



Employee Well-being and Productivity: A Review of Theoretical and Empirical Studies in China

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Abstract

The Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) is a newly introduced framework for assessing matters related to decent employment. This study assesses the determinants and consequences of decent work and employs the model to compare samples of public and private sector Chinese employees from various economic and vocational backgrounds. The findings demonstrate that the PWT is relevant to Chinese employees and that the theory is validated within a Chinese environment. The outcomes have ramifications for people and corporations. Interventions focused on career flexibility and work volition are recommended for people. For firms, quality employment is a crucial factor in enhancing workers' job and life happiness. The research findings and management consequences are ultimately examined. This research aims to clarify the connection between good working conditions and the well-being of employees, using the psychology of working theory as a guide. While the fulfilment of social contribution and self-determination demands partially mitigated the influence of good employment on the well-being of millennial employees, the mediation effect of survival need satisfaction was not significant. Millennial employees' well-being was more strongly influenced by their self-determination needs than by their social contribution needs. The study increases the understanding of the factors that affect employee well-being, and the results may offer suggestions for managers on how to enhance the well-being of millennial employees.

Keywords: Decent Work; Millennial Employees; Need Satisfaction; Psychology of Working Theory; Well-Being

Introduction

Employees' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours have changed significantly as a result of China's social reform and economic transition. In particular, the labour market's talent characteristics have been transformed by the influx of millennial employees into the workforce. Millennial employees are referred to as the "Y generation" in the West (Zhu *et al.*, 2023). In China, this term is used to describe workers who were born in the 1980s and 1990s (Zhou & Zhang, 2023). Chinese millennials have received a lot of attention from their families because of the one-child family policy, which has been in place since 1980 and states that each family can only have one child (Wang, Ding & Kong, 2023). As a result, they are often self-centred and place a high value on their own inner sentiments and psychological demands. Millennial employees want to achieve well-being via their job and also want to have enough time to enjoy their lives. This is due to their demand for work-life balance (Pagán-Castaño, Maseda-Moreno & Santos-Rojo, 2020). Employee well-being may be an indicator of how satisfied workers are with their job and life, and it can have an impact on their attitudes and behaviours at work (Elsamani, Mejia & Kajikawa, 2023). According to previous research, well-being can not only increase employees'

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commitment to their organisations, but it can also boost their job performance (Dirani *et al.*, 2020). As a result, it is very important from both a theoretical and practical standpoint to investigate ways to enhance the well-being of millennial employees.

The psychology of working theory (PWT) states that having a successful job may improve people's well-being by fulfilling their needs for survival, social contribution, and individual autonomy. Empirical studies have also shown that quality employment can predict career and life satisfaction as well as physical well-being. In addition, it has been discovered that the fulfilment of needs through good labour has a major moderating effect on these connections (Arampatzi *et al.*, 2020). Many specialists have conducted extensive research on well-being, but there has been relatively little research on this issue as it pertains to the Chinese millennial workforce. Additionally, it is yet uncertain if there are any differences in the mediating effects of the different types of need fulfilment in the connection between respectable work and the well-being of millennial employees.

This study investigates the internal mechanism through which decent work promotes the psychological well-being of Chinese millennial workers. It also compares the intermediary consequences of meeting survival requirements, social contribution needs, and self-determination needs, based on PWT. The purpose of this study is to find out if and how the satisfaction of needs has an impact on the link between respectable work and the well-being of millennial employees.

In the previous several decades, mankind has faced a number of extraordinary global crises, including wars, genocides, terrorist attacks, economic crises, migratory crises, political crises, climate change, humanitarian crises, and, most recently. Even if they have diverse sources and scales, they all have one thing in common: they lead to catastrophic repercussions on individuals, society, finances, and nature. Examples of these impacts include enormous job losses, social instability, and natural changes that are beyond the control (Nyfoudi *et al.*, 2020).

