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The 'What', 'Why' and 'How' of Employee Well-Being: A New Model

Kathryn M. Page · Dianne A. Vella-Brodrick

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Abstract This paper examines the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of employee well-being. Beginning with the 'what' of well-being, the construct of mental health was explored with the aim of building a model of employee well-being. It was proposed that employee well-being consists of three core components: (1) subjective well-being; (2) workplace well-being and (3) psychological well-being. Following this, the 'why' of employee well-being was investigated; that is, why employee well-being should be an important matter for organisations. It was argued that employee well-being is an important precursor to organisational well-being, as indicated by its links to employee turnover and performance. The next section was concerned with the 'how' of employee well-being; that is, how well-being can be reliably enhanced. Drawing on two models of strengths and a practice model of psychological assessment, it was asserted that strength-based development can reliably enhance employee well-being. A solid framework for understanding and measuring employee well-being is offered in the hope that it will foster a more integrated approach to assessing and optimising employee well-being.

Keywords Mental health · Employee well-being · Performance · Turnover · Strengths · Subjective well-being · Psychological well-being · Positive psychology

1 Introduction

Mental health, defined here as the presence of well-being rather than the absence of illness, has become an increasingly important consideration for both researchers and practitioners working in clinical and health contexts over the last several decades. More recently, the positive mental health movement has extended beyond clinical settings and has also found an important place in work settings. Notable developments linking well-being with organisational factors are positive organisational behaviour, which aims to foster positive

K. M. Page · D. A. Vella-Brodrick (✉)
School of Psychology, Psychiatry and Psychological Medicine, Monash University, Caufield Campus, Australia
e-mail: dianne.vella-brodrick@med.monash.edu.au

phenomena such as hope and resilience among employees (e.g., Luthans 2002; Luthans and Youssef 2004, 2007), and positive organizational scholarship, which is the study of what is positive, flourishing and life-giving, at the organisational level (e.g., Cameron and Caza 2004; Cameron et al. 2003). However, whilst the study of well-being within the discipline of psychology has been guided by comprehensive, research-based models (e.g., Diener 1984; Keyes 2002; Ryff 1989), research on employee well-being has been limited largely because of its near exclusive focus on the measurement of employee job satisfaction (Wright and Cropanzano 1997). The aim of this paper is to address this shortcoming by examining the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of employee well-being and proposing a model that goes beyond job satisfaction.

Beginning with the 'what' of well-being, a comprehensive model of employee well-being will be created by drawing on the mental health and well-being literature. We posit subjective and psychological well-being as key criteria for employee mental health. To apply this model specifically to the domain of work, we add two context-specific constructs; namely work-related positive and negative affect and job satisfaction. Next, the 'why' of well-being will be discussed; that is, why employee well-being should be a key consideration for organisations. It is proposed that promoting and preserving employee mental health leads to improvements in employee performance and turnover, which demonstrates the importance of the construct. Finally regarding the 'how' of employee well-being, it is argued that strength-based employee development is a reliable strategy for enhancing well-being.

2 The 'What' of Well Workers: A Review of the Mental Health Construct

In the 50 years since Jahoda's (1958) seminal report outlining the complexity of defining mental health, significant progress has been made towards the definition and conceptualisation of this important concept. One noteworthy development was the turn away from definitions of health as the absence of disease (Keyes 2006). Later this was cemented by the work of authors such as Diener (1984), Ryff (1989), Waterman (1993) and Ryff and Keyes (1995). Essentially they argued that mental health should be defined as the presence of wellness rather than the absence of disease.

A comprehensive example of the wellness approach is Keyes' (2002, 2005, 2007) complete state model of mental health. Keyes' definition of mental health requires that individuals possess symptoms of both positive feelings and positive functioning. These criteria mirror the symptoms of Major Depressive Episode (MDE), as classified by the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM). To be diagnosed as mentally healthy, individuals must show: (1) symptoms of hedonia, or positive feelings about one's life (as opposed to *a*hedonia in diagnoses of MDE) and; (2) symptoms of positive psychological functioning in life (as opposed to psychological impairment or *mal*functioning). Within this model, those who meet the criteria for complete mental health are classified as *flourishing*. Individuals who report an absence of mental health (but not necessarily the presence of mental illness) are classified as *languishing*. Keyes' model is based on the finding that measures of mental health and mental illness are separate but correlated dimensions. Keyes (2005) tested this hypothesis using nationally representative data drawn from the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) study (N = 3,032; age range = 25–74 years). Mental illness was measured by the Composite International Diagnostic Interview Short Form (CIDI-SF) which detects symptoms of four clinical disorders; namely: Major Depressive Episode (MDE), generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder and alcohol dependence during the last 12 months. Four scales were used to indicate the presence

of mental health: (1) positive affect (feeling cheerful, 'in good spirits', extremely happy, calm and peaceful, satisfied and 'full of life'); (2) life satisfaction (when combined, positive affect and life satisfaction created the global construct of hedonia); (3) psychological well-being (self acceptance, positive relations with others, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery and autonomy) and; (4) social well-being (social acceptance, social actualisation, social contribution, social coherence and social integration). Results of structural equation modeling showed that the best fitting model was one where measures of mental health and mental illness were separate but correlated (−.53) factors. Keyes interpreted these results to mean that the constructs of mental illness and mental health are not bipolar opposites as had been previously assumed.

