

## **Employees' Well-Being in Organizational Studies**

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### **Abstract**

*Employees' well-being is critical to the survival and development of organisations. It has emerged as an important research topic in organisational behaviour and related areas focussing on individuals' perceptions of the events that occur in the workplace. The paper focuses first on conceptualizing well-being, by discussing traditional and more recent organizing frameworks. Then it provides an integrated view of individual, contextual and organisational-related factors influencing well-being of workers.*

**Keywords:** well-being; organizational behavior; theoretical framework; workers.

### **1. Introduction**

Organisational behaviour scholars use and apply psychological, sociological, economic and organisational perspectives in order to understand and predict the determinants of human behaviour (Knights & Willmott, 2007; Tosi & Pilati, 2011). These studies attempt to illustrate how individual behaviour in organisations is related to important key elements: the work environment, personal traits, behaviour and the consequences of behaviour. Organisational behaviour management aims to create a link between performance and satisfaction, by understanding the behaviours of individuals, groups and organisations. People's attitudes towards work and organisational commitment are two important elements in terms of competitive advantage of organisation, performance, job satisfaction and well-being. It is not always easy to change attitudes to increase job satisfaction. That's why many organisations enable periodic climate analysis to understand employees' attitudes towards job attributes, policies, reward systems, progression of career, training, leadership style, organisational structure, in order to enhance their well-being.

Employees' well-being (EWB) is critical to the survival and development of organisations, and it has emerged as an important research topic in organisational behaviour and related areas focussing on individuals' perceptions of the events that occur in the workplace (Sonnentag & Ilies, 2011; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Ilies, 2012).

Today, work is a vital part of most people's lives, and, in turn, it exerts a great deal of influence on their well-being. Workplace situations differ greatly from general life situations; thus, the concept of employee well-being must be distinguished from general well-being. Because of the broad domain in literature, there is in fact a variation in the meaning and definition attributed to the term well-being. In the past this term referred to the absence of disease, thus referring mostly to physical health. In time, the term has acquired a broader meaning, involving the physical (general health, health-related behaviours), and psychological (mental illness, stress, self-efficacy, self-esteem, affective well-being) health at work (De Simone, 2014a). So far, scholars have not reached a consensus on the definition of employees' well-being, a term for which everyone understands the meaning but nobody can give a precise definition. Psychological well-being and subjective well-being or job satisfaction have often been used as proxies to represent employees' overall well-being in organisations.

Literature representing a variety of professional fields, such as psychology, medicine, and organisation behaviour, has contributed to a unified understanding of well-being in the workplace. The real importance of well-being for scholars, researchers, managers, and executives is quite evident, given the link to the everyday work and life experiences of all organisational members. In fact, employees spend a great amount of their time at work, and in some cases they do not necessarily leave the job behind when they leave the worksite (Conrad, 1988). Second, a low level of well-being can potentially affect both workers and organisations in negative ways. Workers whose levels of well-being are reported to be low may be less productive and more prone to being absent from work; in addition, their ability to make high-quality decisions and overall contributions to their organisations may be diminished (Price & Hooijberg, 1992).

The general concept of well-being in the workplace comprises both life and work aspects (e.g. non-work satisfaction enjoyed by individuals, work/job-related satisfaction, and general health), thus involving physical, emotional, mental, and social aspects (De Simone, 2014a).

The measurement of EWB should not only take employees' work and health into consideration but also assess employees' life satisfaction (Siegrist & al., 2006). Lu et al. (2006) divided EWB into work satisfaction, family satisfaction, life satisfaction, and positive emotions, whereas other researchers maintain that EWB should include negative emotions in the workplace (Diener & Ryan, 2011).

## 2. *The well-being at work: literature review*

Well-being in the workplace has increasingly become a common topic in scholarly research journals (Cooper & Marshall, 1978; Smith, Kaminstein & Makadok, 1995; Danna & Griffin, 1999; Warr, 1990) since it may have direct consequences for both individuals and organisations. A number of context-specific measures and models have been developed to specifically assess well-being at work. Historically, many researchers have assessed employee job satisfaction, either globally or as a summation of satisfaction with various job domains (Spector, 1997). Some researchers have suggested using the measures of employees' work-related affect (Daniels, 2000; Warr, 1990) to replace typical job satisfaction measures.

For many organisational scholars the studies on well-being derive from motivation theories. These theories have, in fact, introduced the basic concepts for the study of well-being, because they attempt to understand the reasons why people behave as they do, and the processes that cause the behaviour (De Simone, Franco & al. 2022).

