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Eloise Warrilow

Birkbeck College, University of London, ewarri01@student.bbk.ac.uk

Lisbeth Drury

Birkbeck College, University of London

Joanna Yarker

Affinity Health at Work, London

See next page for additional authors

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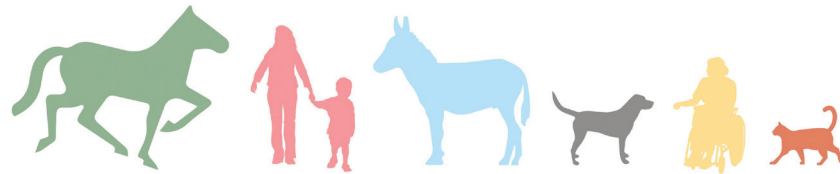
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Authors

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Dog-Friendly Workplaces: Understanding What Works and Lessons Learned Through Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Eloise Warrilow,¹ Lisbeth Drury,¹ Joanna Yarker,² and Rachel Lewis²

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Abstract The demand for pet-friendly practices has increased since the global pandemic, with some employees reporting a preference for working alongside their companion dogs. Despite increased scholarly interest in pet-friendly practices, gaps exist in understanding their real-world impact. This study examines companion-dog-friendly offices postpandemic, focusing on perceived antecedents and outcomes of pet-friendly practices. It aims to identify what works, what does not, and lessons learned. It draws on expertise from the animal welfare and the industrial, work, and organizational psychology sectors. Employing a qualitative approach, this study utilized semistructured, one-hour interviews with 14 participants who had experienced working in a dog-friendly office for a minimum of six months. The sample for this study comprised dog owners who brought their pet dogs to the office, dog owners who opted not to bring their pet dogs to the office, and non-dog owners who worked alongside colleagues who brought their pet dogs to the office. Analysis followed the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The findings highlighted six pertinent themes relating to antecedents for sustainable pet-friendly practices and outcomes for organizations, teams, and individuals: (1) the impact of dog presence on well-being; (2) the need for organizational congruence with dog-friendly practices; (3) power dynamics engendered by dog-friendly practices; (4) presentation to the outside world; (5) continuous responsibility; (6) forethoughts and expectations. There was coherence across the six themes, regardless of the work environment, whether it was a corporate, nonprofit, or start-up setting. Interestingly, and perhaps unexpectedly, some of the non-dog owners in the participant sample emerged as among the strongest advocates for dog-friendly workplaces, while some dog owners' discourse highlighted their reservations about an office full of multihousehold dogs. Dog ownership status does not appear to be indicative of a positive attitude toward a dog-friendly office environment. In conclusion, in the rapidly changing world of work, companion dogs have the innate ability to provide support to humans. The

(1) Birkbeck, University of London, (2) Birkbeck, University of London, and Affinity Health at Work, London

option to bring a companion dog to work can be considered an innovative and cost-effective reasonable adjustment. It can also be a component of an organizational well-being strategy. Dog-friendly office practices have the potential to be part of a broader corporate vision where organizations provide employees with choices in where, when, and how they work, thereby supporting individual needs and preferences.

Introduction

Such short little lives our pets have to spend with us, and they spend most of it waiting for us to come home each day. (Grogan, 2005)

Throughout history, pandemics have shaped how work is understood, carried out, and organized (Rudolph et al., 2021). Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has catalyzed shifts in employee expectations and created opportunities for organizations to innovate and adopt new working practices. This includes practices that support companion-dog-friendly work environments.

There was a significant surge in pet dog ownership during the pandemic, referred to as the “pandemic puppy” phenomenon (Packer et al., 2021). Data from the *UK Pet Food’s Annual Survey* indicated that the percentage of UK households owning a dog increased from 25% during 2017–2018 to an estimated 34% in 2022, equating to a total of approximately 13 million pet dogs. Anderson et al. (2023) reported that 48% of dogs acquired during the pandemic were purchased by individuals aged between 18 and 44, an age bracket that traditionally represents a significant proportion of the working population. The government-mandated lockdown temporarily offered individuals the time and opportunity to care for a pet dog.

Pressure and Opportunities to Adopt New Working Practices

The increasing trend in dog ownership among the working population has posed challenges, particularly when employees were encouraged to return to their physical workplaces as lockdown restrictions began to ease. A lack of time to care for a pet is a well-documented risk factor for dog relinquishment

(DiGiacomo et al., 1998; Dolan et al., 2015; Edwards et al., 2019; Mondelli et al., 2004; Salman et al., 1998; Scarlett et al., 1999; Weiss et al., 2014). The escalating cost of dog care, which has surged by an estimated 74% in the past three years (Bawden, 2022), exacerbates the situation. Additionally, there is an increased risk of relinquishment if workplace cultures do not adapt to accommodate companion dogs.

As pandemic restrictions started to lift, the phenomenon of pet-friendly workplaces gained increased attention from the media, which had messages of advice for employers. For example, the *Guardian* ran the headline, “Want employees to return to the office? Let them bring their pandemic pets along: Pet-friendly offices and insurance for animal companions could be the trending post-pandemic employment perks” (Marks, 2021). Opinion pieces also highlighted the potential predicament for employers. Starling (2021) wrote, “How ‘fur baby culture’ took over the workplace: In this post-pandemic world, employers are under increasing pressure to consider their workers’ four-legged friends.”

Evolving Employee Needs and Their Implications for Employers

Schiavo (2021) asserted that employees have expressed a growing need for support from their employers to accommodate changes in their lifestyles, including the ability to work alongside the companion animals that helped alleviate loneliness and social isolation during the pandemic. The acquisition of companion dogs by the working population is one part of a much wider picture regarding employees’ changing needs since the global pandemic. Gratton (2021, p. 68) asserts that organizations need to design work arrangements that consider individual needs alongside institutional objectives. For example, enabling choices in where,

when, and how employees work could support individuals in managing disparate responsibilities and also support work-life integration, where professional responsibilities are compatible with personal responsibilities. Organizational and individual needs should not be considered mutually exclusive. Instead, Gratton positions flexibility as a win-win for all, enhancing engagement, fairness, and meaning in work.