Keyes' (2002, 2005, 2007) diagnosis of mental health as both positive feelings and positive functioning unifies two previously disparate streams of well-being research. The first of these streams focuses primarily on the hedonic approach to happiness. According to the hedonic approach, happiness stems from efforts to maximise pleasure and minimise pain (Waterman 1993). The primary focus in this research stream is the construct of subjective well-being. Subjective well-being (SWB), known colloquially as happiness, is described as a positive state of mind that involves the whole life experience. SWB contrasts with the eudaimonic approach to happiness. This latter approach views well-being as a derivative of personal fulfillment and expressiveness (Waterman 1993), self-actualisation (Maslow 1968) and self-determination (Ryan and Deci 2001). A core construct within this approach is Ryff's (1989) notion of psychological well-being (PWB) which identifies positive psychological functioning as the key mark of good mental health. We are proposing that subjective and psychological well-being should be viewed as core components of employee mental health and represent positive feelings and positive functions respectively.

2.1 Mental Health Criteria 1: Positive Feelings

2.1.1 Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

Research suggests that SWB has three core components: high levels of positive affect, low levels of negative affect and a cognitive evaluation of one's satisfaction with their life as a whole (Diener et al. 1999, see also Busseri et al. 2007 for a recent validation of this SWB model).

The set-point theory of happiness which espouses that individual levels of SWB are not free to vary but are held at a 'set-point' has dominated several decades of research (see Headey 2008 for a review). However, recent studies have shown evidence contrary to set-point theory. For example, in a large scale longitudinal study Lucas et al. (2003) found changes in marital status were associated with long-lasting changes in life satisfaction when individual rather than average trends were examined. Similar results were found in relation to unemployment (Lucas et al. 2004). Seligman et al. (2005) and Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006a, b) assessed the effectiveness of five positive psychology interventions using a randomly allocated, placebo-controlled design. They collected data using an online assessment centre and a convenience sample of 577 males and females. Results showed two of the five interventions (1) using signature strengths in a new way and (2) being aware of one's blessings, led to increases in happiness and decreases in depression for at least 6 months.[1] The 'gratitude visit' exercise led to large positive changes for one

[1] Note: In this study, 6 months was the final assessment period for participants. Changes in well-being and depression may have lasted beyond this point.

month post-intervention. The two remaining exercises and one placebo control led to positive but transient effects on happiness and depression. Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006b) assessed the effect of a four-week happiness intervention (n = 67) on positive emotions, also using a randomised controlled trial. Results showed that the exercise of imagining one's best possible self led to lasting increases in positive affect. These latter authors interpreted these results to be supportive of Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) sustainable happiness model. This model asserts that happiness is the result of (a) genetic predisposition; (b) life circumstances and (c) one's intentional activities. It posits that the essential ingredient for achieving sustainable changes in happiness is one's volitional activities and habitual performance of appropriate strategies such as regular exercise, mediation and/or counting one's blessings create sustainable increases in happiness. Indeed, Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006a) empirically support this latter assertion. They found that participants adapted much more rapidly to changes in life circumstances (e.g., receiving an unexpected scholarship) than changes in intentional and effortful activity (e.g., taking up piano lessons or regularly working out at the gym).

These more optimistic accounts of the malleability of well-being have led a number SWB authors to challenge the set-point theory of happiness (e.g. Diener et al. 2006; Headey 2006, 2008; Huppert 2005; Norrish and Vella-Brodrick (2008)). Diener et al. (2006), for example, recommended five key changes to Brickman and Campbell's (1971) adaptation level theory (an analogous set-point theory; Headey 2008). The revisions were: (1) that the set-point of happiness is set at a generally positive rather than neutral level (e.g., Cummins 1995, 1998); (2) there are considerable inter-individual differences in SWB set-points, largely due to genetic influences; (3) different components of well-being (i.e., positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction) can move in different directions at different times, allowing the possibility of multiple individual set-points; (4) set-points can change under some conditions (e.g., Diener et al. 2006); and (5) inter-individual differences exist in the degree individuals adapt to objective life circumstances with some individuals habituating less than others. Although these post-hoc revisions help explain recent empirical evidence, the necessity of such revisions suggests that the theory is flawed. This point is also made by Headey (2008) on the basis of longitudinal data drawn from a large-scale German (SOEP) panel study. He highlighted a large minority of individuals whose well-being levels had changed significantly during the course of the study (commenced in 1984), some by as much as two standard deviations. On the basis of these substantial 'anomalies', Headey made strong arguments for the replacement of the set-point 'paradigm'. Such suggestions bode favourably for those interested in employee well-being, indicating that individuals, and thus employees, can volitionally achieve long-lasting upward changes in well-being.

2.2 Mental Health Criteria 2: Positive Functioning

The second criteria for mental health, as posited by Keyes' (2002, 2005, 2007) model, is that an individual reports positive psychological functioning. Although his criteria for positive functioning includes facets of both psychological and social well-being (Ryff 1989 and Keyes 1998, respectively) only the six dimensions of psychological well-being are included in the model we propose later in this paper, as Keyes (1998) specific measure on social well-being has shown poor internal consistency (i.e., alpha coefficients <.70 for each subscale). However, one dimension of the Scales of Psychological Well-Being, "Positive Relations with Others" assesses social well-being, hence, this important aspect of mental health will not be omitted altogether.

