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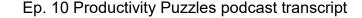
BvA: Are healthy workers productive workers? And if so, why do companies still struggle to put the health and wellbeing of its workforce at the centre of good business performance? And how can we change this? We're going to find out. Welcome to Productivity Puzzles.

[Music playing 0:00:15–0:00:31].

BvA: Hello and welcome to the tenth episode of Productivity Puzzles, your podcast series on productivity, brought to you by The Productivity Institute and sponsored by Capita. I'm Bart van Ark and I'm a Professor of Productivity Studies at The University of Manchester and the director of The Productivity Institute, a UK-wide research body on all things productivity in the UK and beyond.

Welcome to the tenth episode of Productivity Puzzles: an anniversary and a happy one. In this season one of the podcast series we've got ten podcasts done within six months, so no small endeavour and not something I could have done on my own. So thanks to the brilliant teams of The Productivity Institute, in particular Krystyna Rudzki and Podcast.co, especially Ben Hamlen, for their unwavering support for the series. We're hoping to bring you ten more podcasts over the next six months. We've built up a good following of subscribers now, so if you have suggestions for topics into the new year, please let us know through our email address at productivity.ac.uk.

Now, an anniversary of course requires a special topic and a special guest and we have both today. I'm going to spend the next 40 minutes with my Manchester colleague and office neighbour, Professor Sir Cary Cooper, talking about health and productivity in the workplace. Cary is a professor of organisational psychology and health at Alliance Manchester Business School and a world-leading expert on workers' health and wellbeing. His CV is one of the most impressive I've come across. We could fill a whole hour of this podcast just listing all his accomplishments but let me just say that he is the author and editor of dozens, if not hundreds, of books and scholarly articles for academic journals, on topics

ranging from occupational stress, women at work and industrial and organisational psychology.

Now, amongst these many roles, Cary has been the president of the CIPD, which is the Chartered Institute of Personal Development, which is the leading professional body for HR and people development in the UK. He was also the president of the British Academy of Management and, in 2016, he founded the National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at Work, comprised of 35 global employers. And last but not least Cary is a co-investigator of The Productivity Institute, which has given me the opportunity to steal some time from his busy schedule to talk about health and productivity. Cary, welcome to the show here on Productivity Puzzles.

CC: Great to be here, Bart, great to be talking to you.

BvA: Alright, we're going to talk about your new book today but before I do that, you know, I just mentioned that we are office neighbours in Manchester; I arrived here in the UK in September 2020, so the only time that we really started to meet was about the summer this year, that we could actually spend some time together. And we've done so a couple of times and that was great fun.

So I was wondering what you have personally come to appreciate more, having gone through this pandemic? Was it the true value of in-person meetings that you really have begun to appreciate, now that you have experienced what it means to not have them? Or is it the value of being able to work from home and perhaps better combine work and lifestyle? And this is the only time in our podcast that you must choose what you think matters most for you personally?

CC: Thank you very much, Bart. I think I enjoy working partly from home. Because I've always been a social animal. I'm in the university at 7:30 in the morning and I usually leave about 4:30, five o'clock. I love it. I love people. And what I enjoyed is partly working from home, or working from home but not exclusively. But what I have missed is people like you: my colleagues. I really have missed it. And particularly the start of The Productivity Institute, I haven't been able, really, to connect with people even though I'm right amidst you, I'm next door to you, as it were. So I think that's been the downside for me. I didn't realise how much of a social animal I actually was.

BvA: So it's a little bit of both, you know, and I think we all have that same experience. There were some advantages working from home, particularly if you're well set up to do this. We're going to talk a little bit more about that, by the way, in a minute. For a lot of people that wasn't the case, of having facilities at home. But also, you know, meeting with people and being creative, you just need to be together. And, you know, although we

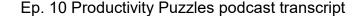do this today virtually at least it's, sort of, being together. So I'm looking forward to this conversation.

Now, as mentioned, you just completed a new book, titled The Healthy Workforce: Enhancing Wellbeing and Productivity in the Workers of the Future, which you co-authored with Stephan Bevan, who's the head of HR research development at The Institute for Employment Studies in Brighton. It's just released so we'll provide a link in the show notes. It was a great read. I really enjoyed reading it. It's a very important topic and I think we could talk for hours about this book. But let me start with asking you why this link between health and productivity is so important to you.

