sufficient to simply assign an area to work. The space must also architecturally represent and echo the relations of governance and the everyday hierarchies expected of places of work. In association, interiors must be designed to create culturally appropriate rooms, and use tools and policies that avoid disconnecting expectations from experience. Consequently, office designs that redraw lines of power and shift the workforce towards alternative ways of being might be theoretically (or even visually) attractive, but, in failing to align with beliefs, cause consternation. And, as fieldwork has shown, workers subtly reorganise spaces to ensure they chime with what they feel constitutes an 'office'. Therefore, work is not simply an activity: work is a type of place – the place where work happens as it should.

But work does not, of course, just happen. It is not spontaneous, unfettered, or free. Work is planned; actions are organised, timetabled, and scheduled to avoid waste and maximise profits. Employment understands the value of people, time, and tasks economically

and fiscally (Gorz 1989) without challenge. Even Aronowitz and Cutler's (1998) so-called 'post-work' world was imagined using financial metrics. Their manifesto called for dignity in work but used quantities to establish alternatives. Concerned with how work preoccupies lives, and advocating for better conditions, their manifesto still failed to tackle how work is founded, and relies, upon hierarchies and obligations. Failure to interrogate how hierarchies are embedded into social life means work lives will continue to rely on (and generate) inequalities and authorities that exert power-over (Wong 2003), and equations will be used to justify choices rather than normalising sharing power. It appears that hierarchies in work are synonymous with, and are as naturalised as, the notion of work itself.

The value of hot-desks is also calculated economically but is sold as a method that reduces work inequalities. Using the neo-liberal language of independence, opportunity, freedom, drive, and choice alongside a youthful vocabulary including agility, nimbleness, and flexibility, hot-desks are presented as 'hot'. They signal a move away from a desiccated, chained or settled past and suggest that work environments are now more dynamic whereby, driven by personal incentives, and unencumbered by baggage typically associated with roles, ungoverned (even 'free') workers can glide through the networks of the organisation at pace in a space seemingly devoid of ladders and hierarchies to climb. Everyone has equal opportunities in an open office because nothing happens behind closed doors.

This study compares the lived reality of using hot-desks with the representations of offices that use them. It concludes that despite, and because of, the neo-liberal ideologies that champion freedom, initiative and personal achievement, rows of hot-desks increase anxieties rather than possibilities as they trouble the ground between independence and the chain of command. People's work ethic, which legitimates inequality, coexists antagonistically with self-direction and equality. Consequently, in landscapes of hot-desks where work cultures are acclimatised to expect power to be exerted downwards and which associate coercion with job security, hot-desks are repurposed *in situ* to reinsert obvious power lines into the environment and reduce choice rather than being embraced as tools of autonomy. Thus, in association with the self-imposed docility of working people and the ubiquitous naturalisation of work and working, the notion of self-rule at the behest of the employer makes open-plan hot-desk

offices an uncomfortable contradiction to negotiate alongside conventional hierarchical management structures.

Context

In 2019, Hywel Dda NHS Health Board in Wales commissioned an ethnographic study to understand how their staff were experiencing the transition from working in disparate, physically distanced traditional offices to working in centres where shared, bookable workbenches (or hot-desks) with computers would be provided for all non-clinical work.[1]

Moves away from tethered working were framed as able to facilitate collaboration and encourage innovation through informal dialogue or chatting with what Hirst (2017) calls 'work strangers'.[2] The designers of these offices advertised the spaces as fashioned to integrate the workforce which, in the context of the NHS, is also expected to produce the desired integrated care.

Integration has become an organisational buzzword and goal. The term conjures up images of slick workplaces where tasks are achieved seamlessly, and where creative collaboration, rapid effective processing, innovation, and efficiencies are generated. Because health and care services have developed into vast, complex intersecting systems, they are regularly accused of being fragmented and, therefore, inefficient. Consequently, a lack of department integration is cited as the cause of delays (Shaw and Rosen 2013; WHO 2016) and, is overwhelmingly considered essential for improving services (Hughes 2019; Steele-Gray et al. 2020).[3] Indeed, the word ‘integration’ is used interchangeably, and is presented as synonymous, with the terms ‘integrated care’ and ‘person-centred care’ in health service documents, which aligns integration with good care and establishes a continuity between organisational processes and care methods (Shaw et al. 2011).[4] Any suggestion that departmental homogenisation or diminishment of specialisation might follow integration has been raised and rejected in favour of foregrounding the importance and value of the enhanced communication that integration is said to provide (Atwal and Caldwell 2002).

