Understanding Wellbeing at Work with an Adaptive and Behavioural Approach to Job Design

Wellbeing Seminar Series
Centre for Economic Performance
London School of Economics
3rd December 2015

Kevin Daniels
Employment Systems and Institutions Group
Norwich Business School
University of East Anglia
and
What Works Wellbeing Centre
‘You’ve got to do it’: Legal case
‘An employer owes a duty to his employees not to cause to cause them psychiatric damage by the volume or the character of the work they are required to perform ....... there is no logical reason why risk of injury to an employee's mental health should be excluded from the scope of the employer’s duty.’
Mr Justice Coleman, November, 1994, invoking 1974 UK Health & Safety at Work Act

‘You ought to do it’: Moral case
Corporate Social Responsibility
‘Human Relations’ management thinking (Mayo, 1933)

‘You’ll be glad you did it’: Business case
Happy-productive worker thesis
Stress accounts for 40% (428000 cases) of work-related illnesses
10.4 million working days lost to stress in 2011/12
Acknowledgements

Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council (D04863X and EP/F02942X/1)

East Midlands Development Agency

Health & Safety Executive

Co-workers on various projects: Nick Beesley, Grahame Boocock, Alistair Cheyne, Laurie Cohen, Jane Glover, Claire Harris, Ruth Hartley, Donald Hislop, Julie Holland, Nadine Mellor, Fehmidah Munir, Karina Nielsen, Vicky Story, Varuni Wimalasiri
Overview

Some problems with current guidance

Two alternative and complementary approaches
  Interpretation and adaptivity

Focus on adaptivity
  Series of experience sampling studies

Brief conclusions for theory and practice
Current guidance – two major assumptions

Job characteristics (behave as if they) are objective properties of jobs and relatively stable
Temporal variation doesn’t matter
How individual does job doesn’t matter
Enhance workers’
  decision latitude, support, role clarity, participation and consultation
Minimize workers’
  ‘unreasonable demands’, inter-personal conflict

Differences between individuals are largely independent of job based approaches to enhancing well-being
But individual differences are not irrelevant nor independent
And how people use the control they have over aspects of their work and the support they have at work are important determinants of how people regulate the impact of work on wellbeing


Basic Approach

Assess levels of job characteristics
e.g. ‘I can control the scheduling of my work’
Likert or frequency scale
Perhaps use multiple sources

Correlate with outcome(s)
Perhaps with moderators

Conclude job redesign is best means of management
But intervention evidence is less conclusive – is something missing?
Basic approach is ....

Convenient
   It’s what we are taught
   Measures available

Seemingly practical
   Scientifically literate policy makers understand it
   Allows easy benchmarking
   Offers easy steps for practice

Skips theoretically important detail
   And this has practical implications
Key theoretical principles

1. ‘Appraisals’ important - reflecting
   a) Personal goals
   b) Experience and habit
   c) Work environment

2. **Coping and self-regulation important**
   a) Enabled by (job) resources – job control and social support principle
   b) Indicates adaptability in how people respond to (reactive) and shape (proactive) their work environment

Enactment of Job Characteristics

Behaviour & function reflect how resources enable adaptivity and proactivity

Behaviour = enacting job resource
- Execution of control (e.g. “changing aspects of work activities”)
- Elicitation of support (e.g. “talking to colleagues”)

Function = why you enact the resource
- e.g. change the environment (situation modification – also known as job crafting)
- e.g. problem-solving
- e.g. taking a break (recovery)
- e.g. regulating affect
Measurement of behaviour and function embedded in complex items – no inference of function or behaviour required

e.g. ‘Did you change the order in which you normally do your work tasks to take a complete break from work?’

Map measurement onto theory in a direct way
Avoids assumptions
Lots of piloting, checking with samples – continued checking
Weight of evidence
Qualitative checks

Early studies

Develop the method – Experience sampling method

‘Beep’ every 2 hours, 5 working days, ≥ working week

Changing aspects of work activities to discuss problems linked to better goal progress and negative affect

Discussing problems to solve problems linked to affective experience

Differentiation – between-person and within-person needs to be accounted for


Discussing problems to solve problems

Assumed

Changing aspects of work activities to solve problems

Work demands in general

Problem-solving demands

Learning

Negative Affect (NA)

Positive Affect (PA)

Two samples, $N = 78$, $k = 533$, $N = 106$, $k = 847$ one week
N = 191, k = 3446, three weeks of data over six months
“Changing aspects of work activities to solve problems”

Fatigue

NA

Cognitive failure
Talking to others to express affect

Changing aspects of work activities to express affect

Understanding personal goals

Perceived empathy

Perceived performance

NA

PA

Relationship quality

$N = 39, k = 272$

Changing activities and schedules to switch to work activities other than the main task

Talking to others about work tasks other than the main work task

Ideas generation

Changing activities and schedules to take a complete break

Talking to others to take a complete break

Wellbeing:
- PA
- NA
- Fatigue

N = 71 k = 692, one week
N = 299 (cross-sectional survey)
Fatigue → Enactment?

Qualitative evidence that people use resources for various functions (including problem-solving)

Some enacted resource/function combinations used to allow other resource/function combinations

e.g. Recovery → problem-solving

Are standard measures and behavioural measures related?

N = 299, cross-sectional survey
Control/support – standard, problem-solving, alternative tasks, complete break

Hypothesised model  CFI = .95, RMSEA = .04
(Job) resource only model  CFI = .67, RMSEA = .12
Function only model  CFI = .81, RMSEA = .09
Partial r’s controlling for other resource (Pearson’s r)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changing aspects of work activities to:</th>
<th>Job control</th>
<th>Social support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>solve problems</td>
<td>.13* (.18**)</td>
<td>.10 (.16**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>switch to other work activities</td>
<td>.12* (.15*)</td>
<td>.05 (.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to take a complete break</td>
<td>.24** (.28**)</td>
<td>.05 (.16*)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Discussing problems to:                |             |               |
| solve problems                         | -.06 (.13*)  | .45** (.46**) |
| switch to other work activities        | -.03 (.06)   | .21** (.22**) |
| to take a complete break               | .07 (.14*)   | .16** (.20**) |
No denying well established and predictive relations between job characteristics and well-being

BUT

Work is a verb as well as a noun

Shift in how job design is conceived
   Job is not independent of the person
   People make the job as they go along
   Crafting and enactment and the purposes they serve are integral

Failure to consider behavioural aspects means critical information is missing
   From theories
   From interventions
   Implies training in relevant skills
   Fits onto three-pronged approach & high performance work systems