Two decades after the publication of the first academic paper on the topic by Wells and Perrine (2001), animals are becoming more present in organizational life and are playing a more significant role in employees' lives. However, research is failing to keep pace with such changes (Kelemen et al., 2020). Currently, there is insufficient evidence to guide decision-makers regarding the implementation of pet-friendly practices. Little is known about the experiences of employees in dog-friendly workplaces.

Study Aims and Objectives

This study aimed to examine the question: Pet-friendly offices postpandemic: What works, what does not, and what lessons can be learned?

Target Audience

The aim of this study is to support organizational decision-makers and practitioners who are contemplating the implementation of companion-dog-friendly practices in the workplace.

Method

Participant Selection

The study utilized a purposive recruitment strategy, predominantly recruiting participants through LinkedIn, a business and employment-focused social media platform. Specific subject matter experts were targeted, including veterinarians, clinical animal behaviorists, human resources professionals, health and safety practitioners, and occupational health specialists. The participant recruitment flyer emphasized

the importance of hearing multiple viewpoints. The recruitment strategy was inclusive of individuals at all levels within the organization, ranging from leaders, professional services (e.g., human resources and health and safety), and employees. It was stipulated that individuals must have worked in a dog-friendly office for a minimum of six months.

Fourteen participants took part in the study. Among the 14 participants (5 males, 9 females), 13 were based in the UK and one in Australia. Age distribution was as follows: 18–34 (6 participants), 35–44 (2), 45–54 (5), and 55–64 (1). Of the 14 participants, six regularly brought their dog to work, three occasionally brought their dog to work, two owned a dog but did not bring it to the office, and three did not own a dog but worked in a dog-friendly office. The participants worked in a variety of sectors: construction (1), wholesale and retail (1), financial and insurance (1), education, social and health care (4), animal welfare (2), business consultancy (1), digital creation and marketing (2), advertising (1), and media (1).

Researcher Description

The lead researcher, who had worked for over six months with her two dogs in a home office, shared this “insider” experience with the participants. However, unlike them, she did not have to navigate challenges such as objections from colleagues, competing for limited daily “pet” places on a “rota” scheme, or concerns about pet-care costs. As Gair (2012) and Griffith (1998) suggest, it is common for researchers to occupy a position somewhere along the “insider-outsider” researcher continuum.

Data Collection

The data were collected through semistructured video interviews, using Microsoft Teams. Kvale (1983) notes that qualitative interviews are well suited to capturing descriptions of interviewees' worlds and their interpretations of the meanings associated with the phenomenon under study.

An interview schedule was developed (see Figure 1) to ensure that the data obtained were relevant

Pet-Friendly Offices Postpandemic: What Works, What Does Not, and What Lessons Can Be Learned**Introduction (approx. 15 min.)**

- **Introduce self**
- **Build rapport:** Make participants feel welcome
- **Briefing:** Revisit content on the information sheet
- **Purpose:** Reiterate that the researcher is interested in the participants' unique experience/expertise relating to dog-friendly offices
- **Participant introduction:** Ask participants if they would like to introduce themselves
- **Ground rules:** Set and agree on ground rules (e.g., please silence phones if possible)
- **Questions:** Invite clarifying questions before starting
- **Consent:** Obtain consent to participate and record

Notes: Proceed if satisfied that participants fully understand the requirements/contents of the information sheet and voluntarily participate.

Icebreaker Question (5 min.)**Q: How many dogs are currently in your office?**

- Follow-up questions:
 - What breed are the dogs?
 - How long have they been coming to the office?

Decision Making**Q: Thinking back before your office became dog-friendly, who participated in the decision-making process?**

- Follow-up questions:
 - Actions: How was the decision approached?
 - Thinking: Why was it done in that way?
 - Outcome: What was the result?
 - Lessons learned: What was learned at this stage?
 - Probe: In retrospect, who else could have been consulted (e.g., dog owners, non-dog owners, those with concerns, professionals/subject matter experts)?

Evidence/Information**Q: Thinking back, what evidence/information was used to inform the decision to become a dog-friendly office?**

- Follow-up questions:
 - In retrospect, what additional information would have been useful to consider before making the decision?
 - How were opinions and attitudes elicited?

Concerns**Q: What were some of the concerns raised before becoming a dog-friendly office?**

- Follow-up questions:
 - Actions: How were the concerns dealt with?
 - Thinking: Why was it done in that way?
 - Outcome: What was the result?
 - Lessons learned: What was learned at this stage?

Policies and Procedures**Q: Before pet dogs entered the workplace, what policies and procedures were developed?**

- Follow-up questions:
 - Did these policies/procedures meet all requirements? Tell me more.
 - Were they adapted in any way? Tell me more.
 - What additional policies/procedures have since been implemented?
 - What aspects of work do the current policies/procedures relate to (e.g., onboarding, health & safety, behavior of pets, monitoring)?

Changes**Q: Once the dogs entered your workplace, what changes did you need to make?**

- Follow-up questions:
 - Regarding the "onboarding" of dogs, what went better than expected?
 - What needed to be revised?
 - What aspects needed additional thinking or to be revisited?
 - What aspects were entirely overlooked?

Environment Design**Q: What specific considerations have been given to the design of the environment in your organization to make it dog-friendly?**

- Prompts:
 - Lighting/acoustics, ventilation, hygiene factors
- Follow-up questions:
 - How have workstations been adapted? Who was consulted to inform these decisions?
 - Actions: What actions were taken to ensure the environment was dog-friendly?
 - Thinking: Who was consulted about these actions?

(continued)

- Outcome: What was the result? Were the workstation designs/environmental adaptations appropriate? What was the follow-up?
- Lessons learned: What was learned at this stage?

Benefits

Q: What have been some of the benefits for you of having a dog-friendly office?

Q: What have been some of the benefits your colleagues have mentioned of having a dog-friendly office?

- Probe:
 - Well-being/stress
 - Feeling a sense of belonging at work
 - Work performance/productivity
 - Organizational commitment
 - Employee engagement
 - Job satisfaction
 - Work motivation
 - Employee attraction

Challenges

Q: What challenging conversations/issues relating to dogs in your workplace have happened?

- Follow-up questions:
 - Actions: How were these issues dealt with?
 - Thinking: Why was it done in that way?
 - Outcome: What was the result? Was it effective? Was it dealt with satisfactorily? What was the follow-up?
 - Lessons learned: What was learned at this stage?

