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Psychological Society

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Division of
Occupational Psychology

Applying the science of psychology to work

Working Group on Health and Well-being in the Workplace Information sheets on health and well-being in the workplace

This document is a series of information sheets designed to provide an introduction to the area of health and well-being at work from the perspective of Occupational Psychology. It is aimed initially at an Occupational Psychology audience as a means of orienting fellow professionals to this domain of practice and research.

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It covers the following:

- **Business case** – provides an overview of the ways in which employee health and well-being benefits society and employers, including some key themes and statistics and sources of further information.
- **National policy** – outlines the context for health and well-being at work in terms of recent national policy reports and initiatives, including links to relevant Government and other websites and a summary of the recommendations.
- **Interventions** – gives a brief introduction to evidenced-based interventions designed to improve health and well-being in the workplace, including links to sources of evidence and practical tools and case studies.
- **Ethics and legislation governing practice** – outlines the ethical codes and legislative frameworks that govern the activities of psychologists working in the field of health at well-being in the workplace, including links to codes of practice and legislation.
- **Research** – provides a brief introduction to the enormous research literature on health and well-being in the workplace, including the current context, background and research questions, together with some introductory texts and sources of information.

Business Case

Key themes

- Improving employee health and well-being has benefits for the economy, society, organisations and individuals, although the business case is insufficiently understood by many employers.
- Good quality work is beneficial for employee health and organisational performance, whilst unhealthy workplaces may directly cause or aggravate pre-existing health problems.
- Employers cannot enforce individual health behaviour changes but they can create the conditions which improve employee health, motivation, engagement and productivity.

Size of the problem

- Ill-health of the working age population costs the UK £100 billion a year¹ with mental ill health alone costing employers £28 billion⁵.
- Average level of employee absence is 7.7 days per year, costing £673 per employee per year⁴.
- Costs associated with 'presenteeism' – when employees attend work when ill – could be 1.5 times more than those of absence, with mental health presenteeism estimated to cost the economy up to £15 billion per year (Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2007).
- Leading causes of absence predicted to rise, with an ageing population increasingly engaging in unhealthy lifestyle behaviours¹.
- NICE estimate that effective management of mental health in an organisation with 100 employees could save £250,000 per year⁵.
- An estimated 10.8 million working days were lost through work-related stress, depression or anxiety. On average, this equates to an annual loss of 0.46 days per worker. The CIPD (2011) report on Sickness Absence found that stress is now the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK.

Benefits to organisations

- Evidence suggests that improving employee health and well-being and/or providing good jobs can have the following benefits (please refer to the source for more information):

Increased employee commitment, motivation, job satisfaction and engagement ^{1 3 5}	Improved patient satisfaction, hospital performance and lower infection rates (NHS) ⁴
Increased productivity ^{1 5}	Enhanced brand/reputation ⁵
Attraction & retention of staff ⁵	Fewer accidents ¹
Less working time lost due to absence ^{1 4}	Reduced costs associated with absence ^{1 4 5}

Sources and further information

- 1) Health, Work and Well-being is a government-led initiative to improve employee health and well-being. Its website contains reports and tools illustrating the business case, including Black's 2008 review of the health of the working age population: www.workingforhealth.gov.uk.
- 2) BITC has launched a new campaign which aims to create the most engaged workforce in the world. The campaign is called the 'Workwell Campaign' and it provides a model that employers can use to promote greater engagement. The website also has a range of other toolkits that could be useful to organisations looking to improve overall well-being. www.bitc.org.uk/workplace/health_and_wellbeing/healthy_workplace_model/
- 3) The Boorman Review made the case for improving health and well-being in the NHS: www.nhshealthandwellbeing.org.
- 4) The CIPD annual absence survey reports on rates, costs and causes of absence: www.cipd.co.uk.
- 5) NICE's guidance on promoting mental well-being at work includes a report on the business case and an ROI calculator: <http://guidance.nice.org.uk>.
- 6) HSE annual statistics for stress and psychological disorders. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/index.htm>

National Policy

Context

- The Foresight project on mental capital and well-being, Working for a Healthier Tomorrow (Dame Carol Black's report) and NICE Guidance on promoting mental well-being at work have given a national policy impetus to health and well-being at work.
 - The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) developed the "Stress management Standards". The HSE also developed a questionnaire (available from their website) for assessing risk.
- ## Key themes
- Several key themes emerge from the reports mentioned above:
 - The relationships between psychological and physical health.
 - The significant costs and potential benefits to the economy, including sickness absence, employee turnover and performance.
 - The business case linking better employee health and well-being with organisational performance.
 - The key role that management and leadership plays in determining employee health and well-being

