

Staff well-being: negotiating new organizational realities in schools facing challenging circumstances



Changes in teachers' work and the challenges facing teacher unions

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ABSTRACT: The extensive literature on workplace stress, its causes, and the consequences for human health and organizational effectiveness, is being complemented by a growing, alternative emphasis on employees' well-being. However, in education (where well-being is particularly at risk) sustained examples of positive organizational approaches, rather than individuals' stress management, are rare. This article seeks to demonstrate the importance of well-being as a tough-minded concept. Secondly, it presents new findings from research in two schools facing challenging circumstances, which are committed to long-term Well-Being Programmes. The findings accord with inter-disciplinary well-being theory, and offer new commentary on the association between well-being, the management of feeling, and informal learning in the workplace. The research indicates the importance of cognitive attitudes such as non-judgmental openness in schools facing challenging circumstances. Some implications are suggested for educational leadership, for the role of unions, and for further research.

KEY WORDS: well-being; Well-Being Programmes; challenging circumstances; informal learning; organizational development; school leadership; teamwork; negotiation.

Employees' well-being (WB) is receiving increased academic attention in this new century, partly because of the international literature on psychosocial stress, and concerns about the effects on human health at work and in society generally. But the interest also follows from a realization that, though employees suffering stress-related illnesses need and deserve intensive support as individuals, the generic problems will persist unless proactive, organizational approaches to WB are developed alongside them. What are these alternative approaches?

In some countries, regulatory approaches to health and safety increasingly take into account the influence of organizational factors on employees' psychosocial health. These are valuable measures, reflecting findings from

research and representations from employee unions. From a utilitarian perspective, employers' duty of care is an investment in human capital, since organizations remain productive when employees stay healthy and safe. Yet the potentiality of the education workforce needs more than risk management; however necessary and serviceable.

The affective aspects of work are negotiated throughout organizations, not merely through the appointed leadership (Briner, 1999; Zapf & Holz, 2006). Employee Well-Being Programmes (WBPs) operate in these areas of complex organizational activity, supported indirectly by unions. They engage with beliefs, attitudes, values, and emotions, promoting responsibility towards colleagues; recognizing the importance of creativity, learning, and the developmental contribution of employees to their schools. Such negotiation involves cohesive partnership, communitarian leadership, and individual responsibility: the ground of new organizational realities.

This article considers workplace WB and its associations with learning and development. It reports findings from a study involving two English schools facing challenging circumstances, and which participate in staff WBPs. Some implications are identified for education, for unions, and for further research.

Well-Being, Learning, and Work: A Brief Review

A persistent difficulty confronts efforts to promote workers' development within healthy and productive working environments: normative, psychosocial approaches may be regarded as unstructured or unworldly compared with 'bottom-line,' rationalist strategies (see also Hartley, 2007). Where the principle of development regards each person as an end, having capabilities of value (Nussbaum, 2001), a more significant factor in organizational programs supporting workers' health or targeting stress is the utilitarian calculation that investment in people improves competitive edge. Such narrow instrumentalism cannot sustain human service organizations needing teamwork and social interaction.

As the organizational literature indicates, "the soft stuff is really the hard stuff" (Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja, 2000, p.12). Therefore this section presents firstly a review of WB theory, showing its underlying complexity and offering an operational definition; secondly, aspects of the literature on employee WB; and thirdly, commentary on workplace learning and WB.

Conceptualizing Well-Being

Disparate conceptions of WB may reflect cultural differences globally, but do not therefore undermine its universal legitimacy (Tiberius, 2004). Moreover, academic disciplines emphasize different perspectives, while societal changes may evoke different WB elements over time.

Human WB is associated with positive psychology and mood contributing to healthy functioning, but is not synonymous with health. A multi-disciplinary conference on the subject used the following working definition of well-being: "a positive and sustainable state that allows individuals, groups or nations to thrive and flourish" (Huppert, Baylis, & Keverne, 2004, p.1331). For individuals, WB has physical, psychological, and social components, including "human resilience" in the face of setbacks (Huppert et al, 2004, p.1331). This conception is useful for several reasons. Firstly, WB facilitates processes of becoming, though it is not their source. It may be associated more with learning, therefore, than with knowledge. Secondly, we cherish WB socially as well as personally. Individuals make a difference to the collective experience. Thirdly, WB is thought to be sustainable--less transient than emotion, and needing our active engagement. Fourthly, the addition of resilience in adversity suggests that WB has gritty qualities not shared by happiness. It seems that this everyday term, well-being, embraces developmental, psychosocial, and existential power.