2.2.1 Psychological Well-Being (PWB)

One of the first attempts to explore what is meant by positive psychological functioning was that of Jahoda (1958). Jahoda reviewed and integrated various perspectives, mostly clinical, on well-being and mental health. She unearthed six healthy psychological processes: (1) acceptance of oneself; (2) accurate perception of reality; (3) autonomy; (4) environmental mastery; (5) growth and development; (6) integration of personality. Although Jahoda's conceptualisation of mental health was a significant contribution to the field, the concept was not developed further due to her inability to produce a measure (Peterson 2006). This omission was addressed with Ryff's (1989) work on psychological well-being (PWB).

Ryff's (1995) definition of PWB was heavily influenced by Jahoda's (1958) work. PWB includes six core well-being dimensions: self acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, autonomy and personal growth. Taken together, these six dimensions "encompass a breadth of wellness that includes positive evaluations of one's self and one's life, a sense of continued growth and development as a person, the belief that life is purposeful and meaningful, the possession of good relationships with other people, the capacity to manage one's life and the surrounding world effectively, and a sense of self-determination" (Ryff 1989, p. 99).

Although there has been some vigorous debate about the validity of the PWB construct as measured by Ryff and Keyes (1995) particularly relating to the abridged scale (e.g., Abbott et al. 2006; Springer and Hauser 2006; Springer et al. 2006), some studies have demonstrated the validity of the PWB construct. For example, Keyes et al. (2002) found that PWB was distinct from the construct of SWB. They modelled the latent structure of the two well-being constructs using a national sample of 3,032 Americans (aged 25–74 years). Factor analysis revealed two correlated (.45) but empirically distinct factors. While none of the SWB facets (life satisfaction, PA and NA) loaded on the PWB factor, three PWB dimensions loaded on both factors (self-acceptance, environmental mastery and positive relations with others). These findings make sense; possessing self acceptance, environmental mastery and positive relations could reasonably be expected to create feelings of both hedonic pleasure and eudemonia. In contrast, the dimensions of purpose in life, autonomy, and personal growth are more existential in nature, thus fitting more closely to the notion of personal fulfilment or eudemonia.

The relationship between subjective and psychological well-being was also assessed by Ring et al. (2007). These authors used a sample of 136 students to assess the relative impact of SWB and PWB on individuals' quality of life (QOL) assessments. An additional aim was to replicate Keyes et al.'s (2002) findings. Their results confirmed Keyes et al.'s model and explained just over 40% of the variance in participant's individual QOL ratings. They also extended Keyes et al.'s results with the finding that SWB mediated the effect of PWB on QOL assessments.

Despite some overlap between the constructs of PWB and SWB, some results support their distinctiveness. This is evidenced through their having differential patterns of correlations with socio-demographic factors (e.g., age, education), and personality. Keyes et al. (2002) found adults with high levels of both SWB and PWB were more likely than adults with low scores on both scales to be highly educated and older. Individuals who were high on SWB but not on PWB were likely to be older, but were not significantly different from those scoring low on both variables in terms of education. In contrast, individuals high on PWB but low on SWB were more likely to be highly educated, but were not necessarily older.

2.3 Additions to Keyes' Complete Health Model: Context-Specific Measurements of Employee Well-Being

Having reviewed what is meant by subjective and psychological well-being, an important question remains: to what degree do such judgements reflect our well-being at work?

2.3.1 Subjective Well-Being at Work

The degree to which one's satisfaction with their job contributes to their overall life satisfaction has been an important and well-researched topic within the psychology literature. Some speculation surrounds the causal ordering of these two constructs; some believe life satisfaction is a determinant of job satisfaction (whereby overall life satisfaction 'spills over' into satisfaction with life domains) whilst others believe job satisfaction is one of the determinants of overall life satisfaction (Rode 2004). Although intuition would support the two being strongly and positively related (much like the contentious happy/productive worker thesis which is discussed later), results have generally found only a modest correlation between the two (e.g., Judge and Watanabe 1993; Rode 2004). For example, Rice et al. (1980), in a meta-analysis of 23 studies, found a correlation of .30. Whilst this work may be criticised in terms of its exclusive focus on the cognitive component of SWB (the correlation between the two would perhaps increase if affect was also considered), it lends preliminary support to the assertion that overall happiness is not an adequate representation of happiness at work. Therefore, whilst SWB is likely to contribute unique variance to employee well-being (most probably due to their mutual dependence on positive and negative affect), additional variance may be explained if such scales were partnered with those specifically measuring well-being at work.

The assertion that context-specific measures of well-being are necessary to capture the subtleties, complexities and variation of employees' cognitive and affective experiences at work has been made by several authors (e.g., Daniels 2000; Warr 1990) and aligns with the Abstract-Specific Hypothesis which claims that what respondents attend to when asked questions concerning the quality of their lives is dependent on how abstract or specific the mode of measurement is (Cummins et al. 2002; Davern et al. 2007; Schwarz and Strack 1999). People do not thoroughly evaluate all aspects of their life when answering global or abstract questions such as 'How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?' Instead, they make relatively fast decisions via cognitive short cuts called heuristics (Tversky and Kahneman 1974). For example, Schwarz and Strack found that people tend to rely on their current mood when responding to well-being assessments. As the level of question specificity increases, however, individuals may attend more specifically to the domain in question, such as that of work, and rely less on heuristic judgements, such as current mood. As such, utilising both work-related and general well-being measures is likely to yield more accurate assessments of employee well-being than when using SWB measures alone.

