Why wellbeing, why now?   01

Introduction

We have been writing about wellbeing for a number of years, and we consider that there is still a gap in the market for a HR practitioners' guide to conceiving, writing, rolling out and evaluating what amounts to an effective people strategy. The purpose of this book is to provide a simple-to-follow 'how-to' guide for those charged with people directorate responsibilities in both the public and private sectors, whether that be in HR, learning and development (L&D) or for people considering entering into this fascinating field as their chosen future careers. This book is also perfect for those who are just a little curious about what all of this stuff is about. Our focus is entirely on making it happen in the workplace, turning thoughts and evidence into practical workplace strategies. It is the Haynes manual for wellbeing and, as we have written about the 'people fleet' previously, this book will take you through the selection, ownership, management, servicing and repair of your most valuable of assets: your people. With practice in mind, we will cover all the points required to get a people strategy off the ground.

This opening chapter introduces the concept of wellbeing and will cover the importance of having an effective people strategy in place. This very much includes elements that will deliver wellbeing in the workplace. As a critical area of performance and productivity that is undergoing burgeoning interest, we draw upon the evidence base to illustrate how getting this right can improve these areas. Furthermore, how this can lead to reduced sickness, increased discretionary effort, trust and employee loyalty.

Wellbeing

It might be appropriate to begin with a brief look at what wellbeing is and perhaps, what we suggest, it is not, in the context of this book. Like any notion of leadership influence or management technique, wellbeing is subject to multiple interpretations. We ascribe subjective feelings to wellbeing – a state of mind and a state of being. These include feeling safe, comfortable, secure, happy, fortunate and, of course, healthy. Many commentators describe wellbeing in terms of psychological constructs of Eudaimonic and Hedonic. This book is not aimed at confusing the reader and we concede that descriptions can become complicated, but we think these two descriptors are more than worthy of further coverage. First, the Eudaimonic characteristics refer to the purposeful side of wellbeing – positive ways we live and view life, and our personal understanding and command of these phenomena, what we will refer to later on as 'knowing yourself'. These include issues such as having positive relationships, a purpose in life, self-acceptance and so on. Hedonic wellbeing can be described in terms of our pleasure or happiness, sometimes framed as subjective wellbeing, and again draws on positivity.

Happiness

The astute will recognize that, well, not everyone has a naturally 'happy' outgoing persona, and indeed this is a very good point. So, if you are not happy, can you experience wellbeing? To answer quickly, yes! Sonja Lyubomirsky, in her superb book *The How of Happiness* (2010), skillfully navigates the key components of what it is to be happy, including ways to recognize that you are, in fact, happy. The issue about walking around all day with a smile on your face is quickly dispatched and replaced by thoughts and feelings of 'non-grumpiness'. Sonja doesn't use this phrase, but we feel it fits quite well with what we are trying to communicate here, in that it is very much a state as much as a trait. If we unpack what it is to 'have' wellbeing, it soon becomes apparent that it is a tricky field of play, but it is almost impossible to try to isolate it from positivity. Another great

author, Martin Seligman, has written expansively on this subject (2003, 2011), although a quick trawl through YouTube reveals that he himself confesses to being quite a grumpy individual. So it seems it is not about the outwardly reaching persona, but something much deeper rooted.

This is where, and why, it is critical to those charged with looking after people in a working environment to have a good understanding of wellbeing. To draw on Collinson's (2012) analogy of 'Prozac Leadership' for a second, we could argue that leaders or managers who obsess about workplace wellbeing may find themselves equally as frowned upon should they take up an endless pursuit all day long of asking everyone if they are 'okay'. The skill is in being able to respond when the answer comes back as, 'No, not really.' Gulping line managers up and down the country may now find solace in this book as we unpack a selection of responses to this perhaps unanticipated riposte.

