

Well-Being at Work – In Context

Understanding the aetiology of work-related health and well-being: Linking individual and organizational factors

The Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) Research Unit at Nottingham Trent University has commenced a 2.5 year research study on the aetiology of work-related health and well-being. The research is supported by the Economic & Social Research Council's First Grant Scheme (Grant Number RES-061-25-0344, PI: Maria Karanika-Murray).

The aims of this work are to investigate:

- (a) how the organizational context impacts on the quality of working life, and ultimately, work-related health and well-being, and
- (b) what factors can affect such outcomes in the long-term.

We know a lot on how job characteristics (for example, job demands and control, job variety, and autonomy) can affect work-related health and well-being. However, despite the agreement that the organizational context is important, we know very little of how organizational level characteristics (for example, culture, leadership, policies, strategies, change, and development goals) can impact on such outcomes. The inherently hierarchical nature of organizations means that 'events at one level of analysis can influence events at another level of analysis'. Elements of the wider organizational context can be vital for shaping employee health and organizational performance. Nevertheless, our knowledge of the role of the organizational context for health and well-being is minimal.

It is important to examine how the organizational context can impact on the quality of working life, health, and well-being. This study will achieve this by adopting a multilevel and longitudinal approach, looking at multiple levels of analysis (the job and the organization) and across multiple time points. This will help to disentangle causes and effects. The potential practical implications of this study include:

- (a) the successful implementation of health and well-being friendly practices, and
- (b) designing sustainable interventions at the organizational level to improve well-being and job satisfaction, reduce absenteeism, and increase performance.

The Research Team

The research team has recognised expertise in work psychology and in occupational health psychology, and numerous publications in academic and practitioner outlets.

Dr Maria Karanika-Murray is leading the investigation. **Dr George Michaelides** is responsible for the day-to-day management of the project. Individually, Maria and George have conducted research for the Health & Safety Executive, the Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council, the European Commission/ European Agency for Safety & Health at Work, and a number of national and international business organizations.

The research team is supported by a steering group which includes Dr Nadine Mellor (Health & Safety Laboratory), Professor Mark Griffin (Institute of Work Psychology,

University of Sheffield), Dr Marc van Veldhoven (Department of Human Resource Studies, Tilburg University, Netherlands), Professor Kevin Daniels (Loughborough University Business School), and Professor Jean Underwood (Division of Psychology, Nottingham Trent University). Dr David Riley (Health & Safety Executive) is also involved in the study in an advisory role.

Methodology and Data Collection

Preliminary Interviews: The research will start with interviews with Health & Safety managers or members of Human Resource Departments in a small number of organizations. During these discussions, the researchers will ask about the organization's policies related to work, health, and well-being, the broader organizational context, and the nature of the work carried out. The discussions will be on a one-to-one basis, and will last 20-30 minutes. These will be conducted between 26 October and 6 November 2009.

The Survey: The information gathered from the interviews will be used to develop the online survey which will be piloted in one organization before it is disseminated to all employees in all participating organizations. The survey will include questions on demographics, the job itself, the organizational context, and health and well-being outcomes.

The survey will be administered online, starting on 11 January 2010. Participants will receive an email asking them to complete the survey. Data will be collected five times every three months. The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete and respondents will be able to stop and start again at a later time. To be able to carry out the statistical analyses, it is essential that we collect enough responses at all data collection points.

Additional information on the organizations will be requested from Health & Safety or Human Resources departments, and will include, for example, organizational size, sector, the organizational structure, and information on relevant policies and practices. This data will help to interpret the results and answer questions relating to the organizational context.

Ethical Issues and Data Protection: It is important to collect accurate data at all data collection points without compromising the identity of the respondents and of the organizations.

Participation in the study is voluntary and data collection will only proceed after informed consent has been granted. Participants can choose to end the interviews or completion of the survey at any time. Notes taken during the interviews will be used to design the final survey and will not be discussed with anyone from the organization or anyone outside the research team. Any names provided will be coded and anonymised. All responses will remain confidential and will be viewed only by the researchers for analytical purposes.

Data stored electronically will be anonymised, so that no individual can be identified, and stored on the researchers' password-protected computers at the University. The names of participating organizations in any feedback, reports, or publications will be used only after organizations have consented to it.

In order to administer the online survey, the research team will require a list of employees' email addresses. These can be email aliases which do not reveal the individuals' name (for example, psy3karanm@now.ntu.ac.uk). We will only need these emails for a short period of time in order to set up the online system that will send automated emails to the participants. During this time this information will be treated as strictly confidential and will be accessible only by the research team. Each individual will be allocated a code which will

be used to collate all the data and match responses at different time points. The email addresses and any other potentially identifying information will then be removed.

The data collected through the survey will be analysed using multilevel techniques for longitudinal data in order to answer the main questions of the study.

The study has obtained ethical approval and the researchers adhere to the ethical principles of the British Psychological Society and follow its Guidelines for Professional Practice and Conduct.

Additional Information Required

In order to administer the online survey the research team will need to be able to contact all employees the organization through the online survey facility, as well as a list of the organization's different sites and departments. This information will be handled in accordance with the ethical procedures discussed above.

There is some additional information that organizations can provide. This will make the data collection more efficient and also help to improve the quality of the data collected. This includes the following information: (a) absenteeism data collected by the organizations, (b) health-related data collected (e.g. sickness absence etc), and (c) information on policies and procedures related to health and well-being. All this additional information will help us to examine the organizational context, interpret the findings, and meet the purposes of the study.

Invitation to Participate

We would like to invite you to become involved in this study as one of the participating organizations.

The study will provide an assessment of the organizational context, job characteristics, and health outcomes. As such, the study is in accordance with the Health & Safety Executive's Management Standards for work-related stress. At the end of the study, the research team will provide feedback in two ways: summative feedback relating to the purpose behind the study and the overall findings (at a mini-conference in September 2011) and tailored feedback reports for participating organizations.

Finally, further to the findings being relevant to the academic as well as the practitioner community, the study findings will be developed into practical guidelines for the end users on the management of work-related health and well-being.

Your involvement in this study will help us to develop needed knowledge on the causes and management of health and well-being at work. We would welcome your participation.

The Research Team

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