In order for organisations to survive and thrive in today's continuously changing globalised business environment, a new culture must be developed. It is difficult to avoid or forecast crises since organisations operate under intricate circumstances. On the other hand, crises might grow more frequent and severe in the future (Ding & Yu, 2021). Agnes claims that current crises are more severe and widespread because of the proliferation of technology, the rapid distribution of information, and the speed of communication. They question the fundamental principles of the current company culture and bring in new and alternative principles (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020).

The organisation and its personnel are both in danger due to the crisis. It has the potential to significantly disrupt the operations of the organisation and may also negatively impact the wellness and performance of the personnel. Employee wellness is an important element that comprises psychological, physical, and social dimensions (Dirani *et al.*, 2020). It makes it clear that human resource management and organisational methods have been implemented correctly and have had a beneficial effect. It relates to the sentiments that the employees have both about themselves and their employment (Chen, Jiang & Ma, 2020). Employee well-being is closely associated with people's happiness with factors such as compensation, connections with coworkers and supervisors, working conditions, job security, opportunity for training, personal progress, and teamwork (Pagán-Castaño, Maseda-Moreno & Santos-Rojo, 2020). Happy and healthy personnel ensure that a firm is sustainable and lucrative, especially during times of crisis.

Companies, when under crisis, have to react and a new human resource management strategy must arise and be executed swiftly (Ding & Yu, 2021). Organisations that want to survive must adopt a new style of thinking in order to achieve sustainable growth and development. Outdated methods should be discarded, and the promotion of new optimum human functioning should be accomplished through the use of contemporary methodologies from the positive psychology movement (Ding & Yu, 2021). Psychological capital is a concept that comes from the theoretical and empirical foundations of positive psychology and is defined and explained in the literature (Lu *et al.*, 2023). It is a way of describing and summarising positivity in the workplace. Psychological capital is linked to individual work performance and psychological well-being and helps employees remain emotionally devoted to the organisation. A

positive employee attitude can have significant effects, including job satisfaction, emotional commitment, staff growth, resilience, and competence (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2020).

It is essential to demonstrate how optimism affects the human component in the workplace, as stated by Wang, Ding and Kong (2023). According to the study, the measurement and examination of employee positivity have not yet been conducted. Zhao *et al.* (2022) also emphasise that further study is needed on optimism. This research attempts to fill this gap by examining the impact that a positive mentality plays in balancing employee well-being and performance during times of crisis. The research provides a thorough evaluation of the literature on the topics of employee performance, employee well-being, and positive mentality.

Review of Literature

In the previous several decades, the world has faced a number of extraordinary crises, including wars, genocides, terrorist attacks, economic crises, migratory crises, crises of politics, climate change, humanitarian crises, and, most recently, a pandemic. Even if they have diverse sources and scales, they all have one thing in common: they lead to disastrous consequences for individuals, society, finances, and nature. Examples of these impacts include enormous job losses, unstable society, and natural changes that are beyond the grasp of humanity (Chen, Jiang & Ma, 2020).

In order for organisations to survive and thrive in today's continuously changing globalised business environment, a new culture must be developed (Cheung *et al.*, 2023). It is difficult to avoid or forecast crises since organisations operate under intricate circumstances (Ding & Yu, 2021). On the other hand, crises might grow more frequent and severe in the future. Agnes claims that current crises are more severe and widespread because of the proliferation of technology, the rapid distribution of information, and the speed of communication (Di Fabio, Svicher & Gori, 2021). They question the fundamental principles of the current company culture and bring in new and alternative principles (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020). The organisation and its personnel are both in danger due to the crisis. It has the potential to significantly disrupt the operations of the organisation and may also negatively impact the wellness and performance of the personnel (Dirani *et al.*, 2020).

Employee wellness is an important element that comprises psychological, physical, and social dimensions. It makes it clear that human resource management and organisational methods have been implemented correctly and have had a beneficial effect. It relates to the sentiments that workforce members have both in regard to themselves and their employment (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020). Employee well-being is closely associated with people's happiness with factors such as compensation, connections with other employees and managers, job safety, working conditions, opportunity for training, personal progress, and teamwork. Happy and healthy personnel ensure that a firm is sustainable and lucrative, especially during times of crisis (Pagán-Castaño, Maseda-Moreno & Santos-Rojo, 2020).