Because, you know, most scholars who are working on things like wellbeing – which not only includes health – they would be reluctant to touch on the productivity part of this, right? Productivity has this image of, you know, working harder, squeezing more out of the workforce, that kind of thing. And at some point in the book you even discuss what healthcare professionals can do and you refer to many of them having even a philosophical objection to the idea that their patients – which are, of course, human beings in need of help – are seen as a factor of production or human capital. Nevertheless, in this book and in your previous work, you really stress this link. So take us through a little bit; what are these links between health and productivity, in your point of view?

CC: I think you're right. I think some people out there, particularly in business, unions and the like, think that when you talk about productivity, you're talking about performance management and they don't like that bit. And why I think it's important and why we decided to do this book is there's tons of research on stress and its impact in the workplace, on wellbeing, and it's linked…particularly organisational factors and they're linked to outcome measures of one sort of another. But the outcome measures they tended to look at are sickness absence, presenteeism, labour turnover. But not productivity.

But if we're to impact the C-Suite people, the top of the organisation, the chief exec, the chief finance officer, people at the top table, I think you have to show the link. If we really believe that health and wellbeing is important not only for the health of an individual employee but actually good for business, I think we have to demonstrate that.

And yes, it's complicated and difficult as you know, Bart, because you're an expert in this, to get the metrics right to measure productivity. Not easy, particularly in service-based economies like ours and in service-based sectors. But why not? We have to do this. And I think in the end if we believe that creating the right kind of culture can produce to the bottom line, lets prove it. Let's get the science behind it.

BvA: And it's interesting, right, because you're saying that, you know, the C-Suite, the CEO, they focus on productivity. Well my experience, quite often they are actually more focussed on things like financial results or cost savings. That's not necessarily the same as productivity.

And I think what you're trying to say is it's not just about saving money on your people, it's actually trying to leverage your people in order to be able to do better in the workplace. I mean, if you think about productivity you've, sort of, got on the top of the line output and on the bottom, below the dividing line, you've got the inputs. It's as much about creating more as a company than it is saving money as a company, right? So I think that's an important element of how you think about this link between health and productivity.

CC: But it's our challenge too, Bart. If the UK is tying at the bottom of the G7 on productivity per capita, with Italy, and 17th in the G20, what are we doing about this? We have to do something about it. Health must be an issue in this. The health and wellbeing affects the performance of people; the performance of people reflects itself in productivity. We can minimise the bottom line to some extent by managing stress-related illness, for example, directly. There are ways of doing it to reduce that.

That doesn't mean we're going to get the benefit for the organisation, by the way, or for the economy, unless we really take productivity seriously. But we can do this. But, you know, it's the start of the… I mean, The Productivity Institute obviously is very important here because one of its strands is health and wellbeing and its link to productivity and I think that's really important.

BvA: Now you just mentioned that a lot of the discussion around, sort of, the role of health in the workplace is about this issue of absenteeism, right, of people not being able to come to work and do their job. But then you also mentioned there's this issue of presenteeism. Maybe you can explain this a little bit? Not everybody may fully understand what presenteeism means and in your view this has really become more important in the past two decades or so.

CC: Oh, this is really quite important. Here's how it started. In the 1980s, when we had the recession, I got called up by a journalist and the journalist said to me Cary I can't understand this – a journalist from a major newspaper – said Cary, we're in the middle of a recession yet the sickness absence rates are not increasing. In fact, they're declining and I can't understand this; what explains this? And I said, well if you're worried about your job and you're feeling ill one day, do you want high sickness absence rates on your HR record? You certainly do not. So what are you going to do? You're going to come to work ill. So that's how the whole thing started.

So I said the issue is not about absenteeism, it's about – I was trying to coin it quickly with the journalist – I said it's about presenteeism. In other words, people turning up, they're feeling so job insecure that they have to turn up, but they're not necessarily producing any added value by turning up, incidentally. Probably infecting other people with the flu or whatever they're coming to work with. And that's when it first started. That term came in the 1980s.

Then the first assessment of it properly by economists was in 2007/8 as we were just entering the financial crisis. The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health – all the economists there are top economists – decided to take a look at what presenteeism – and they had a measure for it – what presenteeism versus absenteeism was causing the economy. And they found that presenteeism was double the cost to the UK economy than absenteeism. That was the first attempt by economists to do it.
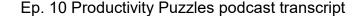
And since then a lot of research has been done and we have found during that recession, you know, the financial crisis, presenteeism rose high…it's linked to job insecurity, really. Or job discontent. It's not just turning up to work ill; it's turning up to work not motivated. You know, I have to come here, I'm feeling insecure. I need to show facetime but I'm not interested in this job and believe me I want leaves on the line, any excuse not to get into the workplace.

