

## **Well-being and Work: Debating Theoretical and Empirical Contributions**

Stream at the International Labour Process Conference, Leeds University, 2011

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The issue of well-being at work has risen in prominence over recent years. Different disciplines and subjects have focused attention upon the theoretical and empirical investigation of well-being in the workplace. In policy debates, consideration has also been given to the promotion of well-being at work. These debates have taken place against a background of concern at the extent of low quality work in several national economies. In general, there is a belief that many organizations have not taken the necessary steps to safeguard well-being at work and, despite policies designed to achieve well-being at work, it is argued that the interventions of national governments and other agencies have been too weak and ineffectual in increasing well-being.

From a UK policy perspective, there has been a well publicized across-Government programme launched in 2005 between various partners (e.g. the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Health, the Health and Safety Executive, the Scottish Government) focusing on well-being at work. At an international level, initiatives such as the ILO Decent Work programme have been linked to the objective of promoting the well-being of workers. However, there remain acute barriers to higher well-being at work. The continuing dominance of neo-liberal ideology and policy, on the one hand, prevents the necessary radical reform of the workplace. The financial crisis, on the other hand, has created a much harsher climate at work, as workers have faced not only job losses and rising job insecurity but also declines in the quality of work which will likely impact on any attempt at promoting well-being at work.

Also, despite widespread acknowledgement that well-being needs to be managed and promoted at various levels, the concept of well-being at work itself remains contested and open to interpretation. Within the social sciences, attention has been given to the conception and measurement of well-being at work via the use of both large-scale social surveys and qualitative approaches. The question of whether well-being can be directly measured by workers' subjective responses to surveys or whether well-being is to be assessed by the actual social and economic circumstances that workers face has also been debated. So, there are differences of concept and interpretation between 'happiness' (subjective) and 'capability' (objective) approaches to well-being at work that need to be further unpacked and examined.

This stream calls for papers that offer theoretical and empirical analysis of well-being at work, from different disciplinary and methodological perspectives. For example:

- Contributions may investigate the uptake and success of well-being policies within actual organizations
- Contributions may offer a critical perspective on the nexus between work and well-being in specific types of organisation or across different geographical areas
- Contributions may look at the use and interpretation of survey data on well-being at work
- Contributions may assist in the development of theory in relation to the concept of well-being at work.
- Contributions may consider the barriers to well-being at work and the ways to overcome them

The Conference:

The Annual International Labour Process Conference is a leading conference on work and employment. It brings together academics and policy makers from the sociology of work and employment, labour studies, business and management, human resource management, industrial relations, organization studies and a range of other disciplines. Selections of conference papers are published in edited books, with twenty now published. Abstracts for the stream should be between 350-500 words and can be either theoretical and/or empirical. Abstract contents should enable the referees to determine what issue, development or problem is being investigated, how it is investigated, what the findings are and what contribution is being made to knowledge and understanding in the field.

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