The well-being and productivity link: a significant opportunity for research-into-practice

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to position well-being as a necessary component of the productivity debate and highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the nature of such a link. It first considers productivity at the national level in order to show how this affects both the climate and the economic policies within which organisations operate.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper presents an overview of current research and practice in the area. It treats the organisation as the primary level of analysis, and before highlights some of the apparent challenges in conceptualising well-being.

Findings – The importance of well-being is rising up national and employer agendas. Organisations need people to perform at their best in a sustainable way. The paper argues that an organisation with well-being at its core will reap productivity gains. It supports the view in the literature that improvements at national level can only be made on the back of sophisticated strategies across numerous organisations. However, for this to happen shared actions and understanding of these challenges has first to be created and acted upon across institutions and organisations. There are notable costs of poor well-being to productivity, and identifiable benefits of promoting and supporting employee well-being for productivity.

Practical implications – There is a clear practice implementation gap. Some organisations are embracing the opportunities to invest in their staff, but those who make employee well-being a business priority and a fundamental part of how the organisation operates are in the minority. There is also an ongoing challenge of measuring the impact of well-being programmes which can inform ROI assessments and enable organisations to demonstrate the business benefits of employee well-being.

Originality/value – There remain many unanswered questions about both the nature of the link between well-being and productivity and the economic impact of an association. This paper sparks further interest in expanding the understanding of the well-being and productivity link or peripheral issues.

Keywords Productivity, Well-being

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The premise that healthy and happy workers will be more productive appears obvious and the message "good health is good business" is a prominent one in Dame Carol Black's (2008) review of the health of Britain's working age population. The research evidence to support the link is growing. However, there is still much we do not understand about the nature of the relationship between employee well-being and productivity, partly because of range of conceptualisations of the term well-being, the challenges of measurement and the diversity of factors both in and out of work which impact our ability to perform at our best in work, as well as the complexity of the relationships between these factors. What is clear is that more research in the area is essential if we are to address the clear practice implementation gap between acknowledging the importance of well-being and action at an employer level to support it.

The aim of this position paper is to inspire more academic focus on the well-being and productivity link by highlighting some of the gaps in our current knowledge which

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require further research and exploration. The aim is not to try to provide answers, but rather to position the opportunity for further research which has the potential to influence and inform employer practice, creating workplaces where people can perform at their best in a sustainable way. Given the cross-disciplinary, and business-wide nature of the organisational effectiveness field, it provides fertile ground on which to develop further insight in this area.

Well-being has attracted attention from academics and organisations as part of creating a workplace where people can thrive and reach their full potential for the benefit of themselves and the organisation. There is also a general acknowledgement of the need for businesses to shift away from the short-termism thinking of immediate gains, particularly highlighted in the economic crash, to considering the long-term benefits of decisions and hence organisation sustainability. These parallel streams of work have more recently come together and we are seeing the importance of well-being rising up national and employer agendas, beginning to get more traction in productivity debates at these different levels of analysis.

At a national level, productivity is considered a key source of economic growth (OECD, online) and a key determinant of a country's standard of living, and at an organisation level it is considered a source of competitiveness. As a short definition, productivity is how efficiently inputs (e.g. capital and labour) are being used to produce output (e.g. revenue from goods and services). OECD (online) summarise productivity as "[…] it measures how efficiently production inputs, such as labour and capital, are being used in an economy to produce a given level of output". People are a central component of the productivity debate, since essentially a business is its people. Yes of course equipment and systems are important, but, going back to grass roots, it is people who make the decisions to invest and develop these.

Increasing the skill level of the current and future working population is a key focus for many governments in the productivity quest, including addressing the scarcity of certain skills and up-skilling specific groups in the labour market. The 2015 Conservative Government productivity plan: "Fixing the foundations: creating a more prosperous nation", (HM Treasury, 2015) states "A nation flourishes when it uses the full skills of all its people in all parts of that nation". This sentiment was echoed by the UK Chancellor in his 2016 budget speech, saying that "[…] our nation's productivity is no more and no less than the combined talents and efforts of the people of these islands".

However, what is clear from the HRM literature is that focusing on acquiring necessary skills is only one part of the productivity jigsaw puzzle. Thinking back to the three components of the seminal AMO model (Boxall and Purcell, 2003), as well as having the ability and skills needed, people also need to feel motivated to utilise their skills and have the opportunity to do so. Adding to this the sustainability argument, CIPD research (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2014) highlights that addressing the productivity gap is not about working harder or for longer; it is about working smarter. We need people to perform at their best in a sustainable way. A working population that is disengaged, characterised by high levels of stress, risk of burnout, high turnover and high levels of sickness absence will not deliver on productivity aspirations. We must look more closely at work itself, the needs and characteristics of our workforce, and the changing nature of workplaces to ensure we are supporting the current and future working population to perform at their best over time.

This paper argues that an organisation with well-being at its core will reap productivity gains, and positions well-being as a necessary component of the productivity debate. By highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of the nature

of such a link, this paper aims to prompt further research across the two fields of well-being and productivity.

Through presenting an overview of current research and practice in the area, this paper will emphasise the need to increase the focus on well-being within the productivity debate, by demonstrating why and how it is a critical area for individuals, organisations and society. We will start by taking a look at the broader landscape to see how well-being and productivity are being considered at a national level, as this wider national context will affect both the climate and the economic policies within which organisations are operating. However, given the focus of this journal on organisation effectiveness, the organisation is the primary level of analysis here.

We will concentrate at the organisation level, discussing what we know about some of the main well-being challenges and their implication for productivity. We will consider how these challenges signal further avenues for future-focused research with a strong link to organisation practice.

There is already a substantial body of knowledge about how different aspects of organisations are related to employee well-being, for example, around job design, the physical work environment and management style. However, there is an obvious disparity in employer investment in developing a healthy workplace. Furthering our understanding of the link with productivity creates substantial opportunity to influence organisation agendas, providing a more concrete rationale of the benefits of a healthy workplace and setting aspiration for more employers to embrace the prospect of creating a great place to work.

Well-being is gaining more traction on national productivity agendas

Well-being is gradually receiving a higher profile on an international stage, with more acknowledgement of its importance to sustainable economic growth. In particular we are seeing much debate around the need to supplement the widely accepted national measure of productivity, gross domestic product (GDP), with measures that reflect sustainability, including the well-being of the population. There is still a very long way to go before this debate turns to widespread adoption, but it is interesting to consider some of the motivations of early advocates.