Positivity

Being told that wellbeing can have a huge impact on productivity and performance may itself inspire managers to view it in a more serious light, or simply view it at all. With austerity measures, cutbacks, efficiency drives, doing more with less and so on becoming organizational norms in seemingly most workplace settings, the skills of a positively charged line manager, free from stimulants, may be just what is needed to create a conducive working environment, one in which the workforce feels trusted, engaged and motivated to work hard. In return they gain an enormous amount of satisfaction from what they do, feel proud and talk positively about their work and their workplace, thus drawing meaning and purpose from their lives. These all seem to be essential criteria for any workplace, and so we suggest that getting wellbeing right can result in huge returns, and not only financial. These results, of course, need to be sustainable, and genuine. Authenticity in wellbeing will lead to a sustainable solution for the workplace; fads and flash-in-the-pans simply will not suffice here.
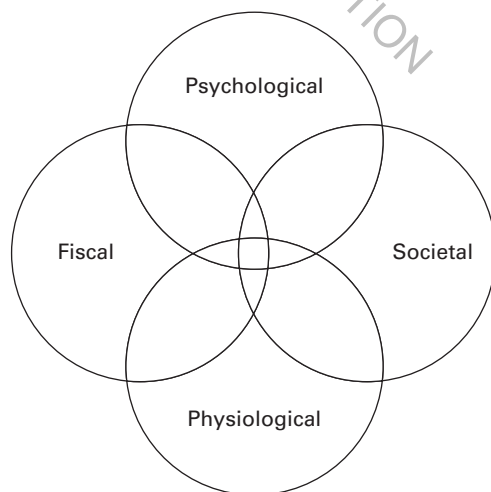
Psychological wellbeing

This is probably an apt juncture to explore a little of the 'ogicals' of wellbeing, having already briefly touched on psychological wellbeing and the sub-descriptors of Hedonic and Eudaimonic wellbeing, meaning and purpose, and such. Although we strongly suggest that psychological wellbeing, when it comes to work at least, is the area where it would be best to spend the time trying to understand, we will label and further describe the other main actors, as illustrated in Figure 1.1 below.

Physiological wellbeing

If people are asked to describe, 'What is wellbeing?' they are generally drawn to descriptors of the physiological kind. That is to say, being free from injury or physical ailments, keeping fit and being active. There is also the dreaded topic of size and weight here, BMI, cholesterol levels and blood pressure. Now, there are two points to

Figure 1.1 The four key tenets of wellbeing

make when it comes to physiological wellbeing – and these may take you by surprise. The first is that the majority of people are not absent from work with physiological issues, well not primarily at least. The second is that wellbeing is much, much, more than the absence of ill health. As such, although popularized as the physiological, wellbeing does not take primary stage under this umbrella. Work-related wellbeing is most definitely impacted upon, in the main, by psychological wellbeing (PWB) issues – namely stress, anxiety and depression, all of which we will cover in depth in the course of this book.

Societal wellbeing

Our third area of wellbeing is that of societal, or sociological, wellbeing. There is currently much debate around measuring societal wellbeing, so we will take a little time to explore why this may be so. The main thrust of the measurement is that it gives the measurers, mainly called upon by their respective governments, an indication of the quality of life experienced by people in that particular area. It is a lens to look at how life is going for the masses. As a brief aside, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is very interested in countries measuring how they stack up on this scale, as an indication of what it is like to live in that country and, of course – and like with all measures – how they compare to the kids across the street (OECD, 2012). This fits closely with financial wellbeing, the final of our four related areas of wellbeing, in relation to the items that cover income, expenditure and so-called disposable wage. It is worth mentioning that the OECD scale covers housing, income, jobs, community, education, environment, civic engagement, health, life satisfaction, safety and work–life balance. We will touch on all of these aspects during the course of this book, and provide some idea about what good looks like, and also some practical steps to embed this in the workplace as part of a wellbeing strategy.

Financial wellbeing

This remains a major source of concern. Take the scenario of a young person leaving school and going to university to further their career options. During this time at university they amass what amounts to be a substantial financial debt that they can carry with them for many years to come. Added to that may be the relatively low levels of pay as they enter their working life and seek to become established, develop and progress up the career ladder. This progression may involve a transient lifestyle, effectively relocating to where the work is, renting accommodation and so on. These may be periods of hardship for younger employees, so we need to be mindful of that. Amongst the financial threats that exist for all workers are, of course, staff redundancies, job losses, splitting up with partners (especially where children are involved), moving house, inheriting debt or taking on loans that they struggle to pay off. What we suggest in Figure 1.1 is that this financial stress can very quickly have a huge impact on our other spheres of wellbeing.

Four conspirators

A closing observation on the Venn diagram in Figure 1.1 would be that it is very rare to see any one of these aspects impacting on individuals in isolation. What you would usually see – and for those charged with people responsibilities, what to look out for – is that they conspire, collude and round up on an individual. Someone may, for example, sprain an ankle whilst out for a jog (being healthy). This may result in them being laid up for a while, perhaps missing work. This then starts to impact on their psychological wellbeing, as meaning and purpose in life is temporarily suspended whilst they recoup. This could also, dependent on their employment contract, impact on their financial income. Finally, if you know people who are very much into their personal fitness and exercise regime and then find they cannot train, they can become quite anti-social – and there you have it, the four aspects have rounded and had a devastating effect on an individual's wellbeing. Now, of course we are not going to suggest that

exercise is bad for you, but what you need to be mindful of is levels of resilience. This is something we will discuss in far more depth later in the book.

