

S-face

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How Can We Work Healthily and Proactively?

Akihito Shimazu

Health
Promotion
Human
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HaPiness



VOL.

030 /100

2019.Oct ISSUE

Japanese Color: TEAL GREEN-iro

Work Engagement to Bridge Between Occupational Health and Management

Work engagement happens when you have pride in and enthusiasm for your work, and are energized and invigorated by it. This mindset, which was defined by Dr. Schaufeli, Professor for Utrecht University, is the antipode of burnout. Studies so far have shown that workers with a high level of work engagement have lower depression and anxiety, are generally in good health and more positive towards personal development, and demonstrate creativity in their work. Measures to support health in the workplace have traditionally focused on preventing mental and physical illness, with a tendency to emphasize the disadvantages of being in poor health. A more effective way of getting managers to recognize the importance of supporting the health of workers is to convey the advantages of being healthy. I started wondering if there was a key word that would resonate with management, and express how a company can benefit from having employees that are both physically and mentally healthy. It was when I was doing research abroad in the Netherlands that I came across the concept of work engagement. Work engagement links an occupational health perspective of a worker's health with the viewpoints of administration and organisational management. It is also being used as a selection criterion of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) Health & Productivity Stock Selection Program, and as an accreditation criterion of the METI Certified Health & Productivity Management Outstanding Organizations Recognition Program.

Does a Worker's Mental Health Affect Their Family's Health?

Research in recent years has shown the health of a worker is influenced not only by his or her on-job experiences, but also by off-job experiences in their family life and community. Moreover, how a person achieves a work-life balance may also impact their family member's health (crossover effect). I have been conducting a series of TWIN Study research projects to investigate this relationship; I started TWIN Study I in 2008, and I am now working on TWIN Study III.

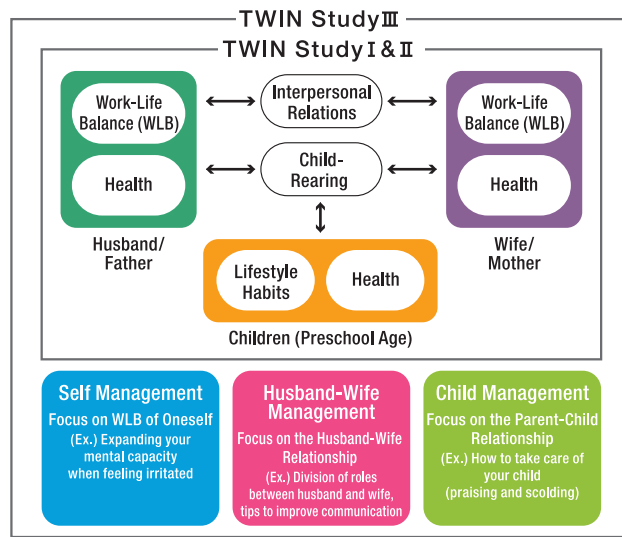
This study is distinctive for its focus on dual-earner couples with pre-school child(ren). First, I looked at the husband-wife interaction in Study I, and from 2010 in Study II I extended my focus to include the child-parent interaction as well as the husband-wife interaction. My research so far has revealed various crossover effects. For example, there is a positive correlation between workaholic father with workings excessively and compulsively and his child's obesity. A reason for this is thought to be the fewer opportunities children have get some exercise by playing with their father, who is always working. Additionally, the findings indicated that in households where the father still has a lot of work to do but also has some discretion as to how and when he does it, the likelihood of having a second child increases up to 9-fold compared to households where the father has little work to do and little say in the method and timing of its completion.

In TWIN Study III, I'm conducting intervention studies using the support program I have created based on the research and results in Study I and II. This program is being conducted in 7 districts nationwide, on dual earner couples with pre-school child(ren). I have been examining the effectiveness of the program with a randomized-controlled trial, in which the participants are randomly allocated into 2 groups (i.e., intervention group and control group) and the indices measured at the around the start and end of the program are compared between the 2 groups.