Most notable examples include the UN championing an International Day of Happiness, and through the moves of some nations to integrate aspects of well-being into their national success measures. In the 1970s the fourth King of Bhutan questioned nations' reliance on GDP and looked for a broader and less materialistic measure of national success and progress, adopting instead a goal of increasing their country's gross national happiness (GNH). According to the GNH Centre Bhutan (online), the GNH philosophy is built on "the ultimate goal of every human being: happiness". The Centre explains that today GNH has evolved to become "a holistic and sustainable approach to development which aims to strike a balance between material and non-material values, prioritizing the happiness and well-being of humans and all life".

In February 2008 Nicholas Sarkozy, the then President of the French Republic, commissioned Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean Paul Fitoussi to create a Commission to examine the appropriateness of GDP as a measure of a nation's economic performance and social progress. They noted the need to be clear on what we actually want to measure and point out that, "what is of particular concern is when narrow measures of market performance are confused with broader measures of welfare. What we measure affects what we do; and if our measurements are flawed, decisions may be distorted" (Stiglitz *et al.*, 2009, p. 4). For example, some economic

policy choices may do well to increase GDP, but they may not have had as positive effect on people's welfare and quality of life. The report says the current statistical system was created to be able to assess how market economies were performing, but now it is perhaps misused as a measure of societal well-being.

The Commission aims to contribute to dialogue about how sustainability can be emphasised through statistical measures, in an economic, environmental, political and social sense. They also highlight that the concepts of happiness, well-being and quality of life are often used interchangeably, but they are semantically different and are measured in different ways, so we need to be clear about what we want to measure and what we are actually measuring. We will return to this point later in this paper.

A summary message of that report is that "the time is ripe for our measurement system to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being" and the Commission advocates, "working towards the development of a statistical system that complements measures of market activity by measures centred on people's well-being and by measures that capture sustainability" (Stiglitz *et al.*, n.d., p. 12). They make specific recommendations about the issues that need to be considered to achieve this objective in their publication, Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, which acts as a stimulus for further debate and research.

Other notable moves at an international level to put well-being and happiness firmly on the agenda of national debates about economic advancement and social progress, include the United Nations passing a resolution in July 2011 that "Invites Member States to pursue the elaboration of additional measures that better capture the importance of the pursuit of happiness and well-being in development with a view to guiding their public policies" (United Nations, 2011, p. 1). Bhutan (given the country's adoption of a GNH index in the 1970s) was invited to convene a panel discussion on the theme of happiness and well-being.

Furthermore, in the UK, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) announced in 2014 that they would publish other indicators of economic well-being alongside the central measure of GDP. An ONS paper published in 2014 (Khan and Calver, 2014, p. 1) states that GDP is "[…] the central and indispensable measure of economic activity" but also considers how this measure alone is not sufficient, proposing seven additional indicators, including the disposable income of households. And since 2011 the ONS has included four questions on personal well-being in their Annual Population Survey. People are asked to respond on a ten-point Likert scale, from 0 = not at all to 10 = completely. Their questions are: overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? "The average ratings for each of the 4 measures of personal well-being in the financial year ending 2015 compared with the previous year: life satisfaction was 7.6 points out of 10 (up 0.10 points); feeling that what one does in life is worthwhile was 7.8 out of 10 (up 0.08 points); happiness yesterday was 7.5 out of 10 (up 0.08 points); anxiety yesterday was 2.9 out of 10 (down 0.07 points)" (Office for National Statistics, 2015).

And most recently, at the beginning of 2016 the United Arab Emirates established a new post of Minister of State for Happiness. The UAE Vision 2021 sets out a national agenda to make the UAE one of the best countries in the world and comprises six pillars, one of which is "cohesive society and preserved identity". National key performance indicators of this pillar include the United Nations' Human Development Index and Happiness Index among other measures.

Considering how we can meet the national productivity challenge in a general sense, Sparrow and Otaye (2016, p. 6) espouse that action needs to start at an organisation level, "[…] improvements at national level can only be made on the back of sophisticated strategies across numerous organisations. Shared actions and understanding of these challenges has to first be created, and then acted upon, across institutions and organisations. HR Directors have an important role to play here".

Before moving to the research that looks at the well-being and productivity link at a more micro-organisation level, the paper first highlights some of the apparent challenges in conceptualising well-being. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to suggest a way forward, it is hoped that by posing some of the evident challenges, we can ignite interest in achieving more clarity about the use of these concepts.

What do we mean by well-being?

As evident in the above discussion about well-being and productivity at a national level, the term well-being is used interchangeably with other terms in organisation research, often having different emphases. Wright and Huang (2012) describe the concept of well-being as an umbrella term, noting, as we have seen above, that discussion of well-being, especially outside academia, uses the term happiness.

Within the academic literature there are many definitions of well-being (Hassan *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, Dodge *et al.*'s (2012) multi-disciplinary review of the theoretical perspectives on individual well-being and the definitions employed concludes that work looking at what we mean by well-being has largely focused on identifying the dimensions of it rather than on defining it. The authors assert that, "as interest in the measurement of wellbeing grows, there is a greater necessity to be clear about what is being measured" (p. 222).

Some of the differences in focus and terminology can be traced back to the roots of two of the main theories guiding well-being research. As summarised by Ryan and Deci (2001, p. 141) these are, "the hedonic approach, which focuses on happiness and defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance; and the eudaimonic approach, which focuses on meaning and self-realisation and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning. These two views have given rise to different research foci and a body of knowledge that is in some areas divergent and in others complementary".

And following from there being a wide array of definitions and conceptualisations of well-being, research in the area employs a multitude of measurement approaches, including both subjective and objective measures and indexes (Danna and Griffin, 1999). More recently, Fisher (2014, abstract) suggests bringing together three of the dominant approaches to conceptualising and measuring well-being from the literature, proposing that, "Comprehensive conceptualisations and measures of wellbeing at work should include three major components: subjective wellbeing (job satisfaction and similar positive attitudes, positive affect and negative affect), eudaimonic wellbeing (e.g. engagement, meaning, growth, intrinsic motivation, calling) and social wellbeing (e.g. quality connections, satisfaction with coworkers, high-quality exchange relationships with leaders, social support, etc.)".

Particularly relevant here for organisation research is the distinction made by Warr (1999) between well-being as a broader concept that is context-free (e.g. the question on life satisfaction posed in the ONS study) and context-specific well-being (e.g. job satisfaction within the context of an organisation). However, as Hassan *et al.* (2009) reflect in their model of employee well-being and its determinants, which builds on

Warr's work, context-free and context-specific well-being are not mutually exclusive. People's level of context-free well-being will have an effect on people's well-being at work, consistent with the notion of "spill over" (Danna and Griffin, 1999) where experiences in work may affect a person outside of work and vice-versa.

