

THE HEALTHY WORKFORCE

The Future of Work

The future of work is a vital contemporary area of debate both in business and management research, and in wider social, political and economic discourse. Globally relevant issues, including the ageing workforce, rise of the gig economy, workplace automation and changing forms of business ownership, are all regularly the subject of discussion in both academic research and the mainstream media, having wider professional and public policy implications.

The Future of Work series features books examining key issues or challenges in the modern workplace, synthesising prior developments in critical thinking, alongside current practical challenges in order to interrogate possible future developments in the world of work.

Offering future research agendas and suggesting practical outcomes for today's and tomorrow's businesses and workforce, the books in this series present a powerful, challenging and polemical analysis of a diverse range of subjects in their potential to address future challenges and possible new trajectories.

The series highlights what changes still need to be made to core areas of business practice and theory in order for them to be forward-facing, more representative and able to fulfil the industrial challenges of the future.

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Enhancing Wellbeing and
Productivity in the Workers of
the Future

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

I dedicate this book to the many excellent colleagues who have helped shape my research and to my brilliant family & wonderful wife Jenny who has helped me navigate my own health and productivity journey (Stephen Bevan).

To all my former PhD students for their research contributions over many years to help create a healthier workplace (Cary L. Cooper).

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CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>xi</i>
1. Why Worker Health and Productivity Matter	1
2. How Health Affects Productivity	7
3. Health and Work in a Pandemic	61
4. Is Your Manager Bad for Your Health?	89
5. Productivity at Work: The Role of Healthcare Professionals	113
6. Workplace Health Interventions to Improve Productivity	141
7. Rethinking Workforce Health as an Asset	175
8. A Road Map to Better Worker Health	213
<i>Index</i>	<i>223</i>

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FOREWORD

The Covid crisis has caused many people around the world to reflect on their behaviours in the *pre*-pandemic era, sometimes with a sense of longing, at others with a tinge of regret. As we emerge from this crisis, it seems likely that our attitudes and behaviours will be reshaped by the crisis on an enduring basis, hopefully in ways which support our future health, wealth and happiness. All crises bring opportunities and the Covid crisis is unlikely to be an exception in this respect.

The Covid crisis has brought into sharp relief the health risks facing us, both mental and physical. These risks shape every aspect of our lives, at work and at play, in ways many of us failed to appreciate fully pre-pandemic. In the light of the Covid crisis, most are now more aware of the need to understand and manage these health risks, both at the individual and societal level. As one example, the mental and physical costs of isolation and loneliness are now clear for everyone to see.

The Covid crisis has also shone a light on the importance of our interactions and relationships with family, friends and colleagues – what is sometimes called social capital. The loss of social capital due to social distancing measures is one of the less discussed casualties of the crisis. But the crisis has also provided fantastic examples of social capital being built in the face of adversity, from small acts of neighbourliness to the

thousands of community actions groups. The crisis could provide the spur we needed to invest more heavily in the social capital that glues our communities together.

Half the working population worked exclusively from home last year, a change thrust upon them due to restrictions. Surveys suggest that this has accelerated the slow-moving trend towards a more flexible workplace. With hindsight, it was odd that so many people chose to spend so much time and money, pre-Covid, doing the least productive, least well-paid and least enjoyable form of work ever invented – namely commuting. As this book sets out, if managed well this shift to flexible working has the potential to bring enormous gains for individual well-being and productivity.

But home and flexible working is no free lunch; it too comes with costs, which also need to be managed. Home working reduces the chances of informal and spontaneous connections and conversations, which are known to be the wellspring of ideas and creativity. Virtual working has the potential to hinder on-the-job learning from others, often the most effective form of training. And the potential loss of social capital from reduced connectivity could come at a longer term cost in reduced social capital and well-being, unless managed properly.

In light of all of this, many companies are rethinking the form of their social contract with workers, customers and communities. Although recognition of its importance has been growing for a while, many organisations (including my own) are beginning to take issues of organisational health much more seriously than ever before in the running and design of their business models. And many more companies are appreciating the value of acting in a purposeful fashion, serving their stakeholders (plural) as well as their shareholders (singular). This shift, too, has the potential to leave a positive and lasting societal legacy.

What is true of individuals and companies is no less true of governments. Many parts of the public sector have had to rethink and reorient their practices during the Covid crisis, at speed, to protect millions of people across the UK and beyond. This, too, has led to a redrawing of the social contract between the public sector and citizens in ways which could have lasting consequences for the risks they face, from unemployment and income to health and happiness.

These are all potentially seismic shifts in our behaviours and attitudes, individually and collectively, affecting every sector of the economy in profound ways. Managed well, these behavioural shifts could deliver big benefits to our health, wealth and happiness. The interactions between these behaviours and sectors is, however, complex. And navigating these complexities is unlikely to be easy because the evidence from different disciplines – from health to economics to psychology – is rarely drawn together to enable us to get a fully integrated picture.

Help is at hand. This timely, rich and authoritative book by Cary Cooper and Steve Bevan provides a comprehensive and forensic explanation of these interactions, drawing on extensive empirical research from a wide range of studies and disciplines. As we all adjust to a world changed forever by Covid, this book provides a blueprint for how we might build back not just better, but healthier, fairer and kinder too, as individuals, businesses and governments. All crises bring opportunities and they come no greater than this.

Andy Haldane, Chief Economist of the Bank of England