Other research on well-being has derived from two general perspectives: the hedonic approach, which focuses on happiness and defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance; and the eudemonic approach, which focuses on meaning and self-realization and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning (Ryan, Deci, 2001).

It is very clear that well-being at work is multidimensional (Page, & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Grant, Christianson, & Price, 2007). Many concepts and measure used in organisational behaviour appear to straddle different dimensions of well-being, including job satisfaction, job involvement, affective organisational commitment, work engagement, positive and negative emotions and moods at work, intrinsic motivation, thriving, and vigor (Fisher, 2010). The separate aspects of well-being, including subjective, eudaimonic and social wellbeing, might fit together to comprise overall well-being in the workplace. *Subjective well-being* refers to individuals' overall assessment of their quality of life based on their own personal standards (Diener, 2000). It includes two basic elements: life satisfaction, or the perception of the quality of one's life, and emotional experience, including positive and negative emotions (Diener, 2000; De Simone, 2014b). Researchers have proposed that *subjective well-being* comprises three major components: high-level positive emotions, low-level negative emotions, and overall satisfaction with life (Busseri, Sadava, & Decourville, 2007). A number of constructs in organisational behaviour display overlap at least partially with *eudaimonic well-being*. These include job involvement, work engagement, thriving, flow and intrinsic motivation, meaning in work. *Social well-being* at work has received the least attention in organisational literature. It consists of feeling embedded in meaningful communities and having satisfying short term interactions and long term relationships with others. Spreitzer et al. (2005) explain that quality connections to others at work in a climate of trust and respect is integrally related to eudaimonic well-being as it enables growth and thriving. Individuals are more engaged at work when their leader cares about them as a person. Social well-being includes satisfaction with peers as well as satisfaction and exchange relationships with leaders. Another relevant construct is social support, having two main dimensions such as emotional support and instrumental support. Giving as well as receiving social support is a predictor of well-being. An additional aspect of social well-being at work might include feelings of belonging to and being embedded in work communities, be they teams or the whole organisation.

Consistent with the traditional organisational framework (Cooper & Marshall, 1978; Smith, Kaminstein, & Makadok, 1995; Danna & Griffin, 1999), the concept of well-being in the workplace is seen as comprising the various life/non-work satisfactions enjoyed by individuals, work/job-related satisfactions, and general health.

Following from War (1990) well-being tends to be a broader concept that takes into consideration the "whole person". Beyond specific physical or psychological symptoms related to health, well-being should be used as appropriate to include context-free measures of life experiences (life satisfaction, happiness), and within the organisational research to include job-related experiences (job satisfaction, job attachment), as well as more facet-specific dimensions. Well-being can refer to the mental, psychological, or emotional aspects of workers.

Well-being in the workplace can have direct implications for individuals (i.e. physical, psychological, and behavioural consequences) and direct implications for organisations (i.e. health insurance costs, productivity, and absenteeism) (Danna & Griffin, 1999). The main physical consequences at the individual level are clearly related to consequences at the organisational level (De Simone, 2015). Many interventions targeted at the organisational and individual levels have been implemented in an attempt to improve the safety and working conditions in the workplace, alleviate or lessen the potential occupational stressors, or improve the individual's coping mechanisms with these stressors.

This, in turn, should correlate to increased employee well-being and health with concomitant improvements in individual and organisational consequences. Thus, employee well-being is grounded on three main areas: individual aspects; work setting-related aspects; occupational stress (organisational climate/context aspects).

In order to explain the influence of individual, context and organisational factors on the well-being in workplace, it is interesting to combine the framework by Danna and Griffin (1999) with the assumptions of the job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & al., 2004; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). According to the JD-R theory, employee well-being is a function of the work environment and, in turn, the work environment is identified by two categories of job characteristics, namely job demands and job resources. While job demands are aspects of the job requiring energy, job resources are aspects of the job that have motivational potential.

