

Exploring Ideal Research Culture in Psychology

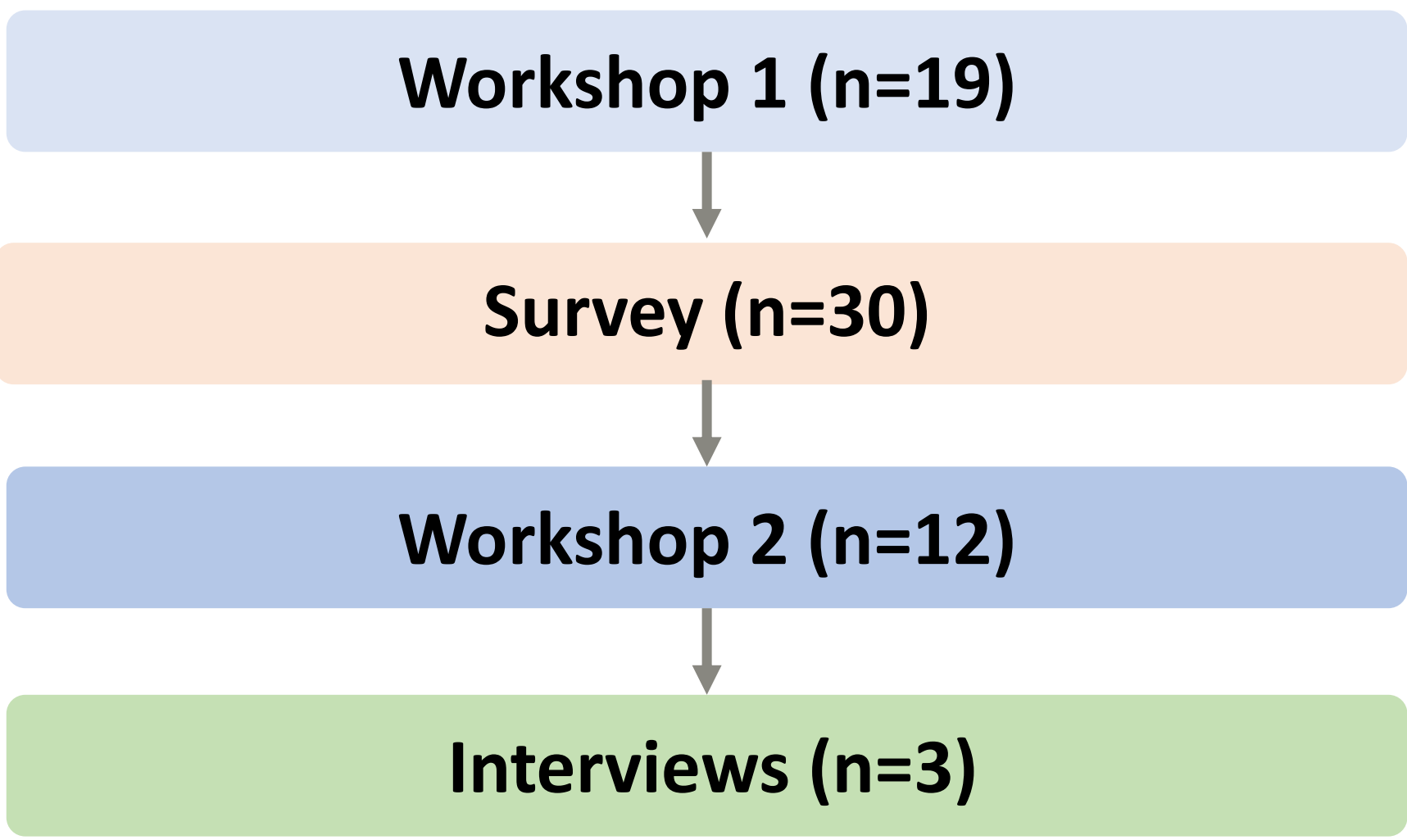
Sotaro Kita (PI) Ying Guo (RA)
Department of Psychology, University of Warwick

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Abstract

- This project addressed a critical first step in enhancing research culture: understanding what an “ideal workplace” for research means to members of the Department of Psychology.
- Using a participatory approach inspired by the Wellcome Trust’s Research Culture Café model, we conducted two workshops and a department-wide survey.
- Interviews with departmental leaders (Head of Department, Director of Research, PGR Director) captured strategic perspectives on implementation.
- A follow-up survey is planned for next year to assess whether the resulting improvements have been achieved.