And again the CIPD – the professional body of HR professionals – found in their last report just this year, they found that presenteeism was on the rise now because we have Brexit, we have the pandemic, we had the furloughing and people are job insecure again and presenteeism on the rise. And I am worried about it because the organisation will think oh man, this is great. Our absenteeism rate is low. But unless we measure the presenteeism bit… Because they're not delivering. And, again, this is a performance and a productivity issue. If they're not delivering – they're turning up, they're showing facetime but they're not delivering to the bottom line in any way – we've got an issue.

BvA: Yeah, and then you go even a step further, right? Because you're not just talking about presenteeism or, sort of, sick people in the workplace, which is not a good thing, but you're also talking about people who are apparently healthy in the workplace…

CC: Exactly.

BvA: …but don't really perform as well in their task. For example, people get to work and they haven't had sufficient sleep, for example. And there are other examples of this as well. So this task performance kind of thing is even a step further, right? It's also about healthy people who do not

perform as well as they could if they had more of a wellbeing, kind of, status.

CC: Absolutely and those are the disengaged, the job dissatisfied people. And therefore, we have to look at, in organisations, what engages people. What makes them job satisfied? How do we manage people to perform better? How do we get them committed? And that, I think, is our challenge. As an occupational health psychologist that's my challenge. And my challenge is to increase their performance, increase their productivity, reduce the ill health that they have, stress-related ill health: what we call the common mental disorders of anxiety, depression stress.

And remember, Bart, 57 per cent of all the long-term sickness absence in the year pre-COVID, as calculated by the Health and Safety Executive, was for stress, anxiety and depression. The leading cause. Musculoskeletal disease – backache and the like – were only 25 per cent. So for the last… And it's not UK, by the way, this is most developed countries now, so it's a big issue globally.

BvA: Yeah, I think that's really been up the agenda. We're going to come back to that issue of how you can, you know, help people in the workplace to perform better as a healthy person. We'll come back to that later.

But we already mentioned once or twice the pandemic and obviously the pandemic had huge consequences but it also had huge consequences for your topic area. Because, you know, quite often this kind of health and wellbeing kind of thing in the workplace was a bit of a niche topic, you know. HR wanted to talk about it but was it really a big discussion in the boardroom? Probably not. And then overnight in March 2020 it suddenly became the topic in the boardroom and we had to immediately do something. So it really tested the readiness of businesses, government, societies, individuals on how to balance the benefit of health against the material and immaterial rewards to work.

So what, in your mind, are some of the most important lessons that we have learnt from a health and productivity perspective from COVID?

CC: Okay, well the pandemic in my view has been a great accelerator to things we wanted to do anyway, before this, Bart. So for example flexible working, or what everybody's called hybrid working. People wanted that but, you know, pre-COVID they didn't take it. And why didn't they take it?

By the way women…there was a gender difference here. Women tended to take it and men did not take it. In fact, I did a bit study of one huge global company and a big government department, funded by a variety of different sources, but we were looking at it, Working Families and myself, as to why they didn't.

And the reason men didn't take it is they thought it would adversely affect their career. Right? That showing facetime in the workplace is what people needed to do to get ahead and so on. And the women took it out of necessity. They thought, by the way, it would adversely affect their career too but because they have the double role, the dual role, of looking after the family and pursuing a career, they had no option. We do have a new man somewhere but I think he's touring Scotland at the moment. In other words, men are much more work orientated than women are. And women are work orientated but they have to do that, kind of, balance.

So that was one of the issues, that people were not taking it up even though they wanted to. This accelerated that.

Now we see it, number one, works and, number two, what do employers want to do? Employers want people to work more flexibly. Why? Many employers – not all employers, by the way. And we'll get to that in a minute. But why they do is because they want to reduce their estate costs. If they have four floors of offices in London or Manchester or Glasgow, right, they might be able, in a hybrid model, only to have one or two floors. Because there will be people who want to be in full-time. There will be people who want to be in a couple of days a week, right? So that saves them money.

They realise that now we're saving down time on commute to work, probably two to three hours in big cities, so they can actually do more added value and maybe enhance their productivity. Not five days a week, because the evidence is they don't want to work remotely. So it accelerated the hybrid working.

I'll tell you what it also did. Another problem we had, my National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at Work, made up of, now, 42 global employers, okay, very big…HR directors, chief medical officers, directors in health and wellbeing. Pre-COVID, three years ago, we all said what's the biggest health and wellbeing issue not only for the health of our employees but for the productivity of the country? And everybody said it was the line manager. These are HR directors, chief medical officers. Now, this illustrated…the pandemic accelerated that trend. We need line managers who have good EQ, emotional intelligence, who have social interpersonal skills. And why do we need it? Because we have some people who are going to work from a central office and some people are going to work from home. How do you manage that…

BvA: That's hard.

