Editorial: Gender & Wellbeing at Work

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Wellbeing at work is a changeable and contested term (Hone, Schofield, Jarden, 2015). However, it has often focussed on attributes of individuals at work rather than incorporating the work environment, the role of the regulatory environment or other external influences affecting employee wellbeing (Ravenswood, 2011). The focus of individual wellbeing and mental health has identified factors such as positive work relationships (Roche, Haar, & Luthans, 2014), meaning in life and social relationships (Diener et al., 2010) and trust in leadership (Roche et al., 2014) as well as individuals' 'resilience'. Measures of employee wellbeing have included fatigue, job-induced stress, job satisfaction and work-life balance (Macky & Boxall, 2008).

Fewer studies have connected individual attributes with the context within which employee wellbeing takes place (Baptiste, 2008). However, some have included aspects of the work environment, such as supportive management (Gilbreath, & Benson, 2004; Hone et al., 2015; Wood & de Menezes, 2011), and supportive colleagues (Hone et al., 2015) and physical factors such as green spaces (Lottrup, Grahn, & Stigsdotter, 2013). The organisation of work can also be crucial with workload and deadlines impacting on people's wellbeing and ability to gain adequate sleep (Moen, Kelly, Tranby, & Huang, 2011), and their ability to detach from work.

The wellbeing literature has focussed more on individual traits and abilities than on organisational context, yet it could be said for the purpose of improved performance, rather than with the aim of improving employee wellbeing (Guest, 2017). What Guest's assertion implies is that the wellbeing research, based in HRM and psychology fields, has lacked a *critical* approach that incorporates not only individual traits but the socio-political and organisational context of their wellbeing.

Guest (2017) proposes a new analytical framework, drawing on the quality of work life literature in employment relations that includes consideration of engaging work, organisational support and employee voice, and a good work environment. Of significance to this special issue, Guest (2017) includes equal opportunities as a key aspect of a good work environment. Such a framework may appear surprising or challenging to a body of literature that has had an individual and/or performance focus, however, the context of the workplace and employment relationship is a foundation of employment relations scholarship. Employment relations wellbeing research has often focussed on employee control (or lack of it) and voice in the workplace. Control over work and its flexibility has indeed been found to be key in employee wellbeing (Wood & de Menezes, 2011). This voice or control extends to organisational policies, for example, how patterns of work are decided, the predictability or unpredictability of work commitments, and the timing of work (Wooden, Warren, & Drago, 2009). It is often

the collective process in which these decisions are made that makes the difference in how employees view the policies (Bailyn, 2011).

Overall, this research (and a large component of ER research in general) often fails to take a gendered analysis of employee wellbeing at work. The one key area that broadly relates to gender and wellbeing has centred upon work-life balance (Gröpel & Kuhl, 2009) and the burden of care work that women still carry: women spend more time on domestic work and childcare tasks than men (Walsh, 2013). Attempts to reconcile domestic and care work with paid work can backfire for women who may 'choose' occupations that are more flexible (such as within the medical professions – Walsh, 2013), and women may be judged more harshly than their male counterparts and seen as less committed to their jobs when they ask for flexible work (Allen, 2005). Recent work emphasises the concept of wellbeing in relation to family demands and their impact on work, with manager support directly influencing the otherwise negative impact (Achour, Ahmad, Nor, & Yusoff, 2017). Some attention has been given to the context within which we consider wellbeing, for example, amongst North American Indian women which finds that the rural context and its attendant socioeconomic factors, as well as community and organisational support are crucial for the experience of work-life balance (Christiansen, Gadhoke, Pardilla & Gittelsohn, 2017). Further 'non-Western' perspectives of employee wellbeing in relation to work-life balance are also emerging, providing welcome critiques of the models used by Western researchers (e.g. Ahour et al., 2017).

However, while this research is essential, conflating women's work roles with care for children, risks perpetuating gender stereotypes of women as successful workers, and women's role in society. Research has only just begun to recognise, for example, the role of wages in women's wellbeing in relation to work-life balance and the work environment (Lips, 2016; Ravenswood & Harris, 2016). Research needs to move beyond what is essentially surface level analysis of the issues for wellbeing at work in relation to gender, and to consider *why* women might have lower wellbeing in relation not only to their family demands, but also in relation to how we organise work in our societies and their experience at work. A notable contribution in this area is Sojo, Wood and Genat's (2016) study on women's negative experiences (sexual violence, harassment and discrimination) at the workplace and its effect on women, specifically investigating the power relationships that are behind these experiences.

