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HAPPY WORKPLACE?

ROBERTSON, I. & C. COOPER (2011) *Well-Being: Productivity and Happiness at Work* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan) 224 pp., 15 x 25,5 cm, ISBN 978-0-230-24995-0, \$ 50.

Robertson and Cooper's work is a book which fills a gap. Although many articles and books are preoccupied with psychological well-being, very few place focus specifically on well-being at the workplace. The book tells us about the new findings and knowledge about this topic in a clear, transparent, plain style, but at the same time with scientific standards. The authors seek to define the concept of well-being from the perspective of the workplace and the staff, its influencing factors, benefits and possibilities of improvement. A very positive aspect of the book is that the authors are aware of both the individual and organisational benefits of psychological well-being (PWB). Although they give us some specific examples, the whole book is about workplace-well-being in general, without focusing on a specific profession.

The book contains five parts, each one focusing on a question related to well-being. Part 1 talks about 'why well-being matters' for individuals and for organisations, and about the links between well-being and employee engagement. The importance of well-being at the workplace is emphasised by the authors already in the first sentence: 'Work can make you sick and work can make you happy. Which one happens depends on who you are, what you do and how you are treated at work' (p. 3). Here the 'who you are' refers to the personality-traits, which are considered to be one of the most important factors of PWB. The 'what you do' is about thriving, resilience and one's engagement with the work, in other words the individual's contribution to PWB. The 'how you are treated at work' concept covers the contextual factors existing at the workplace which influence the employee's PWB. In this first part of the book Robertson and Cooper emphasise the delimitation and clarification of some concepts used in the area of well-being, like 'PWB', 'job satisfaction', 'motivation', 'engagement', 'happiness'. For example, 'job satisfaction' and PWB at the workplace are not the same, because it is possible that an individual is satisfied with their job, but unhappy with the relationships they have with the members of the staff. The authors present the relations between these concepts carefully, and treat the findings referring to the links between PWB and biochemical responses (for example the secretion of cortisol and interleukin) with caution, due to small sample sizes and the lack of representativity of population. The authors use a complex approach when analysing the factors that have implications in PWB: they establish a hedonic factor

(money and material goods) and an eudaimonic factor (the purpose and meaning of life and work). The well-known relation between wealth and well-being is reinforced: in a survey, where people were asked to rank their sense of well-being, the American millionaires' average score was 5.8 and that of the slum dwellers was 4.6, which means that after reaching a point, well-being is independent of the existence of material goods, and it possibly depends more on meaning and purpose that people have in their life or work. Regarding the benefits that PWB of employees give to organisations, the concept of productivity is most analysed, which shows a linear positive correlation with PWB. The ideal work-pressure is analysed as well, which is not too weak and not too strong, avoiding both rust-out and burnout. The ideal quantity of pressure is related both to positive PWB and good performance. The authors draw attention to the fact that with the improvement of the employees' well-being, simultaneously is improved the organisation itself through the increase of productivity, the decrease of absenteeism and the quality of work. Talking about employee engagement and its relation to PWB, the authors try to define the concept of engagement in a clear manner. They report this topic from the very business-focused view of Robinson et al., where engagement is a 'positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation' (p.28). In the conceptualisation of Csíkszentmihályi, the engagement of workers is characterised by positive emotions. Engagement is replaced by an emotional state during work, which is ideal when the state of 'flow' arises. Although authors make a clear delimitation of different views on this topic, maybe it would be useful to detach the concept of engagement to the profession from the concept of engagement to the organisation, because it is possible that someone is engaged to their job due to pragmatic motivations, but the profession itself isn't the profession which makes them happy and in which they would like to engage, independent of contextual factors.

Part 2 is about the concept of well-being. The title of this part is 'What is Well-being?', but here it really refers to psychological well-being. Robertson and Cooper talk about PWB from the perspective of the typical dichotomy in this field: dividing the PWB into the hedonic and eudaimonic aspects. The hedonic part of well-being contains positive emotions, the eudaimonic aspect covers the meaningfulness of life or of work. Part 2 also contains a chapter focusing on the very important topic of the measurement of well-being. The authors, with a policy-focused view, argue this way: 'In fact, being able to measure is important, not just for understanding what might change after an intervention but, in the case of PWB, accurate measurement is even more important in deciding what needs to happen to improve things' (p.51). Robertson and Cooper suggest that researchers should use self-report questionnaires in the assessment of psychological well-being. It remains a question for us whether the other methods and techniques could be mentioned as 'additional information'-gathering methods, and if it could be stated that 'The self-report questionnaire approach is the only realistic method for collecting reliable information about levels of PWB

