

How to Enhance Wellbeing at Work: Six Positive, Evidence-based Interventions

A Short Discussion White Paper by Alan Bradshaw, Director, Surveys and Benchmarks, QoWL Ltd

Our research into quality of working life in UK universities has helped organisations to develop programmes for improving wellbeing. A summary of this benchmarking research into stress and wellbeing in Higher Education can be found in our [media room](#).

As part of our work with universities, we have carried out multiple regression analyses to find out which work aspects are most likely to lead to negative outcomes like stress, and which are most likely to lead to positive outcomes like wellbeing and motivation.

This paper, the second in a series on predictors of different wellbeing outcomes, looks at the **predictors of (positive) wellbeing at work**.

We have been able to identify the key predictors of the General Wellbeing (GWB) factor from our quality of working life survey results. GWB is one of six factors assessed in the research validated Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) measure. As a measure of wellbeing, it includes both psychological and physical health outcomes. The table below also includes results from the statistical analysis of the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) Stress Factors, other data from the QoWL Ltd surveys on Workplace Wellbeing Outcomes and Biographical Indicators.

The strongest Predictors of General Wellbeing (1 = Best predictor):

1. Higher satisfaction with overall quality of working life - QoWL survey outcome question
2. Good sleep - QoWL survey outcome question
3. Higher job and career satisfaction - WRQoL Job & Career Satisfaction factor
4. Good Work-life balance - QoWL survey outcome question
5. Higher enjoyment of work - QoWL survey outcome question
6. Lower levels of anxiety - QoWL survey outcome question
7. Family support for work commitments - QoWL survey outcome question
8. Good working conditions - WRQoL Working Conditions factor
9. Fewer number of days off work due to ill health in the last year - QoWL biographical indicator question
10. Higher satisfaction with the home-work balance - WRQoL Home-Work Interface factor
11. Higher motivation - QoWL survey outcome question
12. Perception of personal performance - QoWL survey outcome question
13. Disability - QoWL biographical indicator question
14. Good working relationships - QoWL survey outcome question
15. Management support - HSE Management Support factor
16. Lower stress - WRQoL Stress at Work factor

There were notable differences between predictors of wellbeing and predictors of stress (To get hold of the white paper '*What Predicts Stress at Work?*' please contact Alan Bradshaw alan.bradshaw@qowl.co.uk). The findings here appear to show that wellbeing is related to the *presence* of positive aspects of work experience and as well as the *absence* of negative factors.

What Interventions might enhance wellbeing?

These results provide valuable insight into the different kinds of interventions that are most likely to be effective in enhancing staff wellbeing. Most of the interventions recommended are interlinked and connected. Improvements made in one area will likely have positive impacts elsewhere.

The analysis indicates that improvements to staff wellbeing could come from:

- Fostering Quality of Working Life
- Management of Work-life Balance
- Enhancing Satisfaction and Enjoyment at work
- Maintenance and Improvement of Working Conditions
- Improved Motivation in Staff
- Provision of Better Management Support

Fostering Quality of Working Life

Overall quality of working life (QoWL) was the single best predictor of wellbeing. QoWL is a broad construct that involves a number of related workplace wellbeing [factors](#), and so it is probably most useful as a model or 'framework' for organisational development, improvement and policy initiatives. For example, organisations could construct a 'Quality of Working Life Statement' that underpins leadership and management development. We will soon be publishing a guide to using QoWL as a framework for the development of wellbeing policies.

Management of Work-life Balance

Three of the top 10 predictors related to aspects of Work-life balance:

- The work-life balance outcome
- Family support for work commitments outcome
- WRQoL Home-Work Interface factor

This appears to show that work-life balance is one of the most important predictors of wellbeing at work. Supporting this conclusion, our qualitative analysis of responses to an open question in the survey showed the importance of related issues such as organisational flexibility and trust. This indicates that implementation of improvements in this area should enhance wellbeing in staff.

Enhancing Satisfaction and Enjoyment at Work

The WRQoL Job & Career Satisfaction factor and the enjoyment of work outcome were highly ranked predictors of wellbeing, indicating how important *positive* aspects of work experience are to wellbeing. Therefore, inclusion of such employee engagement-related outcomes in the development and training of managers should yield benefits both to the organisation and to individual employees.

Maintenance and Improvement of Working Conditions

Working conditions (which includes the physical working environment and having the right equipment) are more important than many managers realise. We have found that how staff view their working conditions is a key determinant of overall quality of working life. Lack of awareness of the importance of working conditions can lead to senior managers overlooking or failing to address problems that could easily be solved. This can over time foster discontent and unhappiness in staff, especially long-serving staff, who may have seen their conditions deteriorate without remedial action. The main implications of this are that it is vital to consult on, and continuously review, working conditions to make sure they are meeting the needs of staff in different parts of the

organisation. Improvements to working conditions also actively demonstrate investment in employees on the part of the organisation.

Improved Motivation in Staff

Motivated employees want to do their best, which is of course good for the organisation, but this result also shows that motivation is also a good predictor of wellbeing. Therefore, there should be a double-benefit from initiatives that boost the motivation of staff. Staff are likely to work harder and better, but also will feel happier and healthier. Improvements in motivation are strongly linked to other wellbeing predictors such as job satisfaction, enjoyment and the quality of supervision. Because of its importance, we will soon be writing a white paper specifically on predictors of motivation at work.

Provision of Better Management Support

HSE's Management Support factor is related more to the practical and organisational aspects of support than the social aspects. It is interesting that management support is a much stronger predictor of wellbeing than [lack of support is a predictor of] stress, indicating that the main reason for improving support from managers is positive; people are likely to feel better if they are supported. These results therefore indicate that where an organisation can take steps to improve support from managers and the wider organisation, this is likely to have a positive impact on staff wellbeing.

Conclusions

These predictors of wellbeing demonstrate that a variety of interventions could yield positive results.

Quality of working life provides an excellent framework, and purpose for, wellbeing policies and organisational improvement.

Improvements to work-life balance and organisational flexibility can foster improvements in staff wellbeing more generally.

Any overall approach to enhancing wellbeing at work should include the maintenance and improvement of working conditions.

Leadership and management development initiatives are likely to be more effective in enhancing wellbeing if they provide effective training to improve support, motivation, job satisfaction, and enjoyment at work.

Alan Bradshaw, Director, Surveys and Benchmarks, QoWL Ltd



About QoWL Ltd

QoWL Ltd is a university spin out company based in Portsmouth. We have developed tools and provide [services that help universities](#) assess and improve the quality of working life of employees. Research has shown that improved quality of working life results in enhanced wellbeing, greater motivation and better retention.

QoWL Services include:

- Surveys and data analysis: Full QoWL Survey; Stress assessments
- Training for managers and staff to improve wellbeing and prevent stress
- Consultancy advice on wellbeing and stress e.g. policy development

Quality of working life (QoWL) is that part of *overall* quality of life that is influenced by work. It is, in essence, a measure of how good your work is for you.

QoWL is broader in scope than wellbeing, stress or job satisfaction and represents the widest context in which an employee would evaluate their work experience.

Company contact information:

Alan Bradshaw, Director, QoWL Ltd Tel: 08454 75 76 95

Email: alan.bradshaw@qowl.co.uk Web: www.qowl.co.uk