When companies are in crisis, they must adapt and implement a new human resource management program right now. Organisations that want to survive must adopt a new style of thinking in order to achieve sustainable development and growth (Zhang, Xu & Khurshid, 2023). Outdated methods should be discarded (Zhu *et al.*, 2023), and the promotion of new optimum functioning for individuals should be accomplished through the use of contemporary methodologies from the discipline of positive psychology (Zhao *et al.*, 2022). Psychological capital is a concept that comes from the concepts and studies of the positive psychology movement and is defined and explained in the literature. It is a way of describing and summarising positivity in the workplace. Psychological capital is linked to individual work performance and psychological wellness (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2021) and helps employees remain emotionally devoted to the organisation. A positive employee attitude can have significant effects, including job satisfaction, emotional commitment, staff growth, resilience, and competence (Lu *et al.*, 2023).

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and examination of employee positivity have not yet been conducted. Zhou and Zhang (2023) also emphasise that further study is needed on optimism. This research attempts to fill this gap by examining the impact that a positive mentality has on balancing employee well-being and performance during times of crisis. The research provides a thorough evaluation of the literature on the topics of productivity among workers, employee well-being, and positive mentality.

Psychology of Working Theory

According to vocational psychologists, work is an important part of people's lives (Zhang, Xu & Khurshid, 2023) because it has a significant connection to how people see themselves. The experience of working is also connected to how people feel about themselves, how much control they feel they have, how consistent their self-identity is, and their physical and mental health (Salas-Vallina, Alegre & López-Cabrales, 2020). The idea of decent work was initially developed at the macro level in order to "promote the possibilities for men and women to secure decent employment that is worthwhile on the premise of liberty, equitable treatment, security, and human dignity" (Fragouli, 2020). Later on, it was incorporated into PWT as a fundamental idea, which is described as "(1) work that offers physical and relationship-safe working environments, (2) several hours that provide opportunities for free time and rest, (3) organisational values that complement one's family and social principles, (4) adequate wages, and (5) access to adequate healthcare" (Elsamani, Mejia & Kajikawa, 2023).

PWT states that decent work may help people achieve well-being by addressing their fundamental human needs. These requirements can be split into three categories: survival needs, community involvement needs, and self-determination needs, which include independence, expertise, and connection (Dirani *et al.*, 2020). The self-determination theory (SDT) also includes the last set of requirements. This theory emphasises how workplace settings or individual variations impact a person's work attitudes, behaviours, health, and well-being through their psychological requirements (Chen, Jiang & Ma, 2020). However, the fundamental distinctions between these two frameworks are that PWT emphasises decent labour as the main antecedent variable of satisfying demands and that it incorporates both survival requirements and social assistance needs. By meeting these requirements, decent employment can further enhance job satisfaction (Duffy *et al.*, 2021) and mental well-being (Fragouli, 2020). Furthermore, when people are involved in jobs that allow them to have safe working conditions, enough time to relax, and access to medical care, they are more likely to improve their physical well-being (Duffy *et al.*, 2021). According to other research, decent work has a favourable effect on workplace engagement and satisfaction with employment and a negative effect on occupational weariness (Di Fabio, Svicher & Gori, 2021) and intention to turnover (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020). As a result, this study used PWT to provide a philosophical structure and to clarify the connection between decent labour and its results.