Speaking Up

Q: What, if anything, has prevented you or others from speaking up about challenges associated with dog-friendly workplaces?

Listen for evidence of power dynamics.

Health and Safety

Q: What specific considerations have been given to the risks associated with dogs in the workplace and health and safety?

- Follow-up questions:
 - Actions: What actions were taken to ensure the office adhered to health and safety legislation? What was done to identify and manage risks (e.g., slips and trips, diseases)?
 - Thinking: Who was consulted about these actions?
 - Outcome: What was the result? What was the follow-up?
 - Lessons learned: What was learned at this stage?

Toolkit

Q: How useful do you feel a toolkit for dog-friendly offices could be?

- Follow-up questions:
 - How useful for employees/teams/the wider organization?
 - Who else could it benefit?

Q: If we were to create a toolkit to support more offices in becoming dog-friendly, what should the toolkit include?

- Prompts:
 - Structure discussion around stages of the employee life cycle.
 - Brand attraction: How to share being a dog-friendly employer? How to track whether being dog-friendly attracts new talent?
 - Recruitment: What training does the dog require? Should there be an agreed trial period/probationary period? What expectations should be established?
 - Onboarding: How could we check organizational readiness? Self-assessment tool? Policies? Onboarding strategy? Risk management, risk assessments, controls, policies and procedures, design of the environment?
 - Development: How can we measure impact (both positive and negative) on levels of job satisfaction, productivity, team cohesion, organizational citizenship? Do we need continuous improvement procedures (plan-do-check-act)? Measurement tools to collect anonymous data from all employees? Monitoring and evaluation plans? What outcomes need to be measured?
 - Retention: How does being dog-friendly impact retention and engagement? How do we measure this?
 - Offboard/exit: How could dogs be exited from the organization while retaining the employee (honest appraisals/exiting process/agreement in place)?

Q: How could we measure the overall success of the toolkit?

- Follow-up questions:
 - Where should the (noncost) toolkit be hosted?
 - How could we disseminate the findings of this study?

Close (7 min.)

- Debrief
- Any questions

Notes and Observations

Reflections: What questions worked well/less well?

Figure 1. Interview schedule.

to the research questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The design of the interview schedule began with the construction of topic areas, informed by a systematic literature review conducted by Warrilow (2023), followed by the development of broad questions and potential follow-up questions for further probing. Prior to conducting the interviews, the interview protocol was piloted and refined.

After each interview, the researcher reflected on the new insights that emerged, as suggested by King (2006), as well as what went well and what could be improved. This process allowed for the modification of the interview schedule as needed, including the addition of new probes or topics. For example, discussion points around the process of removing dogs from the organization when they have been deemed unsuitable for office life were introduced based on participant insights.

Within the participant population, there was diversity in terms of the level of involvement and influence in dog-friendly office practices. During interviews, the researcher omitted certain questions from the research schedule when it became apparent that participants did not possess the necessary insight to answer them. For instance, if participants shared that they had joined the organization after the decision to become pet-friendly was made, questions related to the initial decision-making process were omitted. As suggested by Kidder and Fine (1987), participants do not have to be asked exactly the same set of questions.

Braun and Clarke (2022) argue that in reflexive thematic analysis, where themes are generated rather than emergent, the concept of saturation is not relevant. Fourteen participants engaged in 60-minute interview sessions, averaging 49 minutes each. The shortest interview, lasting 26 minutes, was with E, a managing director who chose to bring their dog to work, keeping it in their private office and limiting its interactions with others. They were the exception to the rule, as the organization did not have pet-friendly status, and the opportunity to bring dogs to work was not extended to other employees. The longest interview (71 minutes) was

with M, a clinical animal behaviorist. At the end of each interview, the MP3 audio file was downloaded by the researcher, transcribed, and assigned a unique, alphabetical letter to protect the participant's anonymity.

Data-Analytic Strategy: Reflexive Thematic Analysis Phases

The study utilized Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis, with visual representations of each stage presented in Figure 2. An inductive approach was employed, allowing the data to drive the analysis. The final six themes in this study were constructed through a six-phase approach:

In Phase 1, referred to as "familiarization," the researcher engaged in focused listening to each participant's interview video recording. During the second round of listening, adopting a more critically questioning mindset, the researcher employed text and doodles as analytical tools to capture ideas and reactions.

Phase 2, "generating codes," involved systematically working through the entire dataset. Succinct labels were created using the comment box in Microsoft Word to represent each key feature of the data related to the overarching research question. To facilitate this process, a thematic analysis coding management macro developed by Babbage and Terry (2023) was utilized to transfer the codes from the Microsoft Word transcripts to Excel.

During Phase 3, theme construction was undertaken using Miro®, a digital workspace for innovation. This platform facilitated the clustering of codes, enabling the identification of several strong conceptual ideas that bound the codes together. This recursive and iterative phase involved revisiting the data, deconstructing it, and reconstructing it. Codes with significant support and substantial depth, such as "continuous responsibility," were promoted to the status of prototype themes.

In Phase 4, referred to as theme development, two key questions proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019)



Figure 2. The six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

guided this stage: whether the codes associated with each theme could cluster around its central concept and what the prototype theme conveyed about the dataset and the research question.

After completing Phase 5, thematic definitions were constructed (Table 1). The findings section of this paper, representing Phase 6, tells a cohesive story using a balance of analytic narrative and data

