

DOPNI Symposium ‘Promoting Psychological Wellbeing at Work’

Introduction

The BPS publication ‘Psychology at work: Improving wellbeing and productivity in the workplace’ (BPS, October 2017) notes “the role of the organisation in ensuring the highest quality results is the one which also promotes employee health and wellbeing, functioning and fulfilment’. The CIPD’s Health and Wellbeing at Work Survey (CIPD, April 2019) report found ‘employers’ growing recognition of their critical role in improving the health of the working-age population.’

Wellbeing at work was a key issue for organisations before the Covid-19 pandemic but has become even more so in the last year. It is an important aspect of organisational life both in providing psychologically healthy work and workplaces for employees but also supporting employees undergoing times of potential increased psychological harm. Occupational psychologists are ideally placed to provide support to organisations and individuals in identifying the factors that impact on wellbeing at work and designing and delivering interventions to enhance wellbeing.

This symposium from DOPNI brings together psychologists working in a range of areas relating to wellbeing at work. They will share insights from their own research and practice about what works in relation to promoting psychological wellbeing in the workplace or supporting employees when they are experiencing difficulties.

This symposium is held in memory of our dear colleague and friend, Dominic McCanny CPsychol, who passed away in January 2020. Having achieved his psychology degree as a mature student Dominic had practiced as an occupational psychologist for over twenty years, setting up his own consultancy and working in partnership with fellow occupational psychologists. Dominic served as a DOPNI Committee Member for many years and was involved in organising and presenting events to members. We dedicate this symposium to Dominic as testimony of his work in bringing the science of occupational psychology to organisations.

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Dr. Christine Grant, C.Psychol, AFBPsS, SFHEA - Coventry Uni

Dr Christine Grant is a Deputy Head of School and leading applied researcher in the psychology of remote e-working, her work explores the impact of technology on remote e-workers work-life balance, job effectiveness and wellbeing, enabling interventions to be developed for employees and their organisations. Christine has worked with many public and private sectors organisations on these researching these issues. Her most recent focus has been on overuse of technology and the ‘always on culture’, and ‘agile working’, examining the effects on the wellbeing of individuals, supervisors and organisational policy. Christine has recently co-edited a book on agile working and well-being. Part of the British Psychological Society COVID19 ‘Working Differently’ Working Group Christine has recently published with colleagues a guide on homeworking during the crisis see: <https://www.bps.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/public/working-from-home>

Christine has also developed a published psychometric measure the e-work life™ scale that enables individuals and organisations to measure the impact of remote working and includes suggested strategies to ameliorate these issues. She has published widely both academically and in the media, being quoted in several high profile articles and radio shows including BBC news <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-28686235> and recently has written several press releases and blogs on digital resilience including: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/changing-work-views/future-work/thought-pieces/digital-resilience-24-7-world> <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/news/2020/coventry-university-working-from-home-expert-offers-mental-wellbeing-tips/>

Most recent publications include: Grant C. & Russell, E. (2020). Agile Working and Well-being in the Digital Age. Palgrave: London; Charalampous M., Grant, C.A., Tramontano (2021 under review) "It needs to be the right blend": A qualitative exploration of remote e-workers' experience and well-being at work. Employee Relations and Kinman, G & Grant, C. (2020) Presenteeism during the COVID-19 pandemic: risks and solutions. Occupational Medicine doi:10.1093/occmed/kqaa193 <https://academic.oup.com/occmed/advance-article/doi/10.1093/occmed/kqaa193/5986708?guestAccessKey=2721baba-17a2-451f-93cd-ba9cd2e312ab>

Christine has received many funding awards including ESRC Balance Network funding to investigate e-resilience. She is also currently working on a research project to develop a digital competency framework for remote e-workers.

Abstract

Agile Working: How to Develop Digital Resilience and Thrive

Acknowledging the modern day pressure to be 'always on', Dr Grant will discuss the value of using technology to facilitate 'agile working'. She will also address strategies to promote resilience in workplaces where the risks of cognitive overload are increasing. 'Agile working' is on the rise and deemed to be a solution for many organisations, understanding what this actually means in practice for individuals, organisations and their managers is imperative, with a dearth of guidance in this area. The talk will cover recent research completed into developing competencies to manage agile and remote workers based on findings from a study with a large private sector organisation.

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Clare Mulligan-Foster

Clare is a Chartered Psychologist and researcher in the area of organisational behaviour and regularly provides consultancy & research projects to both public and private sector companies in the areas of diversity, workforce planning and leadership. Clare has developed specialisms in diversity and inclusion, especially gender and age diversity, inclusive leadership and unconscious bias. She regularly runs workshops and coaching on managing bias and inclusive behaviours and will be able to share her expertise, research and knowledge of best practice in this area. She also leads on Diversity and Inclusion audits and strategic reviews, enabling organisations to have a bespoke plan for implementing and meeting effective Diversity and Inclusion objectives

Clare holds an MSc in Work and Organisational Psychology from Dublin City University (DCU), a BA in Psychology from Dublin Business School (DBS). She is a current doctoral researcher with Birkbeck University in which she is studying career transitions for older workers. Clare is the previous Chair for the Division of Work and Organisational Psychologists (DWOP). Clare is a Chartered Psychologist with the British Psychology Society (BPS) and an accredited coach. She is a member of the Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD). Clare is also a lecturer for York St John University

Before becoming a psychologist, Clare worked for over 20 years in senior roles in the financial services sector, and now mixes her business experience and psychological theory to understand the challenges faced by organisations and help develop the best solutions. Her strengths lie in being able to apply psychological theory and best practice to organisational needs. Her experience can ensure that any interventions are evidence based using academic research, practitioner best practice and the context of the business needs. She uses data and learning analytics to support any interventions to ensure behavior changes are monitored and measured, and that any agreed actions are accountable.

