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Introduction

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Well-being and HRM in the changing workplace

Abstract

In a fast changing and fast-paced global workplace, where maintaining competitive advantage is paramount to success, identifying ways of sustaining employee well-being is of increasing pertinence to a range of stakeholders, both within the context of work and beyond. Within the workplace, well-being is important not only to individual employees in terms of maintaining their own good health, but also to managers and organisations as there is evidence to suggest that poor well-being at work can have adverse effects on performance and overall productivity. Beyond the workplace, health service providers must manage the potential burden of poor individual and population health, exacerbated in many nations by ageing workforces.

Given the existing evidence linking employee well-being to key organisational outcomes such as performance and productivity, identifying ways to enhance employee well-being is, arguably, a core function of contemporary human resource professionals. However, the juxtaposition of an increased focus on well-being at work and the current business climate of needing to do more with less can pose significant challenges for HRM professionals in contemporary organisations.

This special issue was inspired by an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded seminar series entitled 'Sustaining employee well-being for the 21st Century' which, over a period of 3 years from 2013-2016, explored three key areas: what is well-being and why does it matter?; what factors affect well-being at work?, and what challenges or barriers (or facilitators?) are there to enhancing employee well-being? These questions are of particular relevance to HR practitioners if attempts to understand what well-being means to employees, and to manage employee well-being effectively, are likely to be successful and lead to positive organisational outcomes.

In this introduction, we will firstly set out the broad context in order to frame the significance of paying attention to employee well-being at this current time. The paper will then examine some of the key issues of pertinence to researchers in the field of HRM and well-being, and link these back to the three questions explored in the seminar series. We then go on to review the contribution of each of the five papers in this special issue. We conclude the paper with some final observations and by highlighting some potential areas for future research emerging from the papers presented here.

Keywords: employee well-being, human resource management, context, changing workplace

Introduction

In recent years, there has been burgeoning global interest in international and national levels of well-being. The United Nations, for example, named 'good health and well-being' as Goal 3 of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015). The 'How's Life' report, published every two years by the Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development, offers a country by country account of national level well-being indicators. (OECD, 2015). Their most recent report highlights that although OECD countries tend to be doing relatively well, there is still more that most of these countries could be doing to improve the well-being of the general population. In terms of workplace specific issues, long working hours was highlighted as an issue affecting a number of OECD countries. At a national level, the National Well-being Index (ONS, 2011) was introduced in the UK in 2011 to complement the traditional economic measure of national prosperity - gross domestic product (GDP), acknowledging the importance of the health and well-being of the population not only for each individual in society, but also as a measure of the nations health in relation to other nations.

This growing attention to well-being has also encompassed well-being at work. Of significance, the seminal report 'Working for a Healthier Tomorrow (Black, 2008) galvanised interest in, and attention to, the importance of workplace well-being issues both for individual health and for organisational outcomes too. Around the same period, the Health and Safety Executive began developing the Management Standards, aimed at reducing stress in the workplace (Health and Safety Executive, 2009). Sustaining a healthy and productive workforce continues to be pertinent, and ever more challenging in current times, in light of ongoing changes to organisations and the wider environment. (Kowalski, Loretto and Redman, 2015).

It is commonly reported in the HR literature that it is the people, or human capital, that can provide companies with the competitive advantage (e.g. Luthans and Youssef, 2004; Boxall and Steeneveld, 1999; p.445; Barney and Wright, 1998), further supporting the rationale to place employee well-being at the forefront of HR strategy in the 21st century.

The study of well-being at work is a multi-disciplinary area of research interest, spanning a number of disciplines, including economics, industrial and organisational psychology, and sociology. As such, conceptualising exactly what well-being refers to can be complex. In addition, while there is widespread acceptance that being in employment is better for physical and mental health than being unemployed (e.g. Waddell and Burton, 2006; Marmot, 2010), and of the potential adverse effects of poor well-being at work (e.g. Goetzel, Ozminkowski, Sederer and Mark, 2002), the relationship between work and wellbeing is far from straightforward, with poor work-related wellbeing being a key reason for workplace absence (CIPD/Simply Health 2016).

More specifically, data from the latest absence survey from CIPD, the UK's professional body for HR practitioners, acknowledges that stress, acute medical conditions, and mental ill-health are the primary causes for long term workplace absence (CIPD/Simplyhealth, 2016, p.4). This most recent survey report shows that, although, absence levels are down across all sectors, there is still a great amount of variation within and between sectors (CIPD/Simplyhealth, 2016, p.7) with public sector and larger organisations being more at risk. The CIPD survey found workload to be the primary cause of stress, and this was particularly the case in the public sector (CIPD/Simplyhealth, 2016, p.29). These findings support our argument that well-being at work has both personal and organisational implications that require attention if organisations are to ensure a sustainable workforce. Of note, the Economic and Social Research Council, has named mental health as one of its' strategic research priorities for 2016-2020.

One of the organisational implications of poor employee well-being is the potential adverse effect on productivity. According to Porter (1990), the prosperity of nations is linked to productivity and greater productivity can lead to a competitive advantage for organisations. It is pertinent to observe then that in the UK, productivity has not only fallen compared to other G7 countries[1] (Elliott, 2016; Allen, 2015), but currently productivity is also not increasing at the same rate as prosperity. The Office for National Statistics in the UK acknowledge that there is something of a 'productivity gap' (ONS, 2015).

To date the reasons for this are relatively poorly understood, however, there is evidence to suggest that enhancing employee well-being can lead to improved performance (e.g. Wright and Cropanzano, 2000; Robertson and Cooper, 2011). For example, research by Harvard Medical School identified that those with higher levels of well-being were much more productive than those with lower levels of well-being' (Investors in People, 2017). The research team at Harvard Medical School stated that 'Treating mental health problems in the workplace isn't a quick fix.' For HR professionals to fully understand issues around understanding and managing wellbeing at work, it is important to have some awareness of the short and longer term requirements'. Productivity is another of the ESRC's strategic research priorities and a funding call was put out earlier this year to initiate a Productivity Network to address these exact issues.

