This is the published version:


Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30014028

Reproduced with the kind permissions of the copyright owner.

Copyright : 2003, The Authors
WORKPLACE CHANGE & THE CARE OF THE SELF: HEALTH & WELLBEING AS A PROFESSIONAL DUTY OF CARE?

Abstract

Workplace stress associated with ongoing processes of organisational change is a major occupational and public health concern. It is also a costly economic issue – both public and private. In this paper we will use a framework that draws on Michel Foucault’s genealogies of the Self to suggest that stress management in some professional settings emerges as a form of ethical self problematisation.

That is, the management of stress by professionals - in a workplace environment increasingly characterised by the practices of risk management - emerges as a key element of the choices and responsibilities that frame what it means to be professional. To be (a) professional means to be a person capable of making choices and accepting responsibilities that are framed by a duty of care to manage one’s health and wellbeing to maximise organisational performance and effectiveness.

We will examine the ways in which transformations in the organisation and practice of teacher’s work have witnessed large numbers of teachers being seen, and seeing themselves, as stressed. These understandings of teacher stress have provoked a number of strategies designed to encourage individuals to take care of themselves – and to take care of themselves in ways that will make schools more effective.

We are concerned with understanding how it is that at this particular historical juncture the self can be so widely imagined in terms of stress. What processes make it possible at this moment to link the success or otherwise of a massive institutional process of state regulated schooling to the health and wellbeing of teachers and the management of this health and wellbeing by school managers? Beyond this example, what processes are at work that make it possible to imagine that it is a professional duty of care to manage ones’ life in such a way as to be both balanced and effective in contexts of uncertainty and risk?

Peter Kelly (PhD) (contact for correspondence)
Faculty of Business and Law
Deakin University (Geelong)
Australia
ph 61 3 5227 2526
fax 61 3 5227 2151
email pkelly@deakin.edu.au

Professor Derek Colquhoun PhD
Director of Research
Institute for Learning
University of Hull
Cottingham Road
Hull, UK HU6 7RX
Email: D.Colquhoun@hull.ac.uk
INTRODUCTION: ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE AND WORKPLACE STRESS

There is much contemporary policy, organisational and academic interest in the consequences for health and wellbeing of workplace and organisational restructuring. Discussions about ‘workplace stress’ often focus on the apparent inability of large numbers of professional workers to cope with the stresses associated with the transformation of workplaces and work practices during the past 30 years. These workplaces and practices have been transformed by a range of technologies; technologies in the sense of information, communication and production processes and practices which have transformed the nature of work in many organisations; and technologies in the sense of the range of management theories, practices, and techniques that attempt to regulate the nature of work in these settings.

In this presentation we will examine issues related to organisational change and workplace stress not as a psycho-biological concern, or a human resource management concern or an industrial relations concern. Rather, we intend to use a framework that draws on Foucault’s genealogies of the self to suggest that stress management in some professional settings emerges as a form of ethical self problematisation.

That is, the management of stress by professionals - in a workplace environment increasingly characterised by the practices of risk management - emerges as a key element of the choices and responsibilities that frame what it means to be professional. To be (a) professional means to be a person capable of making choices and accepting responsibilities that are framed by a duty of care to manage one’s health and wellbeing to maximise organisational performance and effectiveness.

To make these points more concrete we will examine the ways in which transformations in the organisation and practice of teacher’s work result in large numbers of teachers being stressed. These levels of teacher stress provoke a number of strategies designed to encourage individuals to take care of themselves – and to take care of themselves in ways that will make schools more effective.

ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE AND WORKPLACE STRESS

An introduction to some of the issues we intend to canvass here can be gained by looking at an Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU 2001) Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S) campaign that targets Workplace Stress. The campaign draws on a variety of Australian and overseas studies to highlight ‘the health, social and economic costs of the rising incidence…[of] stress at work, resulting from precarious employment, excessive workloads and unreasonable demands being placed on Australian employees in the 1990s…

The campaign argues that: ‘The more stressful the workplace, the greater the likelihood that employees will suffer from fatigue, anxiety, headaches, insomnia, dizziness, panic attacks, depression, cardiac disorders, backache and other muscular syndromes, with a resultant rise in workplace injuries and absences.’ (ACTU 2001)
The campaign goes on to cite from a number of studies, including a report from the American Institute of Stress suggesting that: ‘…between 75% to 90% of visits to doctors are related to stress, 60% to 80% of accidents on the job are related to stress, and 40% of staff turnover is due to stress at work…’ (ACTU 2001)

In addition the British Institute of Management (1996) reported "an estimated 270,000 people take time off work every day because of work-related stress. This represents a cumulative cost in terms of sick pay, lost production and NHS charges of seven billion pounds annually…” (ACTU 2001)

The ACTU campaign also refers to the issues of stress in the teaching profession, an example that we will use to introduce the specific concerns of this paper: ‘…A survey of stress in 2,500 teachers identified workload, restructuring and feelings of powerlessness and anxiety among the overarching issues…’

‘…Nearly two thirds of respondents reported implementing new curricula as stressful. Over half the teachers surveyed said that their lack of influence …[on] decisions regarding their work was a major cause of stress. Nearly one in five reported a medically diagnosed stress disorder…’

The campaign quotes one primary school teacher as saying: ‘Apart from teaching, we are also expected to be councillors [sic], carers, advisors to parents, writers of curriculum, reports, programmes- not to mention learning new skills in our "own" time- I don’t have any "own" time left- I also have a family who need the odd bit of time!” (primary school teacher)…” (ACTU 2001)

**Transformations in Teachers’ Work: Teacher Morale, Job Satisfaction and Other Problems for the Government of Schooling**

In many Anglo-European nations the ‘morale of the teaching profession’ has been an area of academic, policy and community concern for a number of decades (Evans 1997). Such concerns have focused on issues such as job satisfaction, occupational and organisational health, teacher morale, motivation and professional responsibility. Steve Dinham and Catherine Scott (1996), in a background briefing to a study of teacher 'satisfaction, motivation and health', argue that the last decades of the 20th century have been marked by major transformations in the nature of teachers work and the means by which teacher’s work is regulated.

Educational systems worldwide…have experienced considerable change over the last decade. Changes have affected teaching practice and curricula, greater involvement of stakeholders in education, and restructuring educational bureaucracies with greater emphases upon accountability, rationality and self-management. (p.v)

These processes have seen the relatively recent emergence of a concern for teacher’s health and wellbeing that is framed by the concept of stress – and the linking of this concern to the issue of promoting ‘effectiveness’ within schools. In this ‘effective schools’ discourse differences in student outcomes are argued to be ‘not simply due to the effects of schools receiving different types of students’. Rather, these differences
are ‘associated with differences in the way the schools’ are managed, and in the ‘quality of teaching and learning’ (Mortimore, 1996 p.4).

In the context of ongoing, often profound, change and transformation in organisational and workplace settings we can discern processes at work that require individuals, as professionals, to undertake particular problematisations of themselves – to think about and act on themselves in ways that will enable them and their organisations to be more effective. These processes exist in tension with a variety of risk management discourses that require managers of change to identify, manage and minimise a range of risks – including the risks associated with employee stress. In the spaces generated by these tensions there exist a range of possibilities for thinking, differently, about the nature of organisational change, and the impacts that these transformations may have on the health and well being of employees (Rose 1996).

ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE AND WORKPLACE STRESS

The problem of teacher stress has witnessed attempts to 'responsibilize' (Burchell 1996) a school's leadership team in ways that require them to manage teacher stress in order to deliver on the promise of effective schools. These attempts to deliver on the promise of effective schools are at the same time linked with attempts to manage the various ways of being an effective teacher by making teachers responsible for managing those things that cause them stress. In a policy context that devolves diverse responsibilities to self managing schools, the government of the stressed self emerges an ethical concern for teachers and those that manage them (Foucault 1985).