Clients describe Clare as engaging, passionate and professional. She has worked with a range of clients from Civil Service, public sector, professional services, and small business and can readily adapt her style and knowledge to suit the context. Clare regularly speaks at conferences and corporate events and is in demand for her knowledge and easy, relaxed style in which she can convey theory in a fun and engaging way.

Abstract

Retirement – what else? Supporting older workers career options

Current demographics are showing we are all living longer and working longer. The traditional view of retirement is being challenged as more people are looking to create a longer career. Charles Handy shared his thinking on second curve careers in which we should prepare for our second careers before reaching a plateau. Using modern career theories such as portfolio careers, protean careers and boundaryless careers, how can we support our employees to think about second careers as an alternative to traditional retirement

In this presentation, Clare will challenge some of the traditional views of organisational retirement processes and help us consider new ways of thinking of offering alternative career management options for our older workers... and for ourselves

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Dr Benjamin Gardner

Dr Gardner is a social and health psychologist, and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology, King's College London. His research focuses on understanding and changing behaviour, with a particular emphasis on habit and sedentary behaviour among desk-based workers. His recent work explores the broader work-based goals and contexts that shape sitting, physical activity and wellbeing at work, and developing strategies to promote working practices conducive to physical and mental wellbeing among people working from home. He led an MRC-funded project designed to develop understanding of why people sit for long periods in the workplace, and is supervising a PhD project looking at how changes to working practices have affected health behaviour and wellbeing among people working from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Abstract

Sedentary behaviour, physical activity, and wellbeing at work: A goal-based perspective

Researchers often tacitly assume that people pursue – or should pursue – physical activity, and limit their sitting time, to achieve health and wellbeing benefits. This assumption fails to acknowledge that activity and sitting are often mere by-products of pursuing goals unrelated to health, such as completing work tasks. This talk describes research illustrating the higher-order goals, values and practices that facilitate or inhibit physical activity and sitting in the work context. For example, the acceptability of sitting-reduction strategies in the workplace is shown to depend on how such strategies are expected to influence productivity and relationships with colleagues. We also describe research conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic illustrating how changes to work practices when working from home have incidentally led to increased sitting time, and declines in physical activity and wellbeing. Recommendations for encouraging physical activity, discouraging sitting time, and promoting wellbeing are offered.

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Dr Jo Yarker

Occupational Psychologist, specialising in work, health and wellbeing.
Director, Affinity Health at Work
Birkbeck, University of London

Jo is an occupational psychologist, specialising in work, health and well-being. She is Director of Affinity Health at Work and leads the Professional Doctorate in Organizational Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London. Her work focuses on supporting people to thrive at work, particularly when they are experiencing times of challenge or vulnerability. Together with her colleagues at Affinity, she leads the Work, Health and Wellbeing Research Consortium, a collaboration between researchers and employer organisations, national institutions and interested individuals who support research in workplace health and wellbeing. With a particular interest in stress and mental health, she leads research and provides advice on health and wellbeing strategy, prevention and risk assessment, leadership and management development and absence management. With academic colleagues, she is pioneering a whole-system IGLOO approach that recognizes the importance of Individual, Group, Leader and Organisational resources needed for healthy and sustainable work. She has worked with a number of NHS Trusts and Universities, RBS, Lendlease, AECOM and PwC among others. Her research has been funded by the HSE, CIPD, DWP, ESRC, Mental Health Foundation and Cancer Research UK. Jo is author of more than 150 articles, book chapters, research reports and evidence-based guides and toolkits and presents frequently at professional and industry conferences.

Abstract

IGLOO resources enabling sustainable return to work following mental ill-health

Sustainable return to work (SRTW) for workers with mental ill-health presents a major societal challenge with approximately 38.2% of the EU population suffer from a mental disorder this year. Many experience difficulties returning to work, while research suggests that approximately 19% of workers subsequently relapse, taking subsequent periods of absence or exit the workforce (Koopmans, Bültmann, Roelen, Hoedeman, van der Klink, & Groothoff, 2011). Current research has been limited by a focus on absence and initial return and a siloed approach where work and non-work domains are considered separately. We used the recently developed IGLOO framework as a guiding heuristic to examine the Individual, Group, Leader, Organisational and Overarching context (e.g. national legislation) This approach draws on the conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989) and aimed to identify the resources in and outside the workplace that promote sustainable return to work. Specifically we asked the question: *What are the resources that help workers with common mental disorders stay and be productive after return to work?*

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