

# The digital transformation of work is here – how scientists and practitioners can work together to manage needed workplace changes

Colin Roth



**COLIN ROTH**

BlackBox/Open, Germany

[colin.roth@blackboxopen.com](mailto:colin.roth@blackboxopen.com)

## Panelists

Oliver Kohnke (SAP, Germany), Diana Rus (Creative Peas, The Netherlands), Hartwig Fuhrmann (t-velopment, Germany), Katarzyna Więcek-Jakubek (University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland), Roman Soucek (School of Business, Economics and Society, FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany); and chair and facilitator Colin Roth.

## Abstract

Organizations across Europe are reinventing their structures and processes in the quest to become more “agile”. To facilitate these changes methods like “Design thinking”, “Bar Camps” or “Working out loud” are becoming mainstream, no longer only used in hip start-ups and communication agencies. Traditional working environments, typically associated with rules, routines, and regulations are now transformed into open (co-working) spaces. Something big is going on and we wanted to find out about it by holding an interactive discussion.

In this panel discussion we invited scientists and practitioners to engage in a conversation about future directions of Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) with the aim of keeping education, research and practice relevant to contemporary working practices. We want to look into the current state of co-operation and co-creation within WOP and examine what needs to change and how this will be achieved. Together, we would like to figure out how research can support practitioners in their work with organizations and how to manage the digital transformation. As part of the scientist – practitioner collaborative stream (that has become known as Co-op Friday) this panel discussion compliments the conference theme of Working for the Greater Good by looking into future directions of organizational development and how to use evidence-based practices to help individuals to adapt to change.

The aim of the session was to have an active debate between panelists and the audience generating ideas and activities to improve co-operation. We used an innovative process method called “Bar Camp” to encourage presentation and review. This resulted in interactive discussions with panel members and participants working

The digital transformation of work is here – how scientists and practitioners can work together to manage needed workplace changes

in small groups (see Figure 1) discussing particular issues (see further detail in the following report). Each discussion session was followed by a brief summary that was shared across the groups.

Figure 1  
Small group discussion at the Bar Camp



## Session report

The session took place at EAWOP’s 2019 Congress in Turin, in the Sala Roma on the upper level of the venue. Approximately 65 people attended the session. After a short introduction of the agenda (see Figure 2) three invited experts presented their topics for discussion in “Pecha Kucha” presentations. A Pecha Kucha is a slideshow presentation format with specific rules. The presenter uses 20 slides with a time limit of 20 seconds for each slide to give a short and precise overview of their topic.

The digital transformation of work is here – how scientists and practitioners can work together to manage needed workplace changes

Short texts, illustrations and pictures are used instead of large text blocks. Thus, a Pecha Kucha is limited to six minutes and 40 seconds for each presentation. After each presentation a three minute and 20 seconds discussion was conducted, adding up to a 10-minute timeframe for each topic.

Figure 2  
The Bar Camp agenda

#	What?	Who?	When?
0	Welcome	Colin	10:45
1	Pecha Kucha #1	Katarzyna	10:50
2	Pecha Kucha #2	Hartwig	11:00
3	Pecha Kucha #3	Roman	11:10
4	Post it Session: Open topics	ALL	11:20
5	Sessions 1-4	ALL	11:25
6	Wrap Up 1-4	ALL	11:50
7	Elevator Pitch	Diana & Oliver	12:00
8	Post it Session Open topics	ALL	12:05
9	Sessions 5-8	ALL	12:10
10	Wrap Up 5-8	ALL	12:35
11	Good Bye	ALL	12:45

Katarzyna Więcek-Jakubek from the University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland presented the opening Pecha Kucha. Her topic “Homo Digitalis: Context and challenges for Work and Organizational Psychology” showed that digital transformation in organizations should not only be viewed from a technology perspective, but also through the lens of WOP. Digital transformation calls for new ways of work design, new challenges for team co-operation and team work, alternative models of leadership, and new strategies of self-management (like job crafting). Further, these developments require organizations to develop a culture of innovation. Kasia emphasised that these will be important working areas for WOP practitioners in the future. Thus, she is encouraging the upcoming generation of WOPs to contribute to the transition of modern organizations with both theoretical knowledge and evidence based practices.