Looking specifically at what well-being means at an organisation level in practice, the term has evolved and broadened over time. Traditionally, health and safety was the core organisational focus, with attention directed at preventing injury and ill-health and safeguarding employees. But now the promotion of workplace well-being, at both an organisation and a public policy level, is being talked about in a more expansive and holistic way which encompasses psychosocial as well as the physical aspects of working life (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), 2016b).

This more holistic approach to well-being echoes the changes in the nature of work over the last 50 years. For example, one of the most significant shifts we have seen in advanced economies is de-industrialisation, and the growth of services and knowledge economies. In the UK, "Since the mid-twentieth century, we have seen a decline in manufacturing employment, so that by 2011 less than a tenth of people in employment in England and Wales were employed in this sector, compared with over four-fifths in services" and we have seen this trend across other advanced economies (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), 2013a, p. 3). There has been a notable decline in both fatal and non-fatal injuries at work since the introduction of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, with an 87 per cent decrease in fatal injuries to employees and a 77 per cent decrease in non-fatal injuries (Health and Safety Executive, 2014). However, we are now presented with new challenges which we go on to explore in the next section of this paper.

Now well-being is often discussed as comprising three components: psychological well-being, physical well-being and social well-being (Guest, in Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2016c). For example, Dodge *et al.* (2012, p. 230) propose a simple definition: "[…] wellbeing as the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced" and expand on it by explaining that, "stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing, and vice-versa".

Tehrani *et al.* (2007, p. 4) echoes the three-pronged approach to conceptualising well-being, positioning well-being as "[…] more than an avoidance of becoming physically sick. It represents a broader bio-psycho-social construct that includes physical, mental and social health. Well employees are physically and mentally able, willing to contribute in the workplace and likely to be more engaged at work".

In 2016, the CIPD built on the well-being model proposed by Tehrani *et al.* (2007) to incorporate more recent developments in research in the area and in the world of work more generally. The revised model (CIPD, 2016b) has five domains to reflect the holistic nature of workplace well-being and is intended to assist organisations in developing their well-being programmes by highlighting the key areas to consider. These domains are: health (physical and mental), work (e.g. working environment, line management, work demands), values/principles (e.g. ethical standards, diversity), collective/social (employee voice, positive relationships) and personal growth (e.g. emotional, career development and creativity).

A further component on which well-being conceptualisations differ is outcomes; in particular, outcomes for whom. Tehrani *et al.* (2007, p. 4) present a mutual gains perspective, drawing attention to benefits for multiple stakeholders: "[…] the well-being approach also brings benefits for people at all levels inside and outside the workplace.

It makes the workplace a more productive, attractive and corporately responsible place to work. Positive well-being can also benefit the local community and, more broadly, the country as a whole because of well people requiring less support from the health services".

Similarly stressing the mutual benefits of supporting employee well-being, namely, for individuals and organisations, De Simone (2014, p. 121) concludes her discussion on conceptualising well-being at work with a call to action: "[…] It's time to agree on a more comprehensive definition of overall well-being at work, in order to encourage research on how to best maximise the desirable state for employees that predicts important outcomes for organisations". And it is on this note that we turn to discussion of what we know about a well-being and productivity link at an organisation level.

What do we know about the link between workplace well-being and productivity?

In the narrative of the WHO's Healthy Workplace Framework, Burton (2010, p. 40) asserts, "[…] the health and well-being of workers strongly impacts on the ability of the enterprise to perform its functions, and to meet its vision and mission. The Tallinn model restates that fact, that good health is related to worker productivity. And clearly highly productive workers will contribute to business competitiveness".

When thinking about our own organisations, it seems an obvious conclusion that if people feel a high level of well-being they will be more productive at work, and conversely that when people experience low levels of well-being, they would not perform at their best. Here we consider what existing research into the well-being and productivity link at an organisation level has found in three parts:

(1) the costs of poor well-being to productivity;

(2) the benefits of promoting and supporting employee well-being for productivity; and

(3) other workplace outcomes of supporting workplace well-being which could help inform the productivity link.

Some studies do of course take a dual emphasis, looking at costs and benefits, but for the purposes of this paper we consider the two separately to highlight how a further focus on the second section is needed if we are to have further influence on practice. This discussion will enable us to identify some of the current challenges for research into this area at an organisation level and hence highlight where more theory and practical research would be beneficial.

Finally, we also briefly consider a selection of the highlights of what existing research tells us about the other organisation outcomes of supporting well-being, beyond productivity. Could looking in more depth at the wider research on outcomes help inform our understanding of the nature of the well-being and productivity link? Is there a direct link between well-being and productivity? Are there moderating factors? How does an organisation context affect outcomes? In itself this is a huge raft of enquiry which could perhaps begin with a systematic review of what we already know before identifying particular relationships to examine in more depth.

The costs of poor well-being to productivity

Considering the costs of poor health and well-being to a business, they do provide a persuasive case for action. Overall, the annual economic cost of working age ill-health in the UK has been estimated at well over £100 billion (Black, 2008). Black points out that at the time of publishing "Working for a healthier tomorrow", this figure was

higher than the current annual NHS budget and equivalent to Portugal's GDP. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD) (2015) Absence Management survey, in partnership with Simplyhealth, estimates the cost of absence to employers at £554 per employee, per year. Black (2008) points out that in addition to the health-related productivity cost of absence, employers are also often faced with associated costs of employee turnover, loss of skills, recruitment and re-training.

Research had tended to look at the costs of specific well-being issues, and we will provide a brief summary of findings related to those that have received the most prominent attention of late: musculoskeletal disorders, obesity, mental ill-health, presenteeism and leaveism.

Data published by the Health and Safety Executive (2015) reports that an estimated 9.5 million working days were lost due to work-related musculoskeletal disorders in 2014/2015, representing 40 per cent of all days lost due to work-related ill-health in that period. NICE (2012) presents a summary of data from different sources about the costs and benefits of particular workplace health issues. They cite data about obesity, reporting that in 2010, 26 per cent of adults in England were obese, and that obese people on average take four extra days of sickness absence per year. They also estimate that the annual cost of mental ill-health to an organisation of 1,000 employees is more than £835,000, but through taking preventative action and improving early identification an organisation could benefit from 30 per cent in cost savings – more than £250,000 a year.