VUCA

The modern working environment was best described by George Casey, a US soldier, who made a valiant attempt at framing what most employers – although he was talking in terms of military operations – are facing today. He described a VUCA world (2014), where volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity are all part of the daily challenge. We capture these dimensions in Figure 1.2, and in looking at these areas a little more closely we can get a feel for the landscape facing our employees. Looking at these points in turn we can start to get a picture of what supportive help can assist in facilitating a good day at work for them.

Volatility is the nature and stability of the working task, things that are subject to change at short or no notice, for example – areas of work that can be either the very best, or alternatively the very worst, and are vulnerable to rapid change in both content and prospect. *Uncertainty* is a major worry for nearly all employees and

Figure 1.2 The VUCA world of work
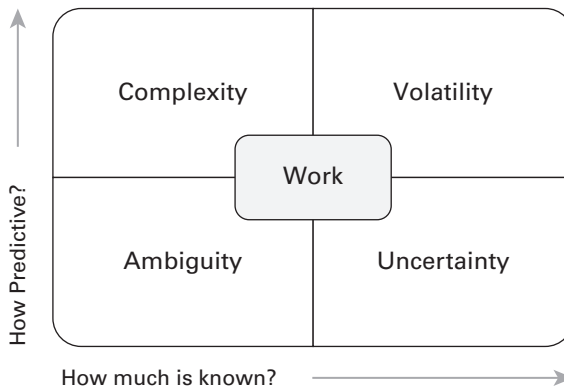
SOURCE adapted from Casey (2014)

employers alike, and has been the subject of much discourse. Long-term single points of employment seem almost extinct, even in some stalwart industries that traditionally offered 'jobs for life' such as those in the public sector, emergency services and so on. We will cover job uncertainty in greater depth further on in this book as we explore surveying the workforce, but needless to say it can be a major source of stress, both in the workplace and outside. In terms of *complexity*, we could frame this as the nature and volume of work entering our organizations. Can this be dealt with in what may be termed traditional ways? Or does it require a bespoke response, making it a 'complex task'? We look at issues such as the relationship the work has with other areas, the predictability of what may result, the number of variables present in the task, your own access to specialist help or assistance. These can all play their part in making 'complexity' a very stressful business indeed. Finally, *ambiguity*. This may best be described in the infamous two-by-two grid models popular with many academics and labelled as the 'unknown unknowns'. These are issues that have no set precedent, little is known of the circumstance or its solution, or even a range of possible solutions. Again, this can be a huge source of stress as workers process the dilemmas presented with ambiguity.

When it comes to looking at your workplace wellbeing strategy, models such as the one depicted in Figure 1.2 can help you frame sources of stress for your workforce and, perhaps more importantly, your own range of responses to those possible scenarios. This approach, scenario analysis, can help in two ways. First, it goes some way to prepare or negate emerging VUCA issues. Second, the exercise itself gives your workforce the confidence that you are, at least, considering some of the dilemmas that are coming their way. This has the effect of both preparing staff for the road ahead and, to some extent, allowing them to get involved with the subsequent response. It can be insightful to discuss these aspects with employees and seek response options from them, including them in decision making and strategy setting. As we look at surveying, later in this book, it will become apparent how vital a process this is, and the benefits it can bring to the workforce in terms of motivation, commitment and engagement levels.

NICE

So what is the likely future of work? The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in the UK issued a guidance paper in March (NICE, 2017) calling on employers to consider four issues in relation to the improvement of mental and physical wellbeing of workers. This approach, going directly to all employers, seems to indicate a deep understanding that the future of work may be very different indeed. If we take some time to examine what the guidelines advise it provides insight into where responsibility for health and wellbeing may be directed in the forthcoming years. It seems the broad-brush approach of 'employer responsibility' is no longer a generally accepted notion, and workers, quite rightly, now require a more nuanced approach. As in our previous look at VUCA, these guiding principles are also a most welcome addition for inclusion in a workplace wellbeing strategy. Hopefully by now the practical elements of this book are beginning to strike a chord.