Revealing the Relationship Between Work, Family and Leisure, and Aiming for the "Three HP" of Working People

Japan is facing a declining labour force, which is being fuelled by a progressively aging society with a falling birth rate. This has led to the realisation of a need for more diversity in how people work, and better quality in the work they do. An essential element of boosting productivity is looking at how to make people work more independently, and with a greater sense of purpose. Professor Akihito Shimazu is revealing the relationship between the health, life, and job performance of workers based on the key word of work engagement, which consists of vigour, dedication, and absorption. Using a multitude of tools developed from his study results, His aim is to enable each person to work healthily and proactively using the 3 HP (Health Promotion, Human Performance, Happiness) approach.

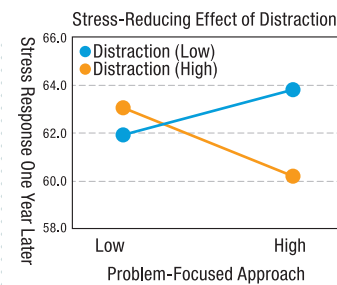
TWIN Study



In TWIN Study III, He is developing a health support program focused on the work-life balance of dual-earner couples with pre-school child(ren). The program combines the 3 areas of self-management, husband-wife management, and parent-child management, and a randomized controlled trial is conducted to evaluate its effectiveness. The research findings are expected to not only advance health support measures on an academic level, but also facilitate the development of practical measures for maintaining their health.



Progressive Research on How We Take a Rest/Break



Source: Shimazu, A., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2007). Does distraction facilitate problem-focused coping with job stress? A one-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 30, 423-434.

Research on stress-reducing effects based on how we take a rest and break from work has expanded from taking an extended vacation to the ways we spend our micro-break time, such as how we unwind after a day's work and what we do during our lunch break. Approaches to cope with stress include directly addressing a problem (problem-focused approach), and doing something to relax and shift your mood to make you feel calmer and better (emotion-focused approach). Looking at the stress-reducing effect of using a combination of these 2 approaches, it is clear that people with the lowest stress levels proactively try to solve their problems while also making an active effort to relax and feel calmer.

A Multifaceted-Approach to Mental Health



He is passionate about taking a multifaceted approach to mental health. "The height of the meeting desk in my research lab can be freely adjusted, so I can also hold a meeting while standing. The expectation is that working in a standing position will raise the level of work engagement more than just sitting the whole time. Standing also makes it easier for the meeting participants to make eye contact, which can facilitate better communication. So far, I've mainly researched the soft aspects of how we work, but going forward I'd like to look at the hard elements as well, including the workplace itself."

Need for New Approaches to How We Detach from Work and Take a Break

Workplaces and work styles are fundamental elements to consider workers' health and their work engagement; but the way we take a rest and break from work is equally important. At the core of how we spend our leisure time is the way we mentally and psychologically detach from our work; basically, it's a question of "Just how much can we forget about work for while?" In fact, there is an interesting connection between psychological detachment from work, mental health, and work engagement. "I completely forget about work on the weekends, and immerse myself in leisure activities so much that when I get back to work on Monday, it's difficult to get back into 'work mode'." Does that sound familiar? Although the more we forget about work the better it is for our mental health, we now know that forgetting about work too much can actually lower our level of work engagement. Nowadays, some companies are introducing a system called as *workation* (work+vacation). This system can prevent work engagement from falling by enabling employees to work occasionally even while they are on vacation. Drawing a line between being on (at work) and off (on leisure/day off) differs for each person. There are some people who feel stressed even if the slightest bit of work encroaches on their time off, and there are others who feel better if they at least check their work inbox to stay on top of things. So going forward, we will most likely also need to consider effective ways for taking a break from work that takes into account these individual differences.



Profile Akihito Shimazu

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Please visit S-face website for details!

There are more articles and video of Akihito Shimazu.

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