In the UK we have seen a rise in the number of reported mental health problems over the past ten years. In the CIPD's (2015) annual Absence Management survey two-fifths of organisations said they had seen an increase in reported mental health problems (such as anxiety and depression) among employees in the past 12 months. This figure has remained high since 2009 when 21 per cent of employers said they had seen an increase.

The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health (2007, p. 1) reports that, "[…] The total cost to employers of mental health problems among their staff is estimated at nearly £26 billion each year. That is equivalent to £1,035 for every employee in the UK workforce. The business costs of mental ill health […] comprise:

- £8.4 billion a year in sickness absence. The average employee takes seven days off sick each year of which 40 per cent are for mental health problems.
- This adds up to 70 million lost working days a year, including one in seven directly caused by a person's work or working conditions.
- £15.1 billion a year in reduced productivity at work".

The Spring 2016 CIPD/Halogen Employee Outlook survey report (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), 2016a) asked a sample of 2,029 UK employees how they would describe their mental health. Overall, 29 per cent describe their mental health as very good, 37 per cent say it is good, 24 per cent say their mental health is moderate, 7 per cent describe it as poor and 2 per cent describe it as very poor. The survey also asks people about the organisational support provided to employees with mental health problems. The findings suggest there is a wide diversity between employers in their practice. A third of respondents said they believe their organisation supports employees very (9 per cent) or fairly well (24 per cent) and 28 per cent believe they support employees not very (15 per cent) or not at all well (13 per cent).

The autumn 2013 edition of the Employee Outlook survey (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2013b) focused on well-being, and suggests that feeling under pressure at work affects an employee's performance at work. Overall, 59 per cent

of the 533 survey respondents who said they felt under excessive pressure at work at least once a week also said it reduced their performance. And 31 per cent of those 533 people said it makes them less patient with customers and clients, and 29 per cent said it has a negative effect on their relationships with colleagues.

The Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, 2008, p. 188) produced recommendations to government and employers of how to enhance well-being and minimise the depletion of mental capital. The authors point out that, "[…] In many cases, promoting the improvement of mental wellbeing (rather than merely preventing poor wellbeing) would be a win-win situation compatible with employers' economic imperatives; for example, because there would be a significant reduction in the amount of time lost at work as a result of stress and depression, and the like".

Their recommendations for interventions that could enhance workplace well-being include (p. 201):

- promoting well-being through auditing work environments for stress;
- encouraging firms to publicly use key performance indicators relating to stress and well-being;
- establish a workplace commission to help SMEs improve the well-being of their staff at work;
- better access to occupational care – in particular by referrals through primary care;
- developing new and more sophisticated ways of flexible working;
- promoting better training for managers in the well-being and mental health of their staff; and
- company health policies should address mental health.

"Presenteeism" and "leaveism" are two further well-being issues that have been found to pose a challenge to productivity, practices that could be reduced through examining the effect of absence policies on staff behaviour, and more targeted well-being approaches to promote work-life balance (Hesketh and Cooper, 2014).

Presenteeism can be defined as "lost productivity that occurs when employees come to work ill and perform below par because of that illness" (Cooper and Dewe, 2008, p. 522). Research on the costs to productivity of presenteeism is mainly US based, with some research in Canada and Australia. The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health (2007, p. 3) draws on that existing international research and looks at the UK context to suggest, "[…] it is conservatively estimated that in the UK presenteeism attributable to mental health problems accounts for 1.5 times as much working time lost as absenteeism". The paper explains that presenteeism is particularly important to consider with regards to mental health, stating, "workers may be concerned about being labelled as mentally ill by their employers and co-workers. Fearing possible stigma or discrimination, they may turn up for work even if feeling unwell" (p. 3).

Leaveism is a phenomenon described by Hesketh and Cooper (2014, p. 146) as, "[…] employees utilizing allocated time off such as annual leave entitlements, flexi hours banked, re-rostered rest days and so on, to take time off when they are in fact unwell; employees taking work home that cannot be completed in normal working hours; employees working while on leave or holiday to catch up". They suggest employees may not want it to appear to their manager that they cannot manage their

workload, or they want to avoid reaching their sickness "allowance", especially if doing so might result in a blemished HR record.

Both leaveism and presenteeism, by their nature, will affect productivity in ways that are not captured by traditional absence management calculations which look at the impact and cost of being off work sick. The concepts are difficult to quantify, and although instruments have been developed in relation to presenteeism, we need to understand more about leaveism and the preventative action required by organisations, given the implications for productivity. Leavism adds another dynamic to workplace well-being and it needs to be factored into discussions on productivity (Hesketh and Cooper, 2014).

Bringing many of these concepts together, a recent study by Hafner *et al.* (2015) examines the links between health, well-being and productivity using the data from the 2014 Britain's Healthiest Company competition. They look at the relationships between lost productivity (in terms of absenteeism and presenteeism) and three categories of health and well-being, namely, the job and work environment (e.g. stress and health promotion initiatives at work), personal lifestyle risk factors (e.g. obesity and smoking) and health and physical risks (e.g. chronic conditions and mental health).

The study found that lack of sleep, financial concerns and being an unpaid carer to a relative are negatively associated with productivity. Mental health problems were also found to be negatively associated with productivity, particularly linked to presenteeism. Employees with musculoskeletal and other chronic health conditions had higher rates of both absenteeism and presenteeism, compared to employees without those conditions. The study also looked at bullying and found those who experienced bullying at work tended to report higher levels of absenteeism and presenteeism.

However, overall their findings yielded mixed results. They found that having a well-being-related key performance indicator or formal goal is important: "[…] employees in companies which do not acknowledge health and well-being as an organisational success indicator report higher productivity loss due to absenteeism and presenteeism" (p. 21). However, they did not find any relationship (positive or negative) between an organisation's well-being initiatives or programme and productivity. And it is on this note that we shift focus from looking at the productivity costs to a business of poor well-being to considering other research which has approached the well-being and productivity relationship from the added-value angle, looking at the added benefits of creating a healthy workplace and investing in employee well-being. On top of the ethical argument that it is the right thing to do, the fiscal argument is that as well as avoiding these costs to productivity, it is in business interest for people to be working smartly and efficiently over the long term, but what does the research say?

The benefits of promoting and supporting employee well-being for productivity

Although as we have seen there is much research into the negative costs to a business of particular well-being issues, fewer studies have looked at the positive economic effects of taking action and implementing well-being programmes. To inspire more employers to take action, it could be argued that compelling dual evidence about the potential cost savings and greater revenue that could be achieved through a well-thought out well-being approach is needed. It is often too easy to focus on costs for productivity, rather than looking at how we enable people to work more smartly and perform at their best over time.