Table 1. Thematic Definitions and Codes

Theme 1: The impact of dog presence on well-being	Theme 2: Organizational congruence with dog-friendly status	Theme 3: Power dynamics engendered by dog-friendly offices
<p>This theme pertains to the transformative power that dogs have in the workplace. It emphasizes their role as providers of emotional support, facilitators of relationship building, constant and reliable presences, and contributors to overall well-being. It highlights a link between pet-friendly work practices and supporting the financial well-being of dog owners.</p> <p>Codes clustered to develop Theme 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An emotional support for all ▪ A constant, reliable presence ▪ Dogs can foster relationships. ▪ Physiological well-being ▪ Supporting financial well-being 	<p>The definition of “organizational congruence with dog-friendly status,” as constructed through participant realities, relates to the extent to which a culture is progressive, encourages experimentation, learns from mistakes, and is open-minded, inclusive, and tolerant. However, organizational incongruence with a dog-friendly status can be indicated by a culture that perceives dogs as a barrier to business growth, implements zero-tolerance policies, and experiences conflicts between culture and goals.</p> <p>Codes clustered to develop Theme 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A progressive organizational culture ▪ Solving issues together ▪ An extra level of complexity for leaders ▪ Work sphere versus dog sphere • Zero-tolerance is not sustainable. 	<p>This theme encompasses power dynamics operating at organizational, team, and individual levels, as well as relationships involving wider stakeholders. At the individual and team levels, the theme explores inclusion/ exclusion dynamics, barriers to speaking up, emotional connections, and social interactions resulting from the presence of dogs. Additionally, some employees may leverage their attachment to their dogs to assert control in the workplace.</p> <p>Codes clustered to develop Theme 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Undermining authority ▪ Treading on thin ice! ▪ The “pro dog gang” ▪ A time and place to speak up
Theme 4: Presentation to the outside world	Theme 5: Continuous responsibility	Theme 6: Forethought and expectations
<p>Dog-friendly workplaces have an impact beyond current employees. They serve as a powerful signal, influencing perceptions of an organization’s professionalism, safety, and overall culture. The presence of dogs becomes an integral part of the organization’s image, attracting potential employees, clients, and stakeholders.</p> <p>Codes clustered to develop Theme 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dogs as part of the company’s narrative ▪ Dogs as a USP ▪ Showing we care ▪ Farcical situations 	<p>The theme “continuous responsibility,” as constructed from the participants’ perspectives, refers to the enduring and multifaceted dimensions of responsibility at the individual, team, and organizational levels, as well as the duty of care to dogs in companion-dog-friendly offices. Participant discourse highlighted the need to establish reliable supervision chains and clear expectations when delegating caregiving responsibilities to colleagues, while avoiding overburdening them. Active monitoring of dogs’ impact on the environment and, conversely, how the environment is impacting the dogs, is important.</p> <p>Codes clustered to develop Theme 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Surviving (the journey) and thriving ▪ Being 100% responsible ▪ An unreliable chain of supervision ▪ Recognizing when it is not working 	<p>This theme encompasses the importance of careful planning and anticipating challenges. It highlights the need for clear policies to avoid complications and to aim for a smooth integration of dogs into the office without disrupting the existing ecosystem. Onboarding dogs requires time and consideration. Dogs in the workplace are considered a perk rather than a right.</p> <p>Codes clustered to develop Theme 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A lack of policies leads to complications. ▪ Integration of dogs needs time and consideration. ▪ A perk, not a right! ▪ Creating the right boundaries ▪ Health and safety

extracts to enrich the overall understanding of the themes and topic.

Findings

This section provides an interpretative account of the themes. The incorporation of pictorial images, with participants' permission, adds a visual dimension that enhances the exploration of these themes. It is recommended that readers familiarize themselves with the "thematic definitions" and the codes clustered to develop the themes provided in Table 1 before proceeding.

Theme 1: The Impact of Dog Presence on Well-Being

An Emotional Support for All. Unanimously, participants acknowledged dogs as a crucial source of emotional support, not only to their owners, but also to colleagues. The interviews elicited numerous compelling stories about the profound impact of dogs' psychosocial support, making it challenging to choose specific examples. C highlighted the role of dogs in aiding the recovery of a fractured workforce following the COVID-19 pandemic.

C: And so many businesses . . . have had really big difficulties after the pandemic with a lot of postpandemic stress, people with long COVID. And I think we really saw the benefit of the dogs.

V highlighted the innate ability of dogs to provide support to humans.

V: We're no longer, if we ever were, a society where people are free to touch each other or anything anymore, but a dog doesn't know that. A dog just comes straight up to you, puts its head in your lap, and wants to be patted or stroked, and for some people, a lot of people, I think it's a really nice thing.

N provided insight into their perception of the positive impact that others experience through their interactions with dogs in the office.

N: I have people that will come from the other side of the office just to come over to stroke [dog's name], because they're having a difficult day. . . . I think people are reassured by her presence. . . . She's a very calming presence for them. . . . I think she's a stress relief for people.

A Constant, Reliable Presence. Several participants described the therapeutic nature of the bond between humans and dogs when discussing the impact of dog presence. Their discourse revealed the profound ways in which dogs acted as calming influences and offered unwavering companionship in the workplace.

N: For me, it's almost like a therapy dog. Work can be very stressful, and [dog's name] is always happy. She's like the calm in the storm at times. . . . I know she's always there. No matter how hard things get, she's always happy to see me and supportive.

D: I always feel at a bit of a loss if [my dog is] not next to me, so it's nice to have that companionship.

Dogs Can Foster Relationships. Dogs can play a significant role in fostering relationships in the office. Several participants emphasized that dogs served as catalysts for social connections. Figure 3, shared by O (not pictured), which portrays colleagues engaged in an interaction with an "office dog," exemplifies this aspect. Both N and O shared experiences of how their dogs facilitated connections with colleagues and supported their integration into new groups within their organizations.

N: [Dog's name] has been great for me to form conversations with other people. Because I'm not a natural sociable person, I find it quite



Figure 3. Colleagues interacting with an office dog at a digital marketing agency in Lincolnshire, UK.

difficult. [Dog's name] helped me open those doors and connect with other people and approach people, because she's become the topic of conversation. That's been really good.

O: When I first started [in my new job], one of the big benefits for me was how dog people like dog people, so if I brought my dog in, everybody wanted to bond over that. That was really nice as well . . . a bit of an icebreaker.

Physiological Well-Being. Several participants highlighted the role of both their own and others' dogs in encouraging physical activity. This concept is exemplified in Figure 4, which depicts employees participating in a collective walk. Additionally, two participants expanded upon this by emphasizing the

connection between exercise and opportunities for bonding with colleagues, as well as the potential for exercise to alleviate stress-related emotions.

D: I go out and walk with my colleagues' dogs and go with them when they go out for a walk, and you get that bonding time when you're out for a walk. . . . It's something about walking, it helps to encourage communication with colleagues and building relations.

C: If someone was really stressed, we'd give them a dog and send them for a walk, or we'd lend somebody a dog or things like that. And we have had a policy of, I think, being very open about things like mental health issues and so on.



Figure 4. Colleagues walking office dogs in Salisbury, Massachusetts.

