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### **Emerald Article: Achieving employee wellbeing in a changing work environment: An expert commentary on current scholarship**

Ellen Ernst Kossek, Thomas Kalliath, Parveen Kalliath

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# INTERNATIONAL EXPERT COMMENTARY

## Achieving employee wellbeing in a changing work environment

### An expert commentary on current scholarship

Ellen Ernst Kossek

*School of Human Resources and Labor Relations, Michigan State University,  
East Lansing, Michigan, USA*

Thomas Kalliath

*Research School of Management, Australian National University, Canberra,  
Australia, and*

Parveen Kalliath

*School of Social Work, Australian Catholic University, Canberra, Australia*

#### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this expert commentary is to provide an overview of current scholarship on changes occurring in the work environment and its impact on employee wellbeing. The commentary touches on frontier issues such as measurement of healthy work environment, positive and negative changes in work environment influencing employee wellbeing, link between employee productivity and wellbeing, challenges in converting theory into practice, sustainable organizational behavior, workplace wellness, and several other issues germane to the special issue.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The expert commentary explicates the current state of scholarship in relation to the theme of the special issue. The design of the expert commentary, a scholarly conversation between the Guest Editors and University Distinguished Professor Ellen Ernst Kossek, provides an easy to access summary of the current knowledge in the area. This format is intended to inform readers of *IJM* and to stimulate further scholarship in the area.

**Findings** – The expert commentary provides a gist of key findings in the extant area of research, serving to inform readers about what we know, do not know, and fruitful areas for further enquiry.

**Originality/value** – It provides an overview of current knowledge in the area.

**Keywords** Healthy work environment, Employee wellbeing, Employee productivity, Workplace wellness, Sustainable organizational behaviour, Workplace, Organizational behaviour

**Paper type** General review

#### Measuring healthy work environment

*Tom: It seems appropriate that we start our conversation with a focus on the measurement of the key construct – work environment. What are the key indicators of healthy work environments in organisations? Can organisations be measured and compared on the levels of these indicators?*

*Ellen: In healthy work environments, employees feel engaged in their jobs and also in their home lives. They feel an energetic connection to their work and family activities and experience what engagement scholars Schaufeli *et al.* (2006) refer to as “absorption, dedication and vigor” in how they address work and nonwork roles. Individuals who work in healthy work environments believe that their job demands are not excessive and that they do not have to sacrifice their family lives or other meaningful nonwork*



roles in order to perform well on their jobs (Kossek *et al.*, 2001). They have positive psychological identities with their jobs and perceive positive transmission and crossover of energy, emotion, and skills between work and family (Westman and Etzion, 1995; Westman *et al.*, 2009). They believe that they are valued at work and their jobs are a good fit with their abilities and interests.

Key outcome indicators of healthy work environments that organizations can be measured on are: work engagement (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006), work-family conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985), work identity, depressive symptoms (Radloff, 1977), person-job fit (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2006), and job satisfaction (Hackman and Oldham, 1976), and positive linkages or spillover between the work environment and family satisfaction (Olson and Wilson, 1982) and life satisfaction (Kossek and Ozeki, 1998). These outcome measures reflect a “dual agenda” view that assumes that healthy work environments have jobs that are designed to promote gender equity and positive crossover to employee’s nonwork lives (Bailyn, 2011). Workplaces can be designed to promote effectiveness on and off the job.

It is important to measure work environment indicators that are antecedents of these outcomes and are characteristics of a work environment with positive job design. These intermediate indicators are job control, the degree to which one feels in control over when and where and how one works (Karasek, 1979; Kossek *et al.*, 2006); workplace social support, the extent that one feels co-workers and supervisors provide social support (Kossek *et al.*, 2011), and a positive work climate or culture that values employees giving equal energy and high performance in both work and personal life roles (Kossek *et al.*, 2001). These three variables: control, social support, and culture are levers that organizations can target workplace interventions at in order to improve how the structure and culture of work influence the healthiness of the workplace (Kossek *et al.*, 2012).

