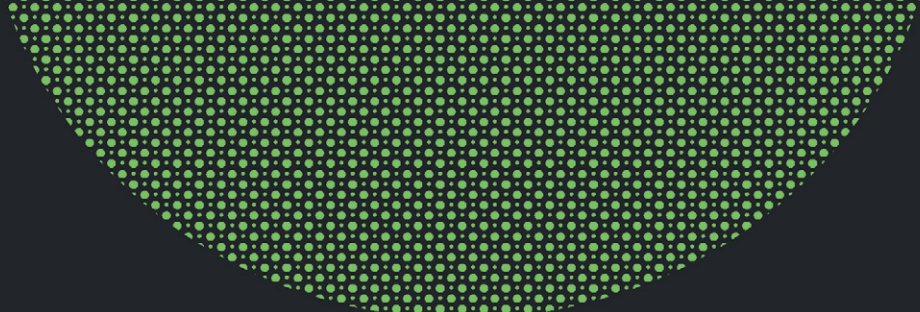


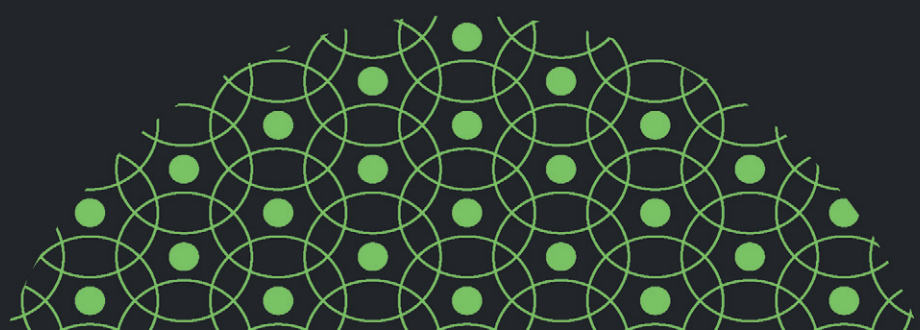


EMERALD POINTS

EDUCATION WORKFORCE WELL-BEING

Policy, Change and Leadership

STEPHEN CORBETT



EDUCATION WORKFORCE WELL-BEING

This page intentionally left blank

EDUCATION WORKFORCE WELL-BEING

Policy, Change and Leadership

BY

STEPHEN CORBETT

University of Portsmouth, UK



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL

First edition 2024

Copyright © 2024 Stephen Corbett.
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

Reprints and permissions service

Contact: www.copyright.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83797-401-6 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83797-400-9 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83797-402-3 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword One</i>	vii
<i>Foreword Two</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1. Introduction	1
2. Well-being in the Context of Working in Education	7
3. External Policy Environment in Education	21
4. Leadership Pressures and Priorities	33
5. Responding to Unpredictable Change	43
6. Leadership Response to Well-being	55
7. Conclusion	69
<i>About the Author</i>	73
<i>References</i>	75

This page intentionally left blank

FOREWORD ONE

In the pursuit of better student outcomes and increased productivity, whilst keeping ahead of technological change and weathering the storm of constant policy reform, the pressures on an educator to ensure career advancement appear immense. The vocational inspiration of the individual that dedicates their energies to the transfer of knowledge to others can be easily overlooked.

As the leader of an organisation that strives to improve the professional standing of technical vocational education teachers and trainers, our whole focus is on empowering vocational trainers to become better teachers. My experience in workforce development, independent evaluation of professional learning and ensuring ongoing engagement in professional development always points to the importance of organisational support and healthy workplace culture for individuals.

Getting this right has an immense impact on our society, as a happy teacher means a happy class, a happy student or a contented employee means an engaged and energised partner, family or community member outside of their work environment. It's crucial to support the vocational inspiration of the teacher.

When meeting Dr Stephen Corbett you are struck by his intellect and drive and passion for the well-being of others, as well as his focus on making a difference through the proposition of sensible and practical solutions to achieving individual and organisational well-being. Thankfully, Stephen's expertise and focus is now succinctly captured in this book.