A number of context-specific measures and models exist that specifically assess happiness at work. These models, however, represent competitive rather than complementary measures of the construct. The historical approach, for example, has been to assess employee job satisfaction, either globally, or as a summation of satisfaction with various job domains (see Spector (1997) for a review). However, this approach has recently been criticised as being an inadequate operationalisation of happiness at work (e.g., Wright and Cropanzano 1997, 2004). These latter authors argued that researchers should replace typical job satisfaction measures with measures of dispositional affect. Warr (1987, 1990)

and Daniels (2000) have adopted a similar approach to Wright and Cropanzano (1997, 2004). Rather than measuring employees' general or dispositional affect, however, they assessed employees' work-related affect. They asserted that such a measurement was a more specific assessment of well-being at work than measures of general affect. In recent years, authors such as Cotton and Hart (2003) have employed a multi-measure approach. Cotton and Hart operationalised employee well-being as consisting of both positive and negative affect (termed morale and distress respectively) and cognitive evaluations of job satisfaction.

We therefore argue that employee well-being be measured through SWB (conceptualised as life satisfaction, positive and negative affect), PWB, work-related affect, and job satisfaction. Although a large body of research has not supported job satisfaction as a valuable predictor of positive organisational criterion such as performance (e.g., Judge et al. 2001), a recent study by Wright et al. (2007), who were originally some of the strongest critics of job satisfaction, gives a more optimistic account of its predictive validity. Taking a new approach to the happy/productive worker thesis, these authors found that job satisfaction was a valid predictor of performance. However, this effect was moderated by employee well-being, which they operationalised as context-free affect. Taken together, these results provide preliminary support for the inclusion of job satisfaction as one of the dimensions of employee well-being.

Evidence suggests that work-related affect would also aid the prediction of employee well-being. Two work-specific models of affect have been posed by Warr (1987, 1990) and Daniels (2000). Warr's model of affect describes affective well-being in terms of two diagonal axes of the circumplex model; that is, anxious-content (tense, uneasy, worried, calm, contented, relaxed) and depressed-enthusiastic (depressed, gloomy, miserable, cheerful, enthusiastic, optimistic). The job-related items were preceded by the question: "Thinking of the past few weeks, how much of the time has your job made you feel each of the following?" Warr (1990) argued that his model of affective well-being was more relevant to the context of work than the PANAS due to the specific focus of the preface and the item content. Warr also criticised the PANAS for covering only two of the four circumplex quadrants (this criticism was also subsequently made by other authors, for example, Wright and Cropanzano 1997). Warr tested his model of affective well-being using an occupationally diverse sample of working adults ($n = 1{,}686$). Patterns of correlations with demographic and occupational factors revealed evidence of construct validity. For example, higher occupational levels were correlated positively with depression-enthusiasm but negatively with anxiety-contentment. That is, higher occupational levels showed more positive and negative arousal, perhaps reflecting the higher level of cognitive requirements for these jobs.

However, we argue that Warr's (1990) model is limited by his decision not to include the arousal dimension of affective well-being. Examining only a subset of employees' affective well-being does not make substantive sense; employees are likely to experience a diverse range of emotions at work, each of which is potentially important for the prediction of valued organisational outcomes. As such, we argue that Warr's model may not have strong predictive validity.

A more comprehensive model of affective well-being is Daniels' (2000) approach to work-related affect. His model depicts five axes on the circumplex model; namely: anxiety-comfort, depression-pleasure, bored-enthusiastic, tiredness-vigour and angry-placid (six-items per axis). Items were prefaced with a similar question to that used by Warr (1987, 1990). However, participants in Daniels' study were asked to report work-related affect from the past week, rather than the past few weeks. Daniels used confirmatory factor

analysis to assess four alternative structures of the scale. Two samples were utilised: social workers (n = 871) and university workers (n = 1915). Both samples supported a five-factor solution (i.e., one factor per axis). Second-order factor analysis revealed two superordinate factors which corresponded with negative and positive affect. These higher order factors accounted for the relationships amongst the five first-order factors. Internal reliabilities of the subscales ranged from .79 to .88 in the two samples. Therefore, Daniels' model, in addition to job satisfaction, would complement measures of SWB in an employee well-being model. Together, job satisfaction and work-related affect may constitute an employees' workplace well-being (WWB).

2.3.2 Psychological Well-Being at Work

As yet, no comparable scale or construct exists that assesses positive psychological functioning in the workplace. Although it would be useful to tailor Ryff's (1989) PWB scale to apply specifically to the workplace (e.g., sense of purpose at work, positive relations with colleagues etc.), substantial validation would be required. However, intuitively all the domains of PWB could plausibly be filled through work. Therefore it is proposed that PWB may be sensitive to changes in employee well-being. This proposition, however, should be tested in future research.