Numerous articles acknowledge evidence of a relationship between HR practices and employee well-being, however, most observe that the relationship is far from clear. It is recognised, for example, that the quality of work matters (Marmot, 2010), but there are substantial gaps in our knowledge as to what constitutes high-quality work in relation to wellbeing and how that may vary between individuals and across organisational contexts. In addition, we need to know more about the nature of

[1] G7 countries include Japan, UK, Canada, Italy, US, France and Germany.

and the processes involved in the relationships between key individual and organisational characteristics, interventions and wellbeing outcomes for both individuals and their employers (Boselie et al., 2005).

In order to enhance our understanding, this introduction will therefore examine some aspects that pose barriers to fully understanding the relationship between HRM and employee well-being. Issues around defining and quantifying well-being are often cited as an area of ambiguity however, in this paper, we propose that greater clarity of the HR practices included and examined in studies is also required if the relationship is to be better understood. Further, we question whether it is possible to separate out the HR practices, and the perceived effectiveness of these, from the context in which these practices are designed and delivered.

In a 2004 critique of HRM research, Godard (2004) argued that studies exploring the relationship between HR and performance tended to neglect the external context. Guest (2017) also made reference to this potential gap in extant research. In response to this, and in support of our own argument, consideration of some of the current and key economic and social conditions will be presented here which can further contextualise the landscape for the potential effects of HR policies and practices on employee well-being, and the subsequent implications for HRM professionals.

The financial crisis of 2008 led to a vast range of issues affecting nations as a whole but which also posed significant challenges for the HR profession in terms of the impact on employee well-being. Two key examples are downsizing of companies (Kalimo, 2003) and increased job insecurity (Hellgren and Sverke, 2003; de Witte et al, 2016). Perhaps surprisingly, results from the latest Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS, 2011), (a national survey of 'people at work in Britain, with data being collected every 7-8 years), found that despite more respondents saying they had to work harder, job satisfaction and reported well-being increased. However, when comparing organisations where managers claimed to have been adversely affected by the recession with those organisations where managers claimed to have experience less adverse effects, the main difference that was observed was in relation to job security, which was notably reported as being reduced for respondents whose organisation had been most adversely affected by the recession (WERS, 2011, p.41). It is also pertinent to acknowledge here some of the key demographic trends which might influence wellbeing at work, such as an ageing workforce and increased emphasis on extending working lives (Vickerstaff et al, 2008, Loretto and Vickerstaff, 2013), higher geographic mobility of the workforce (Green et al., 2009; Redman, Snape and Ashurst, 2009) and concerns over greater precarity in work (De Cuyper et al. 2008; Standing, 2011). As identified here, HR as a profession has seen a number of significant changes which are affecting the role of HR practitioners, and also their practices. This is not happening in isolation, however, it is happening in the broader context of changes to the nature of work itself.

The changing nature of work

Changing workplaces present new challenges to employees and employers alike as stakeholders attempt to navigate the introduction of new technologies amidst a dynamic business environment and while organisations seek to remain viable and to keep employees healthy and performing well. Changes are being seen in terms of *who* is working, *where, when and how* (e.g. Sparks et al, 2001; Dewe and Cooper, 2012). For example, recent years have seen a rise in the migrant worker population. An Australian piece of research by Bahn (2015) published in a previous of this journal highlighted that due to the ongoing skills shortage there, reliance on skilled migrant workers is high. Considerable changes have also been seen in where we work, particularly for knowledge workers who do already have greater flexibility in terms of where and when they work. The role of location has been of great interest to a number of scholars in this field, not only in terms of the effect on performance, but also due to the potential effects on worker well-being (e.g. Redman et al., 2009). The rise and rise of advances in communication technologies has facilitated this greater freedom of movement for workers (e.g. Dewe and Cooper, 2012).

Another key shift that has been evident is the move away from permanent contracts and a shift towards less routine systems, such as temporary and zero hour contracts. Such changes are in parallel with the rise of the 'gig economy', which whilst potentially allowing greater flexibility for workers, also offers less security and has parallels with the 'precarious' work highlighted in the seminal work by Standing (2011; 2016).

Following the financial economic crisis, it is a common assumption that in the contemporary workplace organisations workload is intensifying and employees are being required to 'do more with less' (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010). In such an austere climate, it is timely for well-being at work to be under scrutiny, even where there might be concern amongst employers that investing in well-being is something that can be ill-afforded at present.

Morris (2004) discusses the notion that work is changing, arguing that to some degree this is overstated and, if it is true, can often be resource (or lack of) led, as opposed to for innovative purposes or as a result of globalisation. Ezzamel et al. (1996) had similar conclusions, arguing that "change is incremental rather than transformational, and often for pragmatic, rather than visionary, purposes." Despite Morris's perception that change may not be transformational, this cannot detract from the fact that changes are visible in workplaces globally. The implications of these changes for HR professionals cannot be understated and mark both a key challenge and opportunity for the profession to adapt to these in a way to ensure the attraction, motivation and retention of the workforce in an ongoing unpredictable economic and political climate. The sustainability of the 21st century workforce must be a priority for the profession and a greater understanding of what wellbeing means to different stakeholders in different contexts and how it can be enhanced can only serve to increase the likelihood of sustainability.

The changing role of HR

In light of the economic, social and political changes identified above, the changing functions of HR, and the changing role for HR practitioners is something that must be addressed explicitly in research into the relationship between HRM, employee well-being and performance if we are to understand in context the findings reported. Johns (2006) makes the argument for the more explicit inclusion of context in research publications to aid the reader in interpreting research findings more meaningfully, and this is an issue that will feature strongly throughout the special issue papers.