Psychological studies of WB have reflected the Aristotelian distinction between eudaimonia (self-fulfillment), which confers a sense of purpose and meaning, and the short-term pleasures and desires of hedonia (happiness). Ryan & Deci (2001) compare these viewpoints: both multi-factorial constructs, differing epistemologically. The more hedonic perspective, Subjective Well-Being (SWB) (Diener & Lucas, 1999) includes life satisfaction, positive affect, and absence of negative affect, although Shmotkin (2005) seeks to reconfigure SWB as a dynamic process. Significantly for the new research reported here, no link with learning is made. The eudaimonic conception, Psychological Well-

Being (PWB) (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), proposes six key dimensions: self-acceptance; purpose in life; personal growth; positive relations with others; environmental mastery; and autonomy. Eudaimonic, but not hedonic, WB is associated with positive health (Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004). McGregor & Little (1998) emphasize meaningfulness as a factor, implying an association between WB and learning. Thus PWB functions interpretatively and actively in the world, "for the sake of human flourishing itself" (Hinchcliffe, 2004, p.538). The eudaimonic conception seems more robust because it embraces development and adverse circumstance, thus amplifying the definition offered by Huppert et al (2004).

Theoretical constructs of the fully functioning person (Rogers, 1963) and of self-actualization (Maslow, 1998) belong in the eudaimonic tradition. Both concern human development as well as ways of being. More recently, the social cognitive theory of Bandura (1997) proposes that the (positive and negative) beliefs people hold about their own capacities to influence events actually shape the outcomes of their efforts. His later work emphasizes the importance of human agency in the face of rapid, ubiquitous, and (morally neutral) technological change (Bandura, 2002). The WB message here conveys an uncomfortable paradox about the responsibility of individuals toward others: "People are producers as well as products of their social systems" (Bandura, 2002, p.3). By accepting our tendency to seek fulfillment, and the reciprocity and mutuality of our human condition, the potentiality of concerted action becomes clearer: no-one is without consequence.

Whereas Bandura's (1997) theory refers to self-efficacy beliefs, the 'broaden-and-build' theory of Fredrickson (1998) concerns positive emotions such as joy: to experience positive emotions is to broaden the repertoire of one's available thought-action responses, and to build lasting, personal (physical, intellectual, and social) resources. Emotions differ from mood because they have an object--that is, "emotions are about some personally meaningful circumstance" (Fredrickson, 2004, p.1368). Positive emotions build resilience and contribute transformative resources at personal and group levels, which Fredrickson (2004, p.1375) links explicitly with enhanced human WB. Resilience is significant to WB because life experiences include adversity.

A further theoretical perspective on WB is positive psychology, which seeks to shift the focus of psychology from the psychopathological elements of experience towards life-enhancing features such as hope, creativity, and future mindedness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A well-known concept within this school of thought is 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), a psychological state in which self-motivated, highly engaged individuals enjoy the skilful execution of a challenging task at their optimum capability.

Overall, the literature suggests a way of being that is hard-won, not given. The operational definition used for the purposes of this article is therefore a eudaimonic perspective: Well-Being is a sustainable, positive way of being which facilitates individual, group, and societal flourishing through adaptive learning and development. It involves finding fulfillment and meaning actively and purposefully, nurturing and extending psychosocial resources such as acceptance of self and others, resilience, authenticity, and the management of feeling.

Employee Well-Being

Workplace WB and health have received less academic attention than the organizational decrements from employees' stress-related illness and absence (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Fox & Spector, 2002). Increasingly, however, various perspectives emphasize aspects of employee WB: the role of emotion at work (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Zapf, 2002; Fox & Spector, 2002; Zapf & Holtz, 2006); the benefits to human flourishing in organizations which respect the ethical dimension of work (Hinchcliffe, 2004); and 'flow' in teaching relative to organizational resources such as colleagues' social support and job control (Salanova, Bakker, & Llorens, 2006). These can motivate because they "make employees' work meaningful" (p. 3). From a social ecological perspective, a survey of U.S. workers' opinions finds that while certain jobs may promote individual and community health, "others may undermine health and well-being" (Ettner & Grzywacz, 2001, p. 111). UK civil servants' experiences of unfairness (challenging individuals' values and dignity) over prolonged periods independently predict increased coronary events and depressed functioning; implicitly, policies promoting fairness and justice are likely to foster workers' health (De Vogli, Ferrie, Chandola, Kivimäki, & Marmot, 2007).