The hedonistic pursuit of happiness where pain should be avoided was defined long ago by the Ancient Greeks and is an approach to well-being that has been sought by most for millennia. Stephen wisely explores the notion that individuals and society should seek psychological (or eudaimonic) well-being through the fulfilment of life, for the longer lasting effects of happiness. Psychological well-being ensures we can achieve a fulfilling life through acceptance of our abilities, connection with others and the resilience to navigate challenges and the cunning to seize opportunities. It seems organisational and policy approaches have evolved to risk manage and mitigate unhappiness, rather than focus on how they can further improve our happiness.

‘Picture where you want to be and it will happen’, a wise career coach once told me. A wise coach that related this not only to career goals but also personal and well-being goals. For me this has become a mantra for *life* balance, not work–life balance, as *work* should only be part of the many facets of our existence.

Onboarding and providing ongoing support for teachers and education employees, and robust professional learning opportunities that are a mix of formal, in-formal or non-formal education go a long way to develop teachers to ‘be where they want to be’. As an educational leader it’s important to remember your role is to develop your employees’ unique abilities and potential and shepherd them towards or to this destination. It’s not about getting the best out of people; they need to get the best out of themselves to achieve fulfilment.

Stephen’s research deeply resonates with me as it considers the four sub-sets of welling, resilience, emotional labour, work–life balance, and work–life conflict. It shines a light on how educational leadership and government policy can create organisational cultures that nurture and enshrine well-being through the fulfilment of life. I’m excited to see the impact of this research, as it has the potential to reimagine workforce well-being within the education sector. Within these pages lies the unique opportunity for us to engage in findings that will start this transformation.

Martin Powell
Chief Executive Officer
VET Development Centre
Melbourne, Australia
October 2023

FOREWORD TWO

Professor Corbett is a well-known and highly acclaimed practitioner and research leader in England. His work, nationally, on supporting the continued development of professionals working in education has had significant and lasting impact. We, at ETF, have benefitted from his contribution to education for many years. Examples of his work includes being the strategic lead for delivery of the Department for Education funded Further Forces programme which ran for 5 years and retrained military personnel to become qualified teachers in England's further education sector. In 2022, Corbett's research in the development needs of managers in the further education sector resulted in authoring the Professional Standards for Leaders in Further Education which were published nationally by the ETF and now inform all leadership training programmes we deliver.

Following Corbett's research into FE workforce well-being in 2021, the ETF have further enhanced our offer to further education institutions around the country. Well-being and sector professionalism are at the heart of ETF's strategic objectives to support the FES workforce and we welcome Steve's incisive analysis on what the sector needs to prioritise. This book provides a new and much needed critical commentary of how our global education structures and leadership decisions directly impact on workforce well-being. We learn that the dial is shifting for organisations that are increasingly expected to improve the quality of jobs and support systems available to employees. On this, the ETF works closely with comparable support bodies in England and overseas to identify and disseminate effective practice, so that we can learn from the best examples and expertise. We are seeing an increasing trend of well-being issues emerging for staff. This is a concerning situation that has both immediate and long-term impact on individuals and the sectors they work in. Therefore, the unique approach by Corbett to consider the factors which unite rather than divide us is an important call to arms for education-ists and policymakers.

The balance between prior theory, contemporary research and practical solutions provided within this book provides readers with an excellent grounding in how to initiate and implement a positive culture of well-being in

the education workforce. I would strongly encourage both those who work in education and those whose work impacts on education to read this book and consider its suggestions on how we might facilitate cultural change to create a happy, healthy and productive workforce for the benefit of those in the sector, their students and society more broadly.

PREFACE

Those who have worked in education for a period of time will likely agree a key constant is change. Whilst being in a dynamic work environment can be highly engaging, it is not without its challenge. The speed of change in recent years has led to unintended consequences not least in some instances a diminishing of work conditions.

This book seeks to consider what I believe is a key challenge that spans across all contemporary education sectors globally; workforce well-being. In 2021, I conducted a research study with colleagues into the impact of Covid-19 on workforce well-being in the vocational education sector in England. When presenting the results of this research, I became struck as to how the findings resonated with those working in different education sectors across the world. This led me to dive deeper and undertake further research. In doing so it became clear to me that whilst each education sector has its own context in terms of the students it supports and geographical location the narrative of well-being and factors which impact it have significant similarities.