The new ICCs in Wales are founded, designed, and constructed on precisely the premise that agile, flexible workers associated in the same building without designated offices and with up-to-the-minute digital technology will accelerate communication across siloed teams and, therefore, the desired service integration will follow. Peripatetic or rootless working in communal spaces is intended to encourage what is described as 'collaborative individualism', able to 'emancipate' the individual from the confines of the group or team in favour of the network (Bandinelli and Gandini 2019). Employees in these spaces are expected to mingle, which in turn will cross-pollinate methods and ideas.

Studies that evaluate integration in healthcare tend to employ quantitative and economic metrics and focus on delivery or user outcomes (Baxter et al. 2018), with only limited attention to care givers' phenomenological accounts of 'being integrated' – other than to performance efficiencies in care provision (see: Curry and Ham 2010; Shaw et al. 2011).[5] Literature that explores the phenomenology of workplace changes and how they are managed or produce integration in open-plan spaces is remarkably scarce (Stein et al. 2021), despite the fanfares associated with hot-desk workforce integration.

This paper does not comment on the delivery of integrated care, but instead provides a snapshot of responses that depict how NHS staff explained their experiences of moving to work at hot-desks. It demonstrates that staff at all levels are undermined, even threatened, by the changes hot-desks provide. Using staff voices as the spine that supports the conclusions reached, hot-desks promise freedoms and are sold as inducing radical change, but they are implemented and used by people who understand work using a ticking clock mentality and therefore strive to *replace* those pressures upon each other. Work is never meant to be free; it comes with costs that we all agree to pay.

Methods

This is a focused ethnographic piece that uses phenomenological accounts to allow staff voices, impressions, and their conclusions of working in the new Welsh ICCs to be heard. Hywel Dda Health board approached me and commissioned this study using money from the

Integrated Care Fund. Recognising that most research focuses on efficiencies over experience and that staff seemed to be struggling to accept the changes being planned, managers co-designed the study for me to complete.

As a person who trained as a nurse before becoming an anthropologist, my time in this field provided experiences that chimed with several warmly remembered aspects of my past, and I felt an unexpectedly pleasant camaraderie with the people I worked alongside. The NHS is full of individuals with an overwhelming work ethic; they tend to realise the importance of their contribution and associating with them on a daily basis reminded me again of their extraordinary resilience. However, as an individual who also works in a large organisation (a university), the kind of alienation that top-down workplace changes provoke was also quite close to home. Having to understand the changes from multiple, often opposing, points of view was an interesting task that revealed how some of my own assumptions and biases paint management as sitting over the system they appear to control. Spending time with managers produced my own Wizard of Oz moment when the curtain was pulled back on individuals unsure of consequences, hopefully following trends, and hoping that their activities would be favourably noticed and their careers advanced, something that the layers of hierarchy and the illusion of choices being made tend to obscure.

My time in the ICCs was split into two parts. The first fieldwork period began in October 2019 to coincide with the opening day of the first ICC in Aberaeron (AICC) (NHS Wales 2019a) and continued into early December when the following ICC in Cardigan (CICC) (NHS Wales 2019b) was opened.[6,7] The second fieldwork period began at the end of February 2020 and was prematurely truncated due to the COVID-19 pandemic: it was concluded during the third week of March. As a result of this abrupt termination, communication continued via phone, email and Skype as staff took it upon themselves to contact me. The bulk of the fieldwork was completed in AICC, with little time spent in CICC. However, a significant

proportion of the staff frequent both buildings and therefore some comments can be applied to both centres.

The fieldwork timetable was designed to allow immediate responses to the move to be collected and then later, after the staff felt more settled into the new accommodation, further conclusions to be gathered. Returning to the field in the New Year after a brief period of acclimatisation allowed a comparison of initial reactions with the feelings generated after some time had passed. This method provided information on how to encourage smooth transitions in future developments, as well as the opportunity to consider how initial reactions had tempered and settled.

Over 100 individuals contributed to this study. As the comments in this study describe the opinions of an easily identifiable group, the usual 'storytelling' ethnographic style has been inhibited and quotations have not been attributed to individuals or job roles so as to provide anonymity and protect identities. The reader is reminded that quotes have come from staff at all levels and specialisms and are not just representative of the views of those at particular grades or in particular roles.

Participants were given the opportunity to negotiate editorial changes, and are therefore co-authors of this piece. A certain amount of trust on their part has gone into the research and therefore acknowledgement must be afforded to the part they have played; without their ability to communicate with such clarity and sophistication this knowledge could not have been produced.