### Recent negative and positive influences

*Parveen: Can you identify some changes that have occurred in the work environment that have had the greatest negative impact on employee well-being?*

*Ellen:* Changes in the employment relationship over recent decades has increased the prevalence of “precarious work.” Precarious work has little or no job security, can have pay systems that transfer risk and fluctuations in customer and product market demands from the employer to the employee (Lambert, 2008), and unpredictable nonstandard schedules (Kalleberg, 2011, 2009). The growing economic pressures of globalization have increased economic turmoil where employers have lessened the attachment to workers at all ends of the workforce. At the lower end of the wage spectrum, many employees face what is known as “underemployment,” where workers cannot get enough work hours and pay to match their skill sets or economic needs. Work schedules that limit labor costs and avoid overtime wages are prevalent. Inflexible work schedules and lack of health care benefits in countries such as the USA, where benefits are linked to employment and employer’s cost structures make it difficult for employees to care for their families or themselves.

At the higher end of the wage spectrum, for professional and managerial work, precariousness has increased as well through the rise of job insecurity, skill obsolescence, understaffing, and overwork cultures. Instead of life long careers and an active employer role in keeping employee skills up to date, professionals have boundaryless careers (Arthur, 2006). They are free market agents who must ensure they keep learning skills that are not too specific to their employer but are marketable

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externally. Employees in jobs with rapidly changing technology are likely to have knowledge and skills that can quickly become outdated leading to job loss.

Many employees who work with a computer face a rise in portable e-work where they can be constantly connected to their work and on line at home 24-7 via cell phones, lap tops, and 24-7 global work schedules (Kossek and Lautsch, 2008). Like the low end of the labor market, the ability to work any hour of the week creates nonstandardization in work schedules as well through the promotion of workaholism. There is also the tendency to not be as engaged in home life due to fear of losing one's job. Many professionals increasingly feel they must be constantly available to work in order to demonstrate constant devotion to career.

In summary, work at all ends of the labor market are increasing job insecure, stressful, and follow nonstandardized work schedules that are dictated to a far greater extent by employers needs over employees' needs, health, and well-being. This is especially problematic as worker power in the labor market is lessening *vis-à-vis* employers.

*Tom: It is clear from your comment that employee wellbeing has not improved significantly in recent years, rather increase in competition due to globalization and advances in technology have brought more challenges. But have there been any positive developments? What would you say are some of the changes that had the greatest positive impact on employee well-being?*

*Ellen:* The growth in many forms of alternative work schedules that give employees in some occupations more choice and control over where and when and how much they work is a positive development in the work environment (Kossek and Michel, 2011). Job control has been linked to psychological well-being (Karasek and Theorell, 1990), and with the growth of flexible work arrangements employees can now more actively shape their flexibility in their working conditions which helps them solve the daily demands of integrating personal life and work demands. Compressed work weeks give employees the chance to work full time over a compressed period. For example, employees can work four ten hour days instead of five eight hour days, or a 9-80 work week where employees work nine ten hour days over a two-week period, or three twelve hour days each week. Flextime allows employees to control the time they start or end work each day with some core work hours. Telework arrangements permit employees to either telework from home or shorten commutes by working from a regional center in the suburbs. Part time or reduced load work weeks allow employee to work less than full time for a reduction in pay and hours.

Allowing employees more flexibility in work schedules enables them to be able to participate in other nonwork roles that are meaningful such as family, child, and elder care, or education. Employees may be also able to engage in self-care by being better able to combine work with exercise, volunteering, shorten commutes by being able to start or stop work during nonpeak hours, or go to the doctor without missing work. This shift in greater access to flexibility allows greater diversity of employees to be involved in the workplace and creates a more inclusive workplace where more workers can combine work with other nonwork roles.