It is my belief that positive well-being in the global education workforce is a key factor that we need to take seriously if we wish to have learning environments that thrive and inspire future generations. My hope is that this book provides both provocation and resource for policymakers, leaders and their teams that can positively impact on our approach to education workforce well-being.

This page intentionally left blank

INTRODUCTION

The subject of workforce well-being has become one which resonates across industries. While a perennial issue, it is also one that can be affected by multiple variables, personal, professional, internal and external. This broad scope means that seeking to address poor workforce well-being can seem somewhat insurmountable. By extension, the scale of the challenge can be overwhelming for those managing others, particularly when seeking to make positive change.

In this book, I seek to extend the discussion on well-being, focusing on the education workforce while drawing not only on education but also human resource management and leadership research. Through doing so, it provides a critical analysis that not only highlights the challenges but also presents research-informed recommendations that managers and leaders working in education could find useful. This is not to say the book will provide a list of model answers to address poor workforce well-being, instead it seeks to inspire leaders to implement new approaches to the new challenges of our day in the hope that over time, we will see and experience unilateral improvement.

SETTING THE SCENE

For those working in education, well-being is not a new concept. As practitioners, we have sought to develop strategies to support our students' well-being. There is an appreciation that today's world presents a series of challenges not encountered by prior generations, these include (but are not limited to) social and cultural factors (Kitzrow, 2009), lifestyle (Ridner et al., 2016) and engagement with social media (Alt, 2016). Scholars and

practitioners recognise the continuing challenges each of these factors (and others) have on student mental health and well-being.

By way of an example lets focus on advances in technology and their impact on students and staff in education. The ability to access information whenever and wherever needed makes knowledge more accessible, which many would agree is positive. However, this does then mean the expectations of knowledge and standards in classroom and exam performance increases. To compensate, the same technology provides students greater accessibility to their work through virtual learning environments. While there are distinct advantages to enabling learning and social development beyond the classroom, there are also unwanted consequences. The boundaries between school and home life become blurred. This is not limited to the formality of classwork but also encroaches into the social boundaries whereby students can interact with each other via mobile technology, meaning the days of student life being solely 'behind the school gates' is no longer the case. We can extend this further to consider the ever-present nature of social media that can result in an indoctrination of expected social profile, activity and self-image. More concerning is that once this information, narrative and imagery, is released into the World Wide Web, it is preserved for all time. Meaning a decision made today can affect a student for the remainder of their life. Pause for a moment and consider how many of us made decisions when we were children that we have sought to forget and how might we feel if we were never able to do so.

The issues faced by students bear relevance to the education workforce who are there to educate, develop and support students that are experiencing challenges new to us all. While our mindfulness of student needs and well-being has developed over time, the same emphasis has not been placed on the education workforce itself. This seems misguided given those working in education have comparable issues to their students such as blurred boundaries between work and home, increasing volumes of work driven by expectations to perform at the highest level, while also projecting an idealised profile of oneself professionally and socially. If we acknowledge the consequences and need for action with regard to our students (rightly), we should also ensure the same due regard and care is provided to the workforce supporting those students.

Unfortunately, there are numerous studies highlighting the challenges faced by the education workforce in each sector whether you term this as compulsory and post-compulsory, primary, secondary, further and higher education, K-12 or college and vocational education and training. The discussion and challenge of well-being while ever present across the globe has also had a strong surge within recent years potentially a by-product of the COVID-19 pandemic, or,

simply a realisation that we can all be affected in comparable ways. I, therefore, recommend that when reading this book that you are cognisant of your own context, but do not feel restricted or isolated because of it.

I would suggest that a key uniting factor of the education workforce across the world is values. As highlighted by Rayner and Espinoza (2016), there is an intrinsic motivation that drives people to work in education. This, in essence, being the drive to help others to learn and develop. There is a wide field of knowledge and research that explores values in education and how this can define the way in which education systems and organisations operate, how curriculum is devised and delivered as well as pedagogical principles (Berkowitz, 2011). For the purposes of this book, reference to education values is focused on the drive to do what is best for students. This is a key distinction as within this book we are exploring workforce well-being, factors that affect it and how these might be navigated. To do so, we need to be considerate as to the intrinsic motivation of the workforce and how factors such as funding, curriculum, student experience, working environment and conditions, etc. either align, or not, with the education workforce's values, that is, supporting students to develop and learn.

STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

Chapter 2 begins with an acknowledgement of the scale of the subject area of well-being. The broad field is refined to focus on four key areas of education workforce well-being, resilience, emotional labour, work-life balance and work-life conflict. While it recognises that there are other aspects that could be considered, it argues the value of a targeted approach in the first instance. This scaffolding is designed to support those who want to address poor workforce well-being and wish to use a research informed foundation from which to begin. Having discussed each principle individually, the chapter will then consider the four key areas holistically which leads to the derivation of a definition of positive education workforce well-being. This is in contrast to prior research which has tended to focus on each area independently thus providing a contribution to knowledge through the consideration of the four key areas' collective influence on workforce well-being.

Chapter 3 explores external structural changes in the macro policy environment and how educational leaders' response can impact on workforce well-being. It uses the example of macro policy decisions in terms of performativity to illustrate the impact on workforce well-being, both intended or

not. It then explores a series of case studies in compulsory, vocational and higher education highlighting the comparability between education sectors as well as education across the world. This provides the second contribution to knowledge by highlighting the interrelation between policy decision, response and workforce well-being, something that has not previously been explored. This also provides the opportunity to reflect on policy decisions and leadership response through the lens of workforce well-being considering which approach or mix of approaches could provide optimal outcomes in terms of well-being in their own context.

Having considered the external environment, Chapter 4 progresses to consider the internal leadership context. It discusses the pressures placed on institutional leaders, drawing on the example of agencies which inspect education institutions and derive conclusions on their quality of performance. The impact of which can influence how leaders behave, which in turn impacts on organisation culture and workforce well-being. Conscious that leadership decisions are not intended to negatively affect well-being, a model is proposed (3S of Leadership Decision-Making) to support those making decisions to be considerate of the impact decisions will have on workforce well-being. This model does not seek to prevent decisions, in contrast, it seeks to ensure proactive measures are considered (and taken) to ensure well-being is preserved, encouraging an integration of well-being into decision-making.

Chapter 5 moves to consider educational leader responses to external non-policy-related change, specifically unpredictable change, and the resultant impact on workforce well-being. The chapter uses the Vocational Education and Training sector in England during the COVID-19 global pandemic by way of a case study, as it provides a unique insight as to the impact of the pandemic on workforce well-being. It draws on empirical data collected prior to and during the pandemic specifically for the purpose of establishing well-being in the English Vocational Education and Training sector. It explores prior publications that analyse well-being from a sectoral, gender and psychological perspective. Then, and as a new contribution to knowledge, it provides an analysis of newly presented data which considers the impact of the pandemic on leaders in education compared to the rest of the education workforce. This highlights the need for consideration of leader's own well-being especially when seeking to make decisions that will also impact the well-being of others, providing an opportunity for reflection with regard to the impact of unpredictable change and the strategies that can be employed to prevent decisions that compromise well-being of the workforce.

Having explored well-being of leaders, Chapter 6 provides a better understanding of the expectations of leaders and managers in education. It

provides a brief history of management theory and how this has influenced management practice in education sectors globally. It goes on to discuss distinctions between ‘management’ and ‘leadership’, highlighting the positive and negative connotations with these terms. It then seeks to collate the discussion of leadership, management, policy, decision-making, culture and education workforce well-being into a new model designed to facilitate organisational well-being (Four Stages of Institutional Well-being), making the books final contribution to knowledge and practice.

The concluding chapter summarises the key learning points discovered during the development of this book and sets out a series of recommendations that could be employed by those leading and working in all education sectors. Each recommendation is research-informed and provides practical measures that could facilitate positive impact.

USING THIS BOOK

It is the intention that this book can be used as a resource for both educational researchers and practitioners.