Employee Well-Being

Well-being has been a topic of great interest to the academic community for a long time, since it is a key component of positive psychology. At the beginning of the study, researchers defined well-being as only the psychological and health state at the work level. They measured employee well-being in four ways: workplace fulfilment, workplace burnout, psychological exhaustion, and workplace pressures (Zhu *et al.*, 2023). As a result, several researchers suggested that the assessment of psychological well-being should not only take into account the status of a person's professional life but also consider their psychological sensations that are dependent on aspects of their life outside of work. For instance, Zhang, Xu and Khurshid (2023) broke down well-being into four categories: satisfaction with employment, family satisfaction, life satisfaction, and pleasant emotions. From the perspective of interaction, Zhao *et al.* (2022) suggested that psychological well-being not merely reflects their overall happiness with their jobs and personal lives but also indicates employees' sense of psychological fulfilment; thus, it can be classified into three different categories: life well-being, workplace happiness and psychological well-being. Furthermore, Zhou and Zhang (2023) created a useful measuring tool based on both qualitative and quantitative data in order to address the absence of measurement tools

in prior studies. As a result, the current study was conducted using the operational interpretation of employee well-being provided by Wang, Ding and Kong (2023).

Satisfactory Employment, Fulfilment of Needs, and Well-Being

According to PWT, decent employment may have a direct impact on people's well-being and can also indirectly help people attain well-being by meeting their requirements for survival, community involvement, and individual autonomy (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2020). According to empirical research, decent work not only has a good influence on workers' job happiness and life satisfaction (Chen, Jiang & Ma, 2020), but it may also help employees sense the purpose of work (Salas-Vallina, Alegre & López-Cabrales, 2020). It is clear that the three categories of need fulfilment that are provided by decent employment are in agreement with the three aspects of employee well-being. In particular, decent employment may help employees satisfy their basic needs for survival by providing them with enough pay to cover expenses such as housing, healthcare, and other goods and services, which will in turn boost their well-being (Pagán-Castaño, Maseda-Moreno & Santos-Rojo, 2020). Furthermore, having a good job is a crucial way for employees to build social connections with their coworkers and make sacrifices to others, which is going to, in turn, improve their well-being at work (Nyfoudi *et al.*, 2020). Finally, according to PWT, decent work can fulfil employees' self-determination needs, such as independence, expertise, and connection (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020). Satisfying these physiological requirements can help improve the overall mental health of employees (Lu *et al.*, 2023).

Theoretical Contributions

The current work has three theoretical implications. To begin with, the current analysis was the first to look at the link between the experience of decent work and the well-being of millennial employees in China. Like previous studies, reputable employment can have a positive influence on employee well-being (Fragouli, 2020). On the other hand, this research differs from earlier studies on well-being, which solely examined work satisfaction and personal fulfilment. This study integrated personal well-being, workplace well-being, and psychological health and offered empirical data to suggest that respectable employment might provide general happiness to Chinese millennial employees. As a result, this study contributes to the existing body of research on the elements that determine the outcome of decent work.

Second, in response to Elsamani, Mejia and Kajikawa (2023), who urged for future research to investigate how decent work influences the well-being of individuals through need fulfilment, this study evaluated need satisfaction as a potential basic mechanism in this relationship. According to some of the premises within PWT, this study found that the relationship between decent work and the well-being of millennial employees was partially impacted by the fulfilling of social interaction requirements and the satisfaction of self-determination wants (Dirani *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, it was determined that the intermediary influence of survival requirement fulfilment was not considerable. As a result, this study contributes to the existing body of research on the factors that affect the well-being of millennial employees.

Lastly, the current study expands the breadth of PWT applications because previous studies have been conducted mainly in exclusively Western, individualistic cultural contexts (Duffy *et al.*, 2021). According to Ding and Yu (2021), decent employment may promote job fulfilment and well-being by addressing people's requirements for survival, social participation, and self-determination. Since then, a variety of empirical study projects have been done to explore the link between decent employment and psychological well-being results. For example, Di Fabio, Svicher and Gori (2021) found that getting a decent job can enhance mental health since having a job meets individual needs and can also improve physical health by meeting fundamental survival needs. Duffy *et al.* (2021) also found that having a decent job may indirectly influence health behaviours by meeting people's survival requirements. Nevertheless, there has been no research done to find out whether or not there are differences in the mediating effects of survival, social contribution, and self-determination need satisfaction. According to this study, the mediating effect of self-determination need fulfilment was more important between decent work and the well-being of younger workers than the mediation effect of social contribution need fulfilment (Cheung *et al.*, 2023). This was found by comparing how important the mediation effect was.