Here we take a look at some of the research to-date that has looked at the economic benefits of action. In addition to the overview of findings, we will draw out the recommendations the authors make for future work as these provide particularly valuable learning and insight.

As part of research commissioned by the Health Work Wellbeing Executive, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) (2008) examined the economic business case for investment in wellness programmes, first drawing on the literature, concluding that, "[…] Benefit-cost ratios, which measure the financial return for every unit of cost expenditure, were found in the systematic literature reviews ranging from 2.3 to 10.1" (p. 5). In addition to the literature review, the researchers looked at 55 UK case studies. Some case studies were able to provide costs savings estimates from their well-being programme, for example, attributable to reduced sickness absence, less workplace injuries and reduced turnover. However "[…] Most of the financial benefits take the form of cost savings rather than increased income or revenue flows. In part, this reflects the difficulty of measuring factors such as increased productivity or output and attributing these to wellness initiatives alone" (p. 23).

Only seven organisations were able to provide data on the return on investment of their wellness programmes with a wide variation in the cost-benefit ratios. The authors point out the wide range in the ratios could be due in part to the fact that different case study organisations were tackling different issues, the nature and target of the intervention will differ, and they will have implemented and managed their well-being programmes differently. However, the central message from this work is that most of the organisations studied did find an improvement in their KPIs, leading the authors to conclude: "[…] Evidence from a review of the available literature and case studies provided by the Health Work Wellbeing Executive supports the idea that wellness programs have a positive impact on intermediate and bottom-line benefits" (p. 5).

A study by Hassan *et al.* (2009, p. 46) concludes that although systematic reviews have examined the health outcomes of workplace interventions, there is less research which has looked at the economic benefits of taking action for the organisation. They highlight two core challenges in relating the effectiveness of workplace health interventions to work outcomes which could explain why few studies have done it. First, sector has an influence on the economic effectiveness of interventions, and second, it is difficult to directly compare between studies as they categorise interventions in different ways.

Could the context-specific nature of well-being interventions be a dual strength and limitation? On one hand programmes need to target the organisation and employee needs and be context-appropriate, but this poses a challenge for the generalisation of findings, and prompts interesting discussions about appropriate research methods.

Bryson *et al.* (2014) look specifically at subjective well-being and its link with workplace performance. They called out that although there is an extensive literature on the work factors affecting employees' level of subjective well-being, there is a shortage of empirical evidence about the link between an individual's subjective well-being and workplace performance. To help address this gap, they used Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) data. They explain the term subjective well-being (SWB) "[…] is used to cover a number of different aspects of a person's subjective mental state and has been defined by the OECD to include 'all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives, and the affective reactions of people to their experiences'" (p. 11).

Employees' SWB in the workplace is measured in terms of job satisfaction and job-related affective feelings. They explain that WERS data include nine measures of job satisfaction (satisfaction with pay, sense of achievement, training receipt, job autonomy, skill development opportunities, job security, scope for initiative, involvement

in decision-making and the work itself). And there are six measures of job-related affect, asking the frequency employees feel tense, depressed, worried, gloomy, uneasy and miserable. They asked managers to provide their subjective assessment of the workplace's performance (financial performance, labour productivity and quality of the output/service) relative to the industry average.

They examined the extent to which the level of employee SWB in 2011 could explain the workplace's performance in 2011. In addition, they were also able to use WERS data from 2004, and the longitudinal nature of the study is particularly interesting. They looked at whether any changes in workplace performance from the 2004 and 2011 data were associated with changes in the level of employee SWB between those years. Another question investigated was whether the level of SWB in 2004 was associated with whether the workplace had closed or not in 2011.

Bryson *et al.* found a positive and statistically significant relationship between employee job satisfaction and workplace performance (labour productivity, quality of output, financial performance). They also concluded that the workplaces that saw a rise in job satisfaction between 2004 and 2011 also had an improvement in performance. However, no association was found between job-related affect and workplace performance.

Most helpfully, the authors highlight some key considerations for research into the employee well-being and productivity link. They discuss the level of analysis, pointing out that a relationship between SWB and job performance at an employee level may not mean it is also present at an organisation level. To explain this consideration, they provide the illustrative examples of low levels of SWB among a small number of workers "spilling over" to negatively affect the SWB of others, and of different people having different opportunity for contribution at work: "[…] The review concludes that more research is needed at the level of the workplace or firm in order to generalise beyond the small number of existing studies" (p. 15).

Research by Taris and Schreurs (2009) looked at some of the existing research into the well-being and organisational performance link, including studies with productivity as a measure of performance. They also raise interesting points to steer future work in the area. First that we need to be clear what organisation performance indicators we are talking about. As illustrations they cite examples of a study that found a positive link between high employee well-being and performance in terms of customer loyalty and satisfaction, as well as a study that found high levels of well-being associated with low efficiency and productivity. Similarly, in their paper examining the productivity challenge for HRM, Sparrow and Otaye (2016) highlight the need to be clear on what we mean by productivity when discussing it at an organisation level, as there are many definitions of the term.

Like Bryson *et al.* (2014), Taris and Schreurs also discussed the importance of being clear on the unit of analysis, warning of the ecological error of assuming findings at one level of analysis will hold at another. So we cannot automatically assume that if individual-level well-being is positively associated with individual-level performance, that high individual well-being will also translate into high-organisation performance.

In their research with 66 Dutch home care organisations, they found partial support for the relationship between average level of employee well-being and organisation performance. For example, they aggregated levels of employee emotional exhaustion and found that high levels were related to low-organisational performance in terms of low-client satisfaction, low-productivity and high-personnel costs. However, emotional exhaustion was not found to be related to organisational efficiency. They call for more theory and longitudinal research into the individual well-being and organisation performance link to understand the relationships at play at this level of analysis.

A third point by Taris and Schreurs (2009, p. 121) raises a further critical question: "[…] the fact that the association between employee well-being and productivity is weak brings in the possibility that third variables are responsible for this relationship". They cite the example of job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion being associated with the work characteristics of job control and job demands. They recommend that future research should also "[…] examine the processes linking employee well-being and organisational performance" (p. 133). Similarly, Parry and Sherman (2015) cite the example of an organisation that has statistically linked employee health risks to customer service scores, with healthier employees tending to have better scores. They go on to say better customer service has a positive effect on business performance and profitability.

