2025 LMDE Research Colloquium, Syros

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"Developing Compassionate Workplaces in Europe for the digital and green work environment to protect employees mental and physical health and well-being"

EU-CoWork

Developing Compassionate Workplaces



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ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΚΟ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ
ATHENS UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

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Compassionate workplaces

What is a compassionate workplace?
Why is it important?

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New Challenges in the Workplace



- The COVID-19 pandemic triggered the acceleration of the increased and expedited **digitization** of the work. Furthermore, the impact of AI on job is expected to be massive.
- The fast pace of this transition has affected (and will continue to do so) various **organizational factors**, such as:
  - **Job content** (e.g., task autonomy, task complexity)
  - **Skills shift** (e.g., demand is rising for digital and human-centric skills).
  - **Employment conditions and relations** (e.g., contract type, working hours, work location, involvement in company policy).
  - **Working conditions** (e.g., job demands).
  - **Work relations** (e.g., leadership style and culture, quality of social interactions within the work environment)

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A New Way of Working

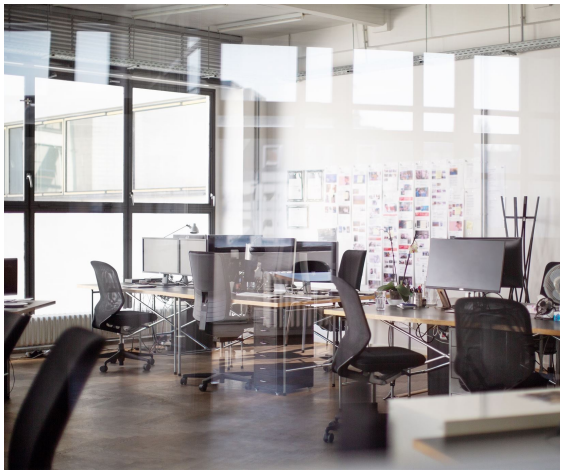
- **Telework**, **Hybrid** Work, **ICT-mobile** Work & **AI** Integration

→ impact on employee mental and physical health

+	−
• Improve work-life balance and create free time • Increase motivation and productivity • Improve autonomy regarding working time • Reduce absenteeism and turnover • Help employees juggle child-care and minimize commuting time • Encourage flexible work and smart scheduling • Improves workplace accessibility for employees with disabilities or serious illnesses	•Lead to longer hours and work-home interference •Cause social isolation and poor relationships •Increase ergonomic risks and management challenges •Reduce autonomy due to technological surveillance •Raise job insecurity and skill obsolescence •Create technostress •Increase mental fatigue due to information overload and constant adaptation •Widen inequality and geographic disparities

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When Life Enters the Workplace



- Rapid work **environment changes**, heighten **vulnerabilities** for employees.
- Pandemic highlighted universal **End-of-Life** (EoL) experiences among workers.
- **Grief** from personal loss affects workplace dynamics.
- Pain and suffering can **spill over** into organizational settings.
- Addressing these challenges is crucial for employee **wellbeing**.
- **Supportive work environments** are crucial for mental and physical health.

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Impact

- Whether due to personal life events or organizationally induced, human suffering within organizations causes numerous **negative** outcomes.
- Serious implications for organizational **performance** and **productivity**

25% of active workforce in EU suffers chronic disease

(Sweden) Family caregiving costs amount to **~3% of GDP (152B Kr/y).**

half of these costs are from **lost productivity**; the rest are direct caregiver expenses (time, money, sleep)

(Greece) Families provide more than **80%** of the caregiving

>$300B/year from job-stress-related losses, stemming from absenteeism, turnover, diminished productivity, and medical costs (US) (American Institute of Stress, 2024)

>$1T/year globally in lost productivity due to depression and anxiety (WHO, 2024)

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A work environment in which members collectively **notice**, **feel**, and **respond** to the suffering and pain of employees experiencing End of Life (EoL) experiences improving employees' **mental and physical health and wellbeing**, leading also to positive organizational outcomes, such as lower **turnover** intention, and stronger organizational **commitment**.

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A **compassionate workplace** refers to a work environment in which company's responsible parties/managers/people in power and/or employees develop **deliberate policy and actions** to **improve** the (work) conditions, health and well-being of those facing **end-of-life experiences** such as serious illness and bereavement.

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Presentation of EU-CoWork

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EU-CoWork Consortium

EU-CoWork has been designed and will be implemented by a consortium of **5 established research teams** from 5 countries (Austria, Belgium, Greece, Sweden, and the UK) and **3 workplace advocacy and policy groups**.

The consortium brings together expertise in healthcare science, nursing, labor sociology, work and organizational psychology, public health, compassionate communities and palliative and EoL care.

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EU-CoWork Consortium

VUB COCO COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITIES CENTRE OF EXPERTISE

Vrije Universiteit Brussel

UNIVERSITÄT GRAZ
UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ
UNI GRAZ

idewe
Optimising work environments

Sheffield University Management School.