Sources

- The Foresight project on mental capital and well-being has produced many reports, including a set of science reviews focusing on evidence concerning psychological well-being at work: www.foresight.gov.uk
- Improving health and work: changing lives - the Government's response to Working for a Healthier Tomorrow, Dame Carol Black's Review of the health of Britain's working age population. This report, Dame Carol's original report and a report from the Royal College of Psychiatrists reviewing mental health and work are all available at: www.workingforhealth.gov.uk.
- The Government called for a major review of the sickness absence system in Great Britain in order to help combat the 140 million days lost to sickness absence every year. The review was jointly chaired by David Frost, former Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce and Dame Carol Black, National Director for Health and Work and published November 2011. <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/sickness-absence-absence-review/>

- The Department of Health Coalition for Better Health brings together organisations serious about tackling big health and well-being challenges. The initial focus will be on: alcohol, work & health, obesity and physical activity:
www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicHealth/HealthImprovement/Healthyliving/CoalitionforBetterHealth/index.
 - In December 2009 the government launched a series of new reports focus on mental health, including "Realising Ambition: Better employment support for people with a mental health problem and Work
www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/legislation-and-key-documents/realising-ambitions-and-Recovery-and-Inclusion – a cross government delivery plan for England:
www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/socialinclusiontaskforce/psa/supportingdelivery/york-recovery-inclusion.
 - A related government-sponsored report, "Engaging for Success – enhancing performance through employee engagement" is also relevant: www.berr.gov.uk. This report has also been accepted by the government.
 - Useful information, including the results from a survey of over 11,000 NHS employees is available in Dr Steve Boorman's report on staff health and well-being in the NHS: www.nhshealthandwellbeing.org.
 - NICE Guidance on improving mental well-being at work: www.nice.org.uk.
 - HSE website: www.hse.gov.uk/stress.
- ## Initiatives to improve health and well-being
- Within the reports and in Government responses several specific initiatives are recommended:
 - Organisations should take a strategic approach to health and well-being with responsibility residing at board level (e.g. NICE, Boorman Report)
 - Regular assessments of employee psychological well-being should be made (e.g. using a survey tool) e.g. (Foresight, NICE)
 - Managers should have health and well-being key performance indicator: (e.g. Foresight, Boorman)
 - Leaders and managers should be trained and developed to deal with health and well-being issues (All reports)
 - Organisations should take a broad view of employee engagement – to include health and well-being (e.g. Boorman)

Interventions

Key themes

- Occupational psychologists are well placed to support organisations in improving the health and well-being of their employees
- A number of recent reports have identified evidence-based interventions that can improve employee health and well-being, resulting in benefits for the individual, the organisation and society.

Role of Occupational Psychologists

- Practitioners can ensure that organisations take an evidence-based approach to improving employee health and well-being
- Researchers can contribute by growing the body of evidence on the effectiveness of workplace intervention

Evidence for effectiveness of interventions

- Evidence on the effectiveness of interventions is mixed, partly due to the questionable quality of research to date.
- Reviews carried out for the Foresight project⁶, National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)⁵ and the Post-2010 strategic review of health inequalities⁷ have concluded that evidence supports the following interventions:

Work context	Management style, organisational justice, workplace support, participation, communication
Work content	Job demands, control, effort-reward balance, working schedules, fulfilment, job stability
Individual	Psychological flexibility, social resources

Sources of evidence

- NICE have provided guidance, on a number of work-related topics including smoking cessation, mental well-being, physical activity and managing long-term sickness absence. The guidance, and associated evidence reviews, are at: <http://guidance.nice.org.uk>.
- The Foresight project on mental capital and well-being includes a set of science reviews on well-being at work: www.foresight.gov.uk.
- A paper for the Post-2010 strategic review of health inequalities, led by Sir Michael Marmot for Department of Health, summarised the workplace interventions that are supported by evidence: www.ucl.ac.uk/qheg/marmotreview.
- The Institute for Employment Studies reviewed evidence assessing the effectiveness of workplace interventions to prevent common mental health problems: www.employment-studies.co.uk/pubs/report.php?id=whwe1107
- LSE conducted an in depth analysis of Royal Mail's approach to improving employee health and well-being: www.royalmailgroup.com/valueofrudefhealth

Practical tools and case studies

- HSE host a number of tools to help employers address work-related stress including the management standards (to identify organisational sources of stress) and the stress management competencies (line manager behaviour: to prevent/reduce stress). The site also includes case studies: www.hse.gov.uk/stress.
- Health, Work and Well-being is a government-led initiative to improve employee health and well-being. Its website contains reports, practical tools links and a number of case studies: www.workingforhealth.gov.uk.
- Business in the Community's campaign to highlight the business benefits to health and well-being at work includes a number of case studies: www.bitc.org.uk
- The Vocational Rehabilitation Association website provides information on interventions to bring people back into the workplace following injury and illness: www.vra-uk.org/

Ethics and legislation governing practice

The role of the occupational psychologist is to protect and support working people and the organisations that employ them and to stimulate healthy, creative development and change. Ways in which we can improve health and well-being include:

- Helping organisations achieve a good fit between person and job.
- Helping people perform at their best.
- Designing safe work environments
- Providing rehabilitation advice and support.
- Resolving conflict and supporting people and organisations under pressure.
- Developing organisational culture so health and well-being are considered important management priorities.
- Increasing knowledge through research.