Changes include a shift towards a more strategic role for HR practitioners (e.g. Guest, 1987; Francis and Keegan, 2006; Paauwe, 2009, van Buren et al, 2011), a trend towards outsourcing (Sparks, Faragher and Cooper, 2001) and outsourcing of the HR provision itself (e.g. Luthans and Youssef, 2004; Delmotte and Sels, 2008), greater opportunities for flexible working (Joyce et al, 2010); managing a multi-generational workforce (Wesolowski, 2014) and devolvement of some HR functions to line managers (Thornhill and Saunders, 1998; Renwick, 2003; Whittaker and Marchington, 2003; Perry and Kulik, 2008), all of which have a bearing in these debates.

Taking flexible working as an example, the changing nature of work has facilitated this and, indeed, this can be perceived as a positive for many employees. However, it can also present a challenge for HR professionals in terms of knowing how best to manage the 'remote worker' or virtual teams, for example, one issue arises in relation to whether processes should be measured or if it is more relevant to measure performance of these individuals by outputs. Nielsen and Miraglia's (2017) notion of what works and for whom and when, particularly resonates here. Joyce et al (2010) also raise the issue that there are limited cost-benefits analyses of wellbeing interventions which can present an additional challenge if not measured as how can organisations then determine whether investing in employee well-being is indeed a win-win or 'mutual gain' or whether it can lead to conflicting outcomes?
As mentioned earlier, Briner and Walshe (2015) report a lack of good quality intervention research around employee well-being and make the case for why a stronger evidence base can help organisations make more informed choices about the actions they choose to take around this. It is important to reiterate though, that without evaluation of initiatives, this prevents organisations from fully understanding the cost-benefit analysis of investing in well-being at work, or not.

Given the changes being experienced across the HR profession in the UK, and beyond, it is worthy of consideration how this has, or might, affect the design, delivery and implementation of initiatives targeted at enhancing employee well-being. One key issue is whether HR have responsibility for well-being of their employees, and what role can or should employees be playing in managing their own health and well-being. The potential costs to organisations of investing in employee well-being, however, is something HR professionals need to consider. It is vital therefore that a strong evidence base exists which acknowledges the relationship between HRM and well-being and the relationship between HRM, well-being and performance outcomes, and that evaluation of interventions becomes more common place, in order to gauge more accurately the effectiveness of investment in this area. As earlier sections of this paper highlight, there is evidence to suggest there is a relationship, however, more research is required to fully understand the exact nature of the relationship. For example, as Peccei (2004) and van de Voorde (2012) discuss, is it a case of 'mutual gains' or 'conflicting outcomes'. As Edgar (2015) commented, there is much variation in existing research between conceptualisations and measures of both well-being and performance which, at present, serves to render the picture relatively opaque.

Examining the relationship between HRM and well-being and performance

The business case for investing in employee well-being can be a controversial topic with some wondering why organisations should get involved. Evidence which shows a clear link between HRM practices and well-being and, perhaps more importantly for organisations, between HRM, well-being and performance, can provide practitioners with the information they require to encourage them to invest their resources.

Literature exploring the link between HRM and performance spans several decades now, and there are a number of existing reviews and meta-analyses which examine this relationship (e.g. Paauwe, 2009; Ford et al, 2011). Despite this, there are still gaps in our knowledge and questions to be answered (Guest, 2011). Wall and Wood (2005), for example, also comment on the need for stronger research methods and on a larger scale if understanding of the relationship is to be advanced. In terms of where well-being fits, Boselie acknowledges that although well-being has entered into the discussions around HRM and performance relationship, it is not consistently included in empirical investigations or theoretical conceptualisations. Boselie et al (2005) also point out that HR practices referred to in studies are not always clearly defined, which can lead to additional problems in terms of fully understanding the role HR has on both well-being and performance. Whilst a number of reviews examine the relationships between HRM and well-being (e.g. Appelbaum, 2002). However, few explore the triadic relationship between HRM, well-being and performance, making it difficult to draw conclusions about this relationship. Recent reviews by van de Voorde et al (2012), Peccei (2013) and Boxall et al (2016), for example, have served to redress this balance. One of the aims of this Special Issue is to further bring well-being 'centre stage' and to encourage scholars in the field to embed wellbeing into these debates.

Van de Voorde et al's (2012) review paper, focusing specifically on quantitative studies, and using happiness, health and relationships as dimensions of employee well-being, highlighted that there remains a lack of consensus regarding the relationship between HRM, wellbeing and performance, with Peccei's (2004) dichotomous distinction of mutual gains vs conflicting outcomes remaining undetermined. The 'mutual gains' perspective, as a more optimistic model, suggests that HRM enhances both employee well-being and organisational performance. In contrast, the 'conflicting outcomes' perspective, or 'pessimistic' model suggests that whilst HRM benefits organisational outcomes such as performance, employees can lose out in terms of well-being. In which case, a trade off situation could be experienced whereby HR practitioners face the dilemma of deciding on a pathway to pursue which distinguishes between practices which may serve to enhance organisational performance, and a different set of practices which might enhance employee well-being.

In trying to ascertain which perspective is most well supported by extant research, Peccei's own review of the literature reported that "this picture is further complicated by a multitude of contextual and contingency factors' that influence the relationships among HRM, employee well-being and organisational performance." (Peccei et al., 2013, p. 37). Indeed, the changing nature of work and the (subsequent) changing role of HR, for example, the devolvement of certain 'traditional' HR roles to line managers, can serve to complicate decision making and the observed relationships even further.

In an article published in an earlier edition of this journal, Edgar et al (2015) support the view that well-being is important for performance, but draw attention to the lack of clarity regarding which specific dimensions of wellbeing are related to which performance outcomes, raising the issue too around the validity of measures of performance that are used in this area of research. Their study findings led to the conclusion that different aspects of well-being relate to different performance outcomes. This lends support to the rationale for developing research in this field further to understand the nuances of these relationships more fully. One route to embarking on this search for greater clarity is around developing a better understanding of what is meant by employee well-being.

