

Marc J. Schabracq, Jacques A. M. Winnubst and Cary L. Cooper (eds.): Handbook of Work and Health Psychology

1996, New York: Wiley. 496 pages.

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This handbook represents an attempt to inform the reader about key aspects of two hitherto separately treated fields — work and health psychology — and to interrelate them more closely. The first part of the book consists of an introductory chapter in which the editors present the theoretical background of this new interdisciplinary field and outline a framework for studying the subject.

The second part contains three essays, with one focusing on the relation between job control and health (Fiona Jones and Ben C. Fletcher), one on the relevance of individual differences in the origins of stress and in ways of coping with it (Norbert Semmer), and one on the relation between social support and stress (Jacques A. M. Winnubst and Marc J. Schabracq).

The third part centres on the problem of diagnosing stress, an issue addressed in two chapters. In the first of them (by Jacques A. M. Winnubst, R. D. de Jong, and Marc J. Schabracq), the authors comment on the results of research pertaining to a standardized questionnaire. In the second essay of this part (by Tom Cox and Amanda Griffiths), a survey-feedback approach familiar in action research is illustrated by means of interviews.

The fourth part of the book presents a discussion of current issues: the demands entailed by flexibility at work in relation to employee health (Töres Theorell), the significance of new technologies (Kai-Christoph Hamborg and Siegfried Greif), special characteristics of women's coping processes (Carla L. Dunahoo, Pamela A. Geller, and Stevan E. Hobfoll), the fact that stressors experienced by women differ from those experienced by men (Ronald J. Burke), alcohol and drugs misuse (Andrew Guppy and John Marsden), mid-career problems (Marc J. Schabracq and Jacques A. M. Winnubst), the special problems brought about by the maturation of senior employees (Marc J. Schabracq and Jacques A. M. Winnubst), acute dramatic stress episodes (Rolf J. Kleber and Peter G. van der Veldern), and professional burnout (Wilmar B. Schaufeli and Bram P. Buunk).

The fifth part revolves around applied research and offers recommendations on job design (Michiel A. J. Kompier), management development (James Campbell Quick, Paul B. Paulus, James L. Whittington, Timothy S. Larey, and Debra L. Nelson), enhancement of perceived self-efficacy (Anneke Vrugt), conflict management (Evert van de Vliert), various stress management techniques such as biofeedback (Lawrence R. Murphy), coaching (Joan L. Meyer), and several workplace health programmes (Paul J. G. Schreurs, Jacques A. M. Winnubst, and Cary L. Cooper).

The volume contains 22 chapters. An appraisal of this work, therefore, cannot go into its individual chapters, but must illuminate it as a whole from various angles. On the positive side, the introductory chapter by the editors (pp. 3–29) broadens the somewhat narrow, familiar explanatory context of stress research to include, among other things, socio-anthropological

outlooks and complementary points of view. This widened perspective, however, is not always kept open in subsequent chapters. For example, the orientation of the contribution entitled 'Job Control and Health', by Fiona Jones and Ben C. Fletcher (pp. 33–50), is relatively conservative, with the authors not taking up the innovative ideas in the editors' introductory chapter. Moreover, the second pillar of the handbook, health psychology, is not explained clearly at a theoretical or empirical level, so the reader cannot help but conclude that the title of the book and the editors' preface promise rather more than the volume actually delivers. For a book probably also intended as a scholarly reference work, an additional conspicuous weakness is that methodological issues receive only peripheral treatment. The chapter by Jacques A. M. Winnubst, R. D. de Jong, and Marc J. Schabracq (pp. 87–102), in which reference is made to the Dutch version of the Organizational Stress Questionnaire, does raise methodological questions, but only in a comparatively brief and thus unfulfilling manner. From a practical standpoint, the way in which the forms of intervention are presented in the fifth part of the handbook (especially those pertaining to the workplace health programmes listed in Chapter 22, by Paul J. G. Schreurs, Jacques A. M. Winnubst, and Cary L. Cooper) seems to me too sweeping and enumerative to be of much use to the practitioner.

Whether practical or theoretical, certain chapters ought perhaps to be considered for deletion in the next edition. As Jacques A. M. Winnubst, R. D. de Jong, and Marc J. Schabracq (Chapt. 5) assert, stress research is in danger of going nowhere because narrow paradigms are constantly reproducing the same research with the same questions, so a new edition should allow more space for potentially innovative contributions. One way I see to increase that innovative potential is to interrelate human engineering, organizational psychology, and sociological issues more closely and, particularly, to elaborate far more on the dynamic perspective of the relation between work and health. The chapter by Norbert Semmer (pp. 51–86) shows a way towards this dynamic perspective in that he analyzes coping processes partly in terms of individual psychology, thereby introducing interesting differentiations. A second potentially innovative element is the construct of integrity expounded on by the editors (pp. 3–29) and later by Marc J. Schabracq and Jacques A. M. Winnubst under the keyword *senior employees* and the issue of their maturation. With this construct of integrity, classical stress research increases its receptivity to social psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Further innovative potential of the dynamic perspective is likely to be found in the question posed by Carla L. Dunahoo, Pamela A. Geller, and Stevan E. Hobfoll (pp. 183–204), who ask which peculiarities could be unique to female coping processes, how they can be explained, and which effects are associated with those peculiarities. Also promising is the research approach used by Rolf J. Kleber and Peter G. van der Velden (pp. 295–310), who discuss the dynamics of adaptation to more or less traumatic events and attempt to work out the special characteristics of the coping processes involved. Anneke J. Vrugt's chapter on perceived self-efficacy and work motivation (pp. 389–403) is another contribution

with approaches that expand classical stress research by means of a process perspective. Those approaches could lend themselves to forging an even more explicit link between work and health psychology.

Almost all the contributions are readily understandable and each is clearly structured. Scientifically speaking, the overall impression is mixed. At various places (e.g. pp. 39–50 and 183–204), one has the feeling that research on stress has not greatly advanced knowledge about the topic in the last 15 to 20 years. On the other hand, it is obvious that new questions have arisen and that interest is beginning to shift from statistical analyses of correlations to the substantively broader realm of dynamic processes. In that sense, the entire field is going through an interesting phase of change. As a handbook, this work offers an informative overview of the discussion, a service that recommends the volume for study by academics and practitioners who choose the chapters appropriately.

Book Notes

Parthasarathi Banerjee and Yoshihiro Sato (eds.): Skill and Technological Change: Society and Institutions in International Perspective

1997, New Delhi: Har-Anand. 365 pages.

This volume is a collection of fifteen papers that deal with the issue of skill development in the context of technological change. This issue is extremely important in the current era of rapid technological progress and intense global competition. The key question is: Can a firm survive through a technological strategy per se or should the skill profile of the workforce be enhanced as well? The contributions to this volume attempt to answer this question from an international–comparative perspective. In this context, the role of the institutional arrangements in different — particularly Asian and Western — societies is underscored. The overall conclusion is that craft skill, community-based work, network cooperation and, above all, humanized design of machinery and the technology–workforce interface have assumed significance. With this conclusion, this volume fits into the rapidly increasing literature that emphasizes the key role of the human dimension.