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# Work and Wellbeing

More than Okay: What Employee Wellbeing Is,  
and Why It Matters

CQ Dossier | Evidence-based Management

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## Executive summary

Most managers are well aware that employee satisfaction and job enjoyment predicts performance, retention, burnout, and other crucial outcomes. Employers also tend to recognize the value in selecting and screening for employees who are optimistic, and otherwise psychologically equipped for their specific position. However, not all employers take a holistic view of their employees' psychological, emotional, and physical wellbeing, nor do they strive to improve it in a global way.

Employee wellbeing is a global, multifaceted topic, and one that is influenced by a multitude of personal and organizational factors. Typically, employee wellbeing is assessed using a variety of measures, including measures of resilience, optimism, efficacy, and hope (Avery et al, 2010). Typically, wellbeing is thought of as being more global and multifaceted than any of the traits that make it up – an employee high wellbeing possesses more than just high job satisfaction, or high resilience – they possess high scores in a variety of beneficial attributes.

While assessing wellbeing – and impacting it – can be incredibly complicated, there are numerous benefits to giving it attention. Employees who are high in overall wellbeing are dynamic and responsive, and “bounce back” from failures, disappointments, and personal struggles (Baptiste, 2008). Employee wellbeing tends to be contagious, as well, in much the same way that burnout can be. When employees are physically as healthy as they can be, and emotionally and psychologically well-cared for in a holistic way, organizations stand to benefit (Samad, 2015). This dossier reviews the latest research on what employee wellbeing entails, how to promote it, and why it's worth looking at from a manager's perspective.

## What is employee wellbeing?

The term wellbeing refers to a person's holistic, overall feelings of positivity and health. Wellbeing is more than the absence of psychological, emotional, or physical dysfunction; it is a state in which an individual thrives, adapts readily to new situations, and makes effective use of tools and resources that they have available. An employee who is high in wellbeing does not lack physical illness, disability, or even mental illness;

rather, they recognize the things that challenge them, and know what kinds of support they need in order to cope and heal (Saito et al, 2004). Employees high in wellbeing are self-aware, and have high confidence in their own abilities and future.

In order for an employee to have healthy wellbeing, they must have adequate physical, emotional, and psychological care. Workplaces that demand excessively long hours and afford employees with few breaks are unlikely to cultivate wellbeing in their employees (Holman, 2004). Workplaces that follow a culture of workaholism, judgment, or hostility tend to actively diminish the wellbeing of their employees. Conversely, if a workplace provides physical health programs, mental health benefits, and an environment that is psychologically comfortable, employee wellbeing tends to blossom.

## How does wellbeing affect employee outcomes?

Research into employee wellbeing and job outcomes is fairly consistent: the more a workplace facilitates wellbeing, the more the employee and the organization stands to benefit (Baptiste, 2008). Employees who are physically and psychologically healthy report fewer sick days; when they do choose to be absent, it reflects a genuine interest in recuperating, rather than an emotional need to avoid work. Employees high in wellbeing are resistant to burnout, and tend to cope with rough periods in an organization far more effectively (Samad, 2015). They are also more likely to respond to toxicity in other employees' behavior in a productive, assertive way that reduces conflict (Boddy, 2014).

Employees who are psychologically and emotionally well exhibit greater motivation and commitment to their organization (Holman, 2004). Overall job performance is higher among employees high in wellbeing; their capacity to produce consistent, high-quality results is boosted by their health and [resilience](#). Productivity tends to be higher among employees with high wellbeing, as well. It is also easier for an employee high in wellbeing to take an optimistic approach to their work, and to view the future of their organization as promising and bright.

Psychological researchers have presented several explanations for why holistic wellbeing is such a strong and far-reaching predictor of employee success. One theory is that most employees in the workforce are currently deprived of some physical,

emotional, or psychological need (or many needs) – thus, the average worker is not performing to their greatest potential. Simply by making more healthful resources available, an organization can help employees reach their high potential. Another theory holds that when an employee recognizes that their employer respects their needs, they feel greater investment in the company, as well as more emotional attachment. Just as we feel attachment to the people who care for us and nurture us as we were growing, employees can feel a deep bond for an organization (or manager) who provides them with necessary resources and genuine nurturance.

## How should a manager boost wellbeing?

Because employee wellbeing is influenced by myriad factors, a manager seeking to improve wellbeing can look to many aspects of the organization. Equality of opportunity has been linked, in multiple studies, with employee wellbeing and performance; when employees feel that everyone is fairly evaluated on the basis of true performance, rather than bias, they are more equipped to thrive and succeed (Guest, 2002). Relatedly, wellbeing is high in organizations that feature a robust sexual harassment policy and protections against sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and racism. When an organization's policies make it clear that justice and respect are core values, many people are able to excel and newfound levels (Lawson et al, 2009).

Managers can also improve employee wellbeing by enacting policies that care for the employee as a whole, dynamic individual. This can include providing support for aspects of life that occur outside the workplace; for example, providing employees with discounted or on-site childcare opportunities or family-friendly parental leave policies can improve outcomes and wellbeing (Guest, 2002). Organizations that include access to fitness centers or bike sharing programs tend to observe increased physical health, and overall wellbeing, in their employees (Cotton & Hart, 2003).

Finally, small contextual changes can be made that have a surprisingly massive impact on wellbeing. The modern-day office is not always well suited to employees' needs; bright lights, ambient sound, and uncomfortable temperatures can distract and irritate workers, and even reduce their physical health (Mills et al, 2007). Unfortunately, many organizations don't take complaints about lighting, sound, or other ambient irritations

very seriously. When an organization does actively work to make their offices comfortable, however, employees report fewer headaches, improved mood, and higher productivity (Gilchrist et al, 2015). Every employee that you manage can be likened to a plant: even the hardiest among them will grow the most under warm, inviting conditions. By taking small steps to create an inviting, pleasant work environment, you can foster growth and reap the performance benefits.

### Key take-aways

- Employee wellbeing is holistic, and involves physical, emotional, and psychological health.
- Employees high in wellbeing are hard-working, more resilient, more optimistic, and more attached to their workplace.
- Providing employees with physical health programs, childcare services, and mental health support can lead to massive improvements in overall wellbeing and performance.
- Even small changes, like improving the quality of the lighting, can leave employees feeling much more comfortable and motivated

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