3 The 'Why' of Well Workers: Employee Well-Being and its Link to Turnover and Performance

It is argued that promoting and preserving employee mental health leads to marked increases in organisational health, as indicated by both performance and turnover. This aligns with Cotton and Hart's (2003) occupational health model which espouses that employee well-being, operationalised as both positive and negative affect, is strongly linked to organisational health via an interaction between individual and contextual variables. The links between well-being and both retention and performance will now be briefly reviewed.

3.1 The Well-Being-Retention Link

Turnover is an important issue for organisations today, largely due to its significant business costs. According to Cascio's (2003) formula, the cost of losing an employee can range between 1.5 and 2.5 times the departing employee's annual salary. Objective measurements of turnover are generally achieved through an assessment of company turnover statistics, with 15% being the generally accepted benchmark (Steel et al. 2002). Retention may also be assessed subjectively by asking employees about their intention to leave an organisation. A large-scale meta-analysis by Steel and Ovalle (1984) found a weighted average correlation of .50 between intentions to and actual turnover. However, irrespective of whether intention to leave predicts actual turnover, employee's who harbour such attitudes are not likely to exhibit high levels of motivation or performance at work. As such, a healthy organisation is likely to be one in which employees intend to continue rather than cease their employment.

A growing body of evidence suggests that employees' intention to turnover is related to the absence of work-related PA (i.e., languishing) rather than the presence of work-related

NA (i.e., ill-being). In a controlled laboratory study, Shoenfelt and Battista (2004) found that positive job satisfaction and mood states reduced turnover intentions in a sample of 154 undergraduate students. This relationship was not observed in relation to neutral or negative mood states/satisfaction. In a sample of police workers, Hart and Cooper (2001) found that employee PA, which they called morale, was negatively and moderately correlated with withdrawal intentions ($r = -.38$). Employee NA, however, which they termed distress, was not related to withdrawal intentions.

In a more recent study, Wright and Bonett (2007) assessed the relationship between job satisfaction, well-being and voluntary turnover in a sample of 112 managers. They hypothesised that well-being, operationalised as employees' general affect, would moderate a relationship between job satisfaction and job performance. Specifically, they expected that individuals with low levels of well-being would be more likely to leave their organisation as a result of job dissatisfaction. This prediction was supported. In addition, both job satisfaction and well-being showed significant main effects on employee turnover ($r = -.25$ and $-.39$ respectively). Similarly, Judge (1993) found that employees' affective disposition moderated the relationship between job satisfaction and voluntary turnover; as was noted earlier, research suggests that well-being is primarily driven by one's dispositional affect. However, in contrast to Wright and Bonett's findings, the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover was strongest for individuals with a positive disposition. That is, employees' who were pre-disposed to view life positively were more likely to quit their job when they were dissatisfied with it. Such findings lend further support to the inclusion of both work-related affect and job satisfaction (WWB) as dimensions of employee well-being.

3.2 The Well-Being-Performance Link

The presumption that happy workers are productive workers, often termed the happy/productive worker thesis, has spanned several decades of organisational psychology research and practice (Staw 1986). Until the late 1990's this hypothesis was operationalised and tested by correlating measures of job satisfaction and performance. Although conceptual evidence seemed to support a relationship between these two constructs, meta-analyses only weakly supported the hypothesis (e.g., Brayfield and Crockett 1955; Iaffaldano and Muchinsky 1985; Judge et al. 2001). The largest and most rigorous meta-analysis on the topic was conducted by Judge et al. (2001). They reviewed correlations from 312 samples ($N = 54{,}417$), finding a true score correlation of just .30 between job satisfaction and job performance.

The 1990s saw a new wave of happy/productive worker research. This movement contended that researchers had not found correlations between job satisfaction and performance because of the erroneous belief that job satisfaction equates to happiness (Cropanzano and Wright 1999; Wright and Bonett 1997; Wright and Cropanzano, 1997, 2000, 2004; Wright and Staw 1999). Wright and Cropanzano (1997) argued that 'happiness' be assessed through an employees' sense of well-being, as measured by Berkman's (1971) psychological well-being scale (described in more detail shortly). They tested this assertion in two separate samples (study 1: $n = 47$ human service employees; study 2: $n = 49$ public sector professionals). Results supported their hypothesis. Well-being, but not job satisfaction, was correlated with performance in both studies ($r = .32$ and .44 for studies 1 and 2 respectively), when demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, tenure) were controlled. In a later study using a sample of human service workers ($n = 47$) and a sample

of juvenile probation officers (n = 37), Wright and Cropanzano (2000) also controlled employees' level of job satisfaction. Results showed that SWB contributed unique variance to the prediction of job performance over and above that attributable to job satisfaction and demographic variables (r = .32). Job satisfaction was not related to job performance (r = −.08). In a subsequent study, the authors also showed that well-being predicted performance up to a year after well-being was reported (r = .36).