LULEÅ UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

HSE Health and Safety Executive

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SORGENETZ

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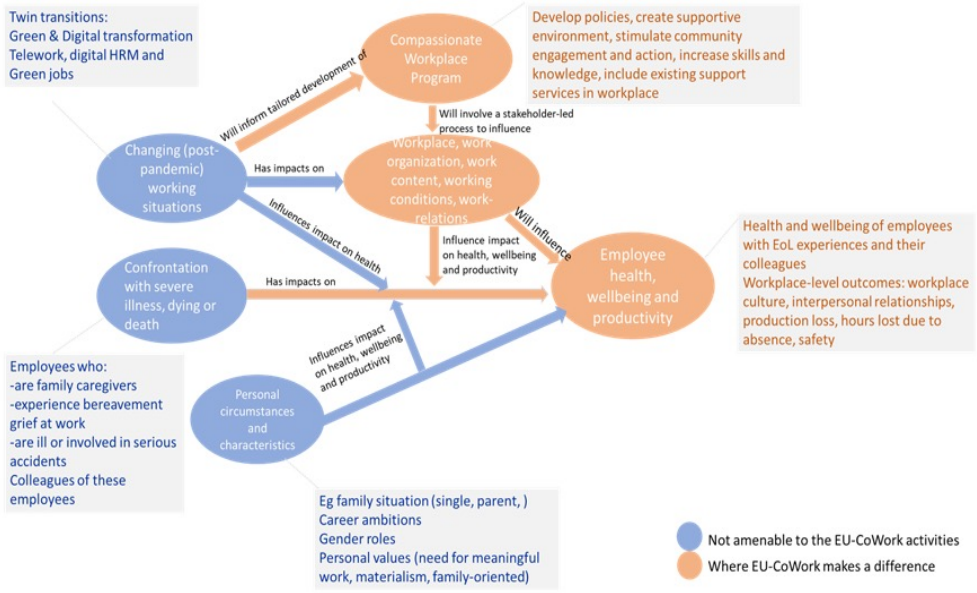
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Objectives

EUCoWork is a transdisciplinary, cross-national research and innovation project that intends to develop, tailor, and evaluate **Compassionate Workplaces Programs (CWPs)** to maintain and promote employee mental and physical health and wellbeing within a variety of work environments in different sectors, across different national, and organizational contexts in Europe.

EU-CoWork

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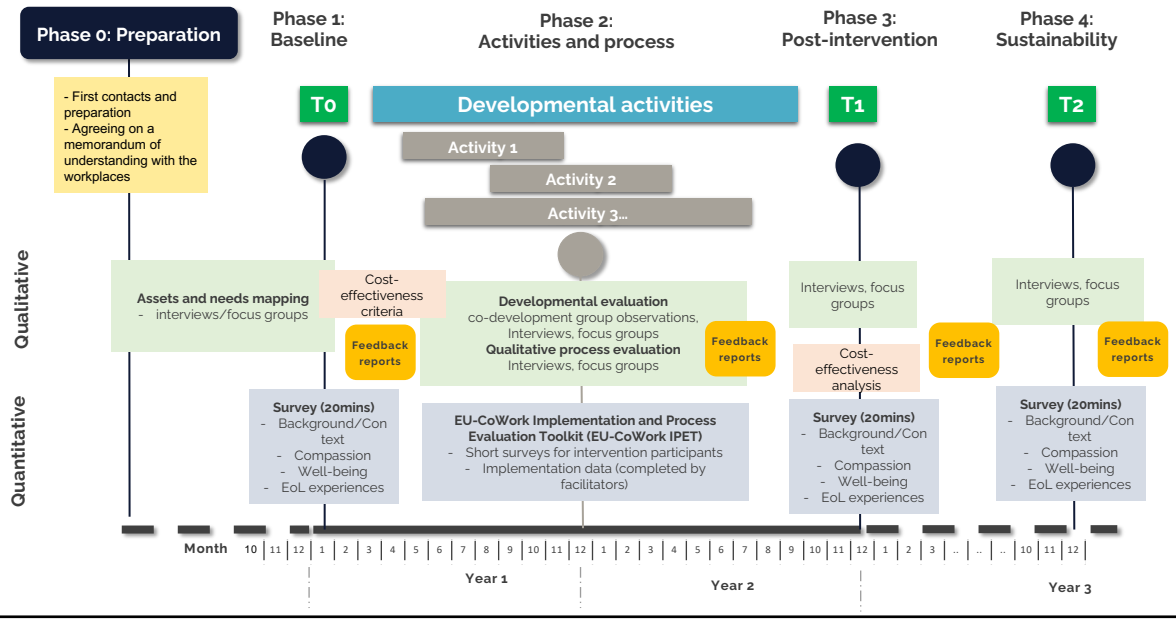


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Design, concepts and principles

- To develop the Compassionate Workplaces Programs (CWPs), a **developmental evaluation approach** will be used with emphasis on participation and co-creation.
- As such, each participating organization will develop, together with the EU-CoWork research team, its **own** CWP tailored to its own needs.
- Each CWP will be **evaluated** to assess its effectiveness at both an individual and organizational level.