Enabling employees' the flexibility to be effective in multiple roles, while still maintaining full time employment will enable for more positive spillover and crossover between work and nonwork roles. Research suggests that multiple roles when they are complementary and not in conflict with each other can enrich and facilitate each other (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). For example, skills learned on the job can be used at

home such as how to problem solve or help a family member use the computer. Similarly, having a happy personal life can mean employees come to work feeling good about themselves and can transfer positive emotion to coworkers and customers and focus on the job.

### **Training in knowledge based economy**

*Parveen: The nature of work has undergone dramatic changes in the last two decades, driven by forces such as globalization and the IT revolution. Some jobs have become obsolete while other jobs are being created that did not exist before (Malone and Laubacher, 2011). As a leader in higher education, can you comment on the emerging pedagogy that we need to embrace to train and equip the work-force in meeting the challenges posed by knowledge based society?*

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*Ellen:* Higher education institutions need to design curriculum that that teach students how to embrace lifelong learning where they are engaged in learning how to learn new knowledge and innovate. This is necessary as it is likely that individuals may have several careers and occupations over the life course.

Research skills are also needed where students know how to stay up to date using E resources from referred outlets and the ability to discern between self-published propaganda and scientific sources. Educational assignments should socialize students to be adaptable, flexible, and able to work in cross-disciplinary teams. Working with others who are from other domains will enable individuals to avoid knowledge silos, and develop skills in cognitive complexity, and interest in collaborating with others who may have insights outside of one's specialty. All of these experiences will enable students to be able to address complex problems. Lastly, educational assignments should teach students to work face to face and virtually with others who may come from many different cultures and perspectives. Students increasingly need to understand that values regarding management and the meaning and role of work may vary greatly across national cultures and borders. Increasing students skills in cultural intelligence (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2008) is a growing competency needs in an increasingly complex and multicultural society.

Students also need to develop skills in work processes and systems thinking as work arrangements and flow will increasingly change and have rapidity in and churn. Developing this perspective will allow for implementation of new technological developments across complex systems and borders as organizational cycle times increase rapidly and become more geographically dispersed in time and space.

### **Employee productivity and employee well-being**

*Tom: Several decades of research in organizational psychology have attempted to uncover the link between employee productivity and well-being (Wright, 2010). Are organisations that foster greater employee well-being more productive and more profitable in the long-run?*

*Ellen:* Organizations are more productive and profitable if they are able to design a workplace that creates congruence in the line of sight between employer and employee interests. This means that the workplace is designed where employees believe they will benefit financially and psychologically if the organization is profitable and successful. In such workplaces, employee well-being is enhanced when several conditions are met (Brough *et al.*, 2009). First, individuals feel they are recognized and valued for good work. Second, they believe they are able to have a career with their employer with

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mutual positive social exchange in the employment relationship where they are fairly paid, and do not have to sacrifice their personal and family well-being in order to perform their jobs. Third, they are able to develop skills and knowledge that keeps them employable for a lifelong career. Thus, designing the workplace to promote employee well-being must be coupled with a high-performing caring culture as this ensures employability for employees. Overall, productive organizations that use human capital effectively take a longer term perspective on the employment relationship where quality human resources are seen as a core competency of the organization. In such a perspective, people are seen as an asset to be nurtured and developed rather than merely a cost to be minimized. Employee and organizational well-being and performance are part of a dual agenda where interests between workers and the company are seen as complimentary.

### **Translating theory into practice: challenges**

*Parveen: Scholars leading the positive psychology movement have argued that positive states help people to thrive, mentally flourish and grow psychologically (Frederickson, 2001). However, creating work environments that enable people to flourish have proved to be very challenging (Bichard, 2009). What are the major impediments in translating theory (e.g. broaden and build theory) into practice?*

*Ellen: The first impediment is simply changing management attitudes about what is good management. Despite the belief that pressure and using fear and “the stick and not the carrot” to motivate higher performance (and the recent biography on Steve Jobs’ leadership did show Apple innovations did develop from tough and demanding leadership and sometimes even unkind leadership), using negativity is generally not that effective (not all managers may be as visionary as jobs).*