Let us spend a few moments now to unpick the guidance. These were, first, to make health and wellbeing an organizational priority. The rationale behind this was to give leaders, and according to NICE these should be named leaders, responsibility. The aim is to display that organizations take health and wellbeing seriously and will support employees. In return, organizations ought to realize increased productivity, lower sickness levels and improved job satisfaction and retention. The guidance also suggests, in the second point, that line managers ought to have the responsibility for workplace health and wellbeing written into their role descriptions, thus formalizing this commitment. Third, what the NICE guidelines refer to as 'quality statements' refers to the identification and management of stress. This includes the skilling of managers in the identification of stress and a call for them to be trained in how to support staff experiencing stress. This is a point that this book can make a major contribution towards, as throughout we provide working examples of how stress may manifest in the workplace – what signs employees experiencing stress may exhibit, and how to address these issues for the benefit of both the workers and the employers. This, taken together with the

fact that one of the most critical elements to any employment is one's relationship with their immediate line manager. We cannot emphasize enough how important this aspect is to anyone, in any arena, undertaking work of any kind. It is a fact that the line manager is the most influential aspect of a person's wellbeing in the workplace. It is often said that people join companies and leave line managers. Employers must feel trusted, valued and appreciated if they are to work effectively and efficiently over time. Once more, we point out the glaringly obvious that when this relationship is going well, productivity and performance is sure to follow hot on its heels.

Ageing workforce

The mean age of the workforce is rising and in this next few paragraphs we will explore why this might be so, but more importantly, the implications for workplace wellbeing.

Professor Martin Vernon, National Clinical Director for Older People and Person Centred Integrated Care for the National Health Service in England, has documented that our population is ageing. He has stated that, over the next 10 years, life expectancy at 65 will increase by almost 2 years. He has said that by 2025 it is estimated that the number of people aged 65 and over will increase by 20 per cent to over 12 million. Whilst for many this is great news, it is unfortunately factual that many people are living longer with multiple long-term conditions, which in part is contributing to increased demand on our health and care systems. Professor Vernon went on to say that in addition, while we can expect the overall prevalence of disability in older people to remain constant at around 20 per cent, the absolute numbers living with lost functional ability is expected to increase by one-quarter, to nearly 3 million people. Overall this means that by 2025 there will be an approximate 15 per cent increase in average years lived with disability. Most importantly, these population averages do not tell the full story. There is emerging evidence of significant and sustained differences in the trajectories of frailty and wellbeing between the richest and poorest thirds of the population across cohorts as they age (Vernon, 2017).

It is not beyond the scope of most to associate an ageing working population with a whole host of work-related challenges. These include mobility, technology, energy levels, sleeping patterns, medication requirements and so on – all of which have repercussions for those charged with looking after the workforce. What we also note is the inevitability of this coming to fruition, as the workforce dynamic shifts, albeit at a glacial pace. According to the Centre for Ageing Better, one in three workers will be aged over 50 by 2020, and by 2024 there will be 18 million people aged 60 and over. That is 3.1 million more than today (UK), which will equate to more than one in four workers being over 60 years old (Thomson, 2017). On top of this, the Workplace Report (Age in the Workplace, 2016) estimates that as many as 1 million people age 50–64 want to return to the UK workplace. However, it seems that the challenge of managing what appears will be an older workforce is still relatively unexplored. We see a point not too far into the future where it may be likely to have three generations all at work, top and tailed by a fourth, and even a fifth. A girl born today (2017) in the UK has a 50 per cent chance of living to be 100 years old. In a 2017 report based in the UK, the CIPD called for employers to keep older workers in the workplace for much longer, recommending an extra 1 million over 50s should be in work by 2022 to address what they considered to be a widening skills gap in the UK (CIPD, 2017). In terms of the wellbeing strategy for any organization, this will require a host of newly documented management skills, education and training. In terms of our previous look at the VUCA world, this dynamic most definitely falls into that category.

As part of planning how to integrate an older working populace into the workplace, those responsible need to be mindful of any needs, limitations and indeed advantages that this can bring. A massive amount of experience is instantly brought to mind. Being able to strategically deploy this experience can bring about huge business benefits, especially in viewing concepts such as learning by mistakes. It is not clear where the upper age limit will be set, if indeed it is set. However, there are most likely some issues around what is ethical or responsible management. As advances in medicine and health care progress rapidly, we propose that some of the issues facing the older working generation and employers are sited in their recruiting, retraining and in

indeed retaining, which may need to be at least revised. To end this short insight it is interesting to note that the first person to live to be 150 years old has already been born. The benchmark of reaching 50 years of age traditionally signalled the later years of working life, and this may now not even signal the halfway point of working life. The Government Office for Science in the UK predicts that 12.5 million people will retire from work between 2012 and 2022, with only 7 million currently available to potentially fill those posts. This is based on birth-rate data and an additional 2 million jobs being created within that time (Cowley, 2016).