Supporting Financial Well-Being. For certain individuals, the importance of a pet-friendly workplace went beyond the physiological and psychological aspects of well-being, extending to financial well-being. This was the case for N, who faced a particular challenge when their organization relocated to new premises and the leaseholders did not endorse pet-friendly policies. N was cognizant of the potential financial implications this could have for them.

N: I don't think it was ever going to be a thing, because obviously I'd brought my dog in, moved offices, and it was like, I have to bring her in, I can't afford day-care. . . . [Dog's name] . . . has been the determining factor of where I work. I won't work for a company that doesn't allow dogs.

In D's discourse, significant emphasis was placed on the financial aspects associated with pet care, particularly in the context of limited resources and rising prices charged by external care providers in the post-COVID era. They highlighted the challenges encountered in finding suitable dog caregivers and the subsequent increase in pet care expenses. This

highlights the heightened financial burden faced by pet owners in securing reliable care for their animals, especially if taking their dogs to work is not an option.

D: Trying to get people to look after dogs at the moment is really difficult, and because there's a scarcity, then the expense of it is also massive. . . . It used to cost £10–£15 for someone to come in for half an hour, an hour, feed [the dog], play with her in the garden, do those kinds of things, and maybe take her for a walk with three to four other dogs. And now, it's easily £30 or more.

Theme 2: Organizational Congruence With Dog-Friendly Status

A Progressive Organizational Culture. One crucial factor that appeared to contribute to the alignment of organizations with dog-friendly policies was the presence of a progressive organizational culture, characterized by open communication, trust, and respect. S and C, who both held leadership positions in organizations they described as start-ups,

emphasized the importance of evaluating the compatibility of pet-friendly policies with the company's interests and culture.

S: I always think of things from the inside out. So first . . . does this [dog-friendly] policy serve the company, do we want to do this? Does this make sense with our culture and office style that we have and if so, let's implement something that makes sense for [our people].

The wider context of S's discourse centered around an organizational culture that empowered individuals to tailor their work arrangements to suit their needs. This included providing opportunities for dogs to accompany employees to the office on a daily basis. Such a culture fostered an environment where employees were encouraged to explore flexible arrangements and embrace a dog-friendly policy as part of their integration of work and personal life.

C's discourse highlighted a readiness to construct job roles and conditions tailored to their employees' talents and needs, including the integration of pets into work environments.

C: It used to be that you created a job, and then you found someone to fit the job. It's now almost that you find a talent, and you create the job around that talent, and you create your team that way. And again, I think the whole dog thing . . . has come from all of that.

Solving Issues Together. Most participants whose organizations had sustainable dog-friendly office practices shared a norm of collaboratively addressing "dog-related issues." C advocated for a collaborative approach to addressing issues, encouraging employees to work together to find a resolution. D gave a strong example of organizational citizenship behaviors, when the entire office collaborated to address an issue with a colleague's rescue dog that had separation anxiety. The office approached the challenge by considering the well-being of both the human and the dog, demonstrating

effective teamwork, support, and tolerance in finding a resolution.

D: It's actually [about] reassuring the owner that we're not upset when the dog is whining, the problem is when the owner feels anxious and guilty . . . and so, the whole office worked together to build it up and [it] got used to being left [on] its own. . . . The dog's fine now and she's really settled. But it's having the people who have the understanding to work through that.

An Extra Level of Complexity for Leaders. Although most participants viewed dogs as a positive addition to office life, some acknowledged that they created an additional level of complexity for leaders. Some leaders found it more challenging to address dog-related issues with owners than to provide feedback on employees' performance. C conceded that "some of those [dog] conversations can be really tricky . . . [as] pets are, to all intents and purposes, like their children." A echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that dogs intensified existing difficulties: "Put the dog in there, and that becomes an infinitely more complicated conversation." A's discontent with the need to handle dog-related issues instead of focusing on what they considered the "real" priorities was evident throughout their narrative.

A: This company's got to double in size, and I am now in my eighth meeting about dogs. . . . We might have to make staff changes, and we are talking about whether the dog can or cannot come into the meeting room and whether someone else can bring their dog.

"Work Sphere" Versus "Dog Sphere." Some people firmly believe dogs do not belong in the workplace and should not be allowed, while others argue for the inclusion of dogs in work environments. For example, R, a dog owner, had some doubts, stating, "I'm not totally convinced that an office with multihousehold dogs is a great place to take a dog."

A mentioned their shock upon seeing dogs in the workplace. According to their schema, dogs belong in other people's houses and perhaps parks, but not offices.

A: Personally, to walk into an office with a dog is always a shock for me. . . . I gear myself up to go to the park, I can't even take my son to the park. To walk into an office space and there's a dog there . . . and I don't think companies say that enough.

Zero-Tolerance Is Not Sustainable. All participants whose organizations had sustainable pet-friendly practices shared a common understanding that dogs are not perfect, acknowledging the occurrence of occasional issues. B conceded, "Even if dogs are fully house-trained, they will have accidents." Several participants alluded to the inevitability of encountering behavioral challenges when having dogs in the workplace. R, a dog owner, acknowledged this by stating, "Obviously, dogs can cause trouble."

Most organizations took occasional accidents and low-level behavioral incidents in their stride. Participants outlined the preventive measures and mitigations they had in place, as well as the relationships that helped maintain pet-friendly practices.

M: Dogs had to have been house-trained for at least six months, and there was a toolkit in place because accidents happen. Dogs are dogs. . . . But as long as the accident is limited to a wee on the carpet and not a person getting bitten, I'd say it's all right. We also made sure to communicate openly with our office cleaners and worked with them to ensure that dealing with these incidents did not become more burdensome for them.

The following account describes M's recollections of their response to a zoonotic disease in the workplace during the pilot week of the dog-friendly office project. A zoonotic disease is defined as a "disease

or infection that is naturally transferable from vertebrate animals to humans" (WHO, 2020 p. 1).

M: One of my colleagues' dogs came in, and she asked me, "What's this on the dog's skin?" And I replied, "That's ringworm." So, in the first week, we encountered a zoonotic disease. But . . . we had everything in place.

Theme 3: Power Dynamics Engendered by Dog-Friendly Offices

Undermining Authority. A joined a senior executive team and had an ambitious remit. They identified as being "really scared of dogs" and had not been included in how pet-friendly office practices were implemented or how they evolved. The following discourse suggests they saw the presence of dogs as a barrier to engaging with their team.

