



What needs to happen alongside job re-design so organisations can improve wellbeing and performance?

## the big picture

Being in a job is good for wellbeing. Being in a 'high quality' job is even better for us\*.

By high quality, we don't mean a certain skill level, type or industry. It's about what makes a job worthwhile for us. Things like:

- how secure it is
- the social connections we have
- the ability to use and develop our skills
- clear responsibilities
- opportunities to have a say in a supportive workplace.

Evidence is clear that such characteristics are significant for our wellbeing at work. If we move into a role with none, or fewer, of these elements, our life satisfaction drops. Even when we move out of unemployment and into work, how big an impact this has on our wellbeing depends on the quality of the job.

A good job is important, but the evidence shows that attempts to improve job quality through job redesign often fail. What needs to happen alongside job redesign to allow organisations to improve wellbeing and performance?

“Your self-worth can really be affected if you're not enjoying your job”

Public dialogue participant, Cardiff

\*See the previous briefing in this series to see more about the impact of employment: [Unemployment, \(re\)employment and wellbeing](#) (March 2017)

In partnership with:



Work and Learning Evidence Programme  
What Works for Wellbeing  
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This briefing is based on a systematic review that looks at what approaches to improving job quality are most effective at improving wellbeing.

Findings are based on a systematic review of 33 published papers, from an initial sift of 4143 results.

This includes findings from the UK and other similar developed economies, including studies which measured a change in wellbeing.

**We sifted through 4,143 studies**

**and 33 were included**



## what evidence did we find?

### There are three types of evidence

performance

wellbeing



**strong**

We can be confident that the evidence can be used to inform decisions.



**promising**

We have moderate confidence. Decision makers may wish to incorporate further information to inform decisions.



**initial**

We have low confidence. Decision makers may wish to incorporate further information to inform decisions.

Strong, promising and initial evidence refer to high, moderate and low quality evidence / confidence as per GRADE and CERQual guidance. For further information on these classifications, please see the Centre's [Methods Guide](#).

All evidence should be considered alongside questions of possible benefits and risks, affordability, acceptability, feasibility and wider impacts, including equity issues, in the user setting. Where the evidence is less strong, these other considerations become even more important.

## Key messages



**Giving people training to develop personal resources**, skills, or problem solving, so they are able to make their own jobs better may have positive effects on wellbeing...



... and in some cases may improve performance.



**Changes to ways of working**, such as office layout or job design, alongside training, may improve wellbeing...



... and in some cases may improve performance.



**Organisation-wide approaches** that improve job quality and a range of other employment practices may improve wellbeing - provided one objective of the change programme is to improve worker wellbeing...



... and they may improve performance.

## what evidence did we find?

(continued)

### training and support



**Giving people training to develop personal resources**, skills, or problem solving, so they are able to make their own jobs better may have positive effects on wellbeing...



... and in some cases may improve performance.

**9 studies**

3 showed  
no impact

6 showed  
positive  
impact

Of these studies, only two also measured job performance. Both showed positive impacts.

### How can training improve job quality?

1. Training can offer staff the space to think about and discuss what is important or problematic in their job.
2. It can develop understanding of, and provide the space to think about, how things could be improved, or how their job could be more rewarding.
3. Training can develop skills, to be able to, for example, take on more responsibility or a more varied workload.
4. Training may develop team or personal capacity to provide emotional support.

With this knowledge, staff can make changes themselves to improve their own jobs.

The following types of training for job quality showed wellbeing impacts:

Approach	Sector
Clarifying role	Healthcare
Self-diagnosing problems	Healthcare
Team emotional support and problem solving	Healthcare <i>See case study 1: stressful, emotionally exhausting workplaces</i>
Personal resources	Healthcare
Skills development	Healthcare
Meditation	Various

Case Study Source: Le Blanc, P.M., Hox, J.J., Schaufeli, W.B., Peeters, M.C.W., & Taris, T.W. (2007). Take care! The evaluation of a team-based burnout intervention program for oncology care providers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92, 213-22. Cost calculations programmes's own



### Case study 1: stressful, emotionally exhausting workplaces

**Providing care on oncology wards can be stressful and emotionally exhausting.**

Two hundred and sixty staff working on oncology wards in Dutch hospitals were provided with team-level training. The training was focused on developing skills in the healthcare workers to change their own work environments so that the improvements were specific to the context of each work team.

The training consisted of six three-hour sessions, with a training session held every month. Topics included communication and feedback, how to build a supportive work environment and dealing with change. Training sessions were interactive and included problem-solving teams to identify areas of work to improve. Because the training was provided for complete teams, the training itself helped to build supportive interactions within teams.

