Psychological well-being at work: Causes, consequences and solutions

Faculty of Occupational Medicine
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Overview

• Why psychological well-being is important
  For individuals
  For organisations
• Causes/Drivers of mental health and well-being at work
• Key workplace factors
• Solutions/interventions
When it goes wrong at work

Short-term

Mentally or physically ill

Long-term

Unhealthy organisational practices

Present but at risk

Engaged and well

Permanently out of work
Referrals to GPs and OPs

Source: The Health and Occupation Research Network, Uni of Manchester, 2011
Why psychological well-being matters

More than 40 longitudinal studies in last 10-12 years
Psychological well-being factors (positive feelings, negative feelings, optimism, depression, anxiety, predict:
• Earlier death
• General ill health (including heart disease, blood pressure, immune system functioning, frailty in later life, cancer(?) ...)

Source: Diener & Chan, 2011
Why psychological well-being matters

- Cardiovascular risk
  Blood pressure
  Cholesterol
  HR variability
- Weight/Diabetes
  Glucose regulation
  Protein & fat metabolism
- Immune system
  Inflammatory processes
  Autoimmune problems
Why does it matter?

Source: Cohen et al., Psychosomatic Medicine, 2003
Why psychological well-being matters

But how big are the effects on mortality and health?

- Twice as likely to have died (2,800 people, two year follow up; 850 people, five year follow up)
- Live 6-10 years longer (healthier and happier)
- Size of effect similar to other well-established risk factors (e.g. smoking, diet)

Sources: Ostir et al., 2000; Wilson et al., 2003; Diener & Chan, 2011)
Psychological well-being: Organisational outcomes

Some studies:

- **Donald et al., (2005)** – almost a quarter (23%) of variance in employee productivity (sample of 16,000 UK employees) is explained by:
  - Psychological well-being
  - Perceived commitment of organisation to employee
  - Resources and communications

- **Cropanzano and Wright (1999)** Five year longitudinal study of psychological well-being and performance. Strong correlation between well-being and work performance

- **Taris & Schreurs (2009)** Client satisfaction (66 organisations, \( r = .29 \))

- **Ford et al., (2011)** Overall performance (111 organisations, total sample 10,000+, \( r = .40 \))
Well-being (positive emotions at work) and Productivity

39,000 people from 27 organisations, over last five years
Comments on the research

• Many prospective & longitudinal studies
• Negative and positive psychological well-being (PWB) are different constructs
• Insights into the psychobiological mechanisms are emerging
• Positive PWB provides a protective effect
• Many studies suggest a dose-response relationship
• Measures of PWB are not standardised
Mental health at work: causes

- Physical health
- Personal circumstances
- Psychological well-being
- Workplace factors
- Personality
- Organisational & Management Factors
“Causes” of mental health at work

Organisational/management processes

Work place factors

Personal circumstances

Health & (psychological) well-being

Personality

Outcomes: Performance, Sickness absence, presenteeism, etc…
Mental health at work

Achievement

Demands
- Cognitive
- Physical
- Emotional

Control

Support
Important workplace factors

• Demands

• Control

• Support

The same factors drive positive psychological well-being, mental ill-health ...and also absence and presenteeism
Workplace factors and well-being

- Demands
- Control
- Relationships
- Change
- Role
- Support

- Demands
- Control
- Support
- Change
- Role
- Reward & contribution

- Resources & Communication
- Control
- Balanced Workload
- Job security & change
- Work relationships
- Job conditions

The ‘6 Essentials of workplace well-being’ - Robertson Cooper
The “6 essential” sources of pressure

- **Resources and communication** (Pressure from lack of resources or information)
- **Control and autonomy** (Limitations on how the job is done or freedom to make decisions)
- **Balanced workload** (Peaks and troughs in workload, difficult deadlines, unsocial hours, work life balance challenges)
- **Job security & change** (Pressure from change and uncertainty about the future)
- **Work relationships** (High pressure relationships with colleagues, customers, bosses)
- **Job conditions** (Pressure from working conditions or pay and benefits)
## Solutions: primary; secondary; tertiary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of intervention</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Preventative measures</td>
<td>Role re-design, selection, culture change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Recognise and/or avoid mental health problems.</td>
<td>Resilience training, stress management training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>Support for those experiencing mental health problems.</td>
<td>Counselling/EAP/support groups/return to work – e.g. Remploy’s “Access to Work” scheme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Well-being Vs Performance ... A mistaken view

Behavioural factors linked to positive PWB

- Fewer distraction from work tasks due to psycho-somatic complaints etc...
- Better memory (poor PWB = bias towards negative events)
- Motivation and self-efficacy
- Flexibility and originality
- Response to unfavourable feedback
- More positive judgements about others
- More productive

- Are likely to live longer ... be sick less often ... and have happier work and home life

Ford et al., 2011; Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005
How things could be?