A: To feel that I am then isolated . . . because of an animal who isn't working . . . I kept coming back to, well, I am a senior person with a team of 100, who now cannot go to that part of the building because of a dog.

A also shared a significant incident where they had to inform an employee that their dog could no longer be brought to work. The employee used their emotional bond with the dog as a means of asserting control, stating, "I just cannot work in this office if I can't bring my dog." This challenging situation ultimately led to a no-win outcome, resulting in both the dog and the individual leaving the organization.

Treading on Thin Ice. Building owners with negative attitudes toward dogs may enforce control by implementing zero-tolerance policies, which can cause anxiety for dog owners in the workplace. N described their own response to a critical incident, acknowledging the potential consequences that could arise if the "incident" was discovered, potentially meaning they could no longer bring their dog to work.

N: [The new policy] is very strict. You literally have one warning and you're out! . . . I remember the first day I took [Dog's name] back into the office. She was so excited to see everyone that she threw up because she was overwhelmed with excitement. . . . Luckily, I was in a part of the office where no one saw. . . . I was on edge, very stressed, and unable to relax.

The “Pro-Dog Gang”. One participant's account highlighted a perceived division in the office environment between dog lovers and non-dog lovers, resulting in an “us vs. them” dynamic. According to A, this resulted in the formation of “pro-dog gangs.” Expressing a dislike for someone's dog is met with incredulity from subordinates, who question, “Why wouldn't you like my dog?”

A Time and Place to Speak Up. Participants emphasized the importance of empowering employees to voice their preferences and take control of their daily interactions with dogs in the workplace. For

example, B stated: “It's about . . . giving . . . people more choice as to being able to separate themselves [from dogs] if they don't want that and to feel comfortable with speaking out if it doesn't feel right for them.” M asserted that “the biggest problem [is] when people don't feel heard.”

Theme 4: Presentation to the Outside World

Dogs as Part of the Company's Narrative. Several participants emphasized how pet-friendly practices shaped external perceptions of their organizations. Specifically, C said, “I think it helped people understand who we were and what we stood for.” Working in the animal health sector, C suggested that pet-friendly practices are congruent with the organization's values. They elaborated: “From the employer point of view . . . it's a very overt symbol of your animal friendliness and ethics.” This narrative is reinforced by their organization's welcome board (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Welcome board at an animal health company in Oxfordshire, UK.

Dogs as a USP. R, D, and C positioned pet-friendly practices as a unique selling proposition (USP) for organizations, serving to attract new talent, reduce employee attrition, and influence applicant decision-making.

D: I think it's a good USP to have as a business, because not everyone is offering it. . . . If you're choosing between two jobs . . . [in addition] it is a good way to protect your colleagues from leaving.

C revealed that an "aspirational dog owner" was influenced to relocate to their organization largely due to their pet-friendly status, meaning they could fulfill that ambition.

Showing We Care. S, a leader at an organization recognized as one of the UK's best dog-friendly companies by Rover.com, suggested that their organization's pet-friendly practices signal a genuine commitment to the well-being of their employees.

S: I do think it shows that we care for people genuinely, it's not just about what you bring to the table . . . we want to make sure that you and your family [including dogs] are in a good position.

S's broader discourse suggests that their pet-friendly practices signal the organization's dedication to creating a work culture that values work-life balance and recognizes the importance of family, where dogs are seen as an extension of family.

Farcical Situations. A's discourse highlighted the consequences that can ensue when the delineation between public and private domains is breached, leading to outsiders being exposed to practices that can impact perceptions of professionalism. A recounted how a situation extended beyond the confines of the office, impacting the public domain: "Clients coming in, and it was like a scene from Mr. Bean with dogs running around or a poo in reception."

Theme 5: Continuous Responsibility

Surviving (the Journey) and Thriving. B, who worked in Central London, emphasized the necessity of assessing how dogs would cope with the commute before even considering bringing them to the office. Once in the office, M, a clinical animal behaviorist, emphasized the need for dogs to be able to "settle" and "switch off." It is the owner's responsibility to ensure their dog can adapt to and thrive in both the commute and the office environment.

Being 100% Responsible. Several participants suggested that responsible ownership was a protective factor for mitigating the potential burden on human resources functions within pet-friendly offices.

B: If people are very responsible with [bringing their dog to work] and have the right guidance on how, as owners, they can be responsible for this and do it in a really responsible way, it shouldn't be an industry.

J also emphasized the essential requirement of responsible ownership for dogs to be allowed in the office, stating, "The owners have to be responsible; otherwise, their dogs are not permitted in the office."

An Unreliable Chain of Supervision. Participants detailed how they had overcome perceived problems and minimized risks associated with pet-friendly practices. However, one detailed the irreversible breakdown of their pet-friendly office status. A described how, over the trial period of implementing pet-friendly practices, the issue of unreliable supervision continued to escalate.

A: And the person who brought [the dog to the office] . . . maybe underestimated how many times they're in meetings and how inappropriate it was to have the dog in meetings. . . . Someone who'd said they'd keep an eye on the dog forgot, went off to lunch, and then the dog wasn't looked after, so there was an unreliable chain of supervision of the

dog. . . . The crescendo was that scene with the six dogs . . . it was just pandemonium. . . . We cannot have dogs.

While the concerns raised by A did not align with the experiences shared by the other participants, it is important to learn from them. A's account highlighted the need to address the issue of inadequate supervision.

Recognizing When It Is Not Working. Interestingly, even though they had the opportunity to bring their dogs to work in pet-friendly offices, a few participants consciously decided against this. They acknowledged that it would not be the optimal choice for themselves or their dogs.

Participants recognized the importance of addressing situations where they perceive that pet-friendly practices are not functioning effectively, as emphasized by V.

V: A staff member brought her two Siberian huskies into the office. . . . She worked in an open-plan area, and those dogs were a little bit too boisterous and disturbed other people. And I said to her . . . you need to keep them under control. . . . One or two people spoke to her and just said, look, this is not working. . . . She stopped bringing them in.

Theme 6: Forethought and Expectations

A Lack of Policies Leads to Complications. The account provided by A, a senior leader in a newly assumed role, illustrated how the rapid influx of additional dogs into the office within a month, without any controls or additional space, alongside an increase in employee headcount, led to increased conflict between different employee dyads and the dogs themselves. When difficult decisions needed to be made, A found that “there was no policy, no boundary, no right to remove.”