In fact a recent study reported in the *New York Times* (Amible and Kramer, 2011), suggests that employees perform better when they are positively psychologically engaged at work. Amible and Kramer argue that managers must be facilitators of employees’ work by helping to eliminate barriers, offering support, and assistance and recognizing high level of effort. Supporting employees’ personal lives as whole people can also lead to higher performance. A randomized field study I conducted using control groups, showed that training leaders to be more supportive of family life lead to higher job satisfaction, performance, and lower turnover in grocery stores when compared to those stores where managers were less family supportive in their behaviors (Kossek and Hammer, 2008; Hammer *et al.*, 2011).

Productivity can also be enhanced when managers ensure that people are happily engaged at work. This does not cost a lot of money according to Amible and Kramer but workers’ well-being depends, in large part, on managers’ ability and willingness to facilitate workers’ accomplishments – by removing obstacles, providing help and acknowledging strong effort. Amible reports that a Gallop poll suggested that lower engagement costs USA, business over \$350 billion annually as people who are not engaged do not care about their employer’s effectiveness are absent more and produce lower quality.

It is also important that work simply be designed to be meaningful and people feel they are not wasting their time but are making progress on issues or problems.

*Tom: In your recent article (Kossek et al., 2011), you argue that although work-family research has mushroomed in the past two decades, work-family researchers have not made a significant impact in improving the lives of employees, as evidenced by reduction*

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*in workplace stress, more positive work-family relationships in employment settings and effectively implemented work-family policies. Can you comment on the reasons for this paradox and the way forward?*

*Ellen:* We argued that work-family researchers and practitioners do not cooperate as much as they could to implement best practice and policies. Thus, many work-family policies have served more as public relations that as levers to improve productivity while benefiting employees. Also, many companies do not culturally buy into the belief that helping people better manage work-life conflicts will improve productivity. Organizations do not see how helping families and meeting employees' personal needs improves productivity.

Another problem is that work-family policies have often been implemented as an end unto themselves and not linked to other workplace conditions such as employment demands giving control over work load and hours. Many managers need help learning how to implement work family flexibility policies; as such policies initially may increase coordination (e.g. setting up meetings and communicating) and motivation (e.g. letting all workers have fair access to flexibility) challenges. The corporate HR departments have not worked as closely as they could with line management to help equitably implement these policies, redesign work systems, and combat cultural bias so they can be used without jeopardy.

We suggested a number of actions for scholars. First, researchers should collaborate with employers to conduct quality research evaluating the effectiveness of work-family policies and practices to improve implementation. Second, research is needed to examine the effects of the growth in wireless technology that is blurring work-family boundaries on job and family stress on and off the job. Third, employees need training to better self-regulate growing and more complicated work family demands. Lastly, cross-disciplinary researcher and practical policy collaborations are needed to do leading edge research to bridge knowledge and practice.

### **Sustainable organizational behavior**

*Parveen:* A recent survey showed that 70 percent of the people believed that it was important for companies to be environmentally friendly (Finch and Macalister, 2007). The same survey found that 97 percent of job seekers preferred to work for organisations that contribute effectively to a more sustainable world. Is there any evidence that a sustainable organisation (e.g. with commitment to become carbon neutral) can influence the levels of employee health and well-being?

*Ellen:* Research is coming out on the importance of positive institutions and linkages between sustainable environments and a sustainable work force. If employees work in environments where they breathe poor air and they and their families develop health issues from a polluted environment they will be less effective in their job performance. They will be more likely to miss work due to health issues of their own or those of family members and they will not feel as vital on the job. They will also be less likely to identify with organizational objectives and mission if they feel ashamed of their employer and believe the employer is creating harm in the local environment and community.

Thus positive corporate citizenship and being a steward of the earth benefits not only the local environment, but the community and the workplace. As Cooperrider and Fry (2012), when individuals collaborate to create a sustainable word, they flourish and

are more likely to innovate, be creative, and have synergies from creating positive relationships and which enhances business performance.