Criticisms can also come from organisations and scholars alike when employee well-being is not linked to organisational outcomes as it is harder then to perceive the 'business case' and to see the rationale for why organisations should invest in well-being at work. Briner and Walshe (2015) states the importance of evidence based practice in HR, and in management more generally, arguing that before any well-being interventions are put in place, thorough research should be done first to provide evidence of a problem that needs to be addressed and, subsequently, to identify what intervention might be most likely to be effective. Indeed, Rousseau and Barends (2011) articulate the value of becoming an evidence-based HR practitioner. The more good quality research evidence HR professionals can have at their disposal, the greater the understanding of what well-being is, what it means to employees and what interventions are most likely to be effective in enhancing not only the well-being of the workforce, but potentially in improving performance too, achieving as Peccei terms it a 'mutual gains' outcome.

What is well-being and why does it still matter?

One key issue that surrounds research in this field to date, is that there continues to be a lack of consensus around what is well-being and conflation with other terms such as employee engagement. Few published articles, focus on 'well-being' specifically. One of the reasons for this is that it is often conceptualised in different ways, for example it can be defined and measured in terms of employee engagement, job satisfaction, or in contrast, in terms of 'burnout'. This serves to exemplify what has already been discussed above in relation to the multi-dimensional and broad umbrella heading well-being can be. Indeed, drawing on literature from across disciplines such as sociology, medicine and psychology, well-being is a broad construct with multiple dimensions and definitions. There remains much scope for further discussion within and across disciplines as to what well-being actually is, , however, it has been argued that to try and create one singular definition may in fact be more obstructive than helpful and too oversimplistic.

Defining well-being presents one of a number of challenges when examining well-being at work. Not only are there a myriad of academic definitions (e.g. Danna and Griffin, 1999; Hird, 2003), there are also multiple dimensions of well-being. One of the most familiar distinctions is between 'eudamonic' and 'hedonic' well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2001), differentiating between 'feeling good' and 'functioning well' (Huppert, 2009); and ways in which it can be conceptualised, for example, as an outcome or as a process. A wealth of professional body definitions also exist, for example, the New Economics Foundations '5 ways to well-being' (Aked et al., 2008). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development define well-being at work as "creating an environment to promote a state of contentment which allows an employee to flourish and achieve their full potential for the benefit of themselves and their organisation" (CIPD, 2007). Various types of well-being, perhaps the most commonly referred to are physical, psychological and social (e.g. Grant et al., 2007). However, with the surgence of other dimensions too, such as 'financial' and 'green' well-being, it is perhaps understandable why scholars argue that there is still much to learn about the relationship between HRM, well-being and performance.

In terms of theoretical conceptualisations, Karasek and Theorell's (1979) Job Demand Control model was one of the first to examine the variables affecting well-being at work, with the model later being amended to include a 'social support' dimension (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). More recently, the Job

Demand- Resource model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) has been established and has subsequently been developed further to differentiate between challenge and hindrance demands (Crawford et al., 2010; van der Broeck et al., 2010). The Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 2002) again acknowledges the importance of resources for sustaining well-being and highlights that to ensure continuation of resources, this needs to be actively worked at by individuals if these are to be conserved. At the centre of these theories is the notion that being equipped with appropriate resources can help offset the potential adverse effects of high job demands in the workplace. It is pertinent for HR in terms of the practices they design and deliver to consider whether these will help employees develop resources to effectively manage the demands of the job.

The three questions which framed the ESRC seminar series that this special issue was inspired by fit closely with many of the issues raised in contemporary literature and review articles in this field. For example, in terms of 'what is well-being and why does it matter?', few would argue that well-being is a bad thing, or something that we should not desire (e.g. Ereaut and Whiting, 2008), however, the way in which well-being is conceptualised varies considerably both within and across disciplines, which can impede efforts to understand more fully the relationship between HRM and well-being. Thus, this question remains pertinent and is something that many of the papers in this issue acknowledge.

With regard to how to develop and sustain well-being, a clear understanding of HR practices and policies is required in terms of what practices are offered, but also in terms of how these are designed, delivered and evaluated. Context again can feature here in terms of what motivates employers to engage in some HR practices over others, but also the issue of employee perceptions of these practices, and of the motivations they attribute to the implementation of these practices is pertinent as this can influence the extent to which the practices in place are effective (e.g. Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Nishii, Lepak and Schneider, 2008) and whether they are likely to have a positive or negative effect on employee well-being (e.g. Edgar et al, 2017) . Lastly, the question of what barriers or challenges may be faced in efforts to improve well-being integrates the issue around which HR practices and policies that are offered with the implementation of such policies.

Thus, in this introduction, we acknowledge some of the key issues concerning researchers in this field, such as conceptualising well-being and the processes and mechanisms by which HR professionals aim to enhance employee well-being, but we also highlight the important role of context, both at the macro and micro level, in terms of addressing the importance of considering what works, for whom, when and how (e.g. Nielsen, 2017). Briner and Walshe (2015) propose that identifying the well-being problem is the first step to identifying which intervention may be most appropriate, and this may vary across organisations.

In his recent article, Guest (2017) brings well-being to the fore and proposes that the existing focus on the relationship between HRM and performance 'has been pursued at the expense of a concern for employee well-being' (Guest, 2017, p.22). He subsequently proposes an 'alternative route to high performance', with well-being taking a more central role. We support Guest's current, and earlier, arguments of the need to bring well-being 'centre stage' (Guest, 2002; 2011), and agree with the mutual gains perspective advocated in his 2017 paper. In this paper, we aim to extend the well-being and HRM debate further by highlighting and focusing on the important role that context plays in the relationship between HRM and well-being, and also by considering sectoral differences which can contribute both to what HR policies and practices are offered and also to how these are designed, delivered and implemented. By also considering employee perceptions of HR policies in relation to well-being, advances can be made in terms of understanding perceived effectiveness of such policies and interventions.