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Cost-Effectiveness Analysis

- **Objective**: Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of CoWork interventions.
- **Why it matters:**
  a) to compare pre- and post-intervention cost/outcome rations
  b) to help organizations understand the investment and measure success.
- **Outcome:** Estimate how much it costs to improve key outcomes (well-being and compassion) by 1%.

Cost Categories:
- Health & counseling
- Compassionate leave
- Other support initiatives

Cost Types include expenditures (below the legal requirements):
- Direct (monetary in Euros/SEK)
- Indirect (time spent/days lost)

Time Periods:
2018–2020 (pre-COVID)
2020–2022 (during COVID)
2022–2024 (post-COVID)

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Working with Organizations

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Secondary sector, stationery manufacturer, family-owned, medium size, Greek

Tertiary sector, B2B, family-owned, medium size, Greek

Primary sector, organic meat producers, family-owned, small size, Greek

Tertiarty sector, Consulting firm, large size

Secondary sector, beer brewery, large size, part of Heineken group

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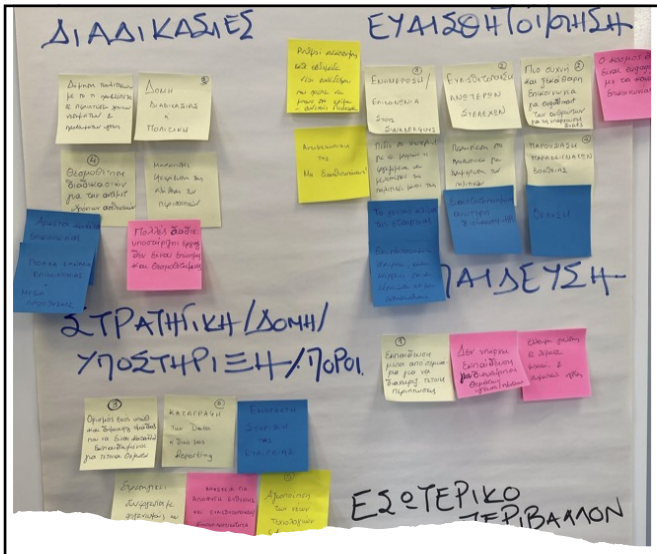
Understanding Organizations and their Context: Data Collection

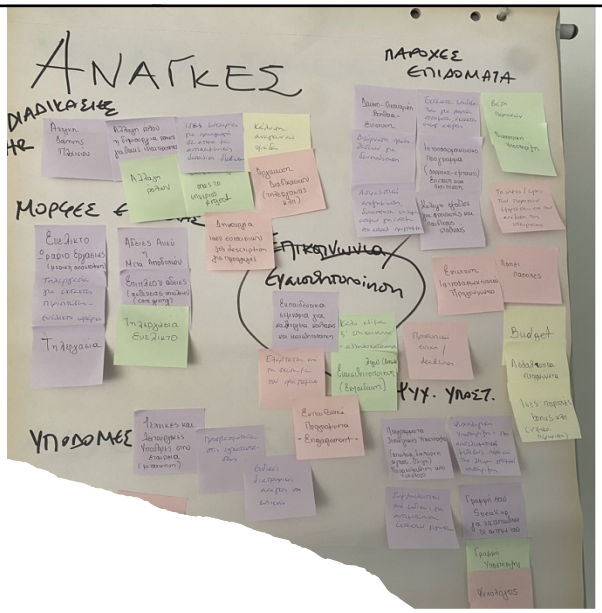
- **Documents –** At the organisational level
- **Individual interviews** - With the management team, CEO, HR and C level managers
- **Group interview –** With the co-development group
- **Individual interviews** – with employees
- **Individual interviews** – with employees who have experienced serious illness, caregiving or grief while working at this workplace

- **Survey** to all employees



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Assets and needs mapping

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Initial Key insights
Context

- Family-owned vs Multinationals
  - Leadership
  - Size
  - Transitional phase

- Production vs Services
  - Skill-levels of employees, e.g. production vs knowledge
  - Power dynamics
  - Gender differences

➡ **Different contexts - Different Needs, Experiences and Resources**

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What are the Key insights?
Experiences, Needs & Resources

- Strong positive attitude towards the project by the core group – Enthusiasm - Trust
- People report that there is a supportive culture but this is on a personal base and this creates favoritism ➡ Need for a more systematic approach
- The need for the project stems from the awareness and empathy
- Training for all employees, create a common language and compassionate presence
- Leadership – the Role of the Supervisor

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What are the Key insights?
Experiences, Needs & Resources
Challenges

- Differences in awareness and readiness to express feelings
- Inclusivity, Engagement due to external pressures/demands and different cultures among BU
- Feelings of guilt
  "There is no time to get sick"
- Budget for the interventions

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EU-CoWork AUEB Team



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