Although Wright, Cropanzano and colleagues' findings show some support for a relationship between well-being and performance, the reported correlations are not markedly higher than the true score correlation found by Judge et al. (2001) in their meta analysis of the job satisfaction-job performance relationship. This calls into question whether their assessment of the relationship is a significant improvement upon previous conceptualisations of the happy-productive worker thesis. One possibility for the modest correlations found by Wright, Cropanzano and colleagues is that their conceptualisation of happiness at work is still not sufficient. In each of their studies on the happy/productive worker thesis, these authors used Berkman's (1971) eight-item measure of psychological well-being. This measure is thought to assess affective disposition via the unpleasantness-pleasantness dimension of the circumplex model (Wright and Staw 1999). It asks respondent's to report how often they have felt very lonely or remote from other people", "depressed or very unhappy", "bored", "so restless you couldn't sit long in a chair", "vaguely uneasy about something without knowing why", "particularly excited or interested in something", "pleased about having accomplished something", and "on top of the world". This conceptualisation and measure does not align with the vast SWB literature. As discussed earlier, SWB is generally defined as the presence of life satisfaction and positive affect, and the relative absence of negative affect (Diener et al. 1999). In line with this definition, SWB research generally captures SWB through both the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al. 1985) and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS, Watson et al. (1988)). Whilst they do not directly account for their departure from previous SWB literature, Wright and colleagues do address their decision not to use the PANAS (see Wright and Staw 1999). According to these authors, a fundamental difference between Berkman's measure of psychological well-being and the PANAS is that the two measures assess different dimensions of the circumplex with the PANAS focusing on activation and Berkman's measure focusing on pleasantness. In a study that compared the effectiveness of these two approaches to measuring well-being, they found that the PANAS did not significantly predict job performance. Confirming their previous findings, Berkman's measure did predict job performance (Wright and Staw 1999).

Although Wright, Cropanzano and colleagues have found significant correlations between well-being and performance (e. g., Wright and Staw 1999), we believe correlations would be strengthened if well-being was defined more comprehensively and included both general and work specific indicators. It is proposed that both work-related affect (e.g., Daniels 2000 model) and job satisfaction also be assessed when examining employee well-being. Whilst there are currently no measures of an employee's positive functioning at work, Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being model is likely to be relevant to the workplace. As such, employee happiness at work may be represented by employees' SWB, PWB and WWB (refer back to Fig. 1). In reference to Wright and Staw's (1999) argument that the PANAS does not adequately predict employee performance, readers should be reminded that Daniels' (2000) measure of work-related affect includes all four quadrants of the circumplex. It also assesses the two higher-order factors of positive and negative affect. As such, it is likely to provide a more adequate representation of work-related affect than either the PANAS or Berkman's (1971) scale. Additionally, although evidence has historically not found job satisfaction to be a useful predictor of performance, a recent study by Wright et al. (2007) had shed new insight

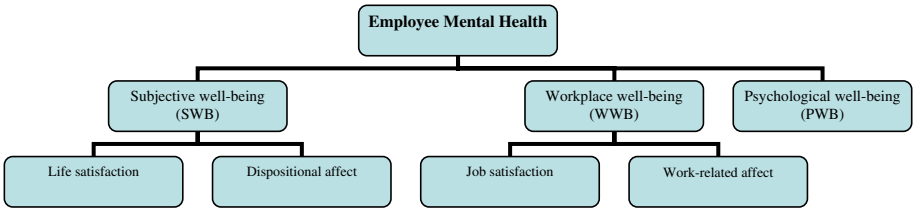

Fig. 1 Model of employee mental health, which consists of three core components: An employee's subjective well-being, workplace well-being and psychological well-being. *Notes*: As per Ryff's (1989) conceptualisation, PWB consists of six dimensions: self acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, personal growth and purpose in life. For simplicity, these dimensions do not appear in the diagram. Both dispositional affect and work-related affect consist of positive and negative components

into this phenomenon. In a study of 109 managers employed by a large customer service company, they found that job satisfaction did predict performance. The key difference from past studies however (and perhaps an explanation for previous non-significant findings) was that job satisfaction only predicted the performance of employee's with high levels of well-being (measured as dispositional affect). That is, employee well-being moderated the relationship between job satisfaction and performance. Although this finding should be interpreted with caution until replicated in a larger sample, it provides additional support for the inclusion of job satisfaction in an employee well-being model.

4 The 'How' of Employee Well-Being: The Strength-based Approach to Enhancing Well-Being

Although much research has been conducted into the causes and correlates of well-being, very little research has focused on ways in which well-being can be reliably enhanced (Sheldon and Lyubomirsky 2006a). Still fewer researchers have specifically investigated how to enhance well-being in the workplace (notable exceptions are research by the Gallup Organization; see Harter et al. (2003) for a review; and Cotton, Hart and colleagues; see Cotton and Hart (2003) for a review). An area that looks particularly promising as a means to enhancing employee well-being is the study of strengths.

4.1 Conceptual Evidence for the Utility of Strengths

Several theories support the conceptual link between strengths and well-being. One such example is Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory. Research on self-determination theory examines the factors that facilitate intrinsic motivation, self-regulation and well-being. The concept of strengths fits well with this paradigm. Specifically, strength-based employee development may enhance employees' ability to meet their psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness; according to SDT, when behaviour is regulated for the fulfilment of these innate needs, an individual is able to achieve more effective functioning, leading to psychological growth and well-being (Ryan and Deci 2000. Research by Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006a, b) on the concept of self-concordant motivation also supports strength-based development as an employee well-being enhancement strategy. These authors assert that one is more motivated to achieve goals that are congruent with one's own values. As such, individuals whom primarily focus their effort on enhancing natural

strengths may be more likely to feel the intervention is self-concordant, leading to better adherence to the intervention, and more positive outcomes. Csikszentmihalyi's (2002) flow theory aligns with this concept. This theory asserts that optimally balancing one's skills with the challenges of a task creates feelings of flow—an innately pleasurable state characterised by intense feelings of involvement.

