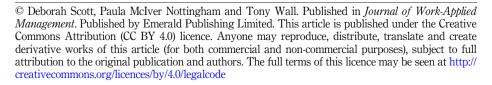# Guest editorial

Welcome to the "Creativity in Work-Applied Management" special issue of the *Journal of Work Applied Management*. When we created the call for papers, we characterised creativity as both a process and an outcome within business and as essential for societal and economic growth (Shalley, 2013; Wall *et al.*, 2017a). We thought such characterisation was likely to remain appropriate as technological development, globalisation and urbanisation trigger significant change in everyday life and employment, making it essential to recognise the skills and capabilities needed for continued participation and influence in the workplace, and that these will include "originality abilities" (Bakhshi *et al.*, 2017). We also thought creativity could be considered through the use of creative problem-solving (Osborn, 1953), organisational aesthetics (Taylor and Hansen, 2005; Wall *et al.*, 2017b), flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), future skills (Ehlers and Kellermann, 2019) or development of the workforce through learning (Helyer, 2015).

We said it could be considered democratically and collaboratively (Adams and Owens, 2016; Rossetti and Wall, 2017), with a view to effecting transformative practice (Page *et al.*, 2014) or philosophically, using the concept of Thirdspace (Soja, 1996) to create opportunities for exploration. We believed it could be engendered differently, relevant to specific organisational environments, instigated through different roles and practice: individuals, organisations and education all have responsibility for cultivation of creativity. We were mindful of Robinson's (2011) idea that creative managers and creative organisations can be identified and that the distinction between imagination and innovation can be helpful in supporting active engagement at all levels in organisational development across companies.

When we created the call for papers for this special issue, we did not anticipate contributors would be writing, and we would be editing, in the course of a pandemic. At that time, it was possible to assume that any reference one might hear to a new virus would be of passing concern, with serious consequences limited in time and location. We began this special issue project giving little thought to the need to consider creativity in such a situation. We write this editorial uncertain about what the workplace and workplace learning will be like in October 2020 (when the special issue is published), and wondering what contribution creativity will make.

By the time you are reading this, the pandemic may have passed its peak; most workers may be working in their familiar, physical workplace again, having worked remotely for some months. What will have changed? Are we still in a state of transition? Much learning was needed as we aimed to work effectively in very different circumstances: digital skills and knowledge were developed to facilitate virtual meetings, virtual learning, teaching and assessment and the meeting of business needs; reassessment of customer concerns and constraints was required, as was learning about colleagues' skills and abilities and how to use them to achieve results. It seems essential for work-applied learning to offer the tools for change, so there is a continuous flow between the workplace, individuals' professional development and external events and situations. We write this some months before publication; practices are already changing, not just as short-term reactions to an unprecedented situation, but because the pandemic has forced incorporation of these reactions into more considered and informed approaches for the future. Already, professional

bodies for managers such as the CMI (2020) and the CIPD (2020) have published reports and guides which not only consider workplace practicalities, but deeper longer-term aspects of workplace learning and management, such as well-being, kindness, mental health, agility and networking. Undoubtedly, by the time of publication, yet further investigations of virus impact on the workplace will be available.

For a long-term lockdown workforce, creativity could be significant for continued experience of new perspectives and ideas, of new practices to suit changing circumstances. Living with uncertainty, in our personal lives as well as in the workplace, might lead to more willingness to work constructively with ambiguity and transition, so that, for example, we might draw on new approaches, perhaps bringing together apparently unconnected spheres, as you will see in this special issue. As news stories about national and global recessions appear alongside news of how countries are dealing with the COVID-19 virus, it would seem essential that returning to the workplace effectively would require an open and creative approach and a continued willingness to learn.

So, please read these articles, thinking of the time in which they were written and when they were published and what they have to offer to work-applied learning and management in this period of uncertainty and change. How does creativity impact on what we do, perceive, think? As you reassess your practice and plan, as the world recovers and creates future solutions/ practice, we hope this diverse exchange of views offers an interesting, inspiring contribution.