### 3. An organized framework of employee well-being

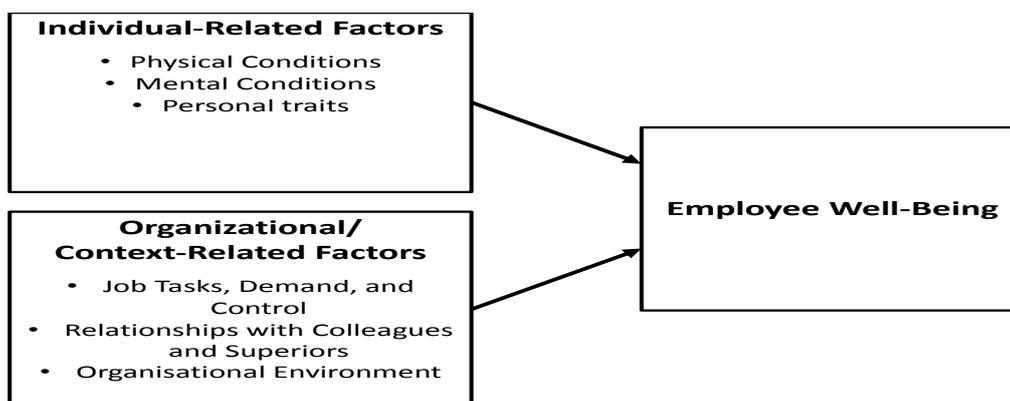
Considering the framework by Danna and Griffin (1999) combined with the assumptions of the JD-R theory, the level of well-being is influenced by both context and organisational aspects and in addition by the personality (De Simone, Franco, & al. 2022). Employee well-being is related to the work environment and the work environment is characterized by job aspects, including job demands and job resources. Job demands require considerable energy (e.g. workload and task complexity). Differently, job resources are motivational factors (e.g. autonomy, opportunities for growth and performance feedback).

The effects on motivation and employee performance of these job characteristics are opposite to each other: while job demands often result in strain and reduced performance, job resources are most likely to result in work engagement and excellent performance. Job demands can be straining and energy demanding, mainly when job resources available are limited. In contrast, when there is an abundance of job resources available, the impact of job demands on strain is buffered (De Simone, Franco, & al. 2022). Moreover, JD-R theory argues that when there are sufficient job resources, job demands may boost employee work engagement and performance.

Exhaustion and work engagement fluctuate from day to day, depending on job demands and resources, which also depend on what employees do from day to day (Bakker, 2015). The daily variability of job demands and job resources generates loss and gain cycles that may impact on the level of well-being and employee performance differently. These cycles depend closely on job demands and resources that employees select or mobilize from day to day; in turn, this choice is highly influenced by personality (Bakker, 2015). Personality traits play a role in determining the extent to which any given individual will display indicators of high or low levels of health and well-being in a given organisational setting. The most widely researched personality factors are Type A behaviour pattern and locus of control (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Type A behaviour pattern generally means that the individual is hard driving, competitive, job involved, and hostile. Measures of locus of control focus on perceived control: people with a so-called “internal locus of control” believe their own behaviours are the primary determinants of what happens to them; people with an “external locus of control” believe that external influence, such as luck or powerful others, are more important determinants of what happens in their lives. The five-factor model of personality can be also used to describe the most salient aspects of personality (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Emotional Stability) and their impact on well-being (Bakker, 2015). Referring to the five-factor model, personal traits have a moderating effect on work environment and they are expected to be able to boost work environment effects on motivation and performance in both a positive and negative way.

Figure 1 identifies the specific aspects for the individual, work setting-related and organisational areas that are critical to employee well-being, according to Danna and Griffin (1999) combined with the assumptions of the JD-R theory (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Bakker, 2015).

Figure 1 - Framework of well-being factors



The main factors influencing employee well-being can be distinguished into individual and organisational/context-related factors. In turn, individual related factors may refer to physical and mental conditions, while organisational/context-related factors may refer to job tasks, demand and control, relationships with colleagues and superiors, and organisational environment. Factors affecting the well-being of workers can have a reciprocal influence, as the presence of some contextual factors may generate the presence of individual factors (e.g. the influence of work duration and shift work on physical exhaustion); on the other hand, individual factors may influence organizational/contextual factors (e.g. depression and stress may lead to perceived role uncertainty and conflict with colleagues and superiors).

In addition, personal traits and resources have a great influence over factors perceived as negative to well-being. Personal resources (e.g. self-efficacy, organisation-based self-esteem, and optimism) were found to partly mediate the relationship between job resources and work engagement (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007), and provide individuals with the ability to control and impact their environment successfully (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004).

An integrated view of factors influencing well-being could better help organisations in searching for overall solutions for dealing with employee malaise. A combination of organisational, professional, and individual factors interact to determine the EWB.

#### 4. Conclusions

Today human resources are at the centre of work organisation and they contribute significantly to the achievement of organisational performance. Increasing interest has been focus on understanding that human resource management has to be at the core of any sustainable solution to improve employee well-being. This paper highlights the importance of conceptualizing employee well-being as a combination of individual, organisational and context-related factors that can vary based on the different personal traits of individuals. All these factors are important when assessing employee well-being. The real challenge for organisations is not to consider EWB as something fixed, since a high level of complexity characterizes both work contexts and individual characteristics.

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