

A short questionnaire to measure wellbeing at work (Short-SWELL) and to examine the interaction between the employee and organisation

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Abstract. The aim of the study was to develop a short measure of wellbeing at work which includes the interactions between the individual and the organisation. This was presented in an online survey to 210 employees doing a range of jobs. Regression analyses showed that positive wellbeing (e.g. job satisfaction; happiness) was predicted by a positive personality whereas negative wellbeing (stress; anxiety/depression) was predicted by negative job characteristics and passive coping. Organisational factors did not predict wellbeing.

Keywords. Psychological contract; organisational commitment; organisational citizenship; wellbeing;

1. Introduction

The main aim of the present study was to continue to examine factors related to wellbeing at work by developing a short questionnaire which included the interactions between the individual and the organisation. The study used approaches developed in other recent studies (e.g. Smith, 2015; Smith & Smith, 2017; Smith & Wadsworth, 2015) which are described in the next sections.

1.1 Inclusion of concepts about the interaction between the person and the organisation

Much of the research on wellbeing at work has focused on job characteristics (e.g. negative characteristics such as high demand; and positive characteristics such as control and support). Another line of research has been concerned with the interaction between the person and the organisation and has led to the development of concepts such as the Psychological Contract, Organisational Commitment and Organisational Citizenship.

The Psychological Contract is an implicit understanding between employee and employer (Argyris 1960) and is a relationship that has been developed throughout the career processes where the employee has higher productivity and lower grievances in return for acceptable wages and job security (Taylor & Tekleab 2004). Rousseau (1989) also described the psychological contract as an individual's beliefs concerning the mutual obligations that exist between the individual and their employer. Psychological Contract fulfilment is a state that occurs when the employer fulfils all the promises to their employees (Guest & Conway 2000). If there is a breach and violation of the Psychological Contract, employees will exhibit negative behaviours at work such as low performance or low work motivation. Measurement of the Psychological Contract assesses the extent to which the employee feels that the organisation has kept its promises, treated them fairly and how much they trust the organisation (Guest and Conway, 2002).

Organisational Commitment is a set of employee's attitudes and behaviours that can help the organisation to achieve its goals and at the same time, maintain a strong desire for the employee to stay as a member of the organisation (Steers 1977). Mowday et al. (1982) proposed a similar definition stating that Organisational Commitment is a strong trust embedded among employees based on organisational goals and values, readiness to provide effort and a strong desire to stay as a member of the organisation. A more comprehensive definition is given by Meyer and Allen (1991) who described Organisational Commitment as a psychological state that binds an employee with his or her organisation and can be

categorised based on three components, namely affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. There is potentially a strong overlap between Organisational Commitment and the Psychological Contract and this was examined here. Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) can be defined as an individual's desire to do extra work-related activities beyond the actual tasks and duties prescribed in their job description or measured in formal evaluations (Bateman & Organ 1983). This includes cooperation with peers, performing extra duties without complaint, punctuality, volunteering and helping others, using time effectively, conserving resources, sharing ideas and positively representing their organisation (Turnipseed & Rasuli 2005). These behaviours represent positive volunteering, therefore, employees cannot be penalised if they do not show the behaviour. OCB has been shown to have 5 major dimensions: altruism, conscientiousness, courtesy, civic virtue, and sportsmanship (Podsakoff et al., 1990). Again, OCB may be strongly related to the Psychological Contract and Organisational Commitment. This was examined here and another aim was to determine whether these organisational variables were predictors of positive and negative wellbeing outcomes that were independent of traditional job characteristics.

1.2 Positive and Negative Wellbeing

Smith et al. (2011) found that it was important to examine both positive and negative aspects of wellbeing rather than inferring one from the other. Both aspects need to be examined using a process model (Mark & Smith, 2008, 2011, 2012; Smith, 2007; Williams & Smith, 2016) which consider the effects of job characteristics (e.g. Negative – job demands; Positive – job resources such as control and support), individual differences (e.g. Negative – passive coping; Positive – positive personality, high self-esteem, self-efficacy and optimism), appraisals (e.g. Negative – perceived stress; Positive – job satisfaction), and outcomes (e.g. Negative – anxiety/depression; Positive – happiness).

1.3 Short scales

One of the potential problems with using models with many concepts is that a very long questionnaire is required. One method of reducing this problem is to use very short scales (often single item) that have been shown to be highly correlated with the original longer scales (Williams & Smith, 2013, 2015). These short scales have also been shown to have the same predictive validity (show the same associations between job characteristics, appraisals and outcomes) as the longer questionnaires (Williams and Smith, 2016). This methodology was used here and the single questions used had been found to be correlated with longer scales in previous research.

1.4 A heterogeneous group of workers

Much of the previous research on wellbeing at work has used staff doing specific jobs (e.g. nurses or teachers). In order to see whether effects generalise across the workforce it was important in this study to consider a heterogeneous sample (both in terms of type of job and demographics).

2. Methods

2.1 Ethical approval

The study was carried out with the approval of the Ethics Committee, School of Psychology, Cardiff University and with the informed consent of the participants.

