

Introduction

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1.1 THE THIRD EDITION

Since the publication of the first edition of this book in 1996 through 2003 when the revised edition was published, there were dramatic changes in the world as a context for business organizations. There have continued to be such changes since 2003. In Section 1.2 we explore the context of work and health psychology, with an eye to the past, attention to the present, and a focus on the future. Time is an increasingly necessary dimension in the world of work. Learning from the past while being anchored in the present is important for a positive, healthy dose of reality. However, the future is the stuff of imagination and dreams, which are every bit as vital to psychological health and the advancement of work activities. We believe that healthy, productive people and companies are ones that know where they have been, where they are, and where they are going. So much for the context of time for the moment!

As editors, we continue to be proud of and happy with this third edition of the *Handbook*, celebrating 13 years of life and vitality. The *Handbook* has changed yet again in this third edition, as well it should. It has been updated with the latest research findings by those on the cutting edge of the science, and yes the practice, of work and health psychology. We have authors who have been with us from the outset as well as a number of new authors who add their own perspectives and points of view to enrich the work. Through

the revision process we have thus maintained continuity by being faithful to the past, invited new authors whose present work is enriching our field, and kept our focus on the future directions in which our discipline is unfolding.

In Section 1.3, we present a short overview of the book. This overview provides a preview of what is to unfold through the five parts and 20 chapters that are included in the third edition of the *Handbook*.

1.2 THE CONTEXT OF WORK AND HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

Context is vitally important to the profession and practice of any discipline. For our purposes, we have chosen time as the dimension within which to place this third edition of the *Handbook*. As we learn in Ecclesiastes, for everything there is a season and a time for every matter. Therefore, let us explore the context of this third edition by looking first at the past, then at our attention to the present, and finally focusing our gaze on the future.

1.2.1 The Past

Since the first edition of this *Handbook* in 1996, the world of work has gone through enormous changes. We have moved from the entrepreneurial 1990s, where we lived and worked in boom times. During these years, jobs in the developed world at least were relatively secure or the opportunities of job mobility were good, as economies in Europe, North America and the Far East were growing. Although the stress levels were high, as there were fewer people doing more work to meet international competition to keep labour costs to a minimum, the opportunities to move from sector to sector or to create new businesses, given the availability of capital, was ever present.

Then at the beginning of the new millennium, we had the emergence of the BRIC economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China. Competition between these countries and other emerging economies, and the existing developed world of Western Europe and North America, grew even faster and more furious. This has meant in the West a more bottom-line management or micro managing of people at work, a higher use of technology and the consequent downsizing of staff and greater demands on employees to work longer and more unsocial hours to achieve the business objectives (why work–life balance issues began to emerge in employee surveys throughout the West). The demands on employees to be more fully committed, to ‘allow’ work to spill over into their personal and family life, to take on unmanageable workloads with difficult-to-achieve deadlines, have meant that ‘real’, consequential stress began to emerge among many workforces. In 2007, the Sainsbury

Centre for Mental Health (2007) estimated that the cost of stress and mental ill health at work costs employers in the UK alone £25.9 billion annually. Researchers found that absenteeism costs £8.5 billion, presenteeism £15.1 billion and turnover £2.4 billion. Presenteeism (that is people turning up to work with stress and mental health problems but not delivering to their products or services) began to increase as jobs became less secure and people felt that they needed to turn up to work even if they felt ill, both physically or psychologically (Biron, Brun & Cooper, 2008).

So the psychological contract between the employer and employee of reciprocity in terms of commitment was being seriously eroded and broken, as organizations began to demand more from employees but without guaranteeing secure employment or a reasonable quality of working life.

The past decade has seen the emergence of new demands and stressors in work environments, most notably a rise in bullying, violence and sexual harassment; the emergence of uncivil behaviour in the politics and political behaviour at work; and the adverse effects of organizational injustice and unfair treatment of people (Pandey *et al.*, in press). Within this same decade, globalization has continued to be a rampant force in the world economy with productivity pressures and health insurance trends becoming increasingly important factors in occupational health psychology (Macik-Frey *et al.*, in press).