In the second Pecha Kucha, Roman Soucek from the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany presented his work on resilience. In digitalised working environments, he argues, people will be confronted with new challenges that will require a broader set of individual competencies to be able to deal with these demands. On the other hand, digitalisation offers new chances and possibilities to develop training, education programmes, and innovative concepts for organizational development. In a government funded research project on resilience at work Roman and colleagues have developed an on-line assessment of individual, team, and organizational resilience. Following assessment on-line training can be designed that is tailored to individual / group learners' needs and resources. Roman Souceks work is another fine example of how cutting edge research in WOP can be directly used to improve work places and to foster skills and competencies of employees in the digital era.

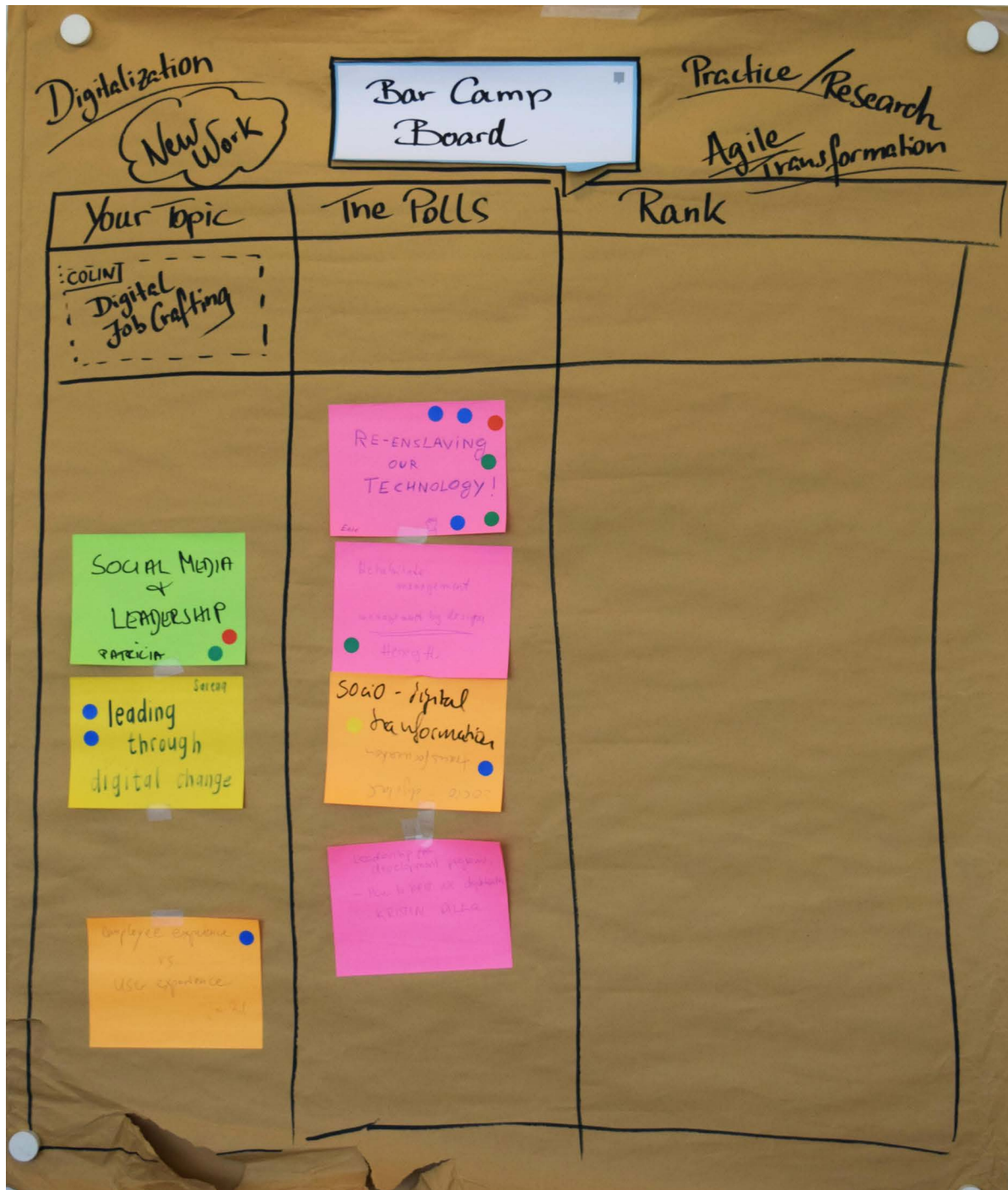
Hartwig Fuhrmann from t-velopment, a WOP consultancy based in Dortmund, Germany presented the third Pecha Kucha on a web-based software that can be used to integrate personnel selection and development. Today, he argues, selection and training are separated domains with specific methods and approaches to measure qualification, performance, or fit. In the selection process, participants typically experience measurement in the form of a set of tests (such as personality profiles). But, after successfully entering the organization new hires are typically confronted with alternative measurements of their performance, competencies or achievements. Hartwig presented a new way of combining personality profiling with competency-based and/or behavioural-based performance measures using a digital feedback tool. Hence, employees will experience a seamless way of being evaluated across their employee life cycle from personnel selection, to training and development, and even to outplacement. He is making a case, that digital innovations can not only improve the efficiency of the Human Resource processes but also improve the quality of decision-making by combining knowledge and evidence-based practices from different areas of WOP.