CC: …dispersed workforce? Really important. How do you manage the fact that 57 per cent of people who will experience long-term sickness

absence, right, how will we recognise it if people aren't in the office that often? How will we know they don't have unmanageable workloads, unrealistic deadlines or whatever the issue is? Ergo, it's important that we have a different kind of line manager. So it accelerated those two trends. And they're very important trends, I think. And also, technology as well.

BvA: Yeah, it really puts the line manager, sort of, in the middle of everything and we'll come back to that. But it even becomes more complicated now, right, because the way this has impacted people is quite different. You mentioned men and women, you could mention young and older people, rich and poor people. You know, the two of us, we're professors, we have our offices at home and things like that. It's quite different than when you live in a small apartment with four kids who need to be home-schooled and everything else.

So the line manager is not only now getting involved in the work life of this person but getting involved in the personal life of these people. Because he or she needs to understand, you know, what's going on at home. Can this person do his or her work? So the challenges for the line manager are becoming huge, right, in this environment.

CC: Yeah, absolutely huge. But you know something interesting about this? Shall I tell you a potential downside of hybrid working – I've just been thinking about this the last week or two – which is gender inequality. Because men are more workaholic than women, when they have options of working hybridly, will men tend to navigate back to the workplace almost full-time – three, four, five days a week. And women, because of their domestic role, working women, will work from home more often, therefore not be as visible in the office and will that affect their promotion and development? So there's an indirect potential… I'm worried about that.

BvA: Yeah, because it's one of those elements of, you know… So there's a lot of discussion about the scarring effects on the labour market of this COVID crisis. And one of them is that you are increasing inequality between men and women, right? So as good as it sounds, like, you know the men got involved with home-schooling the kids and so on, but now that kids are back at school, are we not, kind of, reverting to old behaviours? What have we learnt?

Which really leads me to the next question, taken from the employers' perspective. Because the employer now needs to begin to think about this hybrid working environment; what does that mean. And what are some of the recommendations that you would give employers to make sure that they deal with this transition towards a hybrid environment in a healthy way – no pun intended?

CC: I think if I was… Since I think this is about who your boss is, who your line manager is in a way, I would say to them to do this, number one, you have to provide them with all the equipment they need in the home environment. They really do need that and they need to know about the platforms and all that kind of stuff. You know, the very basic things.

But we need to know what line managers need training to manage in this world, right? And that, I think, is kind of critical. That means, to me, that the organisation has to… And by the organisation I mean HR, frankly. HR needs to take a look at their cadre of managers, from shop floor to top floor, and say to themselves what proportion of our… Look at those 30 per cent of people in our organisation, they're really good managers and we know they are, they're good people managers, right? And therefore, they don't need the training.

But those 40 or 50 per cent really do need the training and we have to earmark training to help them manage people who are working the hybrid model. Ensuring that those managers are also trained to recognise when people aren't coping. What are the symptoms that they see in people, whether they do it virtually or in person? Because we haven't done that kind of training before, incidentally, pre-COVID.

And then what do we do about a workforce – and this is important from a productivity and a performance point of view as well – what about the 20 per cent of people… I'm just saying, you know, fictionally, a 20 per cent of people in that organisation who are very good technically… Because you think about it; people get promoted on their technical skills, not their people skills. People get recruited on their technical skills, not their people skills. We need parity between both of those. What do you do with 20 per cent of people who are currently in managerial roles who are emotionally… I was going to say illiterate but I won't say that. Emotionally not competent. In other words, they don't have the people skills to do the job.

And probably there will be some who are untrainable. And we know that. And so what do we do with that? But this is good, because this helps us from a productivity perspective, in my view. If productivity is basically about what does Cary Cooper produce in an hour or in a week or a day, or however you're going to do it… What do I produce, given the objectives set to me? What I produce to some extent is dependent on how I'm managed by that person. Do they manage me by reward and recognition? Do they manage me by fault finding? How do they manage me? Right? That's partly really important to me. So thinking about the manager I think is a productivity issue.

BvA: Yes, and we're going to talk a little bit more on this after the break. We are not just talking about, you know, mitigating the negative effects of ill health

on productivity, which we need to do, but also leveraging the positive effects of good health. I think that's such an important contribution that you're making in your book. But before that, we first take a short break on what else is happening at The Productivity Institute.

[Music playing 0:24:16–0:24:22].