In academia and education, we can see lines of delineation form (intended and not-intended) between countries, sectors, organisations and people. Within this book, I have challenged the delineations that exist between education from a geographical, sectoral and institutional perspective. This is done purposely as I argue that in the case of well-being, there is more that unites than divides us. This does, therefore, necessitate that you, as the reader, keep an open mind to this way of thinking. In aid of this throughout the book, I provide examples that illustrate the similarities that exist across education institutions the world over and by extension how strategies, suggested in this book, can be used in a multitude of settings.

The book’s critical analysis of well-being in the education workforce is designed to facilitate readers to reflect on what is being explored and consider it within their own context. This does challenge us all to consider our thought processes, behaviours, actions and decisions. I would recommend readers are familiar with the concept of being a reflective practitioner and adapt this knowledge into the skill of employing reflective techniques. I myself agree fully with Petty (2014, p. 313) who states:

Experience itself does not aid learning ... we must reflect on our experiences.

In this vein, I encourage you, as the reader, to employ techniques that truly hold a mirror to your practice mindful that we all have a part to play in facilitating a culture of well-being. Combining this with the provocation of key factors that affect education workforce well-being as outlined in this book and the suggested models to address them, I hope you find the book of use and benefit as that is its intention.

2

WELL-BEING IN THE CONTEXT OF WORKING IN EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

While each sector has its own distinctive structure, the challenge of workforce well-being is one that permeates across all education sectors in comparable ways. Acknowledging what is meant by workforce well-being within an education sector context is, therefore, important. It is for this reason that for this book, the foci of well-being are:

Firstly, workforce resilience, which illustrates the ability for the workforce to respond and maintain forward momentum regardless of the challenges encountered. This key principle, grounded in a positive psychology, provides an indication why those working in education endure perpetual change.

Secondly, emotional labour, which explains how the workforce is driven by intrinsic motivation and values which ensures they deliver what is best for students/pupils. However, this can impact negatively on well-being when an individual's values do not align with their employer, for example, where an institution prioritise achievement of metrics over the best interests of individual students/pupils.

Thirdly, work-life balance, also known as the ability to strike a suitable balance between the time spent on work duties and time spent on personal activities. While this can be a factor impacting on many roles in many sectors, there is the potential for disproportionate impact in white collar occupations.

Fourth, work-life conflict, which can be conflated with work-life balance, as the two factors can have a causal relationship. Within this book, I distinguish the two terms highlighting that work-life conflict tends to focus more on the emotional tension between work and life rather time spent on activities.

NEED FOR A CULTURE OF WELL-BEING IN THE EDUCATION WORKFORCE

The subject of well-being within education has become increasingly present in recent decades. Originally, the focus centred more predominantly on student well-being in particularly supporting students pastorally throughout their studies, thus ensuring their emotional needs are supported as well as their academic needs. As the subject of well-being became more prevalent and the research base grew, consideration branched into teacher well-being. It could be suggested that this was a response to the increasing demands placed on education professionals resulting in challenges for educational institutions to recruit and retain a motivated workforce.

When reviewing the continually emerging literature of education workforce well-being, we are confronted with reports of the impact of neoliberal performativity (Jerrim & Sims, 2022), increasing workloads (Perryman & Calvert, 2020), teacher supply and retention crises (Craig, 2017), high staff sickness absence and/or burnout (Corbett et al., 2023). Often there is a critique of the micro and macro policy environment and the actions of educational institutions' management. Interestingly, research articles highlight the international scale and scope of educational workforce well-being, reaffirming this is not education sector or country specific.

Performativity in Education

Education is often seen as an important commodity across the world. The value and impact of education are, rightly, continually reaffirmed. As with any commodity, we need to be clear as to its purpose and intent while remembering it requires money to create and deliver. The OECD (2022d) reports its member countries' investment in education ranges from 4.5% to 5.4% of each members' GDP per year. UNESCO (2023) reaffirms that the investment in education needs to be prioritised across the world, an ambition many would agree with. There are morale imperatives to supporting education, however, the rhetoric often uses corporate terminology perhaps because investment in education also provides financial benefits for countries and its citizens, highlighted by World Bank reports on the economic benefits of education (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018).

While I agree with the need for investment in education, I would also highlight caution when we consider our use of language as it can lead to interpretations that were not originally intended. When referring to investment