### **Workplace wellness**

*Tom: In the past two decades employers have taken major initiatives to promote workplace wellness (Keller et al., 2009). Is there strong evidence that such initiatives have resulted in mutually beneficial outcomes (for employees, employers, and to society) and are they sustainable in the longer term?*

*Ellen:* Worker wellness initiatives can have positive benefits if implemented effectively. Worker wellness is a culture and not a program. It is a way of life. Worker wellness considers how physiological well-being on and off the job can lead to healthy minds and healthy families. It can also lead to fewer accidents and less stress and depressive symptoms. Worker wellness programs are not a fringe benefit but can reduce health care costs. They can also generate higher morale, loyalty, and retention and reduce absenteeism and workers compensation costs (Barry et al., 2010).

In order for worker wellness programs to be effective, leaders must model participation in these programs and give employees need to have time in their day to take care of themselves. Worker wellness needs to be something all workers are encouraged to do not just the already healthy workers or the higher paid employees. Worker wellness programs need to use positive reinforcement and not penalize people for being overweight, smoking, or having bad habits or lack of time to be healthy. Rewards must be used to recognize small improvements as one step begins the journey to health.

Employers need to recognize that some workers have physiological genes that may get in the way of health or have many caregiving demands such as being a single parent or caring for an elder that may limit the time to participate in wellness activities. Employers who really care about wellness should allow employees to be paid while engaging in wellness and make it easy for people to develop positive habits.

A healthy lifestyle begins with a healthy workplace too. Work structures can make individuals unhealthy if people have too many job demands, too little control and lack of social support to live a positive healthy life (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Abusive and poor managers should be fired as they can create unhealthy workplaces. In sum, the psychosocial environment of the workplace has a far greater impact on worker healthiness and as the individual employees do.

### **Pursuing well-being through individual strategies**

*Parveen: The true meaning of employee well-being and how to achieve it in the workplace has been the focus of considerable scholarly investigation (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Warr, 2009).*

*From your perspective, what is employee well-being? Can you specify some strategies that employees themselves can pursue to attain well-being at work?*

*Ellen:* A recent meta-analysis on antecedents of life satisfaction and work satisfaction (Erdogan et al., 2012) reports that the cognitive appraisal that one has higher satisfaction with life (life satisfaction) has been linked to subjective well-being (Linley et al., 2009). The authors also noted that individuals who tend to see the world as half full and not empty, that is have greater amounts of positive than negative affect are also more likely to have higher well-being on the job.

Employees can take an active role in managing boundaries between work and home. My research with Brenda Lautsch (Kossek and Lautsch, 2008) suggests that individuals who manage boundaries between work and home so they can psychologically focus when at work can actually reduce their working hours, feel less stressed, and able to leave the office earlier. We suggested strategies such as managing boundaries to reduce cross-role and interruptions as individuals are able to then minimize process losses or what we refer to as switching costs from switching from one role to another constantly. We also recommend people set off small time trigger alarms to allow them to wrap up tasks and manage transition times. Transition times or having some time buffers between moving from one task to another enables people to have breaks. Individuals then do not feel as rushed or overloaded from too many demands or overload. Pacing is important.

Exercise can also promote well-being not only physiologically, but also psychologically from positive interaction. Many employees are so busy taking care of their jobs and their families or domestic demands they forget to take care of themselves.

Lastly having a sense of humor and not taking work so seriously or keeping things in perspective is sometimes needed. Sometimes mistakes happen or days do not run perfectly. We need to realize that we can laugh at ourselves and learn from mistakes and try to keep a balanced perspective on work and life.