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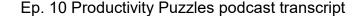
The UK's regional productivity divide is stark by international standards. To investigate why, The Productivity Institute commissioned agenda-setting deep dives into productivity across all English regions and the devolved nations of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Led by our eight regional productivity forums, these insight papers provide unique analysis of the UK's long-standing productivity puzzle and will be published alongside an easy-to-read executive summary. Together, this research highlights where local and national policymakers can make a positive difference to productivity in their area and help contribute towards increased living standards and wellbeing everywhere.

Make sure you follow us on social media @tpiproductivity on Twitter and on LinkedIn to find out when the insights for your region of the UK are published. The Productivity Institute aims to pinpoint why UK productivity has flatlined since the 2008 financial crisis and create the foundations for a new era of sustained and inclusive growth. The Productivity Institute is a UK-wide research organisation funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

[Music playing 0:25:56– 0:25:59].

BvA: Welcome back to my discussion with Cary Cooper on his new book, The Health Workforce, which he co-authored with Stephen Bevans. Cary, before the break we talked a lot about a line manager. And during the break I actually thought a little bit about this. And I'm actually really concerned, because this line manager is a big job and it seems that putting the health and wellbeing of their workers on their plate as well is making this job almost too big and overwhelming.

So, as much as we need to support individual workers in the company on their health and wellbeing, how are we going to support the line manager to actually do this? I mean, you mentioned before the break that maybe not everybody is a perfect line manager but still there are lots of people who will have to do both: they have to create business value and improve their business performance and be an expert in whatever, you know,

made them an expert and why they got promoted in the first place but also need to have this EQ and develop it further. Even if you have an EQ, it needs to get activated in order to keep doing well on this. So what do you suggest to companies to actually really support a line manager in doing their job?

CC: Okay, I think you're absolutely right. We keep dumping more and more on line managers to do. And I think we're dumping more and more on…what to do, because we don't, when we select them in the first place, look at ensuring there's parity between their people skills and their technical skills. So if I can recruit people… And by the way we can do the assessments and do the things to ensure their people skills, their EQ, their empathy and all that. We can get people who have that and we can select them on that. But they have to have parity with their technical skills, obviously.

If we do that, we're not dumping anything on them. Because if they have those skills when they get in there, they will naturally be better listeners, they'll be people who manage people by praise and reward and recognition, rather than fault finding. They'll recognise when people, because they're socially sensitive, are having difficulty coping. Because normally, in a meeting, when they're pretty affable and extrovert, all of a sudden they're withdrawn or they're very aggressive when they normally haven't been aggressive. In other words, those people with those social skills…

Unfortunately, there are a lot of people in industry call them the soft skills, but they're anything but soft. They are the hard skills of management. They will recognise that… And you won't be dumping anything on them. They won't need the training. But with the existing people we currently have in, who have been promoted and recruited on their technical skills, we do have an issue. And those people that need the training need the training, and those people who already have it naturally forget it, because they have it naturally.

BvA: But let me push back a little bit on this. So, you know, I grew up in an academic organisation and in a business organisation, in both. And I think I have, you know, if I speak for myself, sorry, decent social skills. But managing a group of people, you know, still requires quite a bit of understanding how you do this well. I mean, it doesn't come naturally. I mean, it's good if you have the, sort of, amazing setting but you need to think about this hard. You need to also commit to it, right? I mean, if you have a lot of people to supervise, you know, you have to commit to them that you have these regular informal conversations, that you have the formal conversations, that you link it, that you document it. And it all comes on top of, you know, the expert work that you have to do.

So I'm pushing back a little bit on the fact that this will come naturally. It seems to me companies need to do stuff and HR leaders need to do stuff in order to equip their line managers to really perform well in this role.

CC: Oh no, I agree with you, they do need training. And the existing cohort needs training and even the new recruits. But they won't need as much training. But if you ask an average manager, you say to anybody, no matter where they are in the hierarchy, and you say to them after your day at work today, when you came home, what was the thing you didn't like about your job most, and almost all of them, in a managerial role, will say oh god, I had to deal with Fred today. What a pain he was. All he did was cause problems in the meeting. Very negative, glass half-empty type.

So the HR issues that managers…they are the most stressful of anything on people. And almost every manager I've ever talked to says that. They'll say God, if I just could deal with Fred and Janet and the people that cause me aggravation and my team problems, this would be a lovely day at work. So I do think they do need training. You're absolutely right, Bart. But I think we could minimise the amount of training they needed if at the beginning, when we recruited them and / or promoted them…would be a good thing to do.