Challenges to sustaining employee well-being

A variety of barriers exist to our understanding of what works in terms of workplace interventions to enhance employee wellbeing, but also to our understanding of workplace well-being itself. As stated in the 'call for papers' the changing workplace poses a number of ongoing, and some new, challenges for HR professionals to manage, but also for the sustainability of well-being within the current and future workforce more broadly. One key example is in relation to rapidly advancing technologies affecting how we work, what work we do and how we communicate and interact with colleagues.

In addition to long standing risk factors such as high workload, newer challenges have also emerged for example, of destructive/toxic leadership (e.g. Schyns and Schilling, 2013; Boddy, 2011), bullying (Woodrow and Guest, 2014) and cyber bullying (Coyne et al, 2016). These have increased in part due to a rise in pressure on organisations to outperform competitors and to remain viable in these pressured economic times. This is increasingly important to manage well-being but is juxtaposed with an environment of restricted resources and reduced security and stability of working environments.
As identified earlier, measuring well-being brings about its own challenges as it is difficult to compare studies when the measures used are different and when conceptualisations of well-being differ from study to study. As OECD (2015) reiterate, 'Well-being is inherently multi-dimensional, and therefore difficult to summarise succinctly' which, in turn, has implications for measurement. Whilst the existing theories relating to well-being acknowledge the role of resources there is little contextual consideration as to the anticipated likelihood of these being available and/or for how long. A gap in the literature to date also exists around sector and differences in size of organisations. For example, small to medium size businesses tend to be overlooked whilst larger organisations may be over-represented, but also may

have access to more resources to pursue and invest in interventions. Mallett and Wapshott (2017) noted that there is a shift towards greater interest in research in SME’s. These issues provide further rationale for why a ‘one size fits all’ approach may be ineffective in managing employee well-being. Recent advances in HRM literature emphasising the importance of various aspects of the implementation process for interventions (for example, who, when, how, to what extent) to securing better individual and organisational outcomes (Nielsen and Randall, 2012; Nielsen, 2013; Woodrow and Guest, 2014), are therefore welcome and encouraged.

The uncertainties over attribution of causality and the lack of longitudinal research translate into limited cost-benefits analyses of wellbeing interventions (Joyce et al, 2010). Briner and Walshe (2015) present clear advice on how to improve interventions by strengthening the evidence base.

Finally, it is relevant to refer back to an ongoing debate in this field which is around responsibility for well-being at work (e.g. Business in the Community, 2014; Cooper, 2007). Much of the research into well-being at work is at the individual level and, as such, investigates ways in which individual employees can understand and manage their own well-being better. It is not disputed here that this is important and worthwhile, however, this continuing spotlight on individuals and the individual response to working conditions, casts a shadow over looking at the broader organisational and contextual issues described earlier which can serve to influence well-being at work too. It is proposed here therefore that a holistic approach, as investigated and advocated by Loretto et al (2005), would be a useful lens through which to pursue research in this field. More recently, Brohan et al (2010) reviewed the debates over ownership of wellbeing, questioning the extent to which wellbeing is the responsibility of the individual as opposed to the employing organisation and we would argue that this approach should be encouraged if employees and organisations are to mutually benefit. It is of pertinence, that relevant professional bodies (e.g. see ACAS, 2012) also promote joint responsibility when it comes to managing well-being at work.

The above sections have considered what we know so far about well-being and HRM, and where some of the gaps exist. The papers chosen for inclusion in this issue address some of the key gaps identified here and fuel further interest in developing the field by highlighting potential emerging areas for further research in this field.

Contributions to this special issue

The five papers which follow in this special issue address some of the issues introduced here in relation to HRM and well-being in the changing workplace, and map onto the themes, particularly the third theme, explored within the seminar series, which provided the rationale and motivation for the special issue.

The first paper presented is a conceptual piece by Calvard and Sang examining employee well-being and the sociology of violence. The paper takes a fresh look at wellbeing through a socio-political lens and, purposefully moving away from individualistic psychology interpretations of wellbeing, presents a discussion on conceptualisations of well-being which argues for a more interdisciplinary approach in order to achieve a fuller and more meaningful understanding of well-being. The authors adopt an inclusive definition of violence which refers to the use of power to harm, rather than causing harm through physical force. In so doing, they provide a more macro contextual perspective on wellbeing, acknowledging the role of socio-structural factors, such as power relations in the workplace and society, and the effect of changes in the economy. This conceptual piece makes links with the 'dark side' of wellbeing, one of the seminar themes in the seminar series, arguing that to neglect the negative aspects of well-being means only half the picture is being explored in the majority of existing work on well-being in the workplace.

Whilst acknowledging the numerous merits of a more individualised approach to well-being, Calvard and Sang call for a more holistic perspective to be encouraged, proposing that individual approaches alone prevent more close scrutiny of governments and organisations taking place, which in turn can serve to reinforce power imbalance and inequality in the workplace.

The remaining four papers in the issue are empirical papers which combined highlight the importance of context in the design of organisational research, but also of considering the context of the research setting if findings are to be meaningful and for learning to have practical relevance in terms of identifying appropriate interventions or further action by HR professionals, where appropriate.

Continuing with a critical theme, our second paper is an empirical piece by Veld and Alfes, which sets out to critique what they refer to as the commonly portrayed optimistic perspective of the relationship between HRM and well-being. The authors propose that this optimistic view that HR policies and practices help or serve to improve wellbeing neglects to consider the possibility that it may also do harm. In an effort to redress this balance, their quantitative study in a long term health care setting in the Netherlands draws on climate literature to explore these issues. They use facet-specific climates – 'climate for well-being' and 'climate for efficiency', and examine whether both pathways are at work and the different effects these pathways might have. The authors suggest that researchers tend to only look at one perspective or the other and not both, which, tying in with arguments made in the first paper, makes the assumption that the two are independent or provide either/or scenarios, which may not be accurate. The authors conclude that, depending on the climate context, there may be contradictory effects on the relationship between HRM and performance. This fits with claims made by Peccei (2004) that, from observing a number of HR practices, some are more closely associated with enhancing employee well-being, whereas others are more closely aligned with improving performance. Greater consideration of this in the HRM literature would therefore be beneficial in advancing the debate further. Mirroring Calvard and Sang's arguments, Veld and Alfes are also in support of a more holistic approach to wellbeing which acknowledge the context of the workplace environment.