A longitudinal study of UK Health Service workers defines well-being weakly as "people's feelings about themselves

and the settings in which they live and work" (Van Dierendonck, Haynes, Borrill, & Stride, 2004, p.165), but finds that "subordinates who feel better about themselves also report that their manager has a more active and supportive leadership style" (p.173). Although causality cannot be inferred, the relationship between leaders and other employees is a reciprocal, but not synchronous, process influencing WB. This accords with literature critical of leader/follower assumptions: leadership qualities are present and necessary at multiple organizational levels (Ogawa & Bossert, 2000; Anderson, 2004); others as well as senior managers encounter value conflicts (Chatwin, 2004). Everyone, not just 'management,' has a responsibility to nurture WB.

Thus the argument is that schools, in their commitment to meet pupils' developmental needs, benefit from reviewing their own organizational functionality concerning the staff who provide for those children. For example, a bi-national study by Vogt (2003) cites a teacher interviewed in 2000: "it is strange to think that teachers who should be caring cannot care for each other because of all this paperwork and workload" (p. 258).

Workplace Learning and Well-Being

The operational definition of WB used for this article suggests a sustainable, facilitative association with human flourishing, not a state of inertia. Opportunities to learn at work predict health and personal development, including WB (Rau, 2006), and are associated with eudaimonic WB by helping to realize human potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Learning contributes to sustainability by building emotional resilience, benefiting psychosocial health through "an expansion from looking inwards to looking outwards" (Hammond, 2004, p.566). Such resilience matters internationally in education work, where burnout threatens (Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). The emotional fatigue and depersonalization (dissociation) symptomatic of burnout undermine the outward-looking commitment to others which education work requires--yet the sufferer may continue attending work.

Lifelong learning (LLL) and informal learning (IL) have relevance to WB at work. LLL is associated with Dewey's experiential learning theory and his conception of life as 'growth,' where education provides the conditions ensuring "growth, or adequacy of life, irrespective of age" (Dewey, 1916; 1981, p.493). If learning is lifelong, and living involves developmental growth, then our learning changes diachronically with us, connecting experiences, memories, and feelings. Learning is a process, not a product (Hager, 2004; Kolb, 1984), and thus "continuous development involves learning from real experiences at work and learning throughout the working life of both the individual and the organization" (Tsiakkiros, 2005).

Learning is not bounded. From certain European political perspectives learning is both lifelong and lifewide: transferable across the continua of time and space (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006), while considerable evidence now indicates that most work-related learning occurs informally (Coffield, 2000; Livingstone, 2002). Informal learning may happen spontaneously, but its very informality strengthens collegial bonds (Vogt, 2003), consequently supporting people's confidence to pursue ideas. Indeed, Tosey and McNair (2001) advocate "learning as ethos more than mechanism" (p. 107), so that it becomes part of organizational culture (Senge, 1990).

Well-Being Programmes

WBPs encourage proactive approaches to organizational development which promote and sustain the well-being of all employees. WBPs such as those coordinated in the UK by Worklife Support Ltd. (WLS) (2001-) and by Norfolk Local Authority (1999 -) are not 'government-led,' but have been promoted through the Teacher Support Network (TSN), a registered charity of trade union origin having close ties with unions and professional associations. Schools and services opt to participate in a cyclical, long-term process. WBPs provide training for voluntary, school-based facilitators who champion the cause of staff WB, and who lead the internal arrangements for conducting a confidential self-review of staff opinion. A trained, local coordinator discusses the commentary on the school's data at a meeting in school with the Headteacher and facilitators. The employees also receive feedback on the commentary, and are invited to comment. The aim is to support educational organizations in identifying and broadening strengths, and in working through issues they identify, with the employees' active engagement. These processes may be supported at different levels through social and promotional events, organizational adaptation, and strategic development including training. The schools arrange self-reviews in later years, discussing and interpreting data in the light of other relevant information and plans.