We have the ability to assess, to decide the most suitable intervention and to evaluate the impact of any action taken. Day to day challenges facing occupational psychologists and organisations include:

- **Ethics** – occupational psychologists face complex and often competing responsibilities towards organisations and the people who work for them. We are governed by codes of conduct notably:
 - British Psychological Society (BPS)
 - Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC)

The BPS expects members to be guided by these codes in their work as a psychologist and in resolving ethical dilemmas. The BPS does not settle allegations about the fitness to practise of its members: these matters are referred to the HCPC and are covered by its Standards of Conduct Performance and Ethics

- **Legislation** – various important pieces of legislation shape how we work, including:
 - **The Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998** – sets out guidelines about how we deal with confidential client information. Further information from The Information Commissioner's Office www.ico.gov.uk.
 - **The Equality Act 2010** recasts diversity law as a coherent whole bringing disability, sex, race, religion and other strands of discrimination together. More information can be found at The

Equality and Human Rights Commission – www.equalityhumanrights.com

- **The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974** and the **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999** These outline the employer's and employees' health and safety responsibilities. www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/hsc13.pdf . A recommendation of the **Young Report "Common Sense Common Safety"** published October 2010 is a review of health and safety law. Others include restricting the growth of the "compensation culture" and validating the qualification of health and safety consultants www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/lordyoung
- The **Working Time Regulations (1998)** - guidance on the working time regulations can be found on Directgov for workers or employees and businesslink.gov.uk for employers or businesses.
- **Agency Workers Regulations (AWR)** Agency workers must have access to all facilities and job vacancies from day one with a hirer and equal treatment to basic entitlements such as pay and annual leave after completing a 12 week qualifying period in the same job with the same hirer <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/employment-matters/docs/a/11-949-agency-workers-regulations-guide>
- **Know-How** - the following organisations can provide more information:
 - Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) www.cipd.co.uk
 - Health and Safety Executive (HSE) www.hse.gov.uk
 - Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) www.iosh.co.uk
 - Institute of Occupational Medicine (IOM) www.iom-world.org
 - Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors www.ergonomics.org.uk
 - The British Standards Institution (BSI) - www.bsigroup.co.uk

Research

What is the current context for the research agenda?

- Increasing shift from disorder and dysfunction to focus on well-being and positive mental health.
- A shift from physical to psychological work stressors as former have decreased and the latter increased.
- Established relationships between well-being and business outcomes.
- Well-being–related issues associated with the ever more complex 21st Century world of work, including: increased outsourcing and contracting, increased number of SMEs, increased health & safety focus due to litigation fears, impact of remote working.

Health and work – Background knowledge & assumptions

- Work offers opportunities to promote individual health and well-being.
- Work must be recognised as important and beneficial: access to, and retention of, work improves the overall health of the population.
- Long-term sickness absence is a strong predictor of disability and mortality and a consequence of poor psychological well-being.
- Work can have a positive impact on health and well-being ('good jobs' in well managed organisations).
- Management and leadership are important influences on well-being
- Under some circumstances work has adverse effects ('bad jobs').
- Knowledge of the workplace factors that affect psychological well-being is quite well developed (e.g. control, demand, resources).
- The key is prevention of underlying causes (e.g. managing workplace factors), rather than relying just on management of outcomes with secondary & tertiary interventions (e.g. as counselling).

Key research questions for Occupational Psychology

- Definition and measurement of employee health & well-being: where does psychological well-being fit in?
- What are the relationships between psychological and physical well-being at work?
- What are the relationships between psychological well-being and other job and work attitudes, such as job satisfaction, employee engagement and organisational commitment?
- What are the relationships between psychological well-being and business outcomes (e.g. absenteeism, sickness absence, productivity, customer/user satisfaction)?
- What cultural/climate factors impact on psychological well-being at work?

- How can management of the workplace factors be used to improve well-being at work, including, the exploring the impact of specific factors such as leadership, working hours, technology, job insecurity, risk and rewards?
- What behaviour change interventions, including training and development (e.g. resilience training, stress management training, leadership and management development), improve psychological well-being at work?
- How should selection and placement models and assessment processes incorporate psychological well-being at work as a criterion?
- How can ideas from positive psychology be incorporated into the well-being agenda?
- Understanding the above issues in relation to different groups and sectors (e.g. senior managers, service sector, etc.)

Selection of research sources

- Cartwright, S. and Cooper C.L. (Eds) (2009) *Oxford Handbook of Organizational Well-Being*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
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