Addressing one of the core issues raised in the introductory paper, these authors specifically cite the HR practices making up the high performance work system (HPWS) in their particular study– training, performance management, wellbeing, information sharing and role clarity. They address that variations around HR practices included in different studies can mean measuring like with like can be problematic. The authors also propose that HRM practices are the more visible signals of less visible organisational characteristics like goals and values, which may then contribute to the 'climate' of that working environment.

The authors found climate to be a relevant mediator between HR and employee outcomes conclude that positive and negative mechanisms can have a counterbalancing effect on employee well-being. Furthermore, they identify that in an austere working environment, doing more with less employees can still enable high levels of wellbeing if organisation fosters a climate that makes employees feel valued.

Our third paper by Scholarios, Hesselgreaves and Pratt, in contrast to the first empirical paper which examined a 'bundle' of HR practices, focuses on one particular HR practice, flexible working arrangements (FWA). Drawing on a quantitative study of four police forces this paper explores the effects of unpredictable working hours in this profession. Their findings reflect tensions between employer centred scheduling strategies for enhancing work flexibility and HR practices, such as FWA, which indicate give employees greater control and work life balance. As with the previous paper, the authors also acknowledge how austere times have impacted on this particular practice in terms of increased FWA requests from employees and the tensions that this causes.

The authors report an increase in employer centred strategies such as mandatory overtime to accommodate fluctuations in business activity, and identify a gap in research on unpredictability linked to such employer centred scheduling. They looked at measures of well-being and a range of lifestyle behaviours, such as alcohol consumption, as potentially exacerbating any negative effects of unpredictable working hours on wellbeing. One of the aims of the research was to expose whether unpredictable working hours have negative effects on well-being over and beyond those known to exist in relation to working unsocial hours.

The paper contributes to the field by identifying that unpredictability of working hours can incrementally add to the negative effect often observed with unsocial work hours. The results suggested that control over unpredictability seemed limited, even for those on FWAs (employee-led scheduling). As Scholarios, Hesselgreaves and Pratt point out, the question of why this should be the case still needs to be answered. They acknowledge that tensions can be hard to manage in this specific profession between offering the public a 24 hour service and the entitlement of employees to request flexible working arrangements. It is postulated by the authors that the nature of the job may explain why long working hours are still maintained even if engaging in such work patterns seems to be leading to poor health and to other non-work consequences, especially in longer tenure employees. Perhaps, this relates to the notion of public service, that may also be evident across other professions within the public sector, again making the case for why context should be explicit in research studies exploring the relationship between HR practices and well-being and performance. The authors conclude that, in a business climate where more work is expected from fewer employees, increased access to health promoting working arrangements may serve to offset the possibility of longer term illnesses.

According to Franco-Santos and Doherty, the authors of our fourth paper which explores performance management in the higher education setting, the HR-wellbeing relationship lacks research focus. In agreement with the first two papers, they claim that this field of study suffers from issues around definition. The paper proposes that 'directive' HR practices around performance and meeting targets is negatively related to staff perceptions of wellbeing. More 'enabling' practices, such as high staff involvement and communication leads to a more positive relationship with employee perceptions. In this study, the findings suggest that the context and managerial practices that employees are exposed to are influential to their well-being.

Of pertinence, it is proposed by the authors that the ideology of an organisation may influence the ways in which HR practices are designed and delivered. The authors argue that little appears to be known about the distinct effect of individual HR practices, or about underlying organisational belief systems, and thus propose that by looking at directive vs enabling practices, drawing on agency theory and stewardship theory respectively, that a greater understanding can be developed.

As with the previous paper, Franco-Santos and Doherty examine one HR practice specifically, performance management, and explore this in terms of 'directive' or 'enabling' performance management, and how perceptions of performance management practices affected well-being. They also looked at the mediating variables of job demands, job control, management support. The authors refer to Peccei's framework and define, as he did, employee outcomes as a consequence of work experiences, and that these subsequently affect well-being. This was evidenced in this study by measures of job satisfaction and stress levels. The authors go on to link the 'directive' perspective which they refer to with Peccei's notion of 'conflicting outcomes' and the 'enabling' perspective with the notion of 'mutual gains'. The authors address specifically the changing nature of academia and it can be inferred that perhaps a shift from a stewardship (enabling) to agency (directive) approach is being observed, reflected in changing performance management practices being rolled out across higher education settings, in the UK. They found that a directive perception of management techniques was negatively associated with well-being, which serves to support a conflicting outcomes perspective. The authors raise two further important points for developing research in this field, that of differentiating between levels of analysis (e.g. individual, team or organisational) and of examining single versus sets or 'bundles' of HR practices.

Finally, our fifth paper, by Agosti, Bringsen and Andersson, presents findings from a quantitative study of workers from two different departments of municipality workers in Sweden. To contrast and complement our first two papers which adopted a more critical approach to well-being, the authors of this paper take a salutogenic approach to explore what resources (work and non-work) are most valuable in achieving work-life balance. As the authors state themselves, there can be a tendency in work life balance research to focus on the conflict approach (what are the factors preventing work-life balance) rather than exploring factors which may lead to greater balance, and potentially therefore greater levels of well-being. Thus, this paper intends to redress this by focusing on what resources are required to facilitate work-life balance.

Individual employees from two different departments, social care and cleaning/cooking (domestic work), from the same municipality (self-governing local authority) were studied. These departments were selected to compare as irregular hours and shifts were common to both roles. A questionnaire was administered measuring various resources such as life situation, time experience at work/home (e.g. did people feel they had enough time at their work, and in their private lives), time for recovery and well-being.