The school-based facilitators often work as a small, voluntary team promoting WB in schools. Facilitators locally and coordinators nationally are supported through meetings, conferences, school-based development programs, and Web based guidance including statistical data. The emphasis is on elective, proactive, whole-school development which recognizes and builds on strengths; integration with existing practice and policy; teamwork and learning together; facing openly what would be unhealthy to ignore; pride in achievement across the organization; and on encouraging responsible attitudes, without blame, towards one's own and others' WB. A well-being focus includes everyone; it does not seek to identify individuals perceived as stressed, who become "pathologised" (Troman & Woods, 2001, p.5), but encourages understanding and use of independent counseling services.

WBPs share procedural similarities with organizational development (OD) programs of planned change. OD targets organizational effectiveness: "the organization's ability to assess and to solve its own problems" (Cummings & Worley, 1997, p.1), both internally and in the organizational environment. However, a well-being perspective might question: Can an organization develop only through planned change and problem-solving? Other routes include extending current organizational strengths and the potential of staff by envisaging fresh possibilities; holding workplace paradoxes open, rather than seeking to 'resolve' them (Beech, Burns, de Caestecker, MacIntosh, & MacLean, 2004); and dedicating time for what Eraut (2000) calls "deliberative learning" (p. 28-29).

The perceived level of social support in school is a crucial factor in work-intensive situations (Griffith, Steptoe, & Cropley, 1999). It "effectively reduces distress" (Suls & Wallston, 2003, p.317). In this context, debates concerning effectiveness and improvement have given surprisingly little prominence to schools as staff-inclusive organizations, reliant on all their employees--for the study reported below reveals its importance.

Research Methodology

This article uses qualitative data from two schools within a study of organizational development in English schools participating in WBPs. The TSN has provided some research funding, and WLS the technical support, but the research was not commissioned and is not evaluative of the programs.

In any organization, states of WB fluctuate temporally within individuals and groups, but the two participant schools face challenging circumstances which characteristically involve significant emotional demands. Challenging circumstances are defined here as "communities where significant levels of financial deprivation, poor accommodation and long-term unemployment, associated with social problems such as the widespread availability and use of illegal drugs, commonly affect families and the formative experiences of children." The schools participate in WBPs supported by an Employing Authority because they regard staff WB as important to their own sustained functioning.

A modified ethnographic approach suits the study of highly contextualized, emotionally charged and time-dependent processes such as change, development, and learning. Because processes are unobservable directly, the approach uses participants' accounts and perceptions as the sources of information in discussion with the researcher. Engagement with participants is a "co-elaborated act on the part of both parties, not a gathering of information by one party" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.8), in which understanding is socially mediated through dialogue--never simply reiterated. The interviews are semi-structured, referring to broad topics identified in advance to participants, but questions emerge in response to what participants say about those topics. The research has a phenomenological element because the schools are not case studies, but organizational settings where processes develop 'through' individuals. Personal experiences contribute meaning, specificity, and context.

Data have been gathered on generic topics across three one-day visits to each setting over eighteen months, using digitally recorded meetings with the same nine people on each visit: individuals, including the Headteachers, but also two employees jointly. When the first research visits occurred, each school had between two and three years' experience of WBPs, and employees with voluntary facilitator roles have participated in interviews. It is significant, given the history of academic interest in teachers' stress, that in this WB study employees from a wide range of organizational roles have contributed their perspectives.

Names and localities have been changed to protect anonymity and confidentiality. 'Foresters' is a comprehensive school with 1050 pupils aged 11-16. The Headteacher was recently appointed from within the school, with some restructuring of the leadership team. At 'Gorsemoor Primary School,' with 190 pupils aged 5-11, the Headteacher has been in the post three years, following a period of instability affecting staff and pupils. In the six years prior to the research, each school moved from split-site to single-site accommodation, benefiting from new or remodeled and re-equipped buildings. Both schools face budgetary difficulties and falling rolls, but under formal inspection regulations neither has been placed in a category of concern.

Well-Being in Schools: New Research Findings

Review of the WB literature has suggested that eudaimonic elements (such as positive psychology and development; self-efficacy and freedom of action within individuals and groups; flourishing and fulfillment; resilience in adversity; and informal and lifelong learning) have cumulative relevance to schools as workplaces. The schools presented here face challenging circumstances, but are formally committed to promote staff WB. This account of new research findings will highlight how threats to employee WB in the current climate are being negotiated positively.

The findings accord well with the disparate, multi-disciplinary literature reviewed above. Evidence from both schools support three main findings:

1. Organizations, individuals, and groups nurture psychological resilience through various means connected with the management of thought and feeling.
2. A developmental commitment to learning as adults is manifest, actively pursued by individuals and encouraged by leadership. Significant learning occurs informally, and is associated beneficially with WB. However, workplace opportunities for reflection and deliberation are limited.
3. At personal, inter-personal, and organizational levels, an open, non-judgmental, and forthright approach to others is valued and fostered.