First experiences of the buildings

The staff were still moving in when I arrived at the Aberaeron ICC building in October 2019. There was a slightly chaotic but amicable buzz in the air. Managers, technicians, and administrators were furiously coordinating tasks and allocating deliveries, some emotions were raised with the strain of meeting the deadline and having to achieve clinical tasks simultaneously, there was a disagreement about housing files, and someone got hit by a door that was attached incorrectly. Despite the commotion, things were progressing, and staff were beginning to familiarise themselves with the space. Before receiving my photo ID lanyard, I was confronted by a group of employees who were not just stressed by the actions of moving but openly disgruntled about the way the building expected them to function. Without reservations they began lamenting how they had left behind a familiar, homely situation out in the sticks and felt that the move into this 'uniformity without personality' – where their team would be split up – was difficult to understand as an upgrade regardless of the corporate messages communicated at the induction. I sat and talked with this group for some time and felt the depth of their distress. As an introduction to the building, this first day set the scene.

Employees had worked in a quirky assortment of old, often cramped, dilapidated, and damp offices scattered around the counties before this move. While some of the historic buildings that housed their offices held poignant memories about the community for the workers, most were clear that the new accommodation provided the necessary professional touch to finally bring them into the 21st century. Some had been embarrassed of their old offices and dreaded showing visiting professionals where they worked. However, as my first encounter illustrates, feelings of gratitude were not unanimous. Colleagues were divided and in contrast to the many positive comments I heard, many others were troubled by the change.

> [This feels like] … a huge change and even though it was planned over a long period, the actual change was very sudden.

> I find the space sterile, dehumanised and I don't like it. I don't want to be a desk number.

However, it was the requirements of open-plan hot-desk working that caused the most discontent.

Design (and) intentions

> At the end of the day there should be no trace of a person on the workstations.

The ICCs in Wales expressly drew employees from multiple, diverse teams together under one roof. The internal layout of the non-clinical areas was broadly divided into 2 different types of reservable spaces. One could either book a 'breakout' room (for group activities such as meetings) or opt for a numbered plot at a workbench in a large open-plan office. Employees, regardless of seniority, were expected to clock in and book a space electronically when they entered the building.[8] Everyone was free to choose where to sit but were also restrained from using the same desk repeatedly. Work teams were not provided with designated areas in which to congregate, but members could reserve a meeting/breakout room to use. Lockable cupboards, provided for professional equipment only, were positioned around the building, often between workbenches.

The space was decorated in a uniform white-grey-orange/brown colour palette internally, signalling professionalism and cleanliness; the walls were bare and the furniture in each space was identically themed. To ensure the paraphernalia or clutter of people was minimised, staff were required to use the regulation wheelie bags, crockery, and cutlery provided, and were instructed that no plants, posters, or decorative items of any kind were acceptable in the building. Similarly, eating at desks was forbidden; staff were required to use

the kitchen but could have a drink at the workbench. The space, free of pictures, noticeboards, and even signage created a clean, homogenous uniformity devoid of individualities. These design choices explicitly organised and regulated space usage and behaviour. The equivalence inherent within both method and design signalled that the ICCs operated around an ethos of parity in which every individual is afforded the same opportunities. Chiming with this, I was told by the designers that the layout structure and devices were chosen to encourage conversations, foster creativity and facilitate collaboration by breaking down the psychological barriers that physical walls place between colleagues and that 'this provides a very positive step really moving towards collaboration. Collaboration is fab.'

The electronic system and chipped lanyards necessary for bookings and entry into the non-clinical rooms provided building security and enabled activity within the building to be monitored and tracked, thus ensuring that booking the same desk twice was avoided. Undoubtedly, these mechanisms created a new structure and routine, but they were not experienced or understood as such.

> I really need some structure and routine. I don't really like knowing that I have to find a desk – and what if someone is in the spot I booked – and they are a doctor – I can't chuck them out, can I? It's supposed to be equal, but people aren't equal, so yeah.

Some staff were impressed with the air of hygiene and proficiency articulated by the design – they spoke of it being modern, wanting to keep it clean and of feeling valued – but many also, in the same breath, described the change as a worrying threat to team health and talked of how an important sense of belonging might be in danger of erosion because no one, regardless of rank, would easily know where anyone else was.

Without offices, traditional hierarchies are materially removed – there is no corner office for managers – and an aura of workplace equality is provided by the uniform appearance (Kleeman 1992). However, removing the physical signs of hierarchy does not remove any expectations associated with rank. Junior staff articulated how they didn't want to sit next to senior staff and senior staff felt similarly uncomfortable about sitting next to them. Despite this overarching, two-way reticence, people initially followed the rules – persuaded to avoid using the same desk repeatedly by the watchful eye of the electronic surveillance system (Foucault 1991). Unsurprisingly, everyone continued to raise concerns about whom they might end up sitting next to each day, as the opening quote above illustrates.