These calls to action lead us to briefly consider how looking at the existing knowledge of other organisation outcomes associated with workplace well-being could help further our understanding of the nature of the relationship between the two concepts.

Considering other workplace outcomes of supporting employee well-being could help inform the productivity link

Much work has looked at the relationships between well-being and other organisation outcomes. Could this research be useful to understanding more about the well-being and productivity link and the processes involved in the relationship?

In the abstract of his book chapter in which he reviews the research on well-being at work, Warr (1999) notes that: "[…] The research reviewed indicates that greater employee well-being is significantly associated with better job performance, lower absenteeism, reduced probability of leaving an employer, and the occurrence of more discretionary work behaviors". And in their discussion about the benefits of employee well-being, Wright and Huang (2012, p. 1188) summarise that: "[…] employee well-being is significantly related to a number of important work outcomes, including job performance, employee retention, workplace accidents, sick days, absenteeism, customer engagement, quality defects, profitability".

In discussing the business case for employee well-being, Bevan (2010, p. 20) includes employer brand as a benefit of taking well-being seriously. He explains that more and more employees are looking for an employer who offers a good work-life balance and has a good ethical reputation, as well as offering good pay and opportunities for development: "[…] Several UK businesses are now promoting their emphasis on work/life balance, flexible working and workplace health in the 'Careers' pages of their websites (Unilever, BT and GlaxoSmithKline for example) […]. Organisations which pay attention to these issues – and deliver real access to flexibility and workplace health interventions, rather than just promise them – will clearly do better at attracting candidates for whom these issues are important".

He also discusses the relationship between employee health and increased employee commitment, concluding from past studies that there is a two-way relationship with healthy employees (with good physical and psychological well-being) being more committed and vice-versa. Committed employees are likely to work harder, more likely to exert discretionary effort and less likely to leave. He also states a link with customer service from past research, citing studies that have found that having engaged and committed employees has resulted in better customer outcomes.

Focusing on one particular concept inlose-depth here, employee well-being has received prominent attention within engagement research, and Black (2008) calls out a link between the three concepts of well-being, engagement and productivity, saying that a focus on well-being can increase employee engagement and motivation which it

turn helps to drive productivity and profitability. Of course other outcomes could have been chosen as illustrative examples within this section, but within the scope of this paper we will just consider one example.

In their seminal Engage for Success work, MacLeod and Clarke (2009) firmly called out well-being in their conceptualisation of engagement: "[…] we believe it is most helpful to see employee engagement as a workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success, and are able at the same time to enhance their own sense of well-being" (p. 9).

Research generally agrees that well-being and engagement are intricately linked (Lewis *et al.*, 2014; MacLeod and Clarke, 2014). MacLeod and Clarke (2009, p. 60) review cite a case study example of British Gas who achieved "[…] a 12 per cent reduction in staff absence and a 25 per cent reduction in staff turnover, and increased its employee engagement and commitment scores after implementing a wide range of activities aimed at addressing general well-being at work".

Robertson *et al.* (2012) examined the hypothesis that a combination of positive job and work attitudes (engagement) and psychological well-being will better predict productivity levels than positive job and work attitudes alone. Results of a multiple regression analysis lends support to their hypothesis, with implications for practice that ignoring employee well-being will limit the productivity benefits from employee engagement efforts.

However, studies have also suggested that the link between well-being and engagement may not be a straightforward one, which further illustrates the need to look in more depth at the processes involved in the well-being and productivity link. For example, Truss *et al.* (2013) say that as well as low levels of engagement being associated with impaired well-being, we also need to look at the relationship between high levels of engagement and well-being as it may not always be associated with good well-being. What if highly engaged employees work long hours and this may have negative consequences for their well-being? They cite previous work which has posed questions such as the work-life balance of engaged workers and organisations pursuing high levels of engagement without rewarding workers appropriately.

In research conducted by Kingston Engagement Consortium for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2011) a distinction was drawn between emotional and transactional engagement. This is a further demonstration of the complexity of the relationship between employee engagement and well-being. Emotional engagement describes when people have an emotional attachment to one or more aspects of their work and transactional engagement describes people who display engagement behaviour as long as there are rewards but they are not committed to the job or their employing organisation and are likely to leave when a better offer comes along. Kingston Engagement Consortium examined the relationships between these forms of engagement and measures of well-being (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2012, p. 3). They concluded: "[…] emotionally engaged employees are more likely than transactionally engaged individuals to have high levels of well-being and are less likely to experience burnout or work-family conflict".

Although just one example, the concept of engagement provides a useful illustrative example of the complexity of processes through which employee well-being impacts productivity. The challenge here reflects the "black box" conundrum in the HR literature which concerns needing to understand more about the processes involved in the HRM and performance link. A more in-depth understanding of potential indirect

effects, and reinforcing or contrary relationships with mediating variables would help inform employer practice about how to create a healthy workplace.

Growing evidence but not enough resonance with employers

Despite the growing evidence of the link between well-being and productivity at an organisation level, it still is not having enough resonance with employers. Earlier in this paper we discussed the need for more research on the added-value to business productivity of supporting and promoting employee well-being to supplement research into the costs to the business of poor well-being. Together, this two-pronged approach could provide a stronger case for action. There is a significant opportunity for rigorous research to inform employer practice and encourage employers to embrace the opportunity (and rewards) of being a great place to work. What do commentators in the area say are the main blockers to action?

The reflections of Parry and Sherman (2015, p. 35) provide a good introduction to this section of the position paper. They echo the important point by Sparrow *et al.* (2015) that there is a way to go to turn the conversation round to position this area as important for business growth as well as for improving employee health. Parry and Sherman say that existing research tells us a lot about the causes of and costs associated with poor health, but it tells us little about the way having healthier employees can positively affect business results. They say: "[…] there is little doubt that CFOs care about costs and the bottom line. There is also little doubt they are intensely interested in strategies to grow top-line revenue".

PwC (2008, p. 8) research concludes that: "[…] Employers in the UK have not in general considered it their role to improve the health and well-being of their employees. While they may believe that a healthy workforce is a key to their success, they have been slow to act. A number of factors may contribute to this: lack of a clear definition for workplace wellness and core wellness service offering; incentives to increase employee buy-in are poorly understood; no clear business case and evaluation of direct financial return that demonstrates wellness programmes' impact on tangible business benefits".