The first two articles of this special issue focus on creativity in individual learning. The first is by Debbie Scott, who argues the case for "Creatively expanding research from work based learning" (Scott, 2020). The paper reminds of us of the value and role of unexpected experiences and outcomes in learning journeys and how fruitful they can be whilst trying to learn in professional settings. One can imagine, over time, how this might build individual and organisational capacity for resilience and thriving in challenging circumstances. In the second article, we learn about "Professional Artefacts: Evaluating Creative Outcomes for Work-Based Inquiry" (Nottingham, 2020). It is fascinating to learn the ways in which creating artefacts – that can make public our learning and expertise – can have a role in engaging other audiences in that learning. This is perhaps more common in action research projects than it is in work-based learning, and it would interesting to hear of your experiences of using artefacts with different stakeholders in work-based learning projects.

The next five articles move towards creativity with others. Here, Stephanie Wheeler, Jonathan Passmore, Richard Gold and Theresa Quinn link creativity with play, team cohesion and collaboration. In "All to play for: LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® and its impact on team cohesion, collaboration and psychological safety in organisational settings using a coaching approach" (Wheele *et al.*, 2020), we learn about the unorthodox use of coaching with play and note the significance of ensuring people feel safe in engaging in creative activity. Steven de Groot emphasises such needs in "Collaboration of Creative Professionals with Companies (CoCreaCo): Antecedent Conditions for Collaboration in Cross-overs" (de Groot, 2020).

We would agree with the sentiments of the two articles but extend them to work-based learning as well as forms of action learning and research; safety and trust are capstones of change work.

Whilst challenging, the experience and outcomes of engaging in creative collaborations seem to be fruitful especially when crossing professional fields. Steven Cranfield explores these issues in "Creativity and working knowledge: what healthcare managers can learn from architects" (Cranfield, 2020) and explains outcomes deriving from conceptual engagement across knowledge bases. Hatana El-Jarn and Glen Southern share a similar commentary in the context of "extended realities". In "Can Co-Creation in Extended Reality Technologies facilitate the Design Process?" (El-Jarn and Southern, 2020), we learn how technology can help us reconsider some of the processual elements of creativity, design, as well as innovation. Poole *et al.* (2020) also raise challenges in creative collaborations. Here, in "Mind the gap:

Identifying barriers to students engaging in creative practices in Higher Education", we learn about some of the factors which seem to influence creativity in practice, including background, emotional blockages, time (and time management) and the need for accompaniment or guidance. Although these insights relate to the learners in professional contexts, it is clear there is a resonance with managers driving through change at work.

Our final article in the special issue takes a difference stance from the previous papers, as it moves away from seeing creativity as an individual, team or single organisational phenomenon, and thinks about it on a much wider scale. Here, Klaus-Jürgen Meier discusses "Additive Manufacturing – Driving Massive Disruptive Change in Supply Chain Management" (Meir, 2020). Here, we learn about creative (disruptive) models across supply chains which fundamentally challenge how organisations operate internally and externally. We think this demonstrates the potential of creativity when we unleash its power on larger-scale challenges and systems.

The final two articles do not respond to call for papers to the creativity special issue, but are relevant enough to be raised in the wider context of creativity in uncertain times – especially COVID-19. The first of these is "Emotional awareness amongst middle leadership" by Steve Lambert (2020), where we learn about differences in "emotional recognition" between workers and managers in schools – and therefore the potential success for relationship-oriented tasks across an organisation. Where we are planning collaborative creativity or responding to organisational changes, this is a critical insight into plan learning and development priorities. Within the current setting, this might of course mean virtual learning and development activity, which is the focus of Debora Jeske's "Mentoring and Skill Development in e-Internships" (Jeske, 2020). This will be particularly insightful for organisations across a range of countries moving through or out of a pandemic.

As always, we wish to thank all of the reviewers who supported the publication process.

The editorial team of the special issue hopes you are safe and well when the special issue reaches you.

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