Before moving to the sessions based on the Pecha Kuchas participants had the opportunity to choose the topic (and the associated presenter) for the fourth session. Participants were invited to contribute by placing the names of their own topics (described in three words) on a “Bar Camp” Board (see Figure 3). After a short

The digital transformation of work is here – how scientists and practitioners can work together to manage needed workplace changes

moment of hesitation, participants placed their bids on the board. Ten bids were presented and participants voted for their preference by putting a sticky dot on the presentation of their choice. The majority voted for a presentation on “Fostering a digital mindset” that was selected for the fourth presentation.

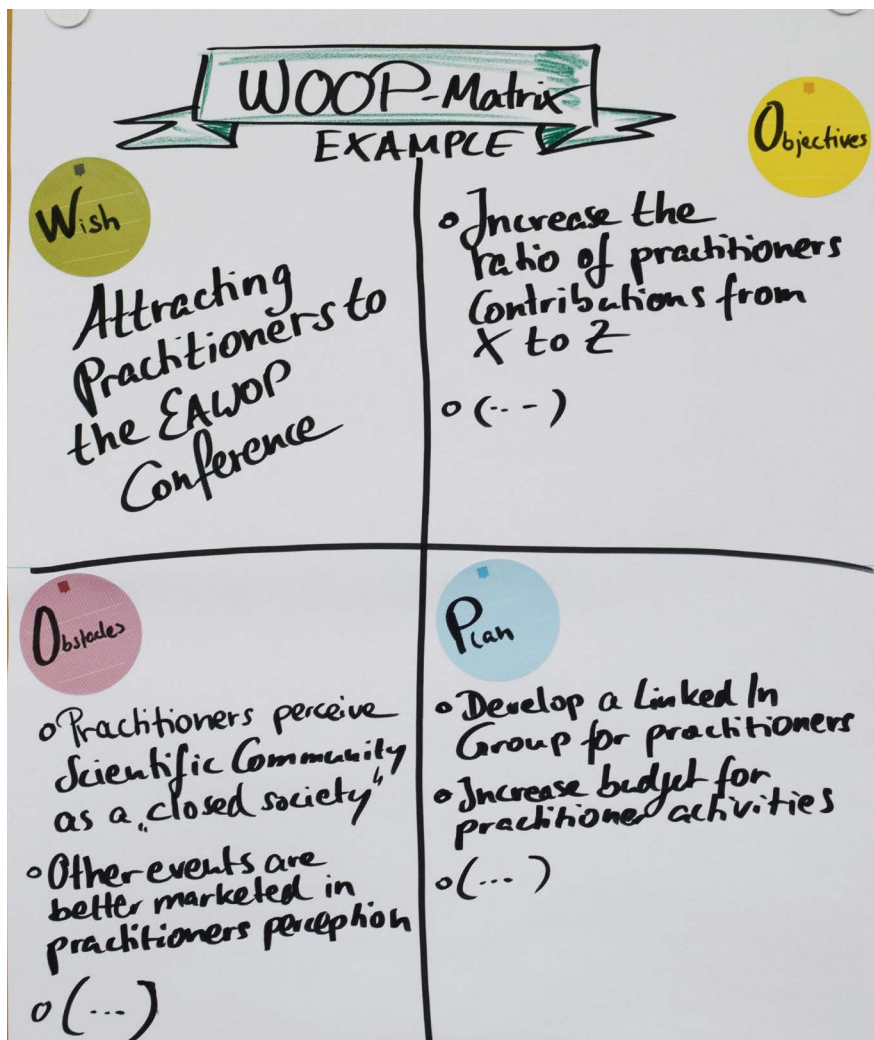
Figure 3  
The Bar Camp board



The digital transformation of work is here – how scientists and practitioners can work together to manage needed workplace changes