### **Workplace bullying**

*Tom: Recent reports suggest that workplace bullying is reaching epidemic levels in various regions around the world (International Labor Organisation (ILO), 2006; Workplace Bullying Institute Survey Results, 2010). There is compelling evidence that targets suffer from an array of negative health effects (Hansen et al., 2006). Some scholars have argued that the ideology focusing on competitiveness may have spawned further traits such as ruthlessness in organizational workplaces (Duffy, 2009). What are some proven best practices to implement zero-tolerance to bullying in the workplace?*

*Ellen: Bullying and incivility in the workplace harms not only the targeted victims but hurts productivity and the well-being of the organization as a whole. Focussing on competitiveness sometimes has lead to a survival of the fittest mentality where talented colleagues are sometimes demeaned as a way to advance one's own interests.*

The most powerful best practice is to put in organizational change strategies to alter the workplace culture to prevent workplace bullying. Duffy and Sperry (2007) suggest that organizations review and revise their code of ethics to adopt a zero tolerance policy against bullying. The policies need to be communicated by leaders to members via active discussion. Training and role plays are needed to allow members to understand the harm bullying does to individuals and the firm.

Leaders play a critical role in the removal of bullying from the workplace. They should be selected based on their ability to manage people in positive ways to that are nurturing and supportive. Leaders also should be chosen based on their courage to stand up to bullies and role model ethical behaviors by speaking out and quashing bullying as unacceptable workplace behavior. A final strategy is to use progressive discipline to send early warning to bullies that they could be fired if they do not change their behavior. This would entail giving a verbal warning, then a written warning, and then a final warning of discharge if the bullying behaviors do not stop. Ultimately, the most effective practice is to remove bullies from the organization, even if they are performing their jobs well. This sends a message that workplace incivility is not tolerated in any form.

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**Contracted work arrangements**

*Parveen: In the age of the entrepreneurship, the self-employed professional contractor is being seen as essential for promoting international social and economic wellbeing (Casale, 2011). As organizations come to rely more and more on outsourced and contracted work arrangements (Guest et al., 2010), comment on organizational best practices that will engender positive outcomes for all parties (e.g professional contractor wellbeing and retention)?*

*Ellen:* While the self-employed contractor often has the psychological benefits of higher autonomy, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being, these individuals are sometimes marginalized socially and economically since they conduct their work outside the boundaries of an organization's boundaries (McKeown and Leighton, 2010). The prevalence of self-employed contractors is only going to grow, as more companies are moving toward employment of contract workers to build on the principle of "flexicurity," the need for employment practices that balance the need for companies to have flexibility in hiring and the employment relationship, with the employee need to have job security (Madson, 2010). Initiated in Denmark which is dominated by SMES and has legislation giving employers a lot of latitude in employment, this goal of flexicurity is to implement employment practices that protect people but not necessarily jobs, the idea that we should protect individuals economic and social well-being and not necessarily their specific job tied to an employer (contractor/calculator).

One best employment practice is for companies and the government to support lifelong training development and economic support for contractors as well as employees between jobs. This helped individuals keep their skills and knowledge up to date which ensures they are able to maintain a regular employment stream (Madson, 2010). It allows contractors to have mobility between employers in case one employers' need for labor decreases, since talents are kept marketable. Employers can also help contractors by helping them develop a breadth of skills by allowing them to work on varied projects so they are able to contribute in multiple ways to an enterprise.

Another best practice that Madsen (2010) recommends is to start including contractors in labor law, collective bargaining agreements, and national pension schemes. Too often contractors fall outside current labor regulation and have less power and workplace rights than other employees. If this employment relationship is increasing, then it is important to protect these workers in employment law. Proactive employers would treat these employees with the same care in fair employment practices and give notice of layoffs the same way they would protect other employees.

A third best practice is to consider the work-life needs of entrepreneurs as well. A recent *Harvard Business Review* Blog (Seibel, 2012) noted that one entrepreneur tries to make sure he does not leave the house till after his children get up and he is able to put them to bed. Organizations can respect the work-life needs of entrepreneurs by not expecting them to work more and a 40 or 50 hours work week and avoid unrealistic demands for project completion or too many global calls in the middle of the night. Allowing entrepreneurs and contractors to work a regular schedule will enable them to have normal sleep patterns, establish family routines, and have time for healthy behaviors such as exercise. This will benefit firms in the long term as the contractor will be available for the next job the company needs and not too burnt out to take on a new job.

