



TIGHTENING THE LINK BETWEEN WELLBEING AND PERFORMANCE

The important role managers play in promoting wellbeing

Effective managers help you thrive at work by:

1. Setting clear goals and sharing where the organisation is heading and why.
2. Giving you adequate support and resources.
3. Giving you help, encouragement and feedback.
4. Reacting to success and failure with a learning orientation.

Ineffective managers drain your work of meaning by:

1. Minimising the importance of your contribution.
2. Eroding your sense of ownership of what you do.
3. Making you feel your contribution is irrelevant or even useless.
4. Neglecting to keep you informed when things change or there are new priorities.

What is 'wellbeing' and how does it apply to the workplace?

Research teams around the world have looked closely at what's involved in living a life that helps you feel content and satisfied. But they have moved away from simply looking at happiness. Feeling 'happy' is all too often a fleeting sensation, hard to pin down and even harder to influence. Inevitably, there are ups and downs in every life and some days will always be better than others. Instead, focusing on how you can thrive will give you an underlying sense of wellbeing, enabling you to deal with challenges in a resilient way.

Five elements have been identified as contributing to this sense of wellbeing. The first is 'positive emotions' - feeling that you have a lot to be grateful for in your life and that you look to the future optimistically. Another concerns relationships - knowing there are people you care about and who also care about you. But it's perhaps the other three elements that have particular relevance, both to your workplace and to your career more broadly. They are the belief that what you do is worthwhile; that you are able to progress goals that matter to you; and, lastly, that you're able to use your strengths and interests in ways you find absorbing and engaging.

How can your workplace support your wellbeing?

An important feature of a healthy work environment is whether you are able to be fully engaged in your job *and* in your home life. Your job demands are not excessive and you don't feel you have to sacrifice a personal life in order to perform well. In addition, you feel valued and that your job is a good fit with your abilities and interests.

Three indicators of a positive workplace have been identified. First, you have an appropriate level of control over what you do and how you do it. Second, the organisational culture is supportive. It is an inclusive, equitable and humane place to work, with zero tolerance of bullying or harassment. Third, there is supervisory support for employee wellbeing and leading a balanced life. In other words, your immediate manager knows how to cultivate positive and supportive relationships with their direct reports.

This last finding about the vital role played by supervisors highlights the importance of providing training in how to be this kind of supportive manager. A study compared the productivity and performance of divisions where managers had received such training versus others which had not. Where managers had learned the specific behaviours known to have an impact on wellbeing, team members reported feeling happier and more satisfied. There was also evidence of greater productivity, higher performance and lower turnover, as well as better morale, reduced accident rates and less absenteeism. The box at the side indicates the type of

supervision skills shown to help - and hinder - employee wellbeing. But there's little doubt that such findings also present a challenge for some organisations because of the need to change attitudes about what constitutes a 'good' manager.

Negative impacts on wellbeing at work

Certain factors in the modern workplace are known to erode employee well-being. First among these is the damage caused by feeling that your job is precarious. When things feel unpredictable, then loyalty and engagement decrease and well-being is reduced. In many sectors, the psychological contract between employer and employee has been weakened by globalisation and economic transition, including underemployment and skill obsolescence.

There is also evidence of understaffing and 'overwork cultures'. In many places, the new hyper-connected world means that there is an implicit expectation that employees are available 24/7. This encourages 'workaholism' and work addiction. In this context, it is important to stress that simply tacking on 'wellbeing programs' (such as lunch time yoga, healthy canteen food or free massages) without addressing an underlying toxic workplace culture is no more than window dressing. The responsibility is inappropriately diverted to the individual and, unsurprisingly, such programs fail to deliver actual wellbeing. Wellbeing programs need to be an enrichment not a PR exercise.

Some positive developments

But there are some positive recent developments that do support well-being. Perhaps the most important of these is alternative work schedules and the opportunity to work flexibly. Technology, which carries the risks mentioned above, can also give employees more control, choice and opportunity. These are all factors strongly linked to well-being, enabling people to integrate, for example, work and family responsibilities in ways that best suit them.

The link between productivity and wellbeing

If organisations can create congruence in the line of sight between employer goals and employee interests, then fostering well-being becomes simpler, with the additional outcomes of greater productivity and profitability. Employees need to believe that they will benefit financially and psychologically if the organisation is successful. As we stress in this briefing, the conditions for this are that, as an employee, you feel valued; you have a career path which is fairly rewarded; you don't have to sacrifice your personal life and you can develop the skills you need to help you stay employable. It turns out that a high performing culture is also a caring culture and happier people really do work harder. But for wellbeing to be more than a fad, you need to focus on manager behaviours, not just glossy programs!