within organisation' (p.62). It seems to ignore the validity of the qualitative approach, which, in many cases, can yield deep and psychologically relevant information about one's well-being, which isn't possible by using the questionnaires. We should take into consideration that quantitative methods aren't absolutely realistic in every situation. Every research is conducted by a researcher or a group of researchers, who have their perspectives, norms, (in the worst cases, also interests) and hypothetical arguments which could influence their research, merely due to the questions of research and goal-settings, thus also influencing the results. Maybe the question is not which is the 'only realistic' method, but in which cases, in which steps of the research should we use the self-report questionnaires and when should we use the interviews or narratives, for example. I agree with the authors' making a distinction between the hedonic and the eudaimonic approach and that this should be the starting point for thinking about the measurement of PWB. It seems to be a very useful approach, when they say 'a comprehensive assessment of PWB at work would need to focus on both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of PWB' (p. 54), and I find it good that they use the ASSET model (A Shortened Stress Evaluation Tool, an organisation-wide audit tool) 'for measuring and understanding the role of PWB in the workplace' (p. 54). The original questionnaire focused on psychological ill-health, and Robertson and Cooper have enhanced the tool so positive emotional experiences, purpose and meaning can also be measured this way to be more useful in measuring PWB at the workplace.

Part 3 is about the influencing factors of well-being, like personality traits and working conditions or work context. In this part Robertson and Cooper report several very interesting research findings which show that inherited personality traits explain variations in PWB at the workplace, evidently in interaction with situational and contextual factors. For example, the tendency to experience positive emotions is an inherited personality trait. Being likely to experience positive feelings makes it more likely to be satisfied with one's job. This could be explained by Arvey's research (ARVEY et al. 1991) which had concluded that job satisfaction is inherited. The very important role of personality could be explained by the fact that underlying personality traits determine people's reactions to events and workplace stressors. In regard to this relationship, it seems to be a very important question whether personality traits or working conditions have the main influence on PWB. It is clearly stated by the authors that there are two personality traits which are most strongly related to PWB: neuroticism (negative correlation) and extraversion (positive correlation). They also use the concept of 'set point' for PWB that is relatively stable for each person and it is influenced by personality. Contextual factors and working conditions are taken into consideration, as they could increase or decrease PWB, but it has the tendency to return to the set point. In conclusion, authors sustain that PWB is not directly influenced by genetic factors, only the personality traits are inherited, and these personality traits, mostly neuroticism and extraversion have an impact on PWB, and the interaction between inherited and contextual factors 'has the biggest part to play' (p. 71). There are four main factors that have the biggest influence on PWB at the

workplace: work and its context (work demands, access to resources and equipment, effectiveness of communication in the organisation), relationships at work and work-home interface (relationship with colleagues and social support), purpose and meaning (clarity about work-goals, feeling that work-goals are worthwhile) and leadership, management and supervision (the impact that the manager has on the workgroup; leadership commitment to employees' PWB). The authors also clarify the impact of social and personal life on PWB and emphasise the importance of balance between personal and working life, as well as between working periods and resting periods.

Part 4 also contains the dichotomy of the individual and the organisational view: one chapter talks about the possibilities of the individual's development of well-being and resilience, and the second chapter talks about the organisational benefits of this. Robertson and Cooper have previously divided the workplace factors which influence the PWB into four main clusters: work and its context, relationships at work and the work-home interface, purpose and meaning, leadership, management and supervision. They show us in a systematic style the possibilities of improving well-being at the workplace, the levels of intervention, and establishing a strategic approach for building a healthy workplace. As far as the development of individual factors (for example, resilience) is concerned, the authors find it possible, because while personality traits are stable and could be very hard to change, our ways of thinking and behaviour can be developed. The best example for this is the development of attributional style, presented by the authors in a well-displayed figure: a positive attitude both in successes and failures results in positive thinking and resilience, a negative attitude has the opposite effect not only in case of failures but in successes too. The attributional or explanatory style can be developed and can result in a better PWB. The authors also present the three levels of PWB interventions: on the primary level the aim is to enhance work situation factors, the secondary level is about the development of individual skills and resilience, as well as the augmentation of management, and the tertiary level provides support or treatment for individuals experiencing low levels of PWB without making changes in the organisation.

Part 5 contains nine case studies analysing different aspects of well-being at the workplace and at different workplaces. One case describes an intervention program that includes the use of a well-being audit and follow-up management development activity, three of the cases report the implementation of some well-being programs in specific organisations, two chapters offer general guidance on the introduction of health and well-being initiatives, one case study describes the introduction of a comprehensive well-being program developed after a well-being audit, and the last case describes the introduction of a well-being theme into a leadership development program. Each case study is well structured, with an initial overview, a background of the case, and after this, the approach of the well-being-building intervention and its outcomes. Every case study is concluded with the summarised evaluation of the intervention.

The most important contribution of Robertson and Cooper's book to the scientific analysis of the psychological well-being is that they summarise the findings and

relationships of PWB from the perspective of workplace factors in one book. It is a systematic and elaborated work on the topic of workplace PWB. This book could also be a starting point for many researches in this field. For example, the evolution of engagement should be investigated with qualitative methods (e.g. focused interviews) and the steps which could be determined through work careers and the contextual factors determining these steps. Parts 4 and 5 contain many suggestions for organisations to ameliorate their employees' well-being, and at the same time their own productivity too.

References

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