MSc Organisational Psychiatry and Psychology, IOPPN
at King's College London

Dr. Gülüm Özer
Lecturer

16 De Crespigny Park
London SE5 8AF
Gulum.ozer@kcl.ac.uk

Organisational Wellbeing Lab: Turning Real Organisational Challenges into Transformative Learning

A public-facing summary for higher-education educators and organisational partners

The Organisational Wellbeing Lab (OWL) connects postgraduate students with organisations that have a genuine workplace challenge to explore. Partner organisations bring questions about areas such as employee wellbeing, engagement, culture or retention. With academic supervision, MSc Organisational Psychiatry & Psychology students investigate these questions through dissertation projects and translate their findings into evidence-informed recommendations and a presentation for the client.

Launched in September 2024, OWL has worked with **13 client organisations** across **30 projects** involving **37 students**. The model creates value in two directions: students gain authentic experience of research and client-facing work, while organisations receive focused evidence and practical recommendations on a live issue.

Why Experiential Learning Matters

Students may understand theories and research methods. However, the challenge is translating this knowledge into practice. OWL addresses this gap by starting with a live organisational problem rather than a predefined academic question. With supervision, students clarify the challenge, review relevant evidence, select appropriate methods, analyse data and interpret what their findings mean in that organisation's context.

This repeated movement between practice and evidence develops more than technical research skill. At a time when the transition from education into employment is becoming more difficult for many graduates, OWL helps students build and demonstrate workplace-ready capabilities rather than simply claim them. Students learn to work with ambiguity, balance academic rigour with organisational priorities, communicate with stakeholders, manage expectations and turn complex findings into feasible recommendations. The client presentation adds an important final stage: students must explain their work clearly to a non-academic audience and respond to questions about relevance and implementation.

What the Experience Has Shown

Student perspectives

Across the first two cohorts, students' reflections described greater confidence in interpreting data, simplifying ideas, presenting recommendations, collaborating and making decisions. They valued genuine responsibility, supervision informed by organisational experience and opportunities to discuss workplace issues across academic and business contexts. Working on live organisational problems also gave them credible examples of research, problem-solving, communication and presentation skills to use in applications and interviews.

The final company presentation is a recurring part of the OWL experience: supervisees practise communicating recommendations with confidence, responding to professional questions and taking ownership of their knowledge. These experiences can support later stakeholder-facing responsibilities and create pathways to further opportunities. For example, one graduate secured a three-month internship with their OWL partner's Shanghai office and felt that the dissertation had helped them secure and prepare for the role.

Client perspectives

Clients highlighted student professionalism, clear evidence-based presentations and the usefulness of the outputs. In the second year, all three clients who responded reported high satisfaction, considered their time investment worthwhile and gave the maximum likelihood rating for hosting another OWL team. They indicate that carefully designed partnerships can support meaningful learning while producing organisationally relevant insights.

The Difference a Client Partner Can Make

For an organisation, an OWL project begins with a workplace question that would benefit from closer investigation. For a student, access to a real brief, organisational context and practitioner feedback can turn a dissertation into a bridge to professional practice. Students gain a credible example of working with a client, navigating constraints and producing findings intended to inform action rather than only to be assessed.

Partners do not need to arrive with a finished research question. OWL works with each organisation to shape a genuine challenge into a feasible student project. Effective partnerships depend on a clear organisational contact, appropriate access to information or participants, timely feedback and openness to considering the findings. In return, students gain experience, confidence and professional exposure, while the organisation receives fresh, evidence-informed thinking on an issue it has identified as important.

Lessons for Educators

- **Use a genuine organisational problem** that is important to the partner and feasible for student research.

- **Agree the scope, roles, access, communication and outputs** before the project begins.
- **Provide early structure, regular checkpoints** and explicit teaching on client communication and recommendation development.
- **Treat ambiguity as part of the learning,** while ensuring that students have enough supervision to interpret setbacks constructively.
- **Build knowledge translation into assessment** so that students communicate findings to both academic and practitioner audiences.
- **Collect feedback from students and clients** and refine the partnership model each year.

An Invitation to Collaborate

Organisations interested in partnering with OWL are invited to bring forward a current workplace challenge that could benefit from focused, evidence-informed investigation. OWL can then help shape the challenge into a feasible student project and clarify the expected commitment, timescale and outputs.

OWL shows how a dissertation can combine rigorous inquiry, professional learning and organisational contribution. This depends on educators creating the right structure and on client partners opening a door to authentic work. By offering a live organisational challenge, a partner can help a student develop professional judgement, capability and confidence while gaining fresh, evidence-informed insight into an issue that matters to the organisation.

Dr Gülüm Özer
Lecturer, MSc Organisational Psychiatry and Psychology
IoPPN, King's College London

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