Technology

Love or loathe technology, avoidance is futile. With not a day going by without some new gadgetry being launched, a fresh set of operating instructions, increased digitization, and new ways of transferring things from one place to another, where it will end up the mind boggles. Today we have devices that can instantly translate languages, recognize songs, our voice commands and turn our heating at home on and off. One constraint is that at present these devices are oblivious to how we feel, if we are low or high. However, emotionally aware devices that can detect and interpret human emotions and adapt the lifestyle applications to match are being developed. The question is how will these be used positively in the workplace? For some this presents opportunities that are exciting and limitless, for others it presents the largest source of stress in the workplace!

If we look at workplace wellbeing and sources of stress, we would like to assume technology helps. If we take a look at your organization's printer policy, as an example. Where once you may have been afforded a desktop printer, conveniently connected to your desktop, or shared with a nearby colleague, is that still the case? Or do you share a printer on your particular floor, or worse? Do you enter a code, wander over to the printer to enter it, only to find it is out of toner, or requires paper? Or, is John from publications standing there printing out the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* for a few hours? This can

be very stressful. So something that was designed to aid flow through a system is now blocking progress. Although we use this as a light-hearted example, there are many such cases where technology has hindered, not helped, in the workplace. In terms of wellbeing it is often a good reflection to think about the way work is designed. Is technology helping to its maximum potential, as we expect our employees to do?

When new technology is introduced in the workplace it can have two very different effects. It can make employees relieved that the once very tedious role requiring manual handling, whether that be physical or mentally processing work on an existing system, has now thankfully been replaced. Or it can make people feel vulnerable to redundancy or layoff. We will look at remote working in the next section, but this too often involves the introduction of new working solutions that negate the necessity for employees to be office based. With the redesign of job comes a new psychological contract and this should be included in any wellbeing strategy moving forward. For example, if the workers that are being affected by a new working model have a genuine say in the new working solution it is likely they will take this ownership forward and be productive in the new arrangements, and often are more productive. We will discuss the management of change in greater depth later in this book, as this is one of the major sources of workplace stress and should be included in the wellbeing strategy. Communication is key here, and the workplace levels of engagement employed.

Remote working

The term describes both employees who are not physically in an office or workplace, as well as those who work flexibly and work both from home and office. This second offering is considered desirable, especially among millennials, with 35 per cent of employees in the United States stating they would change jobs to access flexible working arrangements. The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) outlined a notion of smart working, which they describe as:

> An approach to organizing work that aims to drive greater efficiency
> and effectiveness in achieving job outcomes through a combination of
> flexibility, autonomy and collaboration, in parallel with optimizing tools
> and working environments for employees. (CIPD, 2017)

One of the consequences of this is home working. For many this is the
perfect way to work: maximum flexibility, convenience, autonomy,
trust and empowerment. To some, in contrast, feelings of isolation,
loneliness and abandonment are experienced. According to Gallup 43
per cent of the US workforce sometimes work at home, and they sug-
gest managers need to get far better in addressing this. Humans are
social creatures (well, most are), and although working remotely can
provide enhanced levels of performance and productivity it can also
create feelings of demoralization. So, it is not straightforward at all.

Although the challenges for managers in relation to leading a vir-
tual workforce may be apparent, we will outline here some of the
areas that may not be so obvious on an initial examination. One
thing is for certain, there has not been any meaningful synthesis of
the role of managing a flexible workforce, and it appears that manag-
ers need to become better skilled at this relatively new role that they
may find themselves thrust into. Critically, the role of the line man-
ager changes from person to task. That is, the manager often concen-
trates their efforts and attention to the outcomes and results, rather
than the employees themselves. This is hard to do in a working envi-
ronment such as an office, where personality plays its part signifi-
cantly. This is why we often see people with huge personalities get-
ting away with allsorts in the workplace, and the resultant
productivity, or outcome, may be questionable. Other managerial
challenges involve assessing workload, performance, and ensuring
some socialization with the business; feeling like they have a working
identity. Managers who have a remote, or virtual, workforce need to
adopt different approaches in terms of communicating, assessing the
varying needs of their directs, looking after technology and the re-
quirements thereof; and also, how productivity or performance will
be measured or assessed.

As we work through this conundrum it is easy to see why wellbe-
ing plays such an important part, especially when it comes to finding

meaning and purpose. What line managers can do, and which should form part of the wellbeing strategy for remote workers, is to foster a sense of belonging, even though remote. This means holding constant meaningful communication with the remote workforce, whether that be in person, via video, audio conferencing, text, instant messaging or other media that may well not exist at the time this book goes to press – the mind boggles!