Integration of Dogs Needs Time and Consideration. Participant discourse about lessons

learned emphasized the importance of allocating adequate time and consideration to facilitate a smooth integration and positive experience for new dogs entering a different environment, as well as for other established office dogs and the broader office ecosystem. C candidly acknowledged that the absence of an integration plan had led to situations such as “whining dogs and dogs jumping pen gates.”

To mitigate risks, M adhered to a transparent and staged approach to the integration of dogs into the office, with clear roles and responsibilities for owners, organizations, and clinical animal behaviorists. This involved completing an “is your dog ready for the office” self-assessment, a “dog temperament assessment,” and evaluating behavior using a “dogs in office” probation checklist.

A Perk, Not a Right. Establishing clear expectations and fostering a shared understanding were identified as antecedents for sustainable pet-friendly practices. V emphasized the necessity of “setting out rules at the beginning,” while C highlighted the importance of clearly conveying that “bringing your dog to work is a privilege, not a right.”

Creating the Right Boundaries. Dogs without boundaries and the freedom to roam in the workplace raised concerns among some participants, including A, who is scared of dogs; Z, who expressed wariness about unfamiliar dogs; and D, a dog owner who felt their personal space was invaded by other people's dogs.

Z: And there is also a bit of the psychological thing of even if you [have] . . . a bit of a fear of dogs that you don't know . . . you're going to spend at least the first few hours of that day being very wary and keeping an eye on the dog more than whatever it is you're doing.

A's account illustrates how encountering dogs without boundaries exacerbates their anxiety and discomfort.

A: So I'm [sitting] with anxiety . . . and looking out, is the dog near me? . . . I don't trust them.

D indicated that dog owners themselves may experience a sense of personal space invasion when dogs are allowed to roam freely in workplaces.

- D: That dog [has] no personal space either. . . . You've got this dog wandering up. And because of its size, it gets its head on the desk and if you're trying to eat or drink anything, it nudges you and it slobbers all over you. And I'm very dog-centric . . . but even I find it a bit annoying.

Several participants mentioned that dogs also need boundaries and stressed the importance of not treating dogs as mere spectacles.

- B: So, it's about that respect piece, and that kind of works both ways as well . . . understanding that, yes, it's lovely to have the dogs here, but if they're asleep and they're calm, let's leave them . . . they might need . . . some breathing space.

Health and Safety. Several participants proposed that although risks needed to be proactively mitigated and processes adhered to, the addition of dogs in the office did not require extensive additional considerations for health and safety or insurance liabilities beyond a typical office environment.

- M: Health and safety is a big thing obviously, but dogs don't really add that much to it. . . . Yes, people are more likely to trip over a dog than if there's no dog there, but actually if the dogs are secure, we just mitigate that risk. . . . I . . . think we're sometimes so scared of the repercussions, that no one does [dog-friendly offices].

Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

This section outlines the contributions of the six themes constructed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The Impact of Dog Presence on Well-Being

During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals across the globe experienced heightened levels of loneliness, isolation, fatigue, stress, and anxiety (Bennett et al., 2021; Conroy et al., 2021). These effects were anticipated to have profound and enduring impacts on the mental health of the population (O'Connor et al., 2020). The magnitude of findings in this current study that supported the positive impact of dogs on physiological and psychological well-being in the workplace exceeded those previously reported by Hall et al. (2017), Wagner and Pina e Cunha (2021), Hall and Mills (2019), and Foreman et al. (2019). The discourse from participants in this study emphasized the instrumental role of companion dogs in supporting their daily coping mechanisms, offering nonjudgmental support, enhancing interpersonal relationships, and positively impacting the psychological and physiological well-being of both dog owners and their colleagues. An additional unexpected insight from this study, relevant to the current economic context, is the suggestion that dog-friendly workplaces could act as a protective factor for employees' financial well-being. Such workplaces eliminate the need for employees to outsource the care of their dogs to expensive external providers.

Organizational Congruence With Companion-Dog-Friendly Office Status

The findings of this study support Wagner and Pina e Cunha's (2021) finding that a flexible work culture and the willingness to adopt a trial-and-error approach are antecedents for sustainable pet-friendly practices. However, the findings of the current study indicate that for sustainable pet-friendly practices, there is a need to consider both the current and future organizational context.

The current study's findings extend the existing literature by highlighting a new layer of complexity for organizational leaders. In addition to their remit, leaders must navigate complex and contentious issues around dogs in the workplace, requiring

them to engage with and address the concerns of “pet parents.” Viewing the issue through the lens of Karasek’s (1979) job demand-control model of occupational stress, for one participant, these new demands proved to be incompatible with their existing job demands.

Power Dynamics Engendered by Dog-Friendly Offices

While M detailed their organization’s proactive approach to assessing the potential impact on diverse stakeholders and implementing appropriate measures, some participants suggested that the needs and opinions of stakeholders with “influence and interest” in pet-friendly practices had been overlooked. Regarding the supervisor-subordinate relationship, A, a leader with a fear of dogs, felt that their legitimate power and authority were compromised by subordinates who formed “pro-dog gangs.” Complexities in power dynamics also arose between organizations with a long-standing pet-friendly status and their new building owners, who did not support such practices, leading to employees feeling a diminished sense of control over outcomes. Participant discourse emphasized the importance of proactive management of these relationship dyads.

Presentation to the Outside World

Consistent with the findings presented by Wagner and Pina e Cunha (2021), the current study suggests that companion dogs in the workplace serve a symbolic function in two distinct ways. First, they facilitate an alignment between job seekers and the organization. Second, they communicate organizational values and implications, conveying messages about the organization’s culture and priorities. Several participants considered pet-friendly practices an integral part of their organization’s value proposition. Although most participants perceived dog-friendly workplaces as sending positive signals, a minority were mindful of the potential repercussions that uncontrolled practices could have on the organization’s reputation and levels of perceived professionalism.

Continuous Responsibility

Participant discourse highlighted that responsible ownership is an antecedent for sustainable pet-friendly practices. This involves maintaining overall accountability for dogs and avoiding overburdening colleagues with excessive care responsibilities.