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**Inter-generational differences**

*Tom: Scholars have noted distinct differences in the perspectives of inter-generational cohorts (e.g. baby boomers, GenX, and GenY) with respect to work ethic, attitude toward authority, success in the workplace and work/life balance (Callanan and Greenhaus, 2008; Deal, 2007). What specific strategies can you recommend to organisations for converting this apparent diversity in the workforce into a business advantage?*

*Ellen:* Strategies can be designed to capitalize on variation in age and generational cohort differences that are systematically linked to employee attributes that are important for organizational effectiveness. These include perspective-taking and maturity, family life cycle, work and organizational experience, and technological comfort. Each of these attributes can be capitalized upon in initiatives to improve organizations. First, mentoring programs can be used to encourage senior workers to pass on organizational and job knowledge to younger workers. In return, younger workers can engage in “reverse mentoring” to help older and likely less tech savvy employees learn about the latest IT trends.

Second, work teams can systematically be designed to include a mix of ages to ensure that skill and knowledge expertise is evenly distributed. Balancing age distribution carefully ensures that as retirements occur, no large gaps in succession of leadership result. Mixing ages systematically in team design can use variation in employee life cycle to allow total work and nonwork responsibilities of members to be balanced over the group. Older workers, for example, may not be encumbered by the heavy work-family demands of raising young children and may be able to work different hours than younger workers who may be raising families or if single, trying to form lasting social and romantic relationships. Capitalizing on a mix in work group employee age demographics in the design of work teams also may take advantage of variety of centrality toward work. Older workers may be able to engage in perspective taking. They also may be less likely to be overly stressed by work issues, as they have experienced the ups and downs of working over the course of their careers.

Third, diversity training should be used in team building to ensure that all members of varied age groups understand what each member brings to the table in terms of work skills and style and to promote understanding of peoples different personal lives outside of work.

Fourth, innovative flexible work arrangements can be used to manage talent at both ends of the perspective. Older workers may seek “bridge employment” opportunities that enable them to work in transitional or new roles that are novel or slightly less demanding than their primary career roles as a means to bridge into retirement (Callanan and Greenhaus, 2008). Another strategy used by companies is phased retirement which allows employees to reduce their hours as a step toward retirement (Callanan and Greenhaus, 2008). Reduced load hours are also important for younger and mid career employees as well. Such positions allow employees to reduce hours or load temporarily in order to focus on other demands such as education, family issues, or time for recovery or renewal (Kossek and Lee, 2008). These talent management strategies of mentoring, balanced team design, diversity training, and flexible work arrangements require new ways of structuring work across the entire age spectrum.

**Inter-organizational networks**

*Parveen: In recent years, the traditional inter-firm relationships are increasingly giving way to inter-organizational networks (Miles and Snow, 2007). The unit of performance is no longer a single organization, but the performance of entire networks of*

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*organizations, the core of these network relationships are managed through supply chain management systems. Comment on HRM best practices that will foster employee wellbeing and the flourishing of these inter-organizational arrangements (Hult et al., 2007).*

*Ellen:* The media hype on the long working hours at Foxcom in China, a key supplier of Apple, illustrates the important of organizations ensuring that the suppliers they employ are following humane employment practices. Just as employers can require contractors to become certified in six sigma and other quality practices, employers could establish benchmark employment standards that suppliers need to meet to be able to be hired as a contractors. Such practices might include:

- pay that meets a living wage to the locality where the work is done;
- healthy work environment such as reasonable work hours and adequate breaks during the day;
- adequate staffing so that workloads are fair and not excessive;
- management training for supervisors on how to motivate and fairly treat workers, opportunities for employees to have a say in how the work is done through the use of participative management systems; and
- consideration for work life fit to allow employees to be able to have a satisfying family life.