Predominantly, research into the utility of strengths has been guided by one of two frameworks: the character strengths and virtues (CSV) classification by Peterson and Seligman (2004) and the Gallup Organization's strength framework (Buckingham and Clifton 2001). The CSV classification is based on the tenets of positive psychology; a scientifically-driven field of research and practice that investigates "the study of positive subjective experiences, the study of positive individual traits, and the study of institutions that enable positive experiences and positive traits" (Peterson and Seligman 2004, p. 5). The CSV framework was developed to answer questions relating to the second of these topics: the study of positive character traits. It comprises 24 character strengths such as 'zest, enthusiasm and energy', 'bravery and valour', and 'persistence, perseverance and industriousness'. Strengths are thought to exist ubiquitously across cultures and are associated with feelings of fulfilment and eudemonia.

The Gallup strengths framework (Buckingham and Clifton 2001) is a more concrete model of strengths than the CSV and is believed to represent *situational themes*; that is, "specific habits that lead people to manifest strengths in a given situation" (p. 14) such as work. Hodges and Clifton (2004) defined a strength as "the ability to provide consistent, near perfect performance in a given activity" (p. 218). Strengths, however, are not inborn. Rather, strengths are developed on the basis of the development of talent. Talents are naturally occurring patterns of thought, feeling or behaviour, and are represented via the 34 themes (e.g., 'adaptability', 'command', 'positivity'). For a talent to become a strength, however, it must first be identified and then refined and developed with the appropriate skills and knowledge.

A lesser known model of strengths that may be useful in the current context is Lopez et al.'s (2003) practice model. Rather than setting out a specific strengths framework, these authors put forth a practitioner model which outlines how practitioners can utilise clients' strengths. In contrast to both the CSV and the Gallup strengths framework, these authors posit that practitioners should consider clients' weaknesses as well as strengths. They also assert that behaviour should be context specific as the environment plays a role in how a strength manifests.

Although Snyder et al.'s (2003) model was developed within the context of clinical or counselling psychology, their work is highly relevant to organisational psychology where employees' are equally in need of well-being interventions. Work by Keyes (2002), for example, found that nearly as many adults suffered from the absence of mental health (i.e., *languishing*) as the presence of mental illness (12.1 and 14.1%, respectively). Both groups were related to higher levels of work absenteeism, psychosocial impairment and distress, relative to flourishing individuals (i.e., those with complete mental health). In the same study, just over 17% of the population met the criteria for complete mental health (i.e., positive feelings plus positive functioning). The large majority of adults (52.4%) were considered moderately mentally healthy. These figures were drawn from a nationally representative study of adults aged between 24 and 75 years (N = 3,032), which provides evidence for their robustness. Taken together, these findings highlight the need for well-being interventions to target languishing employees as well as those with mental illnesses. Focusing on employee strengths, as well as problem areas, may prove a very useful means to approach such interventions.

4.2 Empirical Evidence for the Utility of Strengths

A growing body of empirical evidence supports the use of strengths to facilitate well-being. For example, in their review of the effectiveness of positive psychology interventions, Seligman et al. (2005) found that participants' directed to utilise their character strengths in a new way, every day, for one week experienced increases in well-being and decreases in depression for up to 6 months. This finding is congruent with Peterson and Seligman's (2004) initial expectations that exercising one's character strengths leads to feelings of fulfilment akin to the notion of eudaimonic well-being. As previously described, eudaimonic well-being is thought to stem from feelings of being true to the self (Waterman 1993). Given that one's character strengths are indicative of one's authentic self (Peterson and Seligman 2004) it is intuitive that better understanding and utilisation of one's signature strengths will enhance feelings of psychological well-being. Positive changes in general and work-related affect may also be expected.

The Gallup strengths framework also has empirical support (e.g., Clifton and Harter 2003; Harter et al. 2002, 2003; Hodges and Clifton 2004). These studies show strong links between strengths-based development and employee engagement (which Harter et al. 2003, described as being analogous to the concept of employee well-being). Clifton and Harter (2003), for example, meta-analysed the findings of 65 firms involved in employee engagement interventions. Of these organisations, four had utilised strength-based interventions (study group) whilst the remaining 61 had not (control group). Results showed substantial support for the association between utilising employee strengths and employee engagement with the study group reporting significantly higher levels of engagement than those in the control group from year one to year two (d = .65). This effect was further enhanced from year one to year three (d = 1.15). Utility analyses showed an increase in annual per employee productivity of more than US$1000 (i.e. US$1 million for a company of 1000 employees). Research has also shown that engagement is a significant predictor of employee turnover ($p = -.30$) and business-unit performance (p = .38). Again assigning a dollar value to these effects, utility analysis revealed that highly engaged business units accrued $80–$120 K more per month than the least engaged business units (i.e., $960 K per year) (Clifton and Harter 2003).