The use of technology cannot be underestimated here; group Skype calls on a regular basis provide a good example. It may be that managers could also consider some 'online' social time, creating a virtual social community, so that this is not always associated with work, mirroring an office or factory environment for example. Managers can make sure that workers are kept up to date with company events, policies and direction, again negating any feelings of isolation that may creep up. It seems that lots of organizations, although working remotely, have hot-desking facilities to accommodate short-stay visits, meetings and get-togethers not related to work. This social element of wellbeing is an important factor for employees, increasing loyalty and feelings of belonging. To this extent managers may look at innovative ways of bringing the office to the home, re-creating, as far as possible, a virtual office environment, one in which birthdays and anniversaries are celebrated, there are coffee-break discussions, jokes, story exchanges and so on, which mirror the traditional office environment and empower employees to feel part of a bigger team and mitigate against feelings of social isolation or even loneliness.

We will touch a little later on work–life integration but, needless to say, remote working provides opportunities for flexibility. In that respect, the working day could be distributed; it could be early, late or night oriented. The appeal is in the flexibility and permitting that flexibility to truly exist. Research suggests that, perhaps counterintuitively, remote workers are far more productive and in fact end up working longer hours than their office-based counterparts. Managers should also be mindful of this, ensuring adequate rests and breaks are taken, that employees enjoy down time and feel empowered to, well, switch off their computers! A certain amount of face to face should also be aspired to if this is feasible.

Discretionary effort

Our final part of this opening chapter examines the phenomena of discretionary effort, or extra role effort, as it is known in the United States. Another way of looking at it may be the amount of work we do when no one is looking! When set against a backdrop of technology, ageing workforce, VUCA and engagement we can see how this can provide the 'tell-tale' of a successful wellbeing strategy. So, to gauge how successful you are with your wellbeing strategy, you can take a look at these extra-mile behaviours as an indicator of success. They may also help you highlight areas that are not going so well. The reason why discretionary effort is a good means of taking the temperature is that it is almost entirely free-will related to how an employee feels about the work they are doing, and the people they are working with. There are elements of charity and public-service motivation that impact, but we can push through that for the purposes of illustration. If a workplace has high levels of discretionary effort being exhibited across the entire workforce, it is usually a sign that employees are happy with their lot, and that they are drawing meaning and purpose from their working life. It is also unlikely that you will see high levels of discretionary effort alongside high levels of sickness absence.

To make the point, we suggest that you can have a work rate of anything between 0 and 100 per cent. We recommend that to push for 100 per cent on a continual basis will lead, almost inevitably, to employee burnout. This is not good for a number of reasons, for as well as the burnout of the employees themselves, the organization may garner a reputation that does not make it attractive to quality prospective employees. We suggest that managers ought to be seeking a commitment from people to work at about 80 per cent of their capacity. This makes it comfortable, achievable and unlikely to lead to burnout. If we take a look at operations management literature, this is phrased as the 'coping zone' (Johnston and Clark, 2008: 295).

As illustrated in Figure 1.3, if we ask our workforce what they can get away with, the answer would typically be about the 30 per cent mark. This is how much they have to put into the working day to

Figure 1.3 The hypothesis for discretionary effort
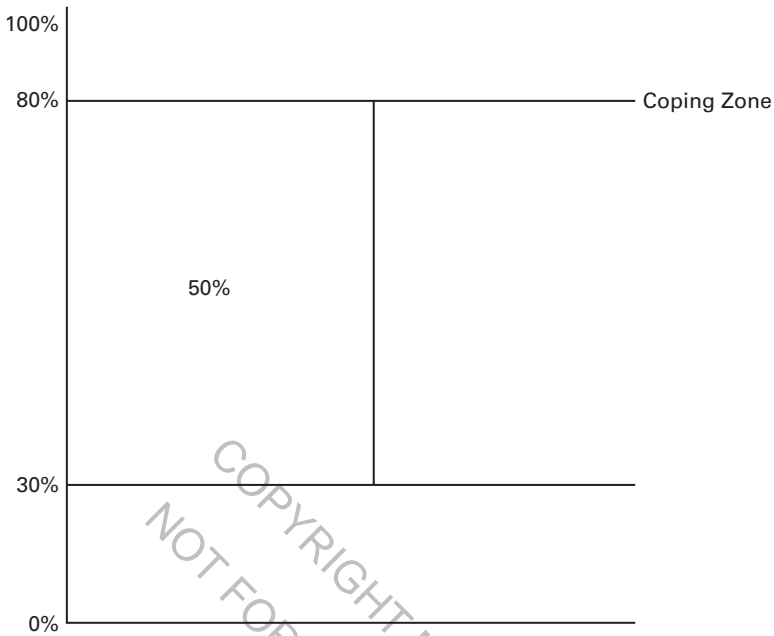
SOURCE adapted from Hesketh, Cooper and Ivy (2017)

avoid sanction, sacking or other punitive measures. This leaves us with a huge gulf of 50 per cent, as shown in Figure 1.3, that we suggest is given up for free, or, is discretionary effort. We hope you can see where we are going with this …

