



# WORKING for a **better tomorrow**

Advances in technology, the Covid-19 pandemic and globalisation are all playing a part in transforming the world of work today and in the future. **Elise Crawford, Sara Pazell** and **Nektarios Karanikas** explain the theory of Good Work Design and why it could be the key to boosting wellbeing and productivity

**T**he ongoing globalisation of economies has transformed and continues to remodel the nature of work. As we move towards the fifth industrial revolution, concerns have been raised about emerging types of work. New ways of working require new skillsets but changes to working conditions are also taking a toll on worker health and wellbeing.

The need for good work has become a pressing matter of importance, heightening the demand for work design skills within the workplace that can aptly respond to calls for work reform. The concept of Good Work Design (GWD) introduced by the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society of Australia (HFESA) responds to these calls for work reform.

### Good Work Design: Overview

Design has been recognised worldwide mainly through product design that improves life. Several countries have a Design Council or similar organisation, such as the UK Design Council which has the mission “to make life better by design by working with people to create better processes, all of which lead to better performance”. This idea of working with people

to create designs that enhance their performance drives the concept of GWD: workers facilitated by human factors professionals or other specialists in work design, encouraged by management, supported by the organisation, and educated by qualified experts to contribute to the design of their work.

In 2019, this idea brought together a group of work design enthusiasts who formed a committee within HFESA to craft a position on Good Work Design. The committee represented 10 discipline areas: health sciences, social sciences, safety sciences, design science, psychology, engineering, legal services, education, human factors and ergonomics.

In principle, GWD is conceptualised as a fundamentally human-centred design-led approach that focuses on making good work available to all workers. All workers extends from top executives to front-line workers, from maintenance staff to cleaners. Everyone in the organisation is there to work so all are central to the success of the business.

Good work means that fundamental business objectives are realised while optimising human health and performance.

The term ‘good’ denotes that there’s no single endpoint of perfect work that can accommodate everything and everyone

- > to the maximum, without trade-offs, especially within the reality of dynamically changing environments. Work design doesn't follow a solid and rigid design process or outcome, but it helps to ensure that the system of work isn't a randomly and stochastically arranged and interacting set of agents.

Achieving GWD involves three phases that are iteratively enacted and constantly adjusted as necessary: discovery, design and realisation.

In the **discovery** phase, early engagement of individuals and teams is paramount. This includes those who drive design, those who co-design, subject matter experts and those who may benefit from good work; often, these are the co-designers but may include maintainers, additional end users or those within the supply chain.

During the discovery stage, it's also necessary to study and comprehend the context, job, task, technology, equipment and social interactions involved, so that problems can be defined and opportunities noted.

The **design** phase involves collaboration, ideation and facilitated solutions to problems, or the co-creation of opportunities for improvement. Activities may include simulations, prototype iterations, trials and reviews, the identification of trade-offs and negotiations.

The **realisation** phase refers to the tangible outcomes, deliverables developed as well as learning about their effectiveness and optimisation levels. This phase seeks a balance between employee health and safety, productivity, and other business outcomes.

### Good Work Design features

Safe Work Australia (SWA) explains that good work means to manage risks and promote productivity and health, suggesting that by addressing worker health, productivity improves, and this supports the achievement of work objectives. Although from the SWA's perspective this stands true and is supported by studies, in our view of GWD, healthy individuals and healthy businesses are equally important. In an elaborated vision of GWD, business objectives must be defined and met in tandem with worker health and wellbeing needs rather than the former objectives being a by-product of healthful work situations.

We believe there's space for a broader perspective that's more strongly oriented in design circles, compelled by human factors and ergonomics initiatives and aligned with these practices. As such, we propose several provisional GWD features outlining what GWD is, what it acknowledges and appreciates, what GWD needs and does and what it creates.

We don't provide the list as an exhaustive checklist-type catalogue of features. Instead, we aim to stimulate further research and debate and, hopefully, poke those in positions of influence to apply this holistic design framework to their organisational strategies.

We appreciate that, in isolation, several of the features listed may mirror some ideas used in other literature or arise from a different orientation. However, contemplating, organising and bringing all these features together under a unified, inclusive, design-oriented and discipline-agnostic GWD framework is innovative. Collectively, the GWD phases and features represent a unified way to advance the agenda.