BvA: So what I found fascinating in the book is the role of the healthcare profession. And by that I don't just mean only the GP or secondary healthcare, but also the healthcare people working in the company. Social support and things like that. And I think what I find fascinating is that you actually see a much better role for healthcare. So on the one hand you were speaking about de-medicalising this whole discussion about health and wellbeing, so that line managers, as we just talked about, can own this.

But at the same time the healthcare community itself needs to change their mindset also in terms of this is not just about, you know, defending the patient against work and against their employer but actually work with the patient towards the path of reintegration that is sensible and that is, you know, effective over time for both the organisation as well as for the individual. So talk a little bit about what needs to change in the healthcare profession to make this role of health and wellbeing in the company work better.

CC: Well it's very interesting, Bart. I'm that old that I can say 40 years ago, when I first started doing work in this field, occupational health was about toxins in the work environment, about bad equipment that could be potentially dangerous and create accidents and all the rest of it. And they weren't at all into health and wellbeing of the sort I'm talking about, looking at stress, anxiety and depression. Incidentally, that wasn't the leading cause of long-term sickness absence as it is now in any case.

But I have seen a great improvement in occupational health. If you talk to most… Like in my National Forum for Health and Wellbeing: I have about 30 chief medical officers on it, right, of major organisations. And do you know what? Or the directors of health and wellbeing. And they're really into this. They see that as their main function. They still have safety as a part of their role. They have to make sure the equipment is sound; they have to make sure there's not toxins in the work environment, that asbestos isn't being blown all over the place, et cetera.
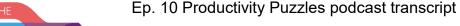
But, you know what, from an occupational health point of view they've moved unbelievably swiftly into this arena. I think the problem we have is that in many organisations they haven't been taken as seriously as they should be. They haven't been seen as individuals who could help the performance of the organisation. Employee health and safety, yes, but not…that wasn't in lots of senior execs' minds as hitting the bottom line.

I think we're seeing changes and I can think of a number of organisations where that's the way they think now. That individual, occupational health, and the people working in it now not only are enhancing an individual's psychological and physical health but also they're helping the organisation become more productive. Outside, we have GPs and I think we need more education for the health professionals not within organisations but in…

Because if you talk to a lot of GPs, they'll tell you quite a lot of the problems that people have, even when they're showing physical symptoms, are stress related. You know, they come with a physical symptom but when they unwrap it the driver of that physical symptom is usually a psychological issue – and frequently a problem at work. I think we need to educate GPs more about that. Those are health professionals who really… Some get it. The younger generation, I think, are getting it. But I think there's a group of them who just don't see the link.

BvA: Well quite often occupational health people in the organisation would still think along, with the organisation GPs, obviously they are there to be the advocate of the patient. And rightly so. But sometimes it leads to a defensive approach, you know, where the patient is actually, sort of, slowed in terms of trying to get back in work and perform, rather than guide the individual to get back into work and actually, you know, begin to lead a healthy work life, if you like. So GPs have a role to play as well.

CC: Yeah, and particularly, by the way, in terms of mental health. And do remember if you take a look at physical health and compare it with mental health. If you have a serious clinical mental health condition you will be off work significantly longer than if you have cancer or heart disease. And that is really important. But if you have the mindset in occupational health

of getting somebody back to work quickly without getting at the underlying sources of it and planning work properly for the individual, we're going to have problems down the line in terms of performance.

BvA: I want to switch the topic a little bit to talking about, sort of, as I mentioned before the break, the positive element of not just focusing on mitigating the risk of ill health but also to, you know, support people in being healthy and therefore being able to do a good job and be happy in their new job. And some of the things that you are talking about, for example, is that we need to think much more about people's job design. And quite often, you know, people just get a job description, that's it. And it's quite often not really adapted, if you like, to what a person can really do to really match it with their skills, their social skills, their technical skills and everything else.

So talk us a little bit through…I think you called this job crafting. And that's a good way of actually getting individuals much closer to the core of their job and being able to perform very well in those jobs.
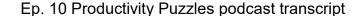
CC: Yeah. Job crafting, it's a new construct but it's not new. They've been doing this in Scandinavia and Holland for a long time. Job redesign…designing a job and letting the individual be a part of that design of a job so that individual can be more constructive and more effective and perform better. I think that's what we don't…

You know the real problem we have is we don't actually listen to a lot of employees when we're in a management role. We don't really engage them in the decision making that affects their job. If we did that more, I think we'd be much more effective. And we somehow…when you get into a manager role, somehow you think as a manager that you should be the person who tells them what your job's about and how you should do it, rather than actually engaging them in making decisions about how to do it.