Governments could provide tax incentives to encourage employers to stand behind the employment practices of their suppliers or face loss of major public contracts. Leading employers and the government could provide training in progressive human resource management practices to help suppliers learn best practices in managing their workforce.

### **Randomized field studies**

*Tom:* A recent global survey of employee engagement found that fewer than 1 in 3 employees worldwide (31 percent) are engaged, and nearly 1 in 5 (17 percent) are actually disengaged (BlessingsWhite, 2011). Despite the compelling evidence regarding the positive consequences of employee engagement and the harmful consequences of employee disengagement (Demerouti and Cropanzano, 2010; Shirom, 2010), a recent review concluded that to date very few field interventions to improve work engagement exist and have been tested (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2010). How important are randomised field studies to advance theory and improve practice, and why are there so few such studies (not only in work engagement but other domains of OB and HRM research (see for instance recent review by Briner and Rousseau, 2011)?

*Ellen:* Randomized field studies are very important for improving practice. In order for leaders and organizations to practice evidence-based management (Briner and Rousseau, 2011), it is critical to have data that compares organizational and individual effectiveness of current and new practices. As an example, I have been a key investigator in the USA. National Work Family Health Network ([www.kpchr.org/workfamilyhealthnetwork/public/default.aspx](http://www.kpchr.org/workfamilyhealthnetwork/public/default.aspx)). The purpose of this network is to show that the structure of work can influence work-family conflict and this is the pathway to improve employee and family health and workplace effectiveness.

Working on a national research team, I designed a workplace intervention to increase family supportive supervisory behaviors via a training intervention (Kossek and Hammer, 2008; Hammer *et al.*, 2011.). This intervention was based on the finding that supervisor support needs to be work-family specific in order to reduce work-family conflict, general supervisor support is not enough to help employees balance outside work demands with their jobs. We collected baseline data on productivity and work-family relationships from several hundred employees in 12 grocery stores and compared their well-being and performance pre and post the training conducted nine months later. We found that employees who were in stores where their managers were trained had lower intention to turnover, higher job satisfaction, and lower depressive symptoms and higher physical and mental health (Kossek and Hammer, 2008; Hammer *et al.*, 2011). We also found that employees were more likely to comply with safety procedures which are one indicator of work engagement (Kossek *et al.*, 2012).

*Parveen and Tom: In the midst of your numerous commitments, we appreciate the time and careful thought that you have provided in your scholarly responses. Thank you.*

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### Further reading

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### About the authors

Ellen Ernst Kossek (PhD, Yale University) is University Distinguished Professor at Michigan State University. A popular keynote speaker internationally, she has trained, and researched workplace issues related to changing work-life relationships, and new ways of working in a 24-7 global world. She was elected to the Board of Governors of the National Academy of Management, Gender and Diversity in Organizations Division Chair, and Fellow of American Psychological Association and Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology. Her award-winning research involves managing organizational change on workplace flexibility, work and family relationships, international human resources management; and workplace inclusion; gender, and diversity. She authored nine books including *CEO of Me: Creating a Life That Works in the Flexible Job Age*. Ellen Ernst Kossek is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: [kossek@msu.edu](mailto:kossek@msu.edu)

Thomas Kalliath, PhD, has qualifications in Organisational Psychology and Management from the Washington University in St Louis, USA and Xavier Labour Relations Institute in India. Prior to joining the Research School of Management at the Australian National University, he had taught organisational psychology, organisational development and change, and personnel training and development at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, from 1995-2004. He is the recipient of a number of excellence awards in research and teaching, and has more than 35 years of professional work experience as a hospital administrator, organisational development consultant and academic in India, the USA and New Zealand.

Parveen Kalliath, is a Senior Lecturer and Deputy Head of School, School of Social Work at the Australian Catholic University. She graduated with a Master of Social Work from the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University, St Louis, USA and a PhD in Social Work from the University of Queensland, Australia. She has over 30 years of social work experience in countries including India, USA, New Zealand and Australia. Her research interest includes work-family conflict and enrichment among social workers, burnout, and empowerment.