The 260 staff who took part in the training experienced slight reductions in emotionally exhaustion at six months and 12 months after the training had finished (1-3% reduction), but 460 staff who did not receive the training experienced increases in emotional exhaustion of around 14% in the same period. The results suggest the training offset other stressful changes and demands at work.

**Cost: £500-£1000 per person**

## what evidence did we find?

(continued)

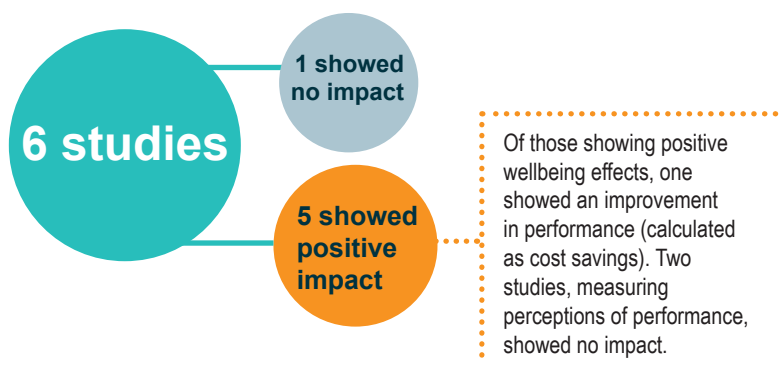
### Changes to ways of working



**Changes to ways of working**, such as office layout or job design, alongside training, may improve wellbeing...



... and in some cases may improve performance.



### Is one approach more cost effective than another?

Changing workplaces or job design alongside training may be a more expensive way per person to improve wellbeing than training alone.

However, theory suggests that this option is likely to have greater positive impacts on wellbeing and performance. The initial evidence may support this. Forthcoming analysis will compare cost effectiveness across workplace interventions.

Examples with published evaluations include:

Approach	Sector
Carrying out a risk assessments and making changes alongside training for staff to carry out these risk assessments themselves	Healthcare
Creating a new flexible office work-space to foster collaboration alongside ergonomics training	Professional services <i>See case study 2:- Office environment</i>
Stress management training, alongside worker input into work-related decisions	Manufacturing

**Case study source:** Robertson, M.M., Huang, Y.H., O'Neill, M.J. & Schleifer, L.M. (2008). Flexible workspace design and ergonomics training: Impacts on the psychosocial work environment, musculoskeletal health, and work effectiveness among knowledge workers. *Applied Ergonomics*, 39, 482-4942.



### Case study 2:

#### office environment

A management consultancy wanted a new office layout that would enable greater worker effectiveness, create operational efficiencies, increase collaboration between employees and enhance health and wellbeing through better designed workspaces. To do this, there was a two hour, interactive training package on office ergonomics developed specifically for the organisation, new ergonomically designed work stations and redesigned office layout to improve the physical work environment.

The 31 knowledge workers who had been through the programme experienced a 48% reduction in the experience musculoskeletal discomfort after six months and a 36% improvement in satisfaction with the physical work environment after six months. Moreover, there were also significant efficiencies, with an 11% fall in the time to complete tasks.

**Cost: £500-£1000 per person**

## what evidence did we find?

(continued)

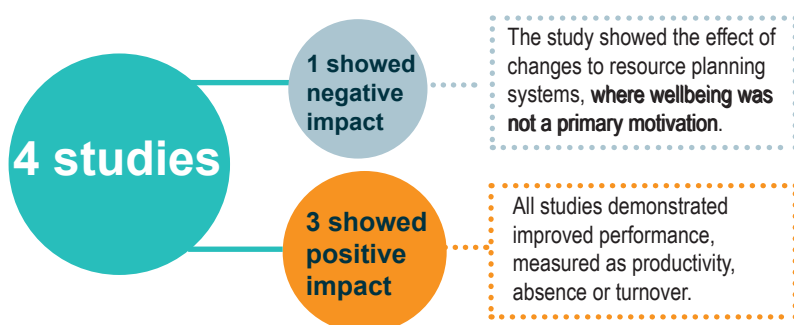
### organisation-wide approaches



**Organisation-wide approaches** that improve job quality and a range of other employment practices may improve wellbeing – provided one objective of the change programme is to improve worker wellbeing...



... and may improve performance.



This option may be most appropriate if there is a clear need to improve performance or safety.