1.2.2 The Present

And then came the ‘credit crunch’ and recession, which dramatically changed the nature of work after nearly two decades of constant economic growth. Jobs are now no longer for life, mobility between sectors, organizations and countries is constrained, fewer people are doing even more work and the issues of work–life balance, reasonable working hours, participative/transformational management are now part of a past era of prosperity. Although the intrinsic job insecurity is high, the hours of work even longer and the impact on the health and well-being of people more problematic than at any time in the recent past, there is an opportunity of reflecting on where we were, where we are and where we should be in the future (Weinberg & Cooper, 2007). It is during times of hardship that we can explore options for the future by learning lessons from the past. This third edition attempts to do that, to focus on issues like the psychological contract at work, the impact of new technology on our lives and stress, on flexible working, on how we can help people in difficult times with coaching, counselling and support systems, on our experiences of individualism v. communalism in our

working relationships, and on how our careers will be changing given the new era of constraint and dwindling resources and opportunities.

1.2.3 The Future

It is safe to say that we have, at the start of this millennium, all the ingredients of workplace stress: an ever-increasing workload with a decreasing workforce in a climate of rapid change and with control over the financing increasingly being exercised by governments. During the recession as well we will have less stability and more job insecurity. The end result over the next few years is that there will be fewer people doing more work, working longer and in more job-insecure environments. The pressures on all of us therefore are likely to get worse not better. Stress is here to stay and cannot be dismissed as simply a bygone remnant of the entrepreneurial 80s and 90s. The challenge for all of us working in the field of work psychology and health in the future is to understand a basic truth about human behaviour that developing and maintaining a 'feel good' factor at work and in our economies generally is not just about bottom-line factors. It is, or should be, in a civilized society, about quality of life issues as well, such as hours of work, family time, manageable workloads, control over one's work and career and some sense of job security.

1.3 THE OUTLINE

In the two previous editions of this *Handbook* we tended to concentrate on understanding the psychosocial factors in the workplace or the sources of stress, with some work on stress management or organizational change approaches to enhancing well-being and reducing ill health. In this new volume, although we will highlight some new work and health psychology problems, we will devote more emphasis on individual and organizational interventions and prevention.

The book is divided into five parts. Part I is an introduction, 'the context of work and health psychology today', exploring the changing nature of work, the psychological contract at work, the social context of work life, burnout and engagement and the impact of job strain on health. In this section we are attempting to highlight the context within which workplace well-being is being adversely affected. It features work on the significance of the psychological contract and then illustrates how job strain can play a significant role in illness, particularly cardiovascular disease in many countries, and we finish with an exploration of 'presenteeism', which is likely to be more prevalent during economic downturn.

Part II focuses on the individual, ‘individual differences and health’, comprising several chapters examining the link between individual differences, work stress and health outcomes, as well as work experiences and stress on the health between the genders.

Part III, ‘the role of workplace factors on health’, looks at the recent work on job control in well-being and employee health, new technologies on stress, the impact of different career patterns and well-being, flexibility at work and its impact on health and acute stress in the workplace.

Part IV explores how we should enhance individual well-being at work and manage unhealthy stress, ‘supporting individuals’, by highlighting approaches to developing the whole person through management development, then we introduce the rapidly growing field of coaching in organizations and the potential benefits for employee well-being. We assess different approaches to helping women cope with their increasing work–home interface demands and, finally, the impact of employee assistance programmes at work.

Part V explores what we can do at the organizational level, ‘organizational approaches to health and well-being’, by looking at organizational culture, leadership and change, building interventions to improve staff well-being and an approach to changing organizational cultures.

In the concluding Epilogue, we explore where we have to go from here, the challenges and obstacles in these difficult economic times. We highlight the research opportunities available. We hope you will find these contributions useful both in terms of your research agenda for the future and in your work to help people cope better with the excessive demands of work. Terkel (1972), after interviewing hundreds of US workers, summarized his feelings of work in this rather negative way, ‘work is by its very nature about violence—to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us’. After that gloomy account, he turned to what ‘work’ could be, ‘work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor, in short, for a sort of life rather than Monday through Friday sort of dying’. That is our challenge for the future.

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