The Victorian Department Of Education (DOE) (1998) Action Plan for managing Staff Health and Wellbeing and Effective Schools is illustrative of certain tendencies to imagine stress management as a professional duty of care. The Action Plan is a departmental framework that offers school managers a means to structure a response to concerns about teacher health and well being – concerns that are explicitly linked to the responsibilities school managers and teachers have to deliver on the promise of promoting effective schools.

GOVERNING STRESSED TEACHERS: PRACTICES OF GOVERNMENT AND PRACTICES OF THE SELF


An analysis of what Dean (1995) calls the practices of governmental self-formation would focus attention on the ways in which educational managers, for instance, attempt to regulate the behaviours and dispositions, the attitudes and aptitudes of teachers so as to reduce stress and realise the promise of effective schools. A concern with practices of ethical self-formation suggests, on the other hand, a means for analysing the practices, techniques and rationalities by which teachers come to know themselves as being professional, and the means by which teachers are encouraged to know, examine and act on themselves in relation to their ability to be effective teachers in order for their schools to be more effective.

Making Sense of: Health Illness and Disease,
St Hilda’s College Oxford 14-17 July 2003
We will now sketch the outline of an analysis that draws on this framework by looking briefly at the DOE’s *Action Plan* for managing *Staff Health and Wellbeing and Effective Schools*

What do such governmental-ethical practices seek to govern? What is the range of personal capacities, attitudes, desires, hopes, ambitions, behaviours and dispositions that are imagined as being of consequence in the management of the stressed self? In the *Action Plan* the leadership team of a school is encouraged to think about developing in teachers a capacity to balance competing claims, pressures and responsibilities in different spheres of activity – schools, homes and relationships (DOE 1998, p.14). Teachers also need to be encouraged to develop a ‘sense of fun, adventure and appropriate risk taking’, together with a capacity to access and act upon the ‘wealth of health promotion’ resources that are ‘valuable’ in ‘planning a physical and mental health promotion program with staff’ (DOE 1998, p.14). Here capacities for self reflection and choice should have as their focus the development of a sense of being responsible for individual, and institutional health and wellbeing so that schools can be more effective.

What is the governing work that promises to manage the forms of selfhood that constitute the stressed teacher? What techniques, activities, checklists, attendance requirements, management practices are mobilised in various sites and relationships to regulate the behaviours and dispositions of stressed teachers in order to deliver effective schools? The *Action Plan* identifies and provides school managers with a ‘step by step process’ for developing staff health and wellbeing (DOE 1998, p.3). This plan outlines, in a series of progressions, ‘nine key categories’ for ‘building effective schools’ (p.4). These 9 categories are grouped in a ‘preferred order’ of 7 areas – Policy (leadership), Professional Health, Organisational Health, Personnel Operations, Physical Environment, Social and Recreational Health (incorporating personal wellbeing and physical health) – that require attention in order to ‘achieve satisfied and effective staff which in turn should lead to greater school effectiveness overall’ (p.4). In each of these areas issues and problems and management rationalities are identified – for example Quality Systems Models for promoting systems effectiveness in Personnel Operations (p.10). Progression through this series of areas identified as producing health and wellbeing in teachers is regulated and monitored by the successful completion of checklists. These checklists require school managers to respond to questions such as: ‘Has the core professional role of teaching been fully explored with staff and an agreed school position been determined?’; ‘Do you have a process for monitoring important systems and improving breakdowns and bottlenecks?’; ‘Have you undertaken a functional audit of facilities and equipment usage?’; ‘Do staff have a time out or rest area free of interruptions?’; ‘Does the school encourage a healthy balance between home and work activities?’ ‘Have you used the School Organisational Climate Survey to determine whether there is an issue with how staff interact professionally?’ (DOE 1998, pp 8-14).