The findings showed employees of a higher age, lower educational attainment and who were in part-time employment had significantly greater levels of work life balance. Unexpectedly, they found no significant difference observed relating to shift pattern. The most significant factor was positive life situation (including positive sense of work, private life, economy and housing). High autonomy at work also led to 'better odds' for positive time experience at work.

The salutogenic approach adopted in this paper denotes a shift in focus from other literature which dominates around identifying and reducing risk factors which could adversely affect work-life balance. The findings from this study revealed a complex web of resources and sub resources that interlink to affect perceptions of work-life balance. Echoing findings from Scholarios, Hesselgreaves and Pratt's paper, the authors here refer to the relevance of autonomy and predictability which can allow more time for social commitments and therefore have a positive influence on work-life balance.

Using ecological system theory, Agosti, Bringsen and Andersson's findings suggest that work and private life, individual and environmental factors interact and are dependent on one another. Thus, although taking a different approach to some of the earlier papers in the issue, this aligns with the general consensus that a more holistic approach to understanding employee well-being is needed. Furthermore, by including a measure of life satisfaction (incorporating items relating to housing and the economy), the authors also acknowledge the importance of various contextual factors and the analysis of results clearly showed the significance of this measure on perceptions of work-life balance. The authors corroborate Calvard and Sang's socio-structural perspective by referring to Pocock's findings on socio political factors whereby power can affect demand and resources, and also links to the first paper by acknowledging the impact, of work-life balance in this case, on not only individuals and organisations but also for society.

Finally, the emphasis in this paper on context and macro factors alludes to the guest editors view that sustainable wellbeing is an issue at many levels, not just the individual or even the organisations. Where this last paper highlights a complex web of resources influencing perceptions and experience of work life balance, the special issue overall gives an insight into the complex web of individual, organisational, societal and political factors that contribute to our well-being, both within and out with the workplace, and the role of context in understanding the relationship between HRM practices and employee outcomes, such as well-being, more fully.

Implications for the future of well-being and HRM in the changing workplace

The changing workplace has ongoing implications for HR as a profession, in terms of their role and function, and also for wellbeing in terms of changing working conditions and the challenge of doing more with less as issues around work intensification continue to be prevalent (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010). A focus on individual characteristics and coping mechanisms, such as mindfulness and resilience training is extremely valuable in terms of strengthening individual psychological capital but can also inadvertently detract from what organisations can be doing in terms of providing decent work, fair pay and working conditions (as referred to by Marmot, 2010), or legislative changes. It is therefore timely for a special issue which brings issues around well-being and HRM in the changing workplace to the forefront.

With an emerging focus on interdisciplinarity, the themes raised in the seminar series and specifically in this special issue show the value that a more holistic understanding of well-being and HRM in the changing workplace can bring. Indeed, the papers presented here call for greater interdisciplinarity, suggesting that this may help with enabling a more holistic understanding by bringing in epidemiologists, economists, sociologists to contribute to our understanding of the business environment, the climate and cultures that underpin organisations that consciously or subconsciously shape not only the HR practices adopted in organisations but also the way in which they are designed, delivered and evaluated.

Thus, plurality of ideas is to be encouraged if current issues and debates in the field of HRM and well-being are to be advanced and kept relevant for the times and climate we find ourselves in as employees, as HR professionals and as members of society.

So, where next for research in this field? The seminar series and the papers presented in this issue highlight a number of key areas for further research, such as the relationship between trust and well-being, the role and importance of identity and of context in terms of conceptualising well-being and understanding the factors that influence the development, maintenance and sustainability of well-being not only at an individual level but at an organisational level, and for society too.

In light of the ongoing changes in the way we work it is worthwhile for future research to consider whether existing theories relating to workplace well-being are equipped to reflect the influential contextual factors that affect well-being at work in the changing workplace. Indeed, a mix of theories have been drawn on to inform the papers presented here in this issue, for example, the work of Foucault (Calvard and Sang), social exchange, norm for reciprocity and Job Demand-Resources model (Veld and Alfes); ecological systems approach (Agosti, Bringsen and Andersson), and agency vs stewardship theory discussed by Franco-Santos and Doherty.

A gap also exists in terms of sector and organisation size specific research, for example, small businesses have been relatively overlooked to date in terms of how they can manage employee well-being with limited resources. Interventions research, and evaluation of interventions, are imperative if organisations are to understand the value of investing in employee well-being and perceiving this as ‘mutual gains’ as opposed to ‘conflicting outcomes’. As Nielsen and Miraglia (2017) question in their recent paper, ‘when, and for whom’ do interventions work? It is clear from this recent paper, and from previous papers on interventions that ‘one size does not fit all’ and that if contextual factors are not taken into account, this can potentially have adverse consequences for the effectiveness of any intervention. This perhaps calls for a shift from the notion of 'best practice', where organisations adopt practices used in other competitor organisations, to a situation where 'good practice' is encouraged in a way that works for each organisation in alignment with the particular needs of their employees.

Moving on, it is also pertinent to investigate the ways in which different discourses of wellbeing may influence the effectiveness of any interventions. As an example, research undertaken by Kowalski (2013) highlighted the often substantial gaps and mismatch between employee (lay) understandings of wellbeing and employer perceptions of well-being which inform employer-led interventions.

In keeping with this notion, we need to invest more efforts in understanding the organisational context of the research we conduct, not only to facilitate the tailoring of well-being interventions, but in order to fully understand the role of HR and the work ethos or culture in which they operate, which may affect the HR practices they adopt and the rationale for doing so. For example, Franco-Santos and Doherty, and Veld and Alfes, both address this, albeit it drawing on different conceptual frameworks. Franco-Santos and Doherty consider whether the HR practices stem from an agency theory approach, or from a stewardship approach. As referred to earlier), this may affect the way in which HR practices are designed, delivered and implemented, but may also influence how employees perceive these policies and practices (Edgar et al, 2015; Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Nishii, Lepak and Schneider, 2008). In their paper, Veld and Alfes discuss the climate for efficiency versus climate for well-being and the potential limitations of only examining this in terms of either/or scenarios. By not addressing contextual issues to frame research into this field, are we only getting half the picture? Looking solely at HR practices and the relationship between these practices and employee outcomes, be that performance or employee well-being has been incredibly valuable to date and has led to a much greater understanding, however, especially in current times, it is perhaps unlikely that a complete picture can be captured or indeed understood by focusing on these in isolation. Are impediments to our understanding of the relationship being exacerbated by separating out policies and practices and employee behaviours from the context in which these operate in?

