
Preface

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Biographical notes: Cristina Simone, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Management at Sapienza University of Rome where she teaches 'Performance Measurement' and 'International Marketing Management'. Her main research fields are strategic management, knowledge management and organisational design. She is author of many international and national scientific publications and she is principal investigator of several Sapienza University funded projects. She is partner of AIDEA (Italian Academy of Business Management) and member of Academy of Management (ID 108910).

In all ages and places, the pursuit of well-being seems to be one of the most constant and tenacious aims of human beings (Russell, 1930). Well-being has been a central concern in philosophy, psychology, sociology, medicine, law, literature and religion. Following the Second World War, thanks to the huge progress in scientific and medical knowledge, the well-being movement began and has gained increasing attention in both everyday life and scientific domains. Terms similar and/or related to the notion of wellbeing (wellness, happiness, quality of life, life satisfaction and work satisfaction) have become very common.

In 1948, the World Health Organisation (WHO) was the first to introduce the term *well-being* in a holistic definition of health: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity". Over the last seventy years, the issue of well-being has gradually permeated the daily life of a wide variety of social spaces, in particular workplaces and organisations. As humans spend much of their life at work, fostering organisational well-being, in turn, promotes individual and social well-being. On one hand, the pursuing of organisational well-being involves several and heterogeneous benefits (medical, economic, psychosocial): lower turnover, lower absenteeism, lower accident rates and reduced health care costs, higher job satisfaction, higher job performance, increased productivity, more intense creativity, enhanced market positioning, and a more responsible sustainable behaviour. On the other hand, practitioners and scholars are increasingly aware of the worrying risks and costs related to an organisational *misbehaviour* (i.e., bullying behaviour, mobbing, burn-out, unfair discrimination): health problems, lower job satisfaction, lower job performance, decreased productivity, reduced creativity, distrust, increased turnover and absenteeism, increase in conflicts and legal disputes. Worrying risks and costs because of which the organisation is likely to collapse.

For all the reasons above, well-being in workplaces and organisations is more and more drawing the attention of managers and scholars. Since the seminal Hawthorne experiments (1920s–1930s) both practitioners and organisational researchers have been fascinated by the hypothesis that organisational-level performance and employees' well-being are mutually interdependent and reinforce each other. However, despite the several theoretical and empirical efforts, the understanding and pursuing of well-being in workplaces and organisations still remain challenging goals for scholars and managers. Indeed, although it is now quite accepted that workplaces play a crucial role in social well-being and health promotion, over the last decades, the challenges to occupational well-being have become more and more difficult because of the dramatic changes of work conditions. The diffusion of information and communication technology at work, the rise of globalisation and the intensification of strategic competition, the increase of outsourcing and downsizing, the need for a more flexible workforce and the related fear of job insecurity. All together, these changes have shaped a more and more unpredictable and complex environment. The workforce suffers from increasing management and shareholders' pressures to keep pace and to save the organisational effectiveness. Under these conditions, organisational attempts to promote employees' well-being are likely to fail or to not be credible in the every-day life of work. Actually, the risk is that well-being is used as a managerial tool to get employees' colonisation. A new way to control the workforce is the so-called 'third' (unconscious) level (Perrow, 1986; Kunda, 1992). In this view, further researches are required to deeper understand the true purposes and effects of organisational well-being.

The special issue would like to shed light on these dramatic tensions and aims to offer academics as well as managers and policy makers who are interested in the current organisational challenges deeper insights in understanding and promoting occupational and social well-being. The wish is that we could contribute to the rise of an intercultural cooperation and we hope that it will be acknowledged as a successful experiment of interdisciplinary reflections contributing to the progress in the field of management.

References

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