Each finding is described more fully below.

Nurturing resilience.

Elena, a teacher at Foresters, illustrates how professional relationships support individuals uncompetitively. For a teacher coming from "a nightmare class" there will be some shared understanding, instead of "I don't have any problem at all." Although Elena's example applies to teachers, her general feeling is that "...learning mentors, teaching assistants, the office staff, the cleaners, you know--I just think everybody works together really well." Emphatically, if people do not co-operate, "it just doesn't work." The risks are plain: pupil numbers in the area are falling, results are not good, student absences are high, and the school is under-subscribed. In this context, the Headteacher's desire to dispel "... the fear of failure, so people are prepared to innovate and try, and even when it fails, try a second time," achieves particular significance.

In her pastoral role, Elena is aware that although most of the children regard her as a motherly figure, "a significant minority," mostly boys, "don't have any respect for women." A few would never "make a good connection" with women in authority over them. She remains calm in such situations, does not find them hurtful, and will not make the pupils' problems her own. However, "when I started, I did."

Elena describes the school as "addictive," which well captures the sense of risk to health accompanying the emotional highs and lows in her daily work, and her commitment to it. She mentions the pride she felt in detecting extremely serious problems masked by "the happy, chirpy exterior" of a particular child who came to her, and whom she assisted considerably. The sense of achievement Elena herself feels in the youngster's progress matters to her own resilience, because: "I'm not saying I'm perfect, you know. You sort of get worn out." Such evidence recalls Zapf's (2002) reference to emotional labor in human services, where providers cannot expect their feelings to be returned by clients.

Gorsemoor Primary School has recently known "tough times," experiencing three successive Headteachers in the course of one year. But the prevailing tone from participants in the study is of spirited optimism, of moving on. Staff members in support roles are happy to come to work, believing it has become a better school. They are positive

about the future, despite the scale of social problems locally. From her secretarial perspective, also, Marisa recognizes the school's supportive ethos: "...although you don't bring your home life into work, you do have your feelings, and you can't just switch 'em off--which is taken on board here." The efforts of the WB facilitators to break down "Us and Them" feelings on the staff are building mutual trust. As Kim, a senior Teaching Assistant (TA) puts it: "I tell my class: You should have a helping hand of five people you could go to. I could go to ten [colleagues], and not be embarrassed."

The Headteacher, Gail, believes that with increased confidence they are "all better, including me, now, at responding appropriately" to the issues they face, and in turn "it's helping our well-being." But the situation was different two years previously. Then, Gail's task was "to gather the staff, in terms of their own emotions and well-being, and, erm, I had to sort of get them to buy into the belief ... that we were all in this together... we could bring about change together."

At Gorsemoor the employees strive to offer an oasis of calm in difficult (sometimes volatile) circumstances, but are aware of the school's vulnerability to inspection. Despite encouraging results from the WB self-review, what would an inspection find if it coincided with a "bad year" of pupil scores? Gail, the Headteacher, was candid with the staff team: "What's the worst it can be? Right, well we get that result and we try and build it brick at a time. Brick by brick, and not see the whole awfulness of it, you know?" The Headteacher offers staff a psychological strategy for coping with what they all dread, but also she demonstrates solidarity with them. Gail believes "supportive, effective teamwork" will equip the staff to negotiate what they cannot control, "for the children, and for ourselves." Reminiscent of psychotherapeutic practices, a group collectively contemplates its greatest dread, drawing strength from that experience: "So we've even talked about what might happen to our feelings, and what might our Well-Being action plan... look like, if we were to suddenly find ourselves in a difficult position--following an inspection, for instance."

Similar forethought is shown at Foresters. Sally (a member of the support staff, WB facilitator, and a governor at the school) relates how the WB committee asked the leadership team to make someone available in the staffroom during a recent inspection, for teachers wanting to talk about what had happened in lessons. In practice, this facility was little used. However, Sally recalls that several people came into her base confidentially: "I like to think part of it is because I do the Well-Being [Programme]," but also, "it is a quieter, cooler environment. And people knew they could come in." She was helping them to keep their nerve.