So, with up to 50 per cent of an employee's effort being discretionary, more or less, we hope you can instantly see that this book is going to be of immense value. We suggest that to tap into this extra role effort, an employee must experience wellbeing at work. We will now explain just how you can achieve this.

Strategy

So, the all-important question now is what is a strategy, and how do we do it for health and wellbeing? There are many great books that unpick strategy as a field of study. Books such as *Strategy* (Wit, 1994),

Strategy Safari (Mintzberg, 2008) and, of course, *Exploring Corporate Strategy* (Johnson, Scholes and Whittington, 2008), now in its eleventh edition and one that has provided the staple for many business students around the world, offering more views on strategy than you can probably consume. In its basic form though, the consensus is that the strategy is, to a point, the long-term direction of an organization, although we concede that strategy is broken down into more sub-headings and contexts than perhaps makes it helpful. What we will stick with for our purposes is how to fit wellbeing into your business's long-term plan, the strategic fit, we might say. As we continue, you will read that there are a great many things to consider as you go about this. Some will merge seamlessly, others will take a little more shoe-horning. Before we get too far ahead of ourselves, let us consider the basic, high-level or corporate-level strategy, as Johnson and his colleagues suggest and as illustrated in Figure 1.4.

As you can see in Figure 1.4, the first thing really to consider is if this wellbeing strategy fits in to your current descriptions of what your strategic purpose is. If it is totally at odds, you may need to do some serious thinking about what this means for you, your employees and your business. You also may consider that this provides a convenient opportunity for you to revise or update your current strategic goals – a strategic refresh, you could say. For example, thinking about how wellbeing fits in to your current context, the current way things happen, your procedures and processes.

This leads nicely on to the second point, baselining your current position. Where you currently are can be quite an insightful exercise,

Figure 1.4 The high-level strategy

Plan

Current
Position

Vision
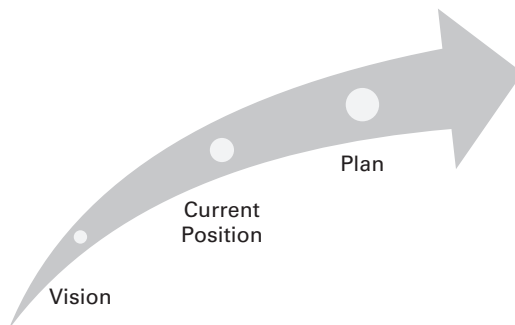
and we have experienced a lot of businesses gaining knowledge by looking at their operations through a wellbeing lens. As we have already touched on, in terms of productivity and/or performance, a well workforce performs at a much higher level. This may provide you with an appropriate point in which to engage with your workforce, customers, suppliers and so on. Staff surveying, which we will discuss in greater depth later in this book, is a great way of taking the temperature. How do those involved with your organization feel, act and speak? You may also wish to document what is already in existence – what is mandated, legislated or practice norms? Do you already have initiatives that are beyond those which you have to have, and do you understand the impact these have? These baselining activities again provide a great deal of insight to inform your way ahead.

Finally, in the high-level strategy we look at the master plan to get all this rolling, including milestones, indicators of success, timescales and maybe more ambitious long-term aims. These could be aspirations to reduce levels of sickness, to have a happier workforce or increased productivity, and so on. Of course, each of these stages can take a considerable amount of time and resources, but we suggest that getting this right will prove of benefit in the long term.