As a result, this research broadens the application of PWT in a collectivist cultural setting that is not Western.

Discussion

According to Arampatzi *et al.* (2020), employee well-being can boost individual potential, enhance organisational performance, and lower absence and turnover rates. As a result, it is very important for both academics and industry to investigate what contributes to employees' sense of satisfaction. The research presented here is the first to investigate how and why ethical employment may be connected to the psychological well-being of young people working within a PWT framework.

This study demonstrated that satisfactory employment positively impacts the well-being of young individuals in the workforce, based on an analysis of available literature (Chen, Jiang & Ma, 2020). The favourable correlation between quality employment and the psychological well-being of millennial workers was somewhat mediated by the fulfilment of social contribution and self-determination requirements, but the satisfaction of survival needs did not significantly moderate this relationship (Wang, Ding & Kong, 2023). In comparison to the fulfilment of social contribution demands, the satisfaction of self-determination needs had a more significant effect on the psychological well-being of millennial employees.

When analysing the findings of this study, it is crucial to include cultural contextual factors. Contemporary Chinese millennials were nurtured at a period of robust economic expansion and have shown considerable satisfaction with their material circumstances. Members of the millennial workforce are presently dissatisfied with only having their basic survival needs fulfilled, in contrast to previous generations (Elsamani, Mejia & Kajikawa, 2023). This may explain why fulfilling their fundamental survival needs may not elicit happiness. Moreover, Chinese millennial employees exhibit a greater propensity for selecting autonomy and control. They are concurrently engaged in learning and are eager to augment their professional capabilities. Consequently, it is logical that the realisation of self-determination necessitates a more significant mediating role in the connection between satisfactory employment and the well-being of millennial persons.

This study has some limitations that must be addressed in the near future. Initially, all surveys collected in this research were self-reported by employees. Consequently, this singular source of information may result in discrepancies in the evaluation of factors. To obtain more credible data, future research may collect assessments through collaborative reports from administrators and staff. Secondly, owing to the paper's length, this study did not independently propose the relationship between each component of decent work and other characteristics (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2020). Future research should decompose effective practices into several elements and examine the relationship between each component and employee well-being, since this is advisable. Third, this study exclusively examined job factors that enhance employee well-being; hence, this study did not explore leadership styles, which are also critical for fostering well-being (Ding & Yu, 2021). It is essential to consider the physical limitations of leadership style when analysing the relationship between quality employment and employee well-being. The cross-sectional design precludes the establishment of causal relationships between variables. Subsequent research may rectify this by collecting longitudinal data, hence enhancing the persuasiveness of the results.

Conclusion

The general mood of the workforce in this new and difficult period is impacted by the general unpredictability that workers must deal with in the workplace and the way that work is changing all the time because of the environmental crisis. During a crisis, organisational citizenship behaviour is positively and significantly impacted by job satisfaction and emotional commitment. The social exchange theory and the reciprocity norm are in agreement with this. According to the findings, improving organisational citizenship behaviour—a critical component of productivity and efficiency—requires fostering staff well-being, particularly during times of crisis. Therefore, in order to survive during a crisis, the human resource agenda should include promoting employee wellness and making sure

that workers feel protected and supported. Positive attitudes at work during crises are also crucial, supporting earlier studies on the benefits of having a positive outlook on work. Positivity is an individual characteristic that promotes higher well-being, according to the concept of the conservation of resources hypothesis. Positive thinkers are more likely to be dedicated, feel more content with their work, and act in supportive ways more readily. Businesses that manage, invest in, and cultivate psychological capital may be able to outperform their rivals. Therefore, the secret to maintaining equilibrium amid a crisis is to foster a positive work attitude and motivate staff to put their health first.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors state that they do not have any personal conflicts of interest.

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