Black (2008) says her call for evidence revealed that organisations are not more readily adopting health and well-being initiatives due to lack of a well-developed business case for doing so. She explains that employers that have invested in employee well-being have done so from different motivations, with some feeling a sense of moral obligation or corporate responsibility about investing in well-being as "it's the right thing to do", and others motivated by the potential to gain competitive advantage or to combat the high costs of sickness absence. And Burton (2010) presents three main motivations for employers to care about a healthy workplace: there is a moral and ethical case, there is a business case and there is the legal obligations.

Black (2008) points out that "[…] the question that needs to be answered is whether employers could expect improved performance from their staff if they invest in their health and well-being" (p. 53). She signals the available evidence does support a business case for investment, as "[…] quantifiable and significant financial benefits from organisations initiatives were found in a number of cases, including large, private-sector business, public-sector organisations and small and medium-sized enterprises" (p. 54).

Despite the growing acknowledgement of the contribution of employee well-being to sustainable business, there is considerable variation between organisations in the extent to which employee well-being is embraced. Just 8 per cent of the 578 organisations represented in the CIPD/Simplyhealth (CIPD, 2015) Absence Management survey report said they have a standalone well-being strategy in

support of the wider organisation strategy, and 21 per cent have a well-being plan or programme as part of their wider people strategy. A quarter of survey respondents said they have well-being initiatives, but not a formal strategy or plan, 37 per cent said they act flexibly on an ad hoc basis according to employee need, and 9 per cent said they are not currently doing anything to improve employee health and well-being.

There is a similar spread of practice according to employees themselves. Of the 1,094 employees asked about employer support for employee well-being in the CIPD (2016) Spring Employee Outlook, produced in partnership with Halogen 16 per cent said they felt their employer was very considerate of their well-being at work, 42 per cent said they were fairly considerate, 25 per cent said not very and 14 per cent of people said their employer was not at all considerate of their well-being at work.

Offering useful insight into why some businesses do not take action, Bevan (2010, p. 24) suggests that: "[…] Many businesses have conflicting emotions about workplace health. They have a genuine concern for the welfare of their staff, but are equally resistant to regulation and 'nannying'. Employers often recognise that their businesses benefit in many ways from a healthy and engaged workforce, yet the same employers can equally be reluctant to invest in long-term (and sometimes even short-term) measures to improve the health of their workplaces".

There is a clear practice implementation gap. Some organisations are embracing the opportunities to invest in their staff, but those who make employee well-being a business priority and a fundamental part of how the organisation operates are in the minority. For example, in their survey of 100 HR leaders and 250 managers, Right Management (2014) found that 41 per cent of organisations see employee wellness as a perk rather than a necessary investment. As mentioned earlier, Sparrow *et al.* (2015) assert that there is much work that needs to be done to persuade leaders and managers that supporting the well-being of their people is important for organisation growth, not just for improving employee health.

A significant opportunity for research-into-practice

For a real step change in organisation practice to occur, we need to ensure the insight from work in this area is available to the practice community. Inviting reciprocal insight from practitioners can help steer the agenda and through working together can seek to inspire a movement driven by the latest thinking in the area. Intervention and support will be most effective if guided by sound theory, evaluation of what works, and consideration of the complexity of the relationship between work and well-being. Bevan (2010, p. 3) makes the point that: "[…] While there is growing and compelling evidence that work is good for health in the vast majority of cases, we still lack the capacity at workplace level to translate what we know from epidemiological and other research into simple, consistent and business-friendly actions to improve job quality, work organisation, health promotion and other drivers of positive health at work".

Throughout this paper we have highlighted the need for further work and suggested some of the potential avenues to embrace the significant research-into-practice opportunity here. Other avenues were hinted at but not discussed and so we revisit some of these in this final section of the paper.

A common thread running through this paper is the challenge of measuring the impact of well-being programmes which can inform ROI assessments and enable organisations to demonstrate the business benefits of employee well-being. At an operational level, data inform decisions about where attention should be targeted and whether to increase organisation focus on particular aspects of employee well-being.

CIPD/Simplyhealth's (CIPD, 2015) Absence Management survey asked employers if they evaluated the impact of their well-being spend. Just 14 per cent of those organisations that invest in employee well-being say they do this evaluation. Those who have a formal well-being strategy or plan and those with a target for reducing absence are most likely to evaluate the impact of their well-being spend. And the type of metrics used is a research consideration. Bevan (2010) found that "take up" or participation rates were a common metric used to assess success of well-being interventions, but he highlights this metric does not indicate behaviour change or lead to a reduction in absence rates. He also flags that some studies investigating productivity or performance gains use self-reported measures which rely on employee accuracy, and the importance of considering the time-lag between an intervention and when we can expect to see any effect.

The authors of a study published by RAND (Hafner *et al.*, 2015, p. ix) state that: "[…] simple economics tells us that companies only find it profitable to invest in health promotion programmes when the benefits outweigh the cost of investment in the longer term. For companies it is crucial to understand the direct link between wellbeing and productivity. Without a clear evidence base, an optimal investment level will not be achieved". However, Towers Watson (2013) concluded from their research that, "Few companies track programme outcomes and measure these against targets, whilst even fewer seek to link to improved worker behaviours and employee productivity".

The small number of employers who have meaningful data around their well-being activity is also an issue for researchers, making case study research and comparator studies difficult. There appears a substantial opportunity for more research to fill this cavity, and more discussion of the methods and approaches that can be used to evaluate the impact of well-being activities, including beyond traditional ROI approaches, perhaps working with employers in the form of action research to develop meaningful measures and impact metrics within their particular context.

A further point discussed above in our consideration of what we currently know about the well-being and productivity link was that the same well-being policies and interventions will be implemented and managed differently between organisations, but also often within organisations where enactment is devolved to line managers. A central premise and strength of organisational effectiveness research is the insight that can be gained from bringing together different fields of research, and looking at the HRM literature could help us think about challenges like this.

During the course of writing this position paper and reviewing some of the research debates in the HRM literature, it is clear that some of these debates would be useful lenses through which to consider further well-being research. For example, drawing on the differentiation made in the HRM literature of espoused vs enacted HR policies (Legge, 1995), similarly intended well-being policies or initiatives may be very different to those which are enacted and subsequently employee perceptions of them. In addition the HRM debate of specific practices vs systems and also bundles, appears to have clear relevance to investigating the well-being and productivity link, already being hinted at in the conclusions of studies reviewed above. Furthermore, conversations with a wide range of case study organisations have highlighted that some opt for a top-down approach to implementing well-being initiatives, while others also embrace a bottom-up approach, empowering staff to take action.

Related to the point that even if the programmes are identical, they are likely to be implemented in different ways in different workplaces, a recent CIPD (2016b) policy paper has drawn attention to a further level of complexity which needs to be considered in research looking at the impact of an organisation's well-being efforts.