In addition, finding a different desk was not straightforward and generated a series of consequences, which will be detailed later. Consequently, this rule presented as a significant challenge to past practice, and it began being described as a threat rather than an opportunity or an improvement. Without a desk, I was told, or a patch in the space, it was difficult to feel safe. Additionally, many were apprehensive about meeting new people and having to work alongside strangers, while others found locating colleagues problematic.

Thus, the reactions to the buildings' rules generated turbulence that reverberated throughout the first months after moving into the ICCs. Some people took time off with stress and others immediately initiated devising small acts of resistance (Scott 1992). These tensions and the concomitant struggles were experienced as being at odds with the way employees – *including those who had initiated and authorised the buildings' designs, and who had established the new rules of practice* – understood *how* to work. The changes worked in theory but in practice employees at every level strained to understand how to place themselves now that the space suggested they were on an equal footing.

Experiencing the weight of placelessness and in-transit insecurities

Staff associated locating desks with being at an airport or a library and – startlingly echoing experiences shared by other researchers – they compared their situation to being akin to homelessness where people with offices had homes (Hirst 2011, 2017).

> We are people, and we need to feel we belong somewhere. This feels like we are just passing through – in transit.
>
> Urgh, it's alright for those people who have offices in other buildings. Different rules apply. We are like the homeless trying to find a place to belong!

The sense of being in transit or just passing through was exacerbated by the allocation of baggage – wheelie bags or 'mobile offices' – supplied to facilitate self-sufficient agility, as the following journal entry and series of quotes illustrate.

> It's the beginning of November and a member of staff is struggling with all her stuff again. She tells me she isn't finding it easy. The distances between things are too great and it is too noisy; she is ending up walking back and forth all day. This is adding time and bother that she isn't happy about. She is having to change her methods and it isn't streamlining practice. She is having to carry things around and 'There are so many times when you just don't want to pack up everything because you need to make tea or have a wee.' She knows she has a lockable bag but just the suggestion of it makes her irritated. She needs to be able to leave confidential, sensitive files for a minute without having to lock up everything.

On the same day, another person volunteered this information:

> [Sigh] It has taken me almost an hour to pack everything away, and I'm only going to have to do it again next time. I am carrying around everything in this blinking bag. It is really heavy, you know. And then they added to it by giving me a laptop – so I have to worry about that now too. My husband was not pleased when I got the laptop out at home. He told me that I wasn't working at home. Trouble is I have to store everything somewhere. I don't think it's right that we have to take stuff home, there should be a division between work and home – plus my nice car is not a work wagon and all this stuff fills it up.

NHS staff are practitioners. Each role requires specific tools and must use a wide variety of utensils and devices: including portable heart and blood pressure monitors, scales and pumps of different kinds, educational literature, and medical supplies. Consequently, the themes of extra time, extra weight, extra actions and extra concerns continued to cause extra irritations.

> I have to walk back and forth now, and it adds about 30 mins extra to my day to sort it all out. I just need everything with me, and don't tell me that I can have it in my bag. I don't want to carry around a huge bag. I have always done that, and I want to divest of all of this heavy stuff.
>
> I'll give you an example: what do I do with my files? Here I am at one of the desks and I need to go to the loo. Do I leave the files? Do I trust everyone? What if the file is of someone's relative and they see it as they go past it? I think contractually I am obliged to put them away or keep them safe which means I have to either take them to

the toilet, put them in a file somewhere – or lock them up in my bag. Well, that just adds so much bother to my day.

These concerns did not present as temporary, trivial, mundane affairs that would be acclimatised to in time but rather assumed heavy symbolic weight regarding how staff felt their work culture was being disregarded in favour of a building and work aesthetic. Staff began to actively state the changes they would like to see.

> If I was in charge of designs, I would zone things. Give people patches to work in. You don't have to have your own desk, but you could have a patch – nurses there, OTs there - or something. Or perhaps all community staff in one room and others in another.[9] I don't know but if one of the big rooms was allocated to all community staff then you would know they would be there. Currently you have to traipse around the building to find people or just stay somewhere and hope they turn up.

In association with this resistance, almost everyone explained how their type of work demanded a fixed, private room and soon comments that justified breaking the buildings' key rule began to multiply, as the following quotes illustrate.

> I have staff affairs to sort out. I can't just do it out in the open with everyone else.
> I have sensitive, difficult conversations. I can't talk in code.
> It's not OK to broadcast personal health information across a room of strangers, and I can't whisper because callers find that weird – and are often hard of hearing!

