BOOK REVIEW


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Arla Day, E. Kevin Kelloway and Joseph J. Hurrell Jr., the editors of this volume, stated that their aim was to provide a comprehensive overview of the concept of psychologically healthy workplaces. After finishing reading this volume, I can confidently certify that it exceeds the initial expectations, being a collection of “state of the art” review on healthy workplaces. It represents a rich source of ideas for future research in this area, where at the end of each chapter the challenges and needed research are discussed. Moreover, this volume presents various interesting intervention programs that can be adapted and implemented in any organization, as the authors of the chapters offer solutions to issues that both small and medium businesses, as well as big international corporations face. Thus, this volume may represent a very good starting point for both researchers and practitioners in this area. Another argument for the value of this volume relies on the impressive list of contributors, well-known in the organizational health area, such as Cary Cooper, Marisa Salanova or Michael P. Leiter.

The book is structured into three main, equally valuable, sections. The first section includes three chapters and represents an introduction in the broad subject of healthy workplaces, therefore setting the stage for the second section (chapters 4 to 9), where specific psychologically healthy workplace components are discussed. The third and last section further narrows the broad scope of health and well-being in organizations, by addressing the contextual elements of healthy workplaces and by offering alternative recipes in creating and maintaining a healthy workplace. Furthermore, each chapter follows the structure of the volume, with a brief theoretical overview at the beginning, with an introduction for the subject at hand, followed by the specifics of the issue addressed, with a critical presentation of advancements in research (future directions) and practice (examples of interventions and/or best practices), with concluding remarks.

The first chapter is more focused on the historical development of psychologically healthy workplaces, proposing a framework for designing such organizational environments. Here, Arla Day and Krista D. Randell drew attention to the importance of developing a solid theory, an integrated framework and integrative research programs, as without them, the concept of psychologically healthy workplace may be in danger of being so broad as to incorporate any and all positive workplace aspects that are associated with positive outcomes.

The second chapter presents the business case for developing healthy workplaces. Cary Cooper and Stephen Bevan addressed both at a macro and a micro level, in a very pragmatic way, the issues associated with ignoring the health of the workforce. More specifically, at
the macro level, are presented the societal and economic benefits of a healthy workforce, and the components that affect the well-being of the labour market, such as workforce aging, pension crisis, and poor workforce health translated in chronic diseases in the working age population. The latter creates a vicious cycle in that it has serious consequences for the society (overburdened healthcare and welfare systems), for the businesses (presenteeism, absenteeism, low productivity), for the individual (poverty, social exclusion, physical and mental well-being), and for their families and caregivers (interrupted and compromised lives and productivity). From the micro perspective the benefits for employers of a healthy workforce are discussed, focusing on what employers can do to improve the health and productivity of their employees. If you are running a business, a legitimate question comes to mind: Why should I invest my time, my money and my resources to create high quality jobs? The authors of this chapter offers significant evidence to support these investments, the direct benefits for the businesses being reduced sickness absence, reduced accidents, improved employee retention, higher employee engagement and commitment, higher labour productivity, enhanced employer “brand” and greater employee resilience. The benefits are paired with the costs associated with the failure to implement and follow such health and safety procedures. At the end of the chapter, the authors offer invaluable suggestions on future research on workplace health interventions, followed by a short summary. I chose to detail this chapter, as it felt like a cold shower. After reading this chapter, it seems impossible not to think about ways of improving the current situation regarding the health and well-being of your employees, colleagues or your own.

In Chapter 3, Stephanie Gilbert and E. Kevin Kelloway bring a fresh perspective on how to create healthy work environments, employing positive psychology concepts to the workplace.

In the next part of this volume are reviewed specific psychologically healthy workplace components such as physical well-being (Chapter 4), work-life balance (Chapter 5), employee empowerment and engagement (Chapter 6), human capital and the importance of growth and development for the employees (Chapter 7), employee recognition practices (Chapter 8), and last but not least, culture and communication (Chapter 9). I will further detail the seventh chapter addressing the issue of employee growth and development. In the last years, I noticed an increased managerial interest in training and development, but sadly the approach is somewhat superficial, when the most common opportunity for development is offered to the employees in a form of a communication training or course, without a proper diagnosis of needs. Raymond A. Noe and Michael J. Tews begin by presenting the benefits of employee development both for the organization (e.g., profitability, productivity, reduced costs, reputation) and for the employee (e.g., well-being, employability, job satisfaction, self-efficacy). This introduction was necessary, as the authors argued in an evocative manner that the employees and the skill sets they possess can make or break the success of an organization. The main focus of this chapter is on the factors that motivate individuals to engage in the development process, arguing that proper motivations positively influence their growth and well-being, which in turn, creates a healthy workplace. Here, the authors considered the role of the learner (e.g., general mental ability, age, personality traits, learning goal orientation, etc.), the organization (e.g., challenging job experiences, post training, coaching), and the learning environment (e.g., supportive organizational climate, high organizational-error management culture). The chapter concludes with a synthesis of future research needs and examples of employee development best practices.

The third part of this volume, focused on practical and specific ways of creating healthy workplaces, begins with the importance of interpersonal relationships at work, with topics such as respectful interactions at work (Chapter 10) and the managerial role in establishing a psychologically healthy workplace (Chapter 11). The next four chapters address the contextual elements of healthy workplaces and expansion of the healthy workplace models, discussing about subjects such as labour unions (Chapter 12), corporate social responsibility (Chapter 13),
the concerns and constraints of small and micro businesses (Chapter 14) or the link between well-being to high-performance work systems (Chapter 15). In the last chapter of the book, Joseph J. Hurrell, Jr. offers a relevant concluding perspective on healthy workplaces from the point of view of a long-time occupational health researcher and observer of the field of occupational health psychology. Selecting only one chapter as representative for this section was a difficult task. As the issue of labour unions appears to be relevant for the Romanian context and as it brings a new, under researched and under used way in building healthy workplaces, I will further develop the arguments made by Katharina Naswall and Magnus Sverke in Chapter 12. The core of this chapter is represented by the role of trade unions in providing for aspects of job security and career development, as well as more traditional aspects of health and well-being in the workplace. The authors present in a very optimistic way the role of trade unions in the past, in the present and in the future in both representing employees’ interests and in creating psychologically healthy workplaces for them to evolve in. Faced with a new reality in the labour market (such as globalization, new technologies, the shift from industrial work to knowledge work), trade unions also face new challenges (such as the individualization and diversification of work and labour, atypical employment, job insecurity). Therefore, strategies to address these challenges in order to maintain their relevance in the present context are examined. Furthermore, the interest is to not only to maintain trade unions relevance for the employees in a global and technologized market, but also to become the advocate for employee health and well-being. Some successfully implemented strategies are discussed, underlining the feeling that indeed the objective can be achieved, and trade unions can be a very powerful partner for both the employers and employees in creating and maintaining healthy workplaces. Another interesting point of view is regarding a friendly competition between trade unions. The argument is that in working to attract new members, the climate of competition thus created and having the employee interests as the main focus, may inspire more creative solutions for good working conditions in organizations.

In conclusion, this volume represents a strong overview of the healthy workplace movement, as the editors put it. More specifically, it is a very rich source of new and interesting research avenues for those who want to contribute to the field of health in organizations, a source of inspiration for the practitioners who want to implement practices and policies in order to create psychologically healthy workplaces, a solid theoretical overview into the main subjects addressed in the field of organizational and occupational psychology for students who are interested in learning more. Altogether, this volume enriches anyone reading it.