Workflow



Participants: PhD students, postdocs, research assistants, academics, and research enablers.

Take Home Message

- The current process was effective in picking up grassroots voices and turning them into departmental actions.

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Contact: Ying.Guo.1@warwick.ac.uk

Workshop 1 (1.5h): Define our ideal research culture and identify the strengths and challenges of our department’s research culture

Some examples of each objective

(s): strength; (c): challenge

Researchers should be **happy**

- Colleagues interact positively and collegially (s)
- Work–life balance vs. job security is a tension (c)
- No clear sense of what ‘enough’ looks like (c)

Researchers should be **creative**

- Diverse topics naturally spark cross-disciplinary thinking (s)
- Often unaware of others’ ongoing work in the department (c)
- Few platforms for broader idea exchange (c)

Researchers should be **productive**

- Proactive individuals drive research initiatives (s)
- Communication between labs is limited (c)
- Collaboration across labs is underused (c)

Research practice should be **open**

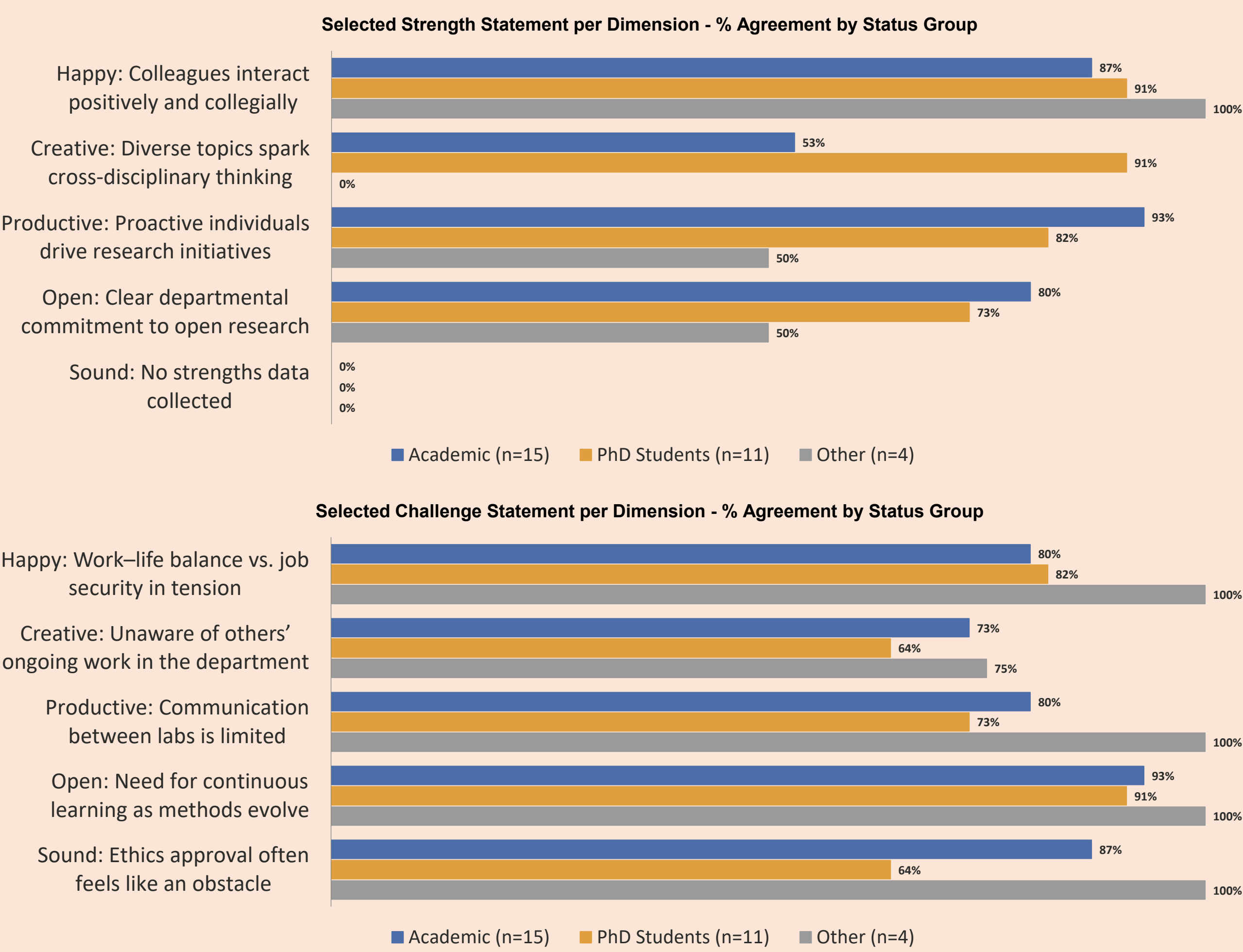
- Clear departmental commitment to open research (s)
- Need for continuous learning as methods evolve (c)
- No templates/training for the Open Science Framework (OSF) or data sharing (c)