Finding one's place: Renegotiating belonging using hot desks and cupboards

In association with the practicalities of using the space outlined above, the cupboards (used only to store equipment and other necessary items for work) were an unexpected addition to the build when staff complained that they were burdened by carrying files and equipment around all day. As the cupboards were positioned around the building, they both broke up the space and, inadvertently, presented groups with the chance to surreptitiously establish departmental or team waypoints and locational markers in the building's landscape. Once installed, staff teams immediately recognised this potential and informally agreed to book desk space near a certain set of cupboards they had negotiated the use of collectively. This serendipitously enabled team members to all but congregate and avoided the extra steps and distance from their colleagues that desks at different points in the building had created. This meant that the rule of desk variety was creatively reinterpreted as staff (at all levels) settled on desks in the same vicinity each day as a result of having manufactured what amounted to concealed team zones tucked around cupboards. The installation of cupboards, stimulated by the shared acknowledgement that the original intentions were uncomfortable to enact, offered an unexpected and novel opportunity to both reinterpret the notion of shuffling and create 'invisible' zones whilst not breaking the rules. The building continued to appear open plan and the system registered different desks were being booked each day, Eventually, as this method established, more senior members of staff began using the same, separately bookable meeting room every day. Interestingly, it was a corner room and was not challenged or contested. However, as staff devised ways to settle, the chance to informally converse outside of one's team diminished.

These actions, in part, emerged from the important social need to feel as if one belongs, not only to a community but to one's work role identity. Belonging is a form of performative self-identification that crucially divides social groups and signifies membership

within a system of power relations (Yuval-Davis 2006). Belonging constructs identities and reflects the investments and attachments people hold (ibid.). Rendering these invisible creates struggles for recognition (ibid.; Probyn 1996) and the way in which spaces are inhabited reveals these struggles and connections (Ross 2004; Tsalapatanis et al. 2019). Staff articulated this in both their actions and in their explanations.

> There is no value for me in sitting next to a someone not in my team; but, sitting next to someone in my team is helpful and that is important to me. That is about belonging and safety. That is where we can blossom, otherwise I am slowed down.
>
> Well, people's roles are so different; you can't just ask someone sitting next to you about stuff.
>
> I think some of us need to be together. I mean, I understand the theory of being shuffled up, but the reality is different.

In addition, these comments also highlight how the notion of random chatting sits awkwardly with beliefs about how work functions, and was therefore judged worthless.

Encouraging team members to be scattered not only caused confusion around how to work – or how roles could be enacted – but also affected the ways in which people could locate each other and, consequently, provided a situation where people felt that important bonds established over time were in danger of disintegrating. Routine proximity allows emotional states to be tracked and recognised. With a hot-desk system, staff maintained that this important community advantage was troubled. For example, I was told,

> If someone has a tendency to withdraw during times of difficulty, it would be easy to hide in this new office building, so other team members may not pick up on this behaviour so early.

According to Nadin (2018), any degradation of group identities at work can impact detrimentally on employee wellbeing. The value of staff wellbeing is now well documented and should not be conceived as a 'benevolent ideal' (Sutton et al. 2016: 181) or a luxury after efficiencies. In Wales, the Future Generations Wellbeing Act (2015) places a duty of care on public bodies to ensure that developments enable 'people's physical and mental well-being [to be] maximised'.[10] For these employees in health and care services their colleagues' wellbeing was central and consequently they manoeuvred their positions to ensure team connectivity.

On returning to the AICC building in February 2020, I was not surprised to see that people had remained in the series of informal zones that had been previously forming. The areas were not signposted, nor officially designated to one team, and in acknowledgement of the original rules individuals continued to avoid using the same desk repeatedly within the zone. Consequently, an organic compromise that re-established past methods had been reached. Today, rather than being in transit, staff arrive and know where, for example, the community nurses can be found, where the social workers are positioned, or where other teams associate, and it is only senior staff who use the same desk daily in a separate office.

The above illustrates how workers responded to the placelessness that the office design instituted. To reconcile anxieties about being 'homeless', the workforce drew unofficial zones within the open-plan area, which established places (or homes) for teams to inhabit. Chiming with stereotypes associated with seniority and the semiotics of the corner office, managers embraced this quiet act of resistance orchestrated by their teams as an

opportunity to adopt rooms that adequately represented their positions in the hierarchy and commandeered separate offices at a distance from more junior colleagues who remained relegated to settlements in the open-plan space. These reconfigurations were not discussed, nor opposed; seemingly, because people were now in, and knew, their place.

Commensality

> Economic rationality has no room for authentically free time which neither produces nor consumes commercial wealth (Gorz 1989:115).

Despite informal zoning and the establishment of private offices, staff from all specialisms and pay grades were obliged to continue sharing the kitchen. As has already been explained, eating was permitted only in the kitchen during official break times. Therefore, unsurprisingly, people would leave the workbenches for the kitchen when hungry and avoided socialising around the computers, because doing so was forbidden and also had the potential to disturb those working at them. The place for socialising was the kitchen.