The WB facilitators in both schools assert firmly that their function is to assist others in finding ways forward, not to solve problems for them (which is important from managerial, union, and counseling perspectives). It would be very easy, in Sally's words, for someone to "leave it with you." These schools are developing organizational practices and cognitive frameworks which anticipate possible futures and actively support employees' resilience.

Commitment to learning as adults.

Schools are places where adults learn and develop, as well as children--a simple truth emerging forcefully from this study, which regards schools as organizations (Glatter, 2006), and which associates learning with WB (Hammond, 2004). Tom, Headteacher at Foresters, relies on teamwork amongst the leadership team to bring forward knowledge. The pretence of being all-knowing is "a flawed model, because it encourages other people to sit back and watch you, really," and "Sometimes I say, No, I should know that, but I don't" Tom is equally ready to give credit to others. Foresters, "is what it is, because those people have made it."

Tom's view of the school's learning is that, "We tend to automatically have this sort of scavenging, hunter-gatherer idea that we will just pick up any good ideas..." Valuing consistency, he retains an image from his own learning experiences: a course in leadership based on team deliberation (Eraut, 2000). The core purposes of the school are determined through long discussion, and then metaphorically are kept under plate glass until a suitable time comes for review. New ideas are scrutinized against this set of principles, to see if they fit.

Even in the more close-knit circumstances of the primary school, Gail accepts that she needs a "healthy challenge" to her view of developments, since "you could take your eye off the ball as a Head" because of external pressures. Hers is an engaged, cognitive problem-solving approach to development, shared with staff: "...we've tried to encourage

amongst each other... the acceptance that there will always be challenges to deal with," for it is "the nature of our work." Gail believes that people need the confidence to speak about workplace worries, so that the group can "look for a strategy to half-solve them," before they spread. Similarly, employees have to accept that some "shine" more than others at certain tasks, "and that's what we try and teach the children." In school assemblies with staff present, Gail says to the children: "I am a learner. I'm your Headteacher, but I'm a learner."

Whether or not a causal connection exists, it appears from this study that where school leaders see themselves and present themselves as learners, acknowledging others' expertise, employees in other roles take learning seriously. Kim is a TA and one of the WB facilitators at Gorsemoor Primary School. She encourages her colleagues, when they feel unsure in some situations with pupils, to "Go and ask" the teachers, despite their anxieties about not knowing, and fear of feeling foolish. Kim strives to persuade her colleagues to take that big step: "And then they'll come back: Oh I'm awful glad you said that. Look what they've given me, to help me. And [the teachers] are very supportive." One senses the sheer relief in: I'm awful glad you said that. Such leadership on Kim's part was not distributed, but something she has developed from experience. The deep learning is about trust: asking for guidance does not bring condescension. It is a good example of informal learning at work, as described by Coffield (2000), but also, of building personal resources (Fredrickson, 2004).

There is some evidence from the two schools that the sheer intensity and pace of work hinders the potential impact of informal learning. Conversations may be constrained to hurried exchanges of information, requests, or responses. At one school, reduced time allocations for lunch, designed to minimize problems in afternoon lessons, thereby lessen the scope for employees to unwind or to reflect on their work calmly.

An open approach.

According to Hammond (2004), a product of learning is a looking outward; a greater openness to experience, which in turn is associated with health and WB. One sign of WB in an organization, therefore, would be that the organization systemically and the employees individually demonstrate such openness.

Both participant schools have systems which indicate openness to suggestions and ideas: means of considering ideas for WB development days and courses, and ways to register worries or complaints through representation. Because Foresters has many employees, a WB Committee has been established, representing different staff groups. Sally, the WB facilitator, is requesting that committee meetings be booked into the school calendar, thus embedding WB further in routines. Employees' concerns can be raised and discussed at meetings, which the Headteacher regularly attends--a factor of major symbolic significance within the school.

At Gorsemoor, WB issues are raised through the school's Change Team, which includes the two WB facilitators, and is chaired by the Headteacher. A suggestion box, checked regularly, is kept in the staff room. Consultation processes have been progressively extended--for example, the mid-day supervisors now have half-termly meetings with the Headteacher. Parminder finds them helpful, and "[The Headteacher] always says: The door's open when you need." Within this conversation Marisa observes: "We are quite open, aren't we, as a staff? ... We're all quite honest with each other: I think that's part of it." The WB facilitators, Josie and Kim, have contributed to this openness by organizing (optional) social evenings for all the staff, where work is not discussed. Josie believes that people get along better as a result: "...you need to sort of get away from school to be able to relax and see other sides of people." Where the history is of "Us and Them," openness includes witnessing more fully someone's personality and capabilities, and thus clearing the way for fuller, more trusting, future communication.