An organisation's well-being approach is more than its well-being initiatives – it is about the extent to which a well-being philosophy is embedded in the business.

The report describes three foundations of a healthy workplace: culture, leadership and people management. The extent to which these three foundations support a healthy workplace is proposed to influence the effectiveness of well-being initiatives. For example, leaders expecting responses to their e-mails over the weekend, or a free evening meal provided at work to staff in compensation of a long hour's culture, are unlikely to result in staff feeling their employer genuinely cares about their well-being. The phrase "culture eats strategy for breakfast", attributed to Peter Drucker, is likely to be a prominent issue to consider in terms of well-being – do cultural cues undermine the intentions of well-being initiatives when the organisation culture is not perceived to be in support of employee well-being?

The CIPD suggests that if well-being initiatives are introduced as add-ons rather than being reinforced by the organisation culture, leadership and people management style, (i.e. part of how the organisation operates) they are likely to be viewed with cynicism by employees and possibly dropped when budgets are squeezed. Looking at the research by Hafner *et al.* (2015), in their discussion of their findings, they highlight the importance of organisation culture and cite research from the Boorman review which advocated staff health and well-being be embedded into the culture of NHS organisations and reflected through staff and manager behaviour. The review asserts that, "[…] it is essential that all NHS Trusts put staff health and well-being at the heart of their work, with a clearly identified board-level champion and senior managerial support" (Boorman, 2009, p. 11).

The roles of leaders and line managers have also received much research attention with regards to well-being, and is succinctly summarised by Black (2008, p. 59) reporting: "[…] senior management interest in these issues and leadership from the very top are vital. In addition, line managers have a key role in ensuring the workplace is a setting that promotes good health and well-being. Good management can lead to good health, well-being and improved performance. The reverse can be true of bad management. Good health equals good business, and the line manager is a key agent of change".

There is much existing research that looks at the effect of each of these three foundations on aspects of employee well-being. However, another potentially fruitful avenue of work could examine the ways in which these foundations (culture, leadership and people management) affect the success of well-being programmes. This line of enquiry could generate multiple hypotheses, for example, is there a multiplicative effect on the impact of well-being initiatives when you couple them with a culture, leadership and people management in support of well-being? Does the absence of any of these three aspects of a healthy workplace undermine the success of initiatives? Are all three proposed foundations needed, or can one compensate for another?

Additional insight in this area could benefit the SME population in particular who may perceive well-being in terms of costly initiatives and therefore the privilege of larger firms. What kind of performance and productivity impact could just focusing on these three foundations to start with have?

Finally, looking ahead to the future world of work, research into the well-being-related challenges employers may be faced with would be particularly valuable. In short, how might the changing nature of work affect well-being and productivity? Here are two avenues which are attracting much debate as initial ideas, but they are of course just two of a raft of trends on the horizon.

An interesting theme to consider is technology – an area receiving more attention now due to its potentially complex relationship with well-being and productivity.

In brief, technology advancement brings obvious benefits, such as increased flexibility about when and where we work and for remote workers being able to connect virtually with colleagues in a more engaging way. However, we are seeing increasingly blurred lines between work and home, as people can be reached wherever and whenever. Some commentators articulate the challenge in terms of always being "switched on", with constant access to our e-mails and messages on different devices. What are the implications for employee well-being?

In their review of work in the well-being domain, Hafner *et al.* (2015, p. ix) cite two leading thinkers in the area: "[…] Over the last decades, accelerating technological changes and new forms of workplace organisation have led to workers assuming increased responsibilities and more autonomy than ever before (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2000). Although this has increased overall productivity, flexible modern working practices have also increased daily job demands, requiring employees to multi-task and leading to increased levels of workplace stress and unrealistic time pressures" (Bevan, 2012).

A further future-focused strand of research requiring more attention is the suitability of well-being approaches to a diverse workforce. There is no one well-being approach which will suit or benefit everyone, so employers need to consider the needs of their employee population. Societal trends include a growing sandwich generation where people are caring for their children and their parents or other relatives or friends and research by the UKCES (2014) suggests that four generations will be working side-by-side by 2030. We also have an ageing workforce, coupled with people working longer: "[…] The proportion of those in employment aged over 50 increased from 21% in 1992 to 29% in 2013, whereas the proportion aged 16-24 fell from 18% to 12%" (CIPD, 2013a, p. 6). And three years after the default retirement age was abolished, 1.1 million people over 65 were reported to be in employment in the period May to July 2014, an increase of 229,000 since October to December 2011 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014).

A diverse workforce can reap significant returns for an organisation, including enabling more dynamic and innovative workplaces. But these demographic trends can also present new well-being issues and employers will need to consider the resulting variation in well-being needs and preferences in addressing them. The well-being approaches or strategies adopted need to enable a wide diversity of people to perform at their best and flourish at work.

Conclusion

Research generally concludes investing in staff well-being can deliver shared value, being good for employees, the organisation itself and wider society. Dame Carol Black's "Working for a healthier tomorrow" review found: "[…] The links between health, employment, productivity and poverty underline the critical importance of improving the health of the working age population in achieving both greater social justice and higher economic growth. Promoting health and well-being for all will raise employment, reduce child poverty and poverty later in life, and raise the growth in productivity of the British economy" (Black, 2008, p. 22).

However, research is telling us there is a broad diversity in employer practice. Some commentators may argue we have been too dependent on ethical belief and assuming businesses will act due to assumed corporate responsibility, with not enough emphasis on an evidence-led approach. Others may say the importance of a healthy workforce for sustainable business performance is obvious. However, the reality is that there is a stubborn implementation gap that needs addressing and more concrete evidence is needed to take us from aspiration of healthy UK workplaces to a reality in practice.

This needs to couple a focus on the motivation for action with more evidence of what works in different organisation contexts.

There remain many unanswered questions about both the nature of the link between well-being and productivity and the economic impact of an association. It is hoped that this paper will spark further interest in expanding our understanding of the well-being and productivity link or peripheral issues. I believe this area provides significant opportunity to further academic understanding at the same time as have an impact on workplaces – do we just want to be able to pay the rent or do we want to work for an employer who really cares about its staff and helps them to be the best they can be at work? Developing a healthy workplace where employee well-being is at the core of how business is conducted is not an easy thing to do and would not happen overnight. However, we know we need to increase UK productivity and if we are to do so in a sustainable way, a focus on employee well-being at an organisation level is essential.

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