Accustomed to grazing while working, some employees found the necessity to move out to eat both restrictive and irritating. They also recognised that collaboration could not be achieved at the workbenches because of this rule.

> As far as I can see, the kitchen is where you meet people… not over the computer. The kitchen is working well. It's been a joy to watch. I think that is about networking.

In addition, some also valued taking down-time in the new kitchen.

> The best thing is to stop for lunch – oh, and we have to walk up and down, so it is good for our 'steps'. We used to just sit in one room.

Leaving the computer for food was framed as important for wellbeing and as the quote above shows, having time for lunch was not only an appreciated novelty, it was also recognised as health inducing.

The link between eating and kitchens is obvious. However, any connection between working and eating is not. Indeed, to explicitly link them tests where work starts and stops, as the muddled rules of the building illustrate. Consequently, how kitchens – and more importantly, breaks – are conceived smuggles ideas about what work is and where work is properly achieved into practice. It is these ideas that keep eating, working, and socialising apart. As a result, staff were ambivalent about using what is understandably seen as their time-out for work discussions or 'integration'. Notionally, breaking down these boundaries appeared freeing but, in practice, translated integration into a directive that uncomfortably blurred work and down time, and suggested that while in the building staff should never stop working. A demand that was unreservedly rejected:

> Lunch time is my time. I'm not paid for it, so I don't want to sit in the kitchen being creative and making connections. I want to be on my own.

Google's offices are often used to represent the epitome of the happiest, most creative, and productive workplace. Google's success is attributed to the kind of casual collision expected from the hot-desk system in the ICCs. Google, however, does not simply provide shared spaces, they also pointedly add food and encourage socialising to augment, lengthen and enhance spontaneous conversation (Bock 2015). This is achieved in part

through proximity and informality around food, thus adding a modern twist to the well-established value of the 'business lunch' extending into the afternoon. Google's methods broadcast a message of a company that wants to nourish its staff – in the broadest sense – but food at Google also has another value. Food stations at Google are strategically placed between teams, thus cultivating an environment where staff from different groups are encouraged to informally snack together (Bock 2015). Unable to break away from normative notions that associate eating and chatting with wasting productive time, the ICCs restricted how and when staff could eat, which disconnected food from work. This was evident in the house rule that restricted eating to the kitchen, which emerged from and reinforced how time at work is divided. Where Google actively associates work, socialising and food, the NHS does not. Adopting designs and methods that herald freedom without evaluating conventional equations of productivity meant that this attempt at combining chatting, eating and working caused friction, which in this case produced rules and resistances that damaged any bold hopes for the building. Teams had found mechanisms to avoid associating with work strangers and refused to use their break time to chat for 'innovation'.

Conclusion

Neo-liberal ideologies are responsible for inspiring an entrepreneurial spirit and championing what appears to be independence and autonomy in the workplace. In association, places of work have been redesigned in ways that reflect the qualities ostensibly required from the workforce. Hot-desks suggest an environment open to possibilities, where obstacles are removed and where one's destiny is no longer controlled by the restrictions of others. However, the phenomenological experience and meanings of hot-desks fall short of these aspirations as they grate up against conventional understandings of how work is achieved.

Rather than encouraging or stimulating efforts to innovate, open-plan hot-desk spaces sit uncomfortably between libraries and transit lounges where nobody belongs, and trouble the naturalised hierarchical methods expected by work cultures (Parry 2018).

Work, and the places where work is performed, rely on organisational systems and strategies that manage and structure the workforce to accomplish company goals. Employees understand how to cooperate within that arrangement. They know that their compliance and obedience is required, and that their role is to complete tasks and execute their work identity satisfactorily. Here, as with most social institutions, inequality is legitimised and fed by the moralising ideas of the work ethic (Weeks 2011). In this soil, equality struggles to take root as a chain of command is ideologically constituted as necessary, almost sacrosanct. Changes to office design that suggest staff can independently self-govern and are able to control their own affairs are approached by workers at all levels apprehensively. They assume their performance should await instruction and be controlled, and to suggest otherwise is to cause bewilderment, consternation, and even abrasion of expectations.

Resistance is a counter force that sits within power (Foucault 1991). It tends to follow any imposition of form and frustrates power through subtle everyday actions rather than overt defiance. Everyday resistances, such as those enacted in the ICCs, are not revolutionary or rebellious acts. They are disguised, non-confrontational, incremental shifts that require no planning and little coordination; they expose how people, caught in the same internalised webs, negotiate compliance when expectations are aggravated (Scott 1992).