The findings of this study challenge Wagner and Pina e Cunha’s (2021) suggestion that dogs add to the burden of responsibility. In contrast, participants in this study overwhelmingly viewed dogs as valuable additions to the office and active contributors, fulfilling important functions. Participants conceded that dogs have needs that may momentarily distract their owners from their work; however, this was not seen as negative. Instead, it was largely perceived as an opportunity for owners to take a break, reset, and achieve a better work-life balance.

Although participant discourse from dog owners did not suggest that their colleagues had any responsibilities toward their dogs, team members being willing to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors may be an antecedent for sustainable dog-friendly offices. In this current study, instances of such behaviors were observed in acts of altruism, such as looking after a dog while their owner was attending a meeting. Owners demonstrated courtesy by recognizing and addressing any inconvenience caused by their dog, and colleagues displayed tolerance during the adjustment period when a dog was settling into the workplace.

Forethought and Expectations

This study identified an additional antecedent for sustainable practices, specifically, the importance of establishing and agreeing upon boundaries and explicit expectations. To safeguard the well-being of *all* employees and avoid permissive practices, consultation with relevant professionals is imperative. This should cover aspects related to animal well-being, health and safety, insurance, and legal considerations before implementing pet-friendly practices. This necessity is highlighted by A’s account of a critical incident when a visitor experienced anaphylactic

shock due to the presence of dogs and the failure to adequately mitigate risks.

Elaborating on the findings of Hall et al. (2017), who suggest that the implementation of appropriate policies can help overcome negative employee perceptions, the present study posits that there is a need to go further. Instead of treating employees as passive recipients of pet-friendly office initiatives, it is important to actively involve them in shaping, managing, and taking ownership of these programs.

Strengths and Limitations

This study is believed to be the first inclusive qualitative exploration into pet-friendly offices, incorporating diverse stakeholder voices. However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, this study focused on the human working population's perceptions of dog-friendly workplaces. However, there was an opportunity to explore the dogs' experiences via the participants. Although it was outside the scope of the study, in retrospect, this could be viewed as a missed opportunity. When responding to a broad question from the interview schedule about the benefits of a workplace where dogs are welcome, a small number of participants, unprompted, considered the benefits from the dogs' perspective. V's discourse suggested their dog relished the opportunity to stay with them at work, allowing them to stay with their "pack leader" all day.

- V: From the dog's perspective, as you know, pack animals, they love being with the pack leader, which obviously they see [me] . . . so it was my dog, and he was very happy because he was with me all the time.

On reflection, the questionnaire schedule could have been adapted to include a new question probe to elicit subjective feelings and perceptions about the experiences of the dogs.

Second, the participant recruitment protocol may have skewed toward individuals already supportive of pet-friendly practices, potentially limiting the

transferability of the findings. It is crucial to note, however, that all participants were encouraged to discuss challenges, frustrations, and critical incidents openly. Additionally, proactively seeking more participants who were not intrinsically supportive of dog-friendly workplaces in the sample could have been beneficial.

Third, the researchers chose not to capture the racial or ethnic distribution of the participants. Given that previous research by Wilkin et al. (2016) has indicated that pet attachment can be influenced by religious beliefs, the study might have missed nuances in perspectives related to pet-friendly practices.

Fourth, it is broadly acknowledged that women are more likely to volunteer for research in general, particularly for animal-related studies (Herzog, 2021; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1976). Although an attempt was made to achieve a gender balance, a number of male participants who had committed to participating in the study subsequently delegated their involvement to female team members. Incorporating more male perspectives would have been beneficial.

Lastly, in relation to the interpretation of the findings, it is important to reflect on the methodological choices made. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2019), the inherent nature of reflexive thematic analysis means that researchers cannot entirely divorce themselves from their epistemological stances, values, and personal experiences. Consequently, data coding cannot be entirely unbiased. This acknowledgment is framed as a methodological choice rather than a limitation.

Future Research

Future research could involve recruiting a small number of organizations considering the adoption of companion-dog-friendly practices to participate in a six-month mixed-methods longitudinal study. Pre- and postimplementation standardized measures could evaluate the constructs identified in the current study. This could be in parallel with observational studies examining the day-to-day impact of dog presence in the office.

The majority of the existing body of literature relating to the intersection of humans and animals focuses on the benefits of the interactions for humans. There is an opportunity to explore dogs' reactions to the workplace environment and its impact on their emotional state and well-being, and the benefits *they* may experience from being part of the office ecosystem.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Schwartz (2021) highlighted the unique opportunity presented by the COVID-19 pandemic to reimagine work practices. It is anticipated that this study's findings will inform decision-makers who are contemplating the adoption of pet-friendly practices in their organizations, encouraging them to explore the potential benefits within their specific context.

The discourse in this study underlined the role of companion dogs in supporting workforce members still dealing with the aftermath of the pandemic. Leaders posited that dogs can offer emotional support in ways that may transcend human limitations. Similarly, most participants shared accounts of well-being enhanced by their companion dogs, to the benefit of both themselves and the wider team. There is a compelling argument to suggest they could serve as a component in a progressive well-being strategy and as reasonable adjustments. Guidance on reasonable adjustments for mental health at work suggests that simple changes to people's working arrangements could be enough to help them remain in their roles and perform well (ACAS, 2022).

It is suggested that dog-friendly work practices deserve to be considered within the context of the psychological theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) and as per Woodend (2019).

Summary and Conclusion

The need for organizational leaders to reimagine well-being in the workplace and explore ways to support and engage their employees has gained attention and significance (Dundon et al., 2023). The findings

of this study suggest dog-friendly offices can play a significant role in positive outcomes for dog owners and their colleagues. It could be pertinent to consider companion-dog-friendly office status as a legitimate component of flexible working practices and a potential workplace adjustment or as part of a well-being strategy. However, for pet-friendly practices to be sustainable, there needs to be congruence between the organization's culture and pet-friendly practices. Dog owners must maintain full accountability for their dogs and demonstrate responsible ownership. Perceived problems can be mitigated by effective planning and agreeing on boundary conditions between impacted stakeholders. A stepwise, multidisciplinary approach with representation from all impacted stakeholders should be taken for the design, implementation, and evaluation of dog-friendly practices.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics Approval

The research proposal received ethics approval from Birkbeck, University of London (Ethics Approval Number OPEA-22/23-05).

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