Contextual issues need to be addressed and understood which in the past have not always been explicitly considered. Doing so may serve to advance our understanding and, in turn, enable us to make some headway in terms of the ongoing 'search for answers' which characterises this field. Johns (2006) stated the importance of acknowledging context in academic publications in order for the findings to be interpreted more meaningfully. More recently, scholars such as Thompson (2011), Delbridge and Keenoy (2010) and Watson (2010) have called for the study of HRM to be conducted through a more critical lens. This would also serve to capture more of the contextual issues at play, and for example, the power dynamics presented in Calvard and Sang's paper. A paper by Jenkins and Delbridge (2013) in an earlier issue of this journal explicitly addresses the notion that 'context matters', applying this to the study of hard versus soft HR approaches in relation to employee engagement. Indeed, in the same special issue, Truss et al (2013, p.2658) critique the dominance of an 'acontextual view of organisational life'.

It is therefore pertinent to consider not only contextual factors such as those immediately affecting the organisation and its employees, such as location of the workplace, acknowledging periods of organisational change, or the potential effects on well-being of flexible working (e.g. Joyce et al., 2010), it is also important to consider the impact that external context (e.g. Godard, 2004; Guest, 2017) such as national and international employment and trade legislation can have on the employee experience, 'acceptable' HR policies and practices, and the geographical movement of labour. Often these factors can be overlooked, however, in the current political and economic climate, an indication of such factors can influence how we frame research questions and research design and also may enable scholars to interpret research findings more meaningfully. Furthermore, in addition to external and organisational context, Alfes et al (2012) acknowledge that the personal characteristics of employees can influence perceptions about practices in the workplace and of well-being.

As prominent scholars in the field call for greater emphasis on well-being (Guest, 2017) and for more evidence-based practice (Briner and Walshe, 2015), a better understanding of the contextual working environment and of the nuances observed across various sectors, professions, job roles and individuals can only serve to enhance the evidence available to HRM scholars and practitioners alike, with regard to the relationship between HR practices and employee well-being.

Furthermore, a number of scholars have identified the need to shift research in this field to having a greater focus on job design, job quality and structural issues in the workplace. Marmot (2010), for example, highlighted that it is not just being in employment that is beneficial to well-being but that the quality of work matters. An article published in an earlier issue of this journal reiterated the need for 'enriched jobs' (Wood and de Menezes, 2011).

These more macro areas for research are needed to complement the more individualistic interventions such as resilience training and mindfulness that are currently topical across both academic and practitioner domains. Taking a more holistic approach to employee well-being that encompasses the individual, organisational and contextual factors can serve to present a more accurate picture of the kaleidoscope of factors that influence well-being, and may also serve to shift the distribution of responsibility for well-being more evenly.

Conclusions

Future research needs to continue to address the current challenges relating to the changing nature of work and the implications this has for HR professionals globally, and for employees themselves. Issues around technology, and the blurring boundaries between work and life; around different patterns and conditions of work, such as shift work and zero hour contracts, to name but a few, all play a role. A greater understanding of how to develop and enhance relationships at work, particularly between employees and line managers in diverse, multi-generational and sometimes widely dispersed workforces is imperative if the sustainability of the workforce is to be ensured. Furthermore, in terms of the changing workplace, as Morris (2004) stated in relation to 'Future of Work' initiatives, much of the research emerges from the UK or US, or at least from the OECD countries. In acknowledgement of this, it can be proposed that greater research evidence from more developing or lower income countries is required to get a more informed understanding of the particular challenges these countries experience in terms of understanding, measuring and managing well-being both in general and in the workplace more specifically.

The 'band-aids' that have been so crucial and which will continue to play an important role in the health and well-being of employees are no longer enough if sustainability of the workforce is to be achieved. Greater efforts need to be made to identify and modify structural components of work, such as job quality and job design. Kramar and Mariappanadar (2015) introduce the concept of sustainable HRM, distinguishing it from strategic HRM by the specific focus on durable long term emphasis on 'developing human and social capital for the future organisation and community sustainability'. This fits well with the themes identified and discussed in the seminar series that informed this special issue and reiterates the importance for HR professionals to consider the role of current and future contextual factors and demographic trends which will shape the workforce of the future. In a turbulent business environment, it is easy to neglect longer term planning, however, macro issues such as the ageing population require thought and preparation now if global workforces are to be healthy, productive and sustainable in the decades to come, and if HR professionals are to maintain a proactive stance in the changing workplace. From the papers presented here, a picture is emerging that sustaining employee well-being goes beyond the individual and the organisation. Adopting a more holistic approach to well-being where a range of dimensions are addressed (for example, physical, mental, social and financial well-being) is a challenge for organisations, employees and HR professionals alike, but is one that must be addressed if theory, research and practice in this field is to advance.

The continuing dominance of well-being at both national and international levels (e.g. ONS, OECD, WHO), combined with well-being being a strategic priority for international bodies, such as the UN, and for key funding bodies, such as the ESRC in the UK, highlights and reinforces the importance of further research into this topic by academics and practitioners within this field, and beyond. Adopting a more holistic perspective in this field, may lead to a better understanding of how HR practices can be designed, delivered and implemented in a way that is most likely to enhance employee well-being and to foster sustainability of the workforce. This special issue presents a 'call to action' to continue to generate an informed and rigorous evidence base from which HR practitioners can make decisions regarding how their organisations choose to invest in the well-being of their employees if organisations are to remain viable and to ensure a sustainable workforce for the future.

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