Rather than providing an opportunity to embrace autonomy, the introduction of hot-desks in the Welsh ICCs paradoxically created an enforced uniformity – a rejection of individuality – where any freedom to be yourself and integrate was organised, restrained, and surveilled, and where the inviolable contract between work and personal time, between the office and home was simultaneously stretched and muddled. The rules, generated and

implemented by individuals schooled in conventional work requirements, despite the best intentions, deemed it necessary to track freedom, police eating and, puzzlingly, both encourage and discourage chatting or socialising at work. Rather than producing a new culture, these designs sat uncomfortably between ideals and expectations, have been used to perpetuate hierarchical thinking, and offer little hope of generating innovation.

The world of work promises gradual, incremental independence after or following years of dependence: that autonomy will result from sheer grit and determination, from obsequious, deferential obedience within the system. Methods that suggest that other ideas are at work are met with confusion. The game is set: we all know how to play it, and endeavour to do so. Moreover, work was never supposed to be free; one works to become free; it is the process by which we imagine we will become free, and to surreptitiously blend work and free time under the banner of opportunity and innovation allows work to bleed into places and activities typically considered off limits by the rules of the game. Requiring a culture of collaboration alongside house rules that restrict informality and socialising to certain locations demonstrates both the confusions of these directives and how authority and hierarchy sit at odds with the claims of neo-liberalism in organisations. Thus, not only is work normalised, but people also actively normalise work so that places, activities and practices chime with what and where work should be. The staff at *Hywel Dda* found ways to be tethered to a place, restricted chatting to non-work times, and re-instituted hierarchies, despite the opportunity to perform on a level playing field.

Staff comments and actions show that while architectural designs that demand proximity to work strangers theoretically support a mixing of sorts, they also run the risk of dampening creativity, generating a sense of homelessness, and being resisted if their purpose is not understood and incorporated cohesively into established cultural methods and meanings. Staff responses to the change demonstrate that normalising a culture of expressive

informality, familiarity and open dialogue is not achieved by simply introducing hot-desks (Miller et al. 2017) because it chafes uncomfortably with the habitus of work. While evidence in other settings does show that congregation has the potential to support collaboration, and therefore integration (Walsh and Hargrave 2020), informal gatherings continue to be perceived as wasting work time in many offices.[11] Chatting is not working. This conception is not the exclusive domain of the employer: employees are similarly attached to this sentiment and struggle to marry eating or socialising with working. What constitutes work is determined by calculations of obvious tasks completed over time, often hourly. Time for innovation by chatting is rarely factored in. The introduction of hot-desks in the Welsh ICCs failed to disrupt these orthodox equations effectively; they continue to exert pressure for the majority, as is evidenced by phrases such as 'better stop chatting and get back to work'.

E-mail: l.attala@uwtsd.ac.uk

Acknowledgements

The research was funded by *Hywel Dda* NHS Health Board, Wales.

My sincere thanks to Dr Ann Bevan, UWTSD; Sue Griffiths, *Hywel Dda,* and all the staff in the ICCs.

[1] NHS refers to the National Health Service in Britain.

[2] Hirst, Alison, 2017. How Hot Deskers are Made to Feel Like the Homeless People of the Office World. The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/how-hot-deskers-are-made-to-feel-like-the-homeless-people-of-the-office-world-72628 (accessed on 8 January 2021).

[3] WHO, 2016. Integrated Care Models: An Overview. World Health Organisation. Regional Office for Europe. http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/322475/Integrated-care-models-overview.pdf (accessed on 8 January 2021).

[4] Shaw, Sara, Rebecca Rosen and Benedict Rumbold, 2011. What is Integrated Care? An Overview of Integrated Care in the NHS. Nuffield Trust. https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/files/2017-01/what-is-integrated-care-report-web-final.pdf (accessed on 8 January 2021).

[5] Curry, Natasha and Chris Ham, 2010. Clinical and Service Integration. The Route to Improved Outcomes. The King's Fund. https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/Clinical-and-service-integration-Natasha-Curry-Chris-Ham-22-November-2010.pdf (accessed on 8 January 2021).

[6] NHS Wales, 2019a. Landmark Moment as Aberaeron Integrated Care Centre Prepares to Opens [sic] its Doors. http://www.wales.nhs.uk/news/51697 (accessed on 8 January 2021).

[7] NHS Wales, 2019b. Cardigan Integrated Care Centre Prepares to Open Doors. https://hduhb.nhs.wales/news/press-releases/cardigan-integrated-care-centre-prepares-to-open-doors/ (accessed on 8 January 2021).

[8] Excluding the staff from Porth Gofal, who are tethered within one of the open-plan offices in AICC. Porth Gofal are a team of professionals who triage support for the vulnerable in the community.

[9] OT: Occupational therapist.

[10] Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, 2015. https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/ (accessed on 9 January 2021).