### How do the costs stack up?

This is likely to be the most expensive option, but can lead to significant savings and improvements in performance. Initial estimates suggest that organisations can have a return on investment, in terms of performance, within six to twelve months. Further analysis comparing cost effectiveness of actions and their wellbeing impact will be published later in 2017.

Examples with published evaluations include:

Approach	Sector
New human resource management system focused on leadership, job design and safety, and communication	Manufacturing
A new workload management tool alongside increased support supervision and support for graduates and increased Continuing Professional Development.	Healthcare
Job / team redesign with changes to management and rewards systems	Manufacturing  <i>See case study 3: extensive changes to improve wellbeing</i>

Case study source: Tregaskis, O., Daniels, K., Glover, L., Butler, P., & Meyer, M. (2013). High performance work practices and firm performance: A longitudinal case study. *British Journal of Management*, 24,



### Case study 3: extensive changes to improve wellbeing

Extensive changes were made to the human resource management system of a manufacturing organisation, with a poor safety record, low job satisfaction and poor productivity. There was strong backing from the CEO and extensive involvement of the trades unions. The human resources department acted in an advisory role – and the changes were implemented by general managers.

Changes included a programme of training for managers and workers, including communications skills and safety training. Additionally, there were shifts in performance management from punitive measures to rewards. There were also changes to ways of working, including reorganisation of roles, teams and steps to allow workers to take decisions to help them meet safety and performance targets.

Changes in team working and training were perceived positively by staff. Following the changes, there were improvements in job satisfaction, organisational commitment and more positive attitudes toward job security. Safety improved immediately these changes were implemented. Three to six months after introduction of the changes, operating hours had improved by 7%, output by 14% and there was a 24% reduction in time delays, 33% reduction in accidents and 77% reduction in lost time incidents.

**Cost: £1000+ per person**



## what evidence did we find?

(continued)

Across all 'types' of action, we found no strong evidence that a particular action or change *always* leads to improved wellbeing.

For this reason, we also looked at some of the things that managers can do to manage changes to job quality effectively and be more likely to successfully improve wellbeing.

This briefing is based on a systematic review published in the journal *Ergonomics*.

You can find a link to the full review, and view the other briefings in this series at

[whatworkswellbeing.org/work-and-learning-3](http://whatworkswellbeing.org/work-and-learning-3)

### understand staff concerns



Find very specific information about what can be changed and how. The more specific the information about a context, the easier it is for employees to see how jobs can be made more interesting and satisfying. This finding is based on five studies, involving more than 590 employees involved in some form action or change.

### engage workers



Staff need to be committed and engaged in attempts to improve job quality. However, unless employees are trained in techniques to improve their own job quality, letting employees act without support might lead to more problems rather than solutions. This finding is based on nine studies, involving more than 4200 employees involved in some form action or change.

### managerial commitment



This finding is based on six studies, involving more than 830 workers. If management commitment is not there already, engage in some management development to secure commitment to wellbeing before introducing any changes.

### integration with other systems



It is important to ensure that changes are not working against other businesses processes and practices. This finding is based on eight studies, involving more than 7800 workers.



## how can we turn this evidence into action?

# 1

### Managers can:

- be aware of the importance of job quality for wellbeing;
- find out what staff see as important for improving the quality of their work;
- ensure that line and middle managers are committed to improving jobs;
- take the action which will best fit the needs of staff and circumstances.

Some improvements in job quality may be possible only through training staff to manage their own wellbeing, others may require

significant changes in business systems.

To be most effective when carrying out these actions, managers can make sure:

- changes are integrated with other business systems;
- staff know that the changes are being introduced for their own health and wellbeing, even if that is only one goal of the changes;
- staff, managers and others are consulted and remain committed through the process.

Unions and professional bodies can consider the levers to encourage higher quality work and supportive management practices. This may include guidance and training for employers and managers - but could also include accreditation.

# 3

### Policy makers could create incentives for

employers to develop high quality work, as well as guidance on how to do so. The Health and Safety Executive recommend improving jobs through their Management Standards for Work-Related Stress. The Standards can be adapted to include the actions outlined in this briefing.

# 2

### Trade unions and professional bodies can make

managers aware of importance of job quality and the ways to improve the quality of work.



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We are an independent organisation set up to produce robust, relevant and accessible evidence on wellbeing. We work with individuals, communities, businesses and government, to enable them to use this evidence make decisions and take action to improve wellbeing.

The Centre is supported by the ESRC and partners to produce evidence on wellbeing in four areas: work and learning; culture and sport; community; and cross-cutting capabilities in definitions, evaluation, determinants and effects.

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