4.3 An Important Point Regarding Weaknesses in Strength-based Models

Positive psychology is just as focused on human illness, disease and malfunction as it is on strengths, virtues and fulfilment. Rather than replace the illness-focused model of psychology, the positive psychology movement aims to provide a greater balance to research and practice within the field, whereby both health and illness are considered (e.g. Keyes 2002; Lopez et al. 2003; Ryff 1989; Seligman et al. 2005). An important component of the strengths versus weaknesses debate is their roots in positive and negative affect. Whilst focusing on one's strengths is likely to engender positive feelings such as joy or happiness, focusing on one's areas of weakness may engender negative feelings such as frustration, anxiety or irritation. According to research by Fredrickson and Losada (2005), an individual's experience of affective (i.e., emotionally laden) events accrues over time. This 'build up' becomes a *positivity ratio* or a ratio of good to bad events. Their research suggests that a positivity ratio of between 7:1 and 3:1 predicts flourishing, or complete mental health.

The effect of the positivity ratio on team performance indicators has also been investigated. Losada and Heaphy (2004) observed the interactions of teams in team meetings. Sixty teams of employees (eight employees per group) were drawn from a large company.

Speech acts (i.e., phrases or sentences) occurring within each team were observed and coded by the research team along three bipolar dimensions: (1) positivity to negativity (e.g., encouraging versus disparaging remarks amongst team members respectively); (2) inquiry to advocacy (e.g., exploring versus supporting a proposal, respectively); (3) other to self (e.g., speech act of group versus speech act of a speaker). Each team was then independently classified as being high-performers (15 teams), medium performers (26 teams) or low performers (19 teams) on the basis of objective data such as profitably, customer satisfaction and 360 degree evaluations. It was predicted that teams showing higher positivity to negativity ratios, comparable inquiry to advocacy ratios and comparable other to self ratios, would fall into the high performing category. Teams who showed higher negativity to positivity ratios and unequal inquiry to advocacy and other to self ratios, were predicted to fall into the low performing category. All other teams would fall in the medium performer category. These hypotheses were supported. Specifically, results suggested that a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative speech acts characterised high performing teams. Losada and Heaphy inferred that positive speech acts in team interactions broaden emotional space allowing the possibility of action. In contrast, negative emotional acts restrict emotional space and close possibilities for action. These conclusions further support the ideal positivity ratio suggested by Fredrickson and Losada (2005). Together, these studies suggest that an effective well-being intervention may be one in which employees' focus approximately 5:1 on developing strengths and weaknesses, respectively.

5 Summary and Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to expand the mental health literature by reviewing the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of employee well-being. Specifically, three topics were addressed: (1) what it is that constitutes employee well-being; (2) why employee well-being is important for organisations and; (3) how well-being can be reliably enhanced. First it was argued that employee well-being consists of subjective well-being (life satisfaction plus dispositional affect), workplace well-being (job satisfaction plus work-related affect) and psychological well-being (self acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life and personal growth). Following this, the 'why' of employee well-being was examined. Two core criteria of organisational well-being were posed: low employee turnover and high employee performance (Cotton and Hart 2003). Strong, negative correlations were found between well-being and turnover. Although moderate, positive correlations were found between well-being and performance, it was argued that these correlations would increase if well-being was conceptualised more comprehensively. Specifically, it was argued that employee well-being should be conceptualised on the basis of the model described here. The next section examined how well-being can be reliably enhanced. It was asserted that strength-based employee development would provide an effective means for fostering well-being. Such an intervention should focus on both strengths and weaknesses with a positivity ratio of 5:1. This comprehensive operationalisation of well-being in the workplace represents an integration and extension of what previous researchers have undertaken in the field. Uniting various streams of research on the topic may allow researchers to progress the area at a more rapid pace. It may also lead to greater agreement regarding the conceptualisation of employee well-being.

Employee well-being is an important academic and practical pursuit due to its links to performance and turnover and may prove to be a valuable tool for demonstrating return on investment (ROI) for employee well-being enhancement programs. Furthermore, such a

model, and its associated measures, may be used by practitioners to track employee reactions to workplace changes in management or HR policy. Thus, this paper may foster increased recognition of the importance of employee mental health. This should not imply, however, that the construct is not important in and of itself.

In the last several years, the world has seen a trend towards more socially-based indicators. Similarly, social metrics, such as employee well-being, would also complement more dollar-based metrics in the business world. Continual research on the causes, correlates and consequences of employee mental health will lead to additional insight into the factors that may enhance employee well-being. Such a task is socially as well as scientifically valuable.

This paper examined one potentially important means to enhancing employee well-being—employee strengths. However, strength-based development is not necessarily the only means for enhancing employee well-being. Others have also examined the potential utility of expressing kindness and gratitude (e.g., Norrish and Vella-Brodrick (2008)), visualising best possible self (Sheldon and Lyubomirsky 2006b) and savouring (Bryant and Veroff 2007). Authors working on positive organizational behaviour (e.g., Luthans and Youssef 2007; Youssef and Luthans 2007) and positive organizational scholarship (e.g., Cameron and Caza 2004) have also made significant progress in this regard. It is hoped that this paper may add to what is fast becoming an 'upward spiral' of research aiming to improve quality of life by offering a solid framework for understanding and measuring employee well-being.

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