[11] Walsh, Paula and Josef Hargrave, 2020. Future of Offices in a Post Pandemic World ARUP.com. https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/future-of-offices-in-a-post-pandemic-world (accessed on 8 January 2021).

References

Aronowitz, Stanley and Jonathon Cutler (eds.)

1998 *Post Work.* NY: Routledge.

Atwal, Anita and Kay Caldwell

2002 Do Multidisciplinary Integrated Care Pathways Improve Interprofessional Collaboration? *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences* 16: 360-367.

Baxter, Susan, Maxine Johnson, Duncan Chambers, Anthea Sutton, Elizabeth Goyder and Andrew Booth

2018 The Effects of Integrated Care: A Systematic Review of UK and International Evidence. *BioMed Central Health Services Research* 18(350): 1-13.

Bock, Laszlo

2015 *Work Rules! Insights from Inside Google That Will Transform How You Live and Lead.* London: John Murray Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre

1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cohen, Rachel Lara

2019 'We're Not Like That': Crusaders and Maverick Occupational Identity Resistance *Sociological Research Online*. 25(1): 136-153.

Fleming, Peter

2015 *The Mythology of Work: How Capitalism Persists Despite Itself*. London: Pluto Press.

Foucault, Michel

1991 *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison.* London: Penguin.

Frayne, David

2015 *The Refusal of Work: The Theory and Practice of Resistance at Work*. London: Zed Books.

Gorz, André

1989 *Critique of Economic Reason.* London, NY: Verso.

Hirst, Alison

2011 Settlers, Vagrants and Mutual Indifference: Unintended Consequences of Hot-desking. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 24(6): 767-788.

Hughes, Gemma

2019 Experiences of Integrated Care: Reflections on Tensions of Size, Scale and Perspective Between Ethnography and Evaluation. *Anthropology and Medicine* 26(1): 33-47.

Kleeman, Walter B.

1992 Hot Desks. *Facilities* 10(9): 11-13.

Miller, Robin, Marisa de Andrade, Marjolein D. Rommy, Volker Amelung, Viktoria Stein, Nicholas Goodwin, Ran Balicer, Ellen Nolte and Esther Suter

2017 Culture and Values. In: V. Amelung, V. Stein, N. Goodwin, R. Balicer, E. Nolte and E. Suter (eds.), *Handbook Integrated Care.* Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. Pp. 237-251.

Nadin, Gethin

2018 *A World of Good: Lessons from Around the World in Improving the Employee Experience.* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Parry, Jonathon

2018 Introduction: Precarity, Class and the Neoliberal Subject. In: C. Hann and J. Parry (eds.), *Industrial Labour on the Margins of Capitalism: Precarity, Class and the Neoliberal Subject*. NY: Berghahn Books. Pp.1-38

Probyn, Elspeth

1996 *Outside Belonging.* London: Routledge.

Ross, Andrew

2004 *No Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Schwartz, Barry

2015 *Why We Work*. TED books, London: Simon and Schuster.

Scott, James

1992 *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* New Haven, London: Yale University Press.

Shaw, Sara and Rebecca Rosen.

2013 Fragmentation: A Wicked Problem with an Integrated Solution? *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy* 18(1): 61-64.

Steele-Gray, Carolyn, Agnes Grudniewicz, Alana Armas, James Mold, Jennifer Im and Pauline Boeckxstaens

2020 Goal-Oriented Care: A Catalyst for Person-Centred System Integration. *International Journal of Integrated Care* 20(4): 8, 1-10.

Stein, Viktoria K, Volker Amelung, Robin Miller and Nicholas Goodwin

2021 The Fourth Dimension of the Quadruple Aim: Empowering the Workforce to Become Partners in Health and Care. *International Journal of Integrated Care* 21(2): 34, 1-4.

Sutton, Anna, Maggi Evans, Carol Davies and Cathy Lawson

2016 The Development and Longitudinal Evaluation of a Wellbeing Programme: An Organisation Case Study. *International Journal of Wellbeing* 6(1): 180-195.

Tsalapatanis, Anna, Miranda Bruce, Diane Bissell and Helen Keane

2019 *Social Beings, Future Belongings: Reimagining the Social*. London: Routledge.

Weber, Max

2003[1905] *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism.* NY: Dover Publications Inc.

Weeks, Kathi

2011 *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Anti-Work Politics and Post-Work Imaginaries*. USA: Duke University Press.

Wong, Kwok-Fu

2003 Empowerment as a Panacea for Poverty – Old Wine in New Bottles? Reflections on the World Bank's Conception of Power. *Progress in Development Studies*. 3(4): 307-322.

Yuval-Davis, Nira

2006 Belonging and the Politics of Belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice* 40(3): 197-214.