2.2 Sample

A sample of 210 volunteers were recruited from the Qualtrics volunteer panel. The main inclusion criterion was that they were in full-time employment. The mean age of the sample was 38.4 years (range: 18-66 years) and 50.0% were male. In terms of ethnicity, 85.2% reported they were white. 68.6% were married/cohabiting, 25.2% were single and 6.2% were separated or divorced.

2.3. Short Smith Wellbeing Questionnaire (Short-Swell)

The online survey was conducted using Qualtrics software. It started with information about the study and explained that participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time and that they could omit questions. They were also informed that the data would be held anonymously and that it would be impossible to identify any individual participant. The first section of the questionnaire collected demographic information and this was followed by the 10-item short SWELL.

The following questions were used and all had a response scale of 1 (Not at all) to 10 (very much so):

1. To what extent does your job have negative characteristics (e.g. high demands; requires a lot of effort; little consultation on change; role conflict; issues with other members of staff)?
2. To what extent does your job have positive characteristics (e.g. control over what you do or how you do it; support from colleagues; support from managers; appropriate rewards)?
3. To what extent do you try to cope with problems in a positive way (e.g. you focus on the problem and try and solve it; you get social support)?
4. To what extent do you deal with problems in a passive way (e.g. avoid them; use wishful thinking; blame yourself)?
5. Do you think you have a positive personality (e.g. open; conscientious; extravert; agreeable; stable; high self-esteem; high self-efficacy; optimistic)?
6. Are you a model employee (e.g. helping; courteous; a good sport)?
7. Are you committed to your organisation (e.g. high job satisfaction; a motivated employee who does not intend to leave)?
8. Do you and your employer have a good psychological contract (e.g. keep promises; treated fairly; high commitment)?
9. Do you have a high level of wellbeing (e.g. high satisfaction; a positive mood; happiness)?
10. Do you have a low level of wellbeing (e.g. stress; anxiety; depression)?

Questions 1 and 2 cover job characteristics; questions 3 and 4 address coping; question 5 measures positive personality; organisational factors are covered by questions 6, 7 and 8; and those relating to wellbeing are questions 9 and 10.

3. Results

3.1 Factor analysis

Factor analysis of the 10 items revealed a two-factor solution with positive items and organisational items in the first factor (organisational commitment; high wellbeing; psychological contract; positive personality; positive coping; model employee; high control/support) and negative items in the second factor (low level of wellbeing; passive coping; high demands/effort). The organisational variables were correlated with positive wellbeing (Model employee: $r = 0.40$; Committed to organisation: $r = 0.50$; Fulfilled

Psychological Contract: $r=0.47$) but not with negative wellbeing.

3.2. Regression analyses

Two regressions were carried out. In the first the dependent variable was positive wellbeing. All of the other variables except negative wellbeing were included as predictors. The only significant predictor was positive personality ($\beta = 0.565$ $t = 8.99$ $p < 0.001$). The second regression analysis was identical but with negative wellbeing as the dependent variable. The significant predictors were negative job characteristics ($\beta = 0.322$ $t = 4.16$ $p < 0.001$), passive coping ($\beta = 0.41$ $t = 5.74$ $p < 0.001$) and low scores on positive personality ($\beta = 0.27$ $t = -2.55$ $p < 0.05$).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study showed that even a 10-item wellbeing questionnaire can have good psychometric properties and predictive validity. The key features of such a questionnaire are that it includes job characteristics, individual differences in personality and coping, appraisals and outcomes. These should reflect the presence of both positive and negative features. In the present study, the appraisals reflected the interactions between the organisation and the employee (Psychological Contract; Organisational Commitment and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour). Univariate analyses often show that these variables are related to wellbeing. However, multi-variate analyses including job characteristics and individual differences show that these variables are more important than the organisational ones (Ahmad & Smith, in preparation). This was confirmed in the present study, with positive personality being the only significant predictor of positive wellbeing, and negative job characteristics, passive coping and low scores on positive personality being the significant predictors of negative wellbeing. Other associations between these organisational factors and outcomes may reflect the fact that they are measuring the same thing. For example, organisational commitment often includes job satisfaction so one would expect a high correlation between these two variables.

In conclusion, a 10-item wellbeing at work questionnaire showed that the two major domains being measured were positive and negative features. Negative wellbeing was predicted by negative job characteristics and passive coping. In contrast, positive wellbeing was largely a function of positive personality. Organisational variables had little predictive power when other variables were covaried and it is suggested that future questionnaires replace them with the appraisal variables (job satisfaction; perceived stress) and the outcome variables (anxiety/depression; positive affect) that have been used in longer versions of SWELL (e.g. Smith & Smith, 2017):

Job satisfaction:

Are you satisfied with your job?

Perceived stress at work:

How much stress do you have at work?

Anxious/Depressed because of work

Are you anxious or depressed because of work?

Happy at Work

Are you happy at work?

Practitioner summary

This article describes a 10-item measure of wellbeing at work (the Short Smith Wellbeing Questionnaire – Short SWELL). The questionnaire is shown in the paper and is available for

general use. It takes a very short time to complete, measures positive and negative features of work and is based on a simple model of the wellbeing process. The present version includes measures of the Psychological Contract, Commitment to Work and Occupational Citizenship Behaviour. These variables had little predictive value when other factors were covaried and it is suggested that future versions of the questionnaire replace them with questions asking about job satisfaction, happiness at work, perceived stress and anxiety/depression.

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