Who are the governing subjects? Here we can name the stressed teacher as a being recognised as having certain emotional, physical and psychic capacities and needs. The nature of these capacities and needs are problematised in order to incite a form of teacher selfhood that is actively responsible for managing individual health and wellbeing so that schools can be more effective.
The program is informed by a rationality that suggests that; ‘The school can contribute to the personal health of staff by fostering a positive work atmosphere which encompasses a healthy balance between work and home activities’. The program acknowledges the limits of the school’s ‘responsibility for individual physical and emotional health’ – the choice of ‘lifestyle and recreational pursuits are the responsibility of individuals’. But a ‘supportive culture can assist staff making lifestyle decisions’ (DOE, 1998, p.14). Indeed, within this program school managers have new forms of responsibility to ensure that a ‘supportive culture’ is developed and that staff participate in activities that will enable them to develop the capacity to manage the stresses of teaching.

Here the ideas that ‘people are not pentiums’, and that ‘managers need to accommodate their changing physical and emotional needs’ (DOE 1998, p.2), are indicative of particular, historically contingent ‘horizons of identity’ (Dean 1995). These versions of what it is to be human are suggestive of ways that school managers and teachers should see themselves and their responsibilities to themselves and others in the project of delivering effective schools.

What is the telos of these governmental-ethical practices? What forms of existence do they seek to engender in relation to the multiplicity of ways of being a teacher, when only certain modes of being promise to provoke forms of ethical self problematisation with regard to the goal of effective schools? Important here are processes that seek to identify teachers as ‘professionals’ with the capacity to recognise their ‘role at work and how this fits with the goals of the school’ – goals which include the capacity to identify ‘the relationship between professional growth, job enrichment and morale’ (DOE 1998, p.7). Being a professional, in this sense, requires that certain practices of ethical self-problematisation are mobilised so that school managers and teachers can recognise the stressed self as placing at-risk the promise of effective schools.

**STRESS MANAGEMENT AS ETHICAL SELF-PROBLEMATISATION: SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS**

It can be argued that the governmental-ethical practices mobilised in these attempts to govern the stressed teacher place a profound burden of responsibility on school managers and teachers for delivering on the promise that a massive institutionalised schooling system can be made more effective. The DOE (Victoria) Action Plan seeks to make these reflections on personal and professional capacities to cope an ethical responsibility of professionals who are committed to delivering more effective schools.

In many organisational settings similar rationalities encourage interested stakeholders to imagine employees as being stressed, and as being responsible for managing that stress. We are encouraged to think and act on ourselves as individuals who are stressed. At the intersection of therapeutic and management discourses there is an encouragement to positively act on ourselves in order to be more effective, to seek a balance between the various demands of work, of home and of relationships.

As Foucault (2000) argues a history of the care of the self would be a history of subjectivity, but a history that did not take as its objects ‘the divisions between the
mad and the nonmad, the sick and the nonsick, delinquents and nondelinquents’. Nor would such a history be concerned, principally, with the ‘constitution of fields of scientific objectivity giving a place to the living, speaking, labouring subject’. Rather it would be concerned with the ‘putting in place, and the transformations in our culture, of “relations with oneself”, with their technical armature and their knowledge effects’ (p.88). Within this sort of analytical project the question of governmentality would become one in which the central concern would be; ‘the government of the self by oneself in its articulation with relations with others (such as one finds in pedagogy, behavior counselling, spiritual direction, the prescription for models of living and so on)” (p.88).

In this sense, a history of the present ways in which we imagine the problems of organisational change and workplace health and wellbeing might continue to focus on the ways in which a professional identity is profoundly marked by a capacity to maintain balance in the midst of change, uncertainty and risk. And continue to problematise the forms of responsibility that emerge as a consequence of requiring those who wish to be positively identified as professional to do this sort of work on themselves.

References
Australian Council of Trades Unions (ACTU) (2001) National Stress @ Work Campaign, Release Date: 13/06/2001