Four workshops were then held, three facilitated by the invited panelists and the fourth by the person who contributed the new topic. Participants could then join the workshop featuring the topic that they were most interested in. Each workshop was held in separate parts of the Sala Roma lasting for 25 minutes. Each group presented their results on prepared posters using a four-field “WOOP” matrix; WOOP stands for “Wish”, “Objectives”, “Obstacles”, and “Plan” and is a helpful and structured tool to come up with first ideas, next steps, or even measures that can be implemented directly after the meeting (see Figure 4).

Figure 4  
Example of the WOOP matrix



Exploring the topic of “How to foster a digital mindset” discussion identified that in order to achieve a major ‘wish’ to take people along the way, a core ‘objective’ can be

to provide training both on digital mindset as a competency and as an attitude. One major ‘obstacle’ might be that people fear to be left behind, and not join the training. The group came up with a specific ‘plan’ to overcome these potential obstacles, (e.g., by engaging leaders in the process, allowing participation, and transparent communication about the vision and objectives of the training programme).

## Round two

Following the workshops, a second presentation round was held. Two invited experts presented their topics using another presentation technique, the “elevator pitch”. For one minute only, the presenters had to give a clear picture of the topic and to attract people to their workshop.

The first topic was presented by Diana Rus from Creative Peas, a WOP consultant based in Amsterdam. She invited the participants to engage in a broader discussion about what researchers and practitioners in WOP can achieve together in the future. In her workshop, the participants worked on core objectives for future collaboration of WOP researchers and practitioners. During the workshop, participants argued that one objective could be, that researchers and practitioners work out a common identity and thus unite as “one body”. Some other ideas that emerged were that meetings (such as the EAWOP congress) could become a platform for strong debate and co-creation among researchers and practitioners. Moreover, research results should be translated into “stickable” products, and these products should be aligned with ethical guidelines and human principles. One other common theme that emerged was that “No one should be left behind”, meaning that WOP research and practice should be accessible to, not only, knowledge-intensive workers but also to blue-collar workers.

The second topic was presented by Oliver Kohnke, the Chief Business Consultant at Business Innovation and Transformation Services of SAP, Germany. His topic was “Digital culture” and the future role of WOPs as facilitators of such a culture. The participants worked out four objectives: First, they should follow a “balanced, human-centered approach”. Secondly, they should emphasise applied WOP. Thirdly, they should add competency in how to measure progress and success. The fourth objective was “theory development”. They also discovered potential obstacles such as a lack of



business reputation and missing networks that might be detrimental to the potential impact of the practical application of WOP in the field.

As in the first round, the Bar Camp Board was also used to place and select additional topics by the participants. Two additional topics were selected: “Effective communication in times of digitalization” and “Digital competencies”. According to the participants in the first group, important challenges for effective communication in times of digitalisation are complexity, work-life balance, and variation in participation among co-workers. The group discussed how to implement digital communication platforms and how to foster a broader acceptance in the use of these platforms. According to the discussion, leaders will be key figures in the process, acting as role models, moderators/facilitators will be needed to foster engagement, and pilot testing in small groups will be helpful to develop tailor-made solutions that fit to the needs of the specific organizations. According to the second group, relevant digital competencies in the future will be communication skills, social media literacy (including the ability to cope with information overload). In order to foster digital competencies, the group stressed the importance of acknowledging work design in technology design, making another case that WOP practitioners are also needed in the Information Technology sector.

Both topics were discussed and facilitated by participants during a 25-minute workshop followed by a presentation of the outcomes using the “WOOP” matrix.

## Evaluation

Overall, the session was very well received by the participants and there was a noisy, lively atmosphere demonstrating active engagement with the tasks and discussion. Participants were happy to offer topics and facilitate workshops and there was a high level of co-operation with the session organisers.

Feedback and ideas were collected on a “Wall of take aways”. In summary, participants liked the active learning aspect of the session, wished that more congress sessions were organised like this one, and that digitalization and new work should have a broader platform at the up and coming EAWOP Congress to be held in Glasgow, in May 2021. These ideas will be taken forward to the Programme Committee by the session organisers.