If we had more of that, if we listened more to employees and found out what they felt and then developed them that way… Jobs develop and with new technology coming in and particularly with AI coming in… Artificial intelligence is going to change a lot of things and really we have to listen. Employee voice becomes extremely important now. We have to listen to them, we have to help them design the job they're doing and the job of the future. Because that job of the future is going to change monthly or over a period of months.

BvA: Yeah, so it sounds to me that we shouldn't think any more about, there is a job and we need a person who fits the job. We should think about in terms of there are tasks to be done and we have people who have certain competencies to do those tasks. And we have to optimally match those. So that means that sometimes people's roles are going to change and that you involve other people that start working in a team. This is a good

thing anyway, if they start doing that, right? So I think it's, kind of, that flexibility.

Now, this all sounds good but this is much about people who have a permanent job. And as we know we have a lot more people now who have temp jobs, we have gig workers and all those kinds of things. Isn't part of the problem that we're looking at, in terms of, sort of, this rising issue of presenteeism and other things that we've been talking about in this podcast, isn't it a result of the fact that people's association with the organisation isn't as strong as it used to be in the time when they had a permanent job?
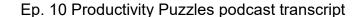
CC: No, it isn't as strong. And certainly if you take a look at the Z and the Millennial generations… And you know people call them snowflakes, right? And the reason they call them snowflakes… Industry calls them snowflakes. Senior people in the workplace say, I don't think I want to hire too many Millennials here, because, I mean, they just go from one employer to another employer.

When I talk to my students who've been at Manchester Business School, who come back to me, I say how are you, how are you doing in your job at X? They say X? I left X two years ago. This is a young Millennial speaking. I said well, why did you go? He said you know what, it's a terrible organisation to work for. And then when I start to dig deeper, they'll say things like, you know, my dad worked for an organisation he hated, to pay the mortgage. And he stayed with that organisation for years. His productivity probably dwindled year by year 'cause he wasn't motivated and everything else. I'm not going to do that.

And the next generation don't want that. They want to be engaged. By the way, they want to work hard. They are snowflakes in the sense of prepared to leave something they don't like.

And I remember the Chartered Management Institute, when it was called the British Institute of Management, 30 years ago, the average manager worked two jobs in a lifetime, for two different employers. That figure's probably a dozen now, right? They want to be engaged, they want a good quality of working life. And, by the way, you can retain them and get commitment from them in that. Can you get commitment in a gig, kind of, economy? Can you get people who have multiple jobs, what's called the empty raincoat, you know, tons of different kinds of jobs? I'm not sure it's going to go, necessarily, in that direction. They'll have several jobs.

But if you want to retain people you create the right kind of culture, you will retain them. But you have to listen to them and they have to be part of the crafting of the job and the organisation. If we can do that, I think we'll keep people – good people. But sometimes people do have to go

somewhere else. That's how they learn, by going elsewhere. There's nothing wrong with that. But if you want to retain them for a period of time and you've invested a lot of money in them… And these people are…you know, you lose them within two years, you've lost money and you've lost time.

BvA: Yeah. So we talk a lot about companies need health people to create more productivity. Are productive workers also more healthy workers?

CC: Well I think the more productive companies, by the way, create a culture in which people can be healthy. In other words, it gives them autonomy and control over their job, it provides them flexible working, manages them by recognition. I think you're right. What causes what? It's the chicken and egg again.
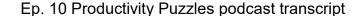
And I do think that it's the culture that you create in the organisation that makes it more productive, but it also makes people healthier if it's… You know? Although if you were to ask a number of, say, sociologists, they might say something like yeah but that's performance management; productivity means you're managing by command and control and performance management, this is what we'd expect… I don't see that's the case.

I think the productive company is one that creates a healthy culture for individuals that makes them feel valued and trusted. Those are two critical words. It gives them control. It gives them autonomy. It gives them the opportunities to influence decision making and they have a voice in where the organisation is going. The evidence seems pretty clear on that.

We need more studies on the link between health and productivity. We really do. Because, as you know, Bart, you know, the indicators, the metrics measure productivity, is not easy in many service-based economies. And, you know, it's okay if you want to look at call centres and you want to look at manufacturing but when you get into, you know, an insurance company… Well you could probably do it there. But I think we just need more of these studies to show the, kind of, link.

And also, what are the precursors and what are the outcomes? What is influencing what? But in a very healthy organisation… I would have thought a very productive organisation stimulates individuals who themselves then become healthier and more motivated, they affect productivity in a very positive way. And I've seen it. I've seen organisations that do that.

BvA: I'm really interested by this word culture. And this is going to be my last question. Because, you know, businesses will love this story. I think this is good and I think it's important that I talk about it. There's also a risk that

there's a bit of greenwashing going on, if we can use that term for the moment, right?