Summary

To conclude, this chapter has set the scene for the strategic importance of having an effective people approach in place. We have drawn on a myriad of contemporary thought to illustrate how getting right this vital aspect of workplace strategy can improve operational performance, can lead to reduced sickness, increased discretionary effort, trust and employee loyalty. We have taken a brief look at some of the new ways of working, posing a number of considerations for those charged with people management responsibilities, as well as those simply focused on looking after their fellow workers. We have discussed strategies to deal with an ageing workforce, remote working and the huge impact that technology has in the workplace. Most importantly we highlighted how addressing the

wellbeing issues related to these aspects of work can pay huge dividends, and why they should be included in an overall practical strategy. We have concluded with a look at the modern-day working environment, and the challenges faced by both employees and employers as they work to cope with a fast-changing world of work. We have illustrated how the criticality of wellbeing impacts on productivity, performance, engagement and discretionary effort. Setting the scene for the following chapters that detail exactly what to do and include, this chapter has highlighted, to quote Simon Sinek (2009), the 'why?' Chapter 2 will take a look at how to get started on wellbeing, and the key areas to consider. These include that all-important aspect of having the right leaders, creating the right working environment – one that is conducive to good workplace wellbeing and, finally, what makes up personal resilience. Unpacking these and following a systematic approach can be of real benefit for both employees and employers alike.

Key takeaways from this chapter

Wellbeing

We split wellbeing into two areas, Eudaimonic and Hedonic. Eudaimonic characteristics refer to the purposeful side of wellbeing – the positive ways in which we live and view life, and our personal understanding and command of these phenomena, 'knowing yourself'. Hedonic wellbeing would be described in terms of our pleasure or happiness, sometimes framed as subjective wellbeing, and again draws on positivity.

Psychological wellbeing

This is very much the topic that takes centre ground in this book, the wellbeing in our head, in its very basic form. This is how we think, process, behave and respond to others. It is our source of stress, both good (eustress) and bad (distress).

Physiological wellbeing

If most people are asked to describe 'what is wellbeing?' they are generally drawn to descriptors of the physiological kind. That is to say, being free from injury or physical ailments, keeping fit and being active. Physical fitness, size and weight, BMI, cholesterol levels and blood pressure are all physical.

Societal wellbeing

Although there are lots of measures for this, what we are looking at here is how we are generally faring within society – our societal wealth, if you like. This can also be a descriptor of what our friendship circles look like, outside of the working environment. For example, whether we have outside hobbies and interests, people to care for, charitable work. Governments globally compare societal wellbeing, as we have detailed.

Financial wellbeing

In the modern age of technology, consumerism and rising prices, concerns around financial wellbeing can very quickly have a huge impact on our other spheres of wellbeing, so it is important to consider finances as a trigger to other areas of wellbeing.

VUCA

The acronym stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity – an apt description of the modern area. All of these can trigger workplace stress, so this is an important concept to understand and become comfortable with.

NICE

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in the UK is a body that recommends best practice in a whole range of health-related issues. Leaning on robust research NICE guidance is

very much viewed as approved practice in the UK and can be depended on as a place to start if you are unsure about a path to take.

Ageing workforce

This is a considerable challenge in most countries. According to the Centre for Ageing Better, one in three workers will be aged over 50 by 2020, and by 2024 there will be 18 million people aged 60 and over – that is 3.1 million more than there are today in the UK. That will equate to more than one in four being over 60 (Thomson, 2017). On top of this, the Workplace Report (Age in the Workplace, 2016) estimates that as many as 1 million people age 50–64 want to return to the UK workplace.

Technology

When new technology is introduced in the workplace it can have two very different effects. It can make employees relieved that the once very tedious role requiring manual handling, whether that be physical or mentally processing work on an existing system, has now thankfully been replaced. Or it can make people feel vulnerable to redundancy or layoff. It is a major source of workplace stress and its influence can be polarizing. Love or loathe technology, it is coming at a huge scale and pace, so should not be underestimated in any wellbeing strategy.

Remote working

Another polarizing practice, remote working has seen an ebb and flow in some organizations. Research suggests that people are more productive and work longer when working remotely. Other research reports feelings of loneliness and isolation. Working away from the office via technological links is still relatively underexplored. In terms of wellbeing strategy, it needs careful consideration and certainly needs a differing management approach.

Discretionary effort

A further key concept, and one we have written about previously, is discretionary effort, or extra role effort, as it is known in the United States. Another way of describing it is the amount of work we do that goes beyond that for which we are rewarded, going the extra mile and so on. In terms of wellbeing, discretionary effort is viewed as indicative of experiencing meaning and purpose in your working life. It should be noted there are contrasting views on discretionary practice, mainly dependent on what your work actually involves.

Strategy

This is seen as the long-term direction or plan, and of course is the subject of this book. Planning an effective wellbeing strategy is critical to business success, so should not, under any circumstances, be overlooked or underestimated. We dedicate quite a lot in this book to strategic decision making and wellbeing strategy. Our next chapter will begin that journey of how to get started.

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