This Special Issue highlights research in New Zealand, Australia and South East Asia. Comparable with our call for papers for this issue, narrow definitions of wellbeing have been shattered, and the interactions between individuals, work and society are investigated in more detail in each article. The issue begins with an article that challenges our concept of careers, older workers and wellbeing. The first article by Myers and Douglas examines older women's re-entry into work in New Zealand after having spent time on a self-initiated expatriation travelling and working overseas. Although these women returned energised and enthusiastic for new work and career opportunities, they faced discrimination and disadvantage based on their age. While highlighting negative stereotypes and the reality of discrimination against older women in New Zealand, this article argues for a more holistic view of wellbeing at work which includes not only meaningful work, but also a consideration of the role of career paths and earnings in reckonings of wellbeing. It urges both academics and practitioners to consider the reciprocal nature between employee and organisational wellbeing.

Pringle, Davies, Giddings and McGregor also consider the role of earnings in wellbeing for women in engineering and care occupations. Continuing a more complex view of wellbeing, the authors connect the individual (micro), organisational (meso) and social/economic (macro) levels of wellbeing and show how the relationships between these levels impact on women. This article situates itself within the context of the gender pay gap in New Zealand, and challenges the positivistic, quantitative views of wellbeing that have persisted in psychology and industrial relations based research, with a call to contest a recent shift in IR research to more managerial perspectives, rather than exploring underlying power relationships.

From here, we move to Australia where Corr, Dixon and Burgess discuss wellbeing of managers, business owners and providers in the low-paid, high pressure industry of early childhood education. This provides a different perspective by focussing on the competing time pressures of women between their managerial responsibilities and their own personal childcare commitments. Part of the Work, Time, and Health project, this highlights how the complexity of regulatory requirements in early childhood education, as well as increasing skills shortages, adds to the demands on managers. It seems that managers prioritise the needs of others, in their professional and personal lives, over their own health. The flexibility afforded these managers and business owners because of their positions did not always have a positive effect on their health behaviours because of the long and varied hours in the industry.

Still located in Australia, Werth, then, examines the nexus between paid and unpaid work in her study of women working with chronic illness. In particular, in a context in which 'wellbeing' is an assumed prerequisite for work and deviance from that expectation is viewed negatively, Werth examines the influence of support in the personal environment upon women's opportunity to succeed in the labour market. For those suffering chronic illness, paid work also involves the emotional work of 'passing', covering up the effect of the illness, and the emotional work of disclosure of chronic illness. This is especially so for diseases that are misunderstood to be 'fixed' if an individual makes the appropriate lifestyle choices, such as auto-immune diseases. Because of the expectations of wellbeing, there is a dearth of research on workers with chronic illness. Werth argues that within an increasing focus on individual resilience, the definition of wellbeing should include 'understanding and accommodations in social and work environments'.

Incorporating the social and work environments in our considerations of wellbeing is also argued by Pio and Singh in their study and article of acid abuse victims in South Asia. This research brings and introduces a different perspective to the Western/developed country concepts of wellbeing to this Issue, by examining wellbeing through the context of social enterprises that aim to improve the wellbeing of acid violence survivors. The employer in this enterprise and their survivor-volunteer employee had contrasting views, with the survivor's views of wellbeing being tainted by social stigma surrounding acid attacks and disability – similar in some ways to Werth's argument that 'wellbeing' or its presumption can be negative for women with chronic illness. This tension between perceptions of wellbeing resulted in a negative impact on both employer and employee. Pio and Singh argue that wellbeing can be achieved in similar circumstances through the organisation of structures that acknowledge all perspectives, encouraging mutual respect despite differing status and positions.

One aspect of gender and wellbeing at work that still requires considerable research, especially given indicative mental health statistics, is that of the wellbeing of gender diverse people (Thoroughgood, Sawyer, & Webster, in press). Although this Special Issue does not address that, it is a subject that we would like to see given greater attention from employment relations and HRM academics. Notwithstanding this gap, this Special Issue does provide a much needed focus on the multi-faceted experience and concept of wellbeing for women. In doing so, it highlights the importance of in-depth critical qualitative research to reveal the socio-political relationships that influence and affect the wellbeing of women at work across three regions. In contrast to much of the previous work in wellbeing, this Special Issue strengthens the call for a more comprehensive definition of wellbeing that considers, not only the individual, but also their identity or position within their career, profession and society. It brings to our attention the complex relationship between how women are treated at work, including their remuneration, the social status of their work and their wellbeing. As editors of this Special Issue, we would propose a new definition of employee wellbeing: "employee wellbeing is the holistic outcome of individual identity, the work environment and the socio-political context that constrains and informs an individual's opportunity to thrive at their workplace and in the community".

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