Because if I'm honest with you – and I'm sure that you have a lot of good examples here – but overall, the effort in companies to really deal with this topic… Let me give you an example. The effort for companies to deal with the over-65s for example, in the company. And we'll have more of them and we'll probably get more of them in companies as retirement ages get later and they get delayed. You know, I think most companies would still tell you that they'd rather see those people retire, one way or another, so that they can hire younger workers.
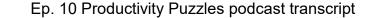
So, you know, the amount of effort that I really see happening for companies to engage older workers…and broadening this to the overall view of, you know, trying to get ill health people and integrate them in the organisation, the response might quite often be well okay, let's say that we're good, okay, and we have some scores and things like that. So we do some greenwashing that we're okay with this but in practice how much are we changing.

So the question that I am having to you is what is going to make the difference to drive this beyond a favourite HR topic towards a topic that can be discussed in the boardroom and isn't being seen by the other C-Suite members as a nuisance to talk about? So how does health and wellbeing become core of the business proposition that companies are working on, so that it becomes worth their time to discuss it in the boardroom?

CC: Well it's a very good question, Bart. And this is the question my National Forum for Health and Wellbeing have been working on for the last year and the last couple of months in particular. And what we are starting to think is we need a non-executive director on the board who is responsible and accountable for the health and wellbeing of employees. We need, on the annual reports of all organisations – both in the private and the public sector – indicators, metrics, on what you've done in the past on this.

This could be fairly objective measures, too, as well as subjective measures like employee satisfaction rates, sickness absence rates, particularly mental health sickness absence rates. There's a whole load of indicators we can have.

And we're now…we set a subgroup up in my National Forum for Health and Wellbeing – again, remember it's HR directors, chief medical officers – we're trying to put the metrics together and in the next month or two we will have these metrics. We think those metrics ought to be…many of these should be published in the annual report, not the sustainability report. Non-executive directors should hold the board accountable for

improving the metrics and not decreasing them. We saw it worked when we looked at gender pay gap. It is working for gender pay gap now. That was set by the board. There was somebody responsible on the board for that. I think we have to do the same with health and wellbeing.

And I think we'll see… I think in my view if we get that right, I think that will affect the productivity and the performance of the organisation. But we have to hold people accountable. It's no longer fuzzy stuff. We can't just do smoothies on a wellbeing day and sushi at your desk and mindfulness at lunch. This is not what wellbeing is about. It's about this being a strategic corporate issue and it has to be treated properly and it will, as research is beginning to show, deliver to the bottom line.

BvA: But it's about metrics and it's about accountability but it's also about culture. And, you know…

CC: It is.

BvA: …you need to be able to… The leadership, ultimately, has to lift this and walk the talk, if you like, and show that this is important.

CC: And we do, Bart, have organisations where the people at the top believe it. If you look at BP, they have a chief exec who believes in this stuff and has made a major impact on their organisation. We have Mace, the builder, who have done enormous things, where the chief executive and his team look at this on a regular basis as their senior leadership team meetings. These are the organisations who are treating this not as a good wellbeing day where we all have fun for a day and have massages at our desk. It's not about that. It is strategic, boards held accountable, people in HR – or whoever it is that's responsible – the director of health and wellbeing at work or the chief medical officer or whatever – is held accountable for it. And that's what we're seeing more of. Still too few but it will grow.

BvA: Well, Cary, I think we only scraped the surface of so much interesting stuff to talk about that's in your book and I would really recommend the audience… I hope you got a teaser here of taking a good read of this book. It's actually a great read as well, very well written. I'd like to thank you but also your co-author, Stephen Bevans, for putting this book together jointly and for making such an important contribution. Thank you for joining us.

CC: Thank you very much, Bart, it's been a pleasure.

BvA: Productivity Puzzles is now going for a break for a couple of weeks but we will be back soon, in the new year, with a new series. As mentioned, let us know any suggestions of topics or speakers; just get in touch with us

through our website, productivity.ac.uk. Meanwhile, take your time to listen to the episodes that you may have missed. And you can of course also sign up to the entire Productivity Puzzles series through your favourite platform, to make sure you don't also miss out on any future episodes. Or follow us on Twitter and LinkedIn.

Productivity Puzzles was brought to you by The Productivity Institute and sponsored by Capita. And this was me again, Bart van Ark, at The Productivity Institute. I wish you all a great holiday time. I always say goodbye by wishing you also stay productive. But this time take some good time off too. That's one important lesson from today's conversation. Thanks for listening.

[Music playing 0:50:09– 0:50:43].

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