Research practice should be **sound**

- Ethics approval often feels like an obstacle (c)
- The ethics approval process is slow (c)
- Unclear what AI use is ethical (c)

- Kita, S. (2024). Five adjectives to convey what good research culture looks like: A tool for effective and efficient communication. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 11(3), 315–320.

Survey: Following Workshop 1 to gather perspectives from a broader range of voices across the department.



Additional Comments (Challenges)

- Happy: heavy teaching load & unclear duties; PhD funding runs out before completion
- Sound: ethics review (HSSREC/BSREC) seen as slow and risk-averse
- Open: lack of departmental vision with clear resources and templates

Workshop 2 (1.5h): Discuss possible ways to enhance research culture

Objectives

Questions

Potential Solutions

Happy

There is no clear sense of what ‘enough’ looks like

- Create a roadmap/infographic of thesis milestones for PhD students
- Introduce a whole-PhD thesis plan, reviewed at check-in points (e.g. annual review)

Creative

We have few dedicated platforms for broader idea exchange

- Refresh the department website with up-to-date researcher/research info
- Use department screens as a rolling dashboard of research updates

Productive

Collaboration opportunities across and within labs are not fully utilised.

- Introduce small reward mechanisms (e.g. bursaries) for cross-lab collaboration
- Organise internal lab tours as part of Research Away Day

Open

There is a need for continuous learning opportunities.

- Survey PGRs on desired topics and let them vote to prioritise workshops
- Offer a workshop on AI tools for research, open to all career stages

Sound

Ethics approval is slow

- Offer a light-touch fast-track ethics route for low-risk PhD studies
- Provide a review timeline

Interviews: Capture strategic perspectives on implementation

Interviewees: Head of Department; Director of Research; Director of Postgraduate Studies

Director of Postgraduate Studies

- Extend PhD students’ funding to 3.5 years
- Discuss ‘what is enough’ explicitly at the start of the PhD and revisit at the annual review
- Create a mock annual review as a website resource to ease first-year anxiety
- Downloadable checklist for early supervision meetings
- More visibility into what other PIs are working on

Director of Research

- Supportive of lab tours/open days to improve visibility across labs
- Cited an existing fast-track model (DRAW framework) for low-risk PhD ethics approval
- Backed opening AI workshops to all career stages, not just early-career framing
- Website refresh and automated researcher profiles already underway

Head of Department

- ✓ Agrees on clarifying ‘what is expected’ (not ‘enough’) early & throughout the PhD
- ✓ Supports encouraging PIs to present in existing internal seminar slots
- ~ Good-practice seminar: open to it as a staff-led discussion with a targeted invite list, not a blanket yearly slot
- ~ 3.5-year funding: personally supportive, subject to next year’s studentship budget
- ~ Checklist: yes for a student-facing checklist; prefers general guidance (not a checklist) for supervisors
- ✗ Not currently taken forward: mock annual review, lab tours without a clear purpose, ethics fast-track route, ethics review timeline

✓ Approved ~ Conditional / to be discussed ✗ Not taken forward