Another aspect of openness in both schools, evident across a variety of roles, is a non-judgmental stance toward the pupils, their parents, and the community--coupled with a desire to understand situations empathically. Although feelings are engaged, this approach is distinct from sentimental weakness. Elena, who has a pastoral role at the secondary school, gives heart-rending accounts of what some pupils experience, and which come to her specific attention. Consequently, she is "much more tolerant of people in general." When Elena sees people suffering addiction to drugs or alcohol, she feels "real pity for them... because it all depends on your circumstances, doesn't it?" Jess, an administrator with the Special Needs team at Foresters, similarly believes that her experience of work has changed her outlook. Having taken the minutes for multi-agency meetings about particular children with severe

behavioral difficulties, she sees them differently. She might have been "a bit abrupt" with them formerly, whereas now Jess tries "to talk to them more calmly, and ... give them more leeway, I suppose--because they're troubled."

At Gorsemoor, Kim (a TA) relates how she meets mothers who are on drugs. She tries not to judge them, "...even though I wouldn't leave my kids all night." Kim considers any such mother who comes into the school as she would a child: "Well what's she been through in her life? And she needs as much help as that child." The school also welcomes parents: "...they know that they can come in at any time, and we've always had a good response from them," even though "It's not good on parents' evenings." Again, this considerate understanding is not sentimental. Kim recalls that at Social Services meetings she has had "to say things I don't want to say" to parents, although "We're doing it to help the child, and I think they do understand that at the end of the day." Openness requires sensitivity to others' feelings, but forthright professional statements in professional contexts have their place; teachers are not the only education workers involved. It is emotionally demanding work, but this study finds that ultimately the eudaimonic reward lies in doing some good.

Commentary on the Findings, and Further Implications

Alongside accounts of joy, thankfulness, passionate endeavor, and pride in achievement, the data contain contextually specific references to anxiety, displeasure, mistrust, and grief. Like other workplaces, the two schools are subject to human weaknesses and distress. However, as organizations, they attempt to negotiate the realities of these shifting sands, sometimes making mistakes, but learning progressively. They use their experience inclusively to develop personal and organizational WB resources, evolving a discourse of potentiality, not deficit.

Unions, which have done so much to protect members' welfare, can help schools proactively and in partnership to use the strength of their values and beliefs in influencing positively their experiences of change. Many union members are already engaged in developing practical approaches, based on understanding human WB as a tough-minded concept, capable of supporting people in emotionally demanding work. Such demands concern all unions having members in education. The rich experience gained has yet to be fully articulated: the research visits have found numerous practical ideas capable of adaptation and use elsewhere. Unions have a major, creative role in sharing these understandings across the membership through their literature, seminars, courses and conferences, and in routine discussions with individuals and organizations.

While the predominant 'improvement' discourse is of repairing deficit, the existing, multi-disciplinary body of academic knowledge of WB theory and practice remains dispersed. However, the literature review and the findings from this study indicate the value of a positive orientation towards identifying and nurturing benefits and strengths. Negative assumptions and preoccupations can be replaced with positive, coherent theorization across a wide range of fields, supporting well-informed and sustainable organizational practices capable of use in educational organizations internationally.

Politically, a WB approach begins from valuing, not exploiting, the intrinsic motivation of education workers, who draw inspiration from a deeply felt, communitarian ethic of public service. Conceptually, it involves understanding schools as organizations-not somehow removed from the real world, but dedicated to its future. Philosophically, it reasserts development as the central purpose of education, supporting inclusively employees' lifelong, informal and formal learning through that endeavor. Organizationally, it develops systemic, holistic means to achieve WB and health, involving leadership which understands their developmental importance. Collectively, the approach becomes a productive, feasible, and necessary agenda for future research.

Conclusion

Participation in a formal program does not ensure high levels of staff WB, but represents a school's commitment to nurture it; and that responsibility falls to every employee. The two schools in this study face challenging circumstances, but are vibrant, far from cheerless places. The employees are committed to their pupils while also negotiating their own paths of learning, development, and WB-often informally, but openly, within and beyond the organization. The prospect is that with support and encouragement such engagement has the power to unify, rather than divide, groups within the wider developmental purpose of education.

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