### The next steps

There are several opportunities to support the implementation of the GWD approach. First, work design theories and studies must become increasingly trans- and inter-disciplinary instead of viewing work from a mono-disciplinary or limited angle.

Instead of advertising only wins and great results, we must understand how compromises are made and what challenges arise. We need to gain honest and transparent insights through various channels. Implementing and testing the GWD phases across diverse work contexts will gradually build a crucial mass of knowledge to allow refinement of the GWD features and revisit its business value and merits.

To achieve the above, researchers need to design with the industry studies that go beyond cross-sectional surveys that collect perceptions or evaluate situations.

We don't see GWD as another construct that represents, moderates, or mediates cause-effect relationships to be tested through hypotheses. GWD is about actioning its phases based on evidence- and practice-informed decisions, collecting data from the whole journey, and sharing all small and great struggles and wins.

On this front, we must also improve the communication among practitioners, designers, researchers and industry by presenting material in the language of the intended audience directed at contemporary concerns, so that audiences comprehend the relevance.

### Conclusion

The approach to Good Work Design through the extended concept presented here responds to calls for better and fresh ways to design and manage work.

The GWD features listed here illustrate our vision but, most crucially, mean to advocate an informed, balanced, reconciled and human-centred design-led approach to workplace strategy. We posit that this will enable business success and promote worker health and wellbeing.

We promote GWD as a regenerative design practice that expands capacity and capability for design throughout the organisation and leads to sustainability in organisations. Nonetheless, we invite everyone to debate and challenge the content of this position and each other's views with the hope that the list of GWD features we have proposed will mature and advance GWD theory and practice. ■

## About the authors

**Elise Crawford** is a Senior Lecturer at CQUniversity who specialises in professional practice in human factors and the safety sciences.

**Sara Pazell** is the principal work design strategist of a human-centred design consultancy in Australia

**Nektarios Karanikas** is Associate Professor in Health, Safety and Environment at Queensland University of Technology.

## Provisional list of Good Work Design features

Good Work Design	
<b>IS</b> 	A framework for undertaking workplace (re)design
	Human-centred
	Propped by human factors and ergonomics approaches
	Regenerative because it builds design capability (skills and resources) and capacity (ability to host and support design projects) throughout the organisation and the supply chain
<b>APPRECIATES</b> 	The evolutionary and ecological aspects of variable human performance
	The 'just right' balance of 'joy work' and 'work-work'
	'Design-in-use' or the applications and spontaneous adaptations of work design in business
	The role of humans in highly automated systems
	That the design process is as important as the outcomes
<b>NEEDS</b> 	The positive emotional experiences associated with creation through design versus the fear associated with needs to contain all that can go wrong
	Facilitation by a work design strategist
	Support by subject matter experts
	Collaboration with 'conventional' designers
	Resilience engineering strategies to inform and test work designs
	Access to successful 'work arounds' or 'near rights' (versus 'near misses') to leverage on design-ready changes
<b>DOES</b> 	Systems of transparent and defensible decision making in work governance
	Reconciles the varieties of human work
	Designs for diversity
	More than 'consider business needs'; it realises business objectives in a competitive, pioneering and sustainable manner while maintaining and promoting worker health and performance
	Involves discovery, (iterative) design and realisation of good work
	Implements effective change management practice to test ideas, manage iterative trials and launch progressively larger and more ambitious design campaigns throughout an organisation or cross-industry
	Addresses safety-critical, material, unwanted, high-consequence and other types of unfavourable events (what is not wanted) but also focuses on design for what is wanted for human performance across a spectrum of needs
	Prospects new design opportunities on an ongoing basis
	Tolerates a degree of fallibility to promote innovations
	Focuses on storytelling to promote shared learning and tacit knowledge in a business
	Enables cross-industry learnings and continual insights about a changing world of work
Celebrates design successes in a resounding way	
<b>CREATES</b> 	A visibly human-centred organisation
	Unified business strategies among departments
	Positive experiences of work, the effects of which extend beyond work
	A sense of coherence, meaning, and manageability to work
	A culture of innovation
	Design that either works well or stands out because it is magnificent
Tacit knowledge about design to enable self-efficacy while building confidence to ideate, experiment and innovate design-related change in supported or structured ways	