Occupational health
Counselling
Fast track treatment etc...

Health and Safety
Risk assessment
Training etc...

Mentally or physically ill

Present but at risk

Engaged and well

HR
Talent management, Discipline & Grievance
Selection processes, Leadership & Management development etc...

Mentally or physically ill
Building positive well-being?

- Tracking well-being AND the drivers of well-being
- Resilience building
- Leadership and management
- Selection assessment and talent management
- Employee Engagement
Building positive well-being?

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Work & Well-Being

- Resources and Communication
- Control
- Balanced workload
- Job security & change
- Work relationships
- Job conditions

Psychological Well-Being, Resilience: & Coping Behaviour

Individual & Organisational outcomes
Building resilience: The evidence

Pre-training measures: e.g.
• Psychological health
• Performance & productivity

Assign to training

Conduct training

Post-training measures: e.g.
• Psychological health
• Performance & productivity
Building resilience

• Improved job satisfaction, well-being & productivity
  4.5 month follow-up (Sales agents)

• Better coping styles, successful return to work (long-term illness due to stress/burnout)
  6 month programme

• Better mood, heart rate, cortisol during trauma
  (Police officers) 12 month follow-up

• Improvements in anxiety, stress, quality of life
  (Physicians) 8 week follow-up
The “resilience prescription”  
Charney (2007)

• Positive attitudes and emotions
• Personal moral compass – sense of purpose
• Find a resilient role model – actively finding one is important
• Face your fears
• Develop coping strategies – make active use of them
• Develop cognitive flexibility – learn to “reframe”
• Establish and nurture a supportive social network
• Look after your physical condition – exercise may be the “magic bullet”
• Develop/train regularly in multiple areas – challenge and mastery
• Recognise and develop signature strengths
Building resilience

• **Positive attributions** – Optimistic thinking styles
• **Challenge & Mastery** - Experiencing tough challenges - Stretch … but not Panic zone!
• **Recognising and developing (signature) strengths**
• **Workplace purpose** – meaning and purpose at work
• **Physical well-being**
Resilience: The role of physical activity

Low physical activity:
- More likely to experience stress
- Poorer positive psychological well-being
- React to stressors more extremely

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<th>Physical activity</th>
<th>Odds ratio for stress</th>
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<tr>
<td>Low – sedentary or less than 2 hrs per week</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate – 2-4 hrs per week</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High – more than 4 hrs/several times per week</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jogging</td>
<td>0.27</td>
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Schnohr et al., 2005
Resilience: The role of physical activity

Taking up exercise

• Impact of exercise is equivalent to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

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<tr>
<td>No change - Sedentary</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>No change - Active</td>
<td>0.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sedentary - Active</td>
<td>0.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Active - Sedentary</td>
<td>0.72</td>
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Lawlor & Hopker, 2009
Building positive well-being?

- Tracking well-being AND the drivers of well-being
- Resilience training
- Leadership and management
- Selection assessment and talent management
- Employee Engagement
Management & leadership

• Management/leadership behaviour related to:
  Burnout
  Health complaints
  Psychiatric disturbance

Even when controlling for: age, health practices, support from other people at work, support from home, stressful life events, and stressful work events.
Types of pressure

• Hindrance pressures
  Role ambiguity
  Work Relationships
  Job insecurity

• Challenge pressures
  Workload
  Time pressure
  Job scope
  Responsibility
## Pressure

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<th>Job satisfaction</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Turnover</th>
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<td>Hindrance</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>-0.66</td>
<td>-0.63</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
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Podsakoff et al., 2007
Pressure & Performance

- Rust-out space: Motivation at risk
  Not enough challenge

- Motivated & Well
  High performance
  and enjoyment

- Burn-out & stress
  Psychological well-being at risk

Performance vs. Pressure Diagram
Building positive well-being?

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Lessons from cases

• Some people don’t get it
• The terminology matters
• A strategic (joined up) approach will maximise the benefits … but it’s hard to achieve
• Interventions need to be based on evidence
• The belief that well-being and performance are in conflict is commonplace
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