Enhancing career management and well-being in changing organizations

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Individuals need resources to cope effectively, and confidence in their ability to succeed in changing organizations and to endure job insecurity. Career management and well-being can be improved by developing coping skills and abilities related to career goal setting and attainment. Preparedness for work life transitions can be increased with group interventions applying techniques of social modeling and active learning. Preparedness means readiness to respond to uncertain outcomes and it enables coping in stressful continuous work life uncertainty or involuntary transitions. For enhancing employees’ coping and well-being during organizational changes we developed a group intervention to promote career management preparedness. We aimed to study the effects of the group intervention on well-being, job engagement and work career. The effects of the group intervention were investigated in a randomly assigned field experimental study (RCT-study) during 2006 - 2008 in 17 organizations, involving 718 participants. The mean age of the participants was 50.5 years (SD = 6.5) and 88 % of them were women. After the T1 baseline measurements the study comprised three follow-up questionnaires: T2 at the end of the intervention, T3 7-month after the intervention and T4 1.5 years after the intervention. The response rate at T3 was 85.4 %. The proximal effects show a very significant increase in career management preparedness and work life goals among the group participants compared to controls. The 7 month follow-up results of the experiment demonstrated that the intervention significantly decreased symptoms of depression. The intervention also had a conditionally significant beneficial effect on job engagement. The group intervention most benefited those employees who were at risk of depression. In summary, enhancing career management preparedness in changing organizations has beneficial effects on work goals and well-being, especially among those at risk.

The role of health and well-being in safety performance

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Descriptive models of how accidents occur are now commonplace in the aviation industry. These models are useful for guiding accident investigation teams and for helping to decide what changes need to be introduced to reduce the possibility of further accidents. However, from a psychological point of view, what has been lacking in the field is an empirical model that links organizational constructs such as safety climate with individual variables such as psychological health and then shows how both of these combine to influence important performance outcomes such as workplace violations and errors. The aim of this research program was to develop and test such a model. The context for this research program was the field of aviation maintenance, where errors and violations represent an extremely serious threat to safety. A multivariate approach was used wherein data collected from safety climate surveys were used to test structural models linking climate, health, and performance. The first study focused on the link between safety climate, health, and maintenance errors. The results suggested that safety climate does not have a direct effect on errors but has a strong indirect effect via the psychological health experienced by individual workers. A second study replicated this finding. A third study extended the model to include workplace violations and demonstrated that the link between violations and errors is not as strong as some might think. This third study also reinforced the causal chain running from safety climate, through psychological health, to errors. At the same time, it showed a strong direct link between safety climate and violations. Health and well-being are often explored in the context of positive work outcomes such as commitment and tenure,
where they have been shown to contribute useful variance. This series of studies shows that they are just as useful when exploring negative outcomes, such as errors in high risk industries. The paper concludes with recommendations as to how these empirical findings can be used to support ongoing initiatives in safety training.

Keywords: aviation maintenance, accidents, safety, workplace violations, safety

Tailoring interventions for those in most need: Grouping employees by burnout and engagement

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The experience of either workplace engagement or psychological burnout has profound consequences for both individual well-being and organizational productivity. Most engagement and burnout research however, is based on aggregated data, which overlooks the insights to be gained from specific individual perspectives. The current research aimed to group respondents according to their specific burnout and engagement responses and to identify the resulting group similarities of workload, job control, reward, community, fairness and values (Areas of Work-life Survey, AWS). The research aimed overall, to illustrate the work perceptions of the most at-risk workers, with a view to tailoring interventions specifically for the employees in most need. Three independent samples of employed workers in Australia responded to a survey. Samples one (n = 255) and three (n = 706) were employees of an education union and sample two (n = 260) was a mixed group of employees representing a number of organizations. The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) were employed to classify respondents in respect to the similarity of their responses using K-means cluster analysis. Subsequently differences between groups in regard to the AWS were confirmed using MANOVA analyses. The cluster analysis identified five specific groups of respondents who were most like-minded in regard to burnout and engagement: Empowered, Under-pressure, Unengaged, Burnout and Severe Burnout groups. Employees within these five groups demonstrated distinct similarities in regard to their scores of workload, control, reward, community, fairness and values.

Keywords: workplace engagement, psychological burnout, organizational productivity, well-being, workload