Introduction

The psychological influence that employment can produce upon work performance and safety, and employee health and relationships was increasingly acknowledged throughout the twentieth century. Industrial and organizational psychology began in earnest investigating the work hours and work organization among factory workers, incorporating ability and personality tests into the selection process for military personnel, and treating the ‘shell-shocked’ survivors of the World Wars. The period of approximately 1920 to 1950 was marked by the creation of various kinds of Psychology Boards (for example, Defence and Public Service) and Applied Psychology Units established within some universities in Europe and the US. Thus formal recognition was finally applied to the profession of Organizational Psychologist. Since this period of course, the field has further diversified to include ‘hard’ industrial topics such as ergonomics, job analysis and recruitment testing, as well as the ‘softer’ organizational topics such as occupational stress, job control and work–family balance.

Most recently the sub-discipline of occupational health psychology has emerged within the organizational psychology domain, and the interest in this field has generated dedicated journals, academic texts and university courses. The growth of interest in occupational health psychology has occurred in response to employment changes within the last few decades. Thus Western countries have experienced a substantial shift of employment from manufacturing industries to service and knowledge industries, labour markets have changed to include more female and educated workers, while work design has incorporated technology allowing work to be conducted not only in the workplace, but also at home and whilst travelling. The traditional constraints of employment within the early twentieth century have therefore largely disappeared.

In a response to these changes, this book discusses eleven topics pertinent to contemporary workers and to occupational health psychology researchers in particular. Some of these topics such as organizational coaching and work addiction are relatively new additions to this field, while other topics such as occupational stress and job satisfaction have a longer research history. All eleven topics, however, form the core of occupational health psychology and each is expected to be of interest for
researchers throughout the coming years. The book begins by reviewing the impact of work on employees’ psychological and physical health. Chapter 1 defines psychological well-being and discusses its common antecedents such as biological predispositions, gender, marriage, personality characteristics, employment and finances. The consequences of well-being are also reviewed, such as job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviours, absenteeism and turnover. Chapter 2 discusses how work influences the physical health of employees, with a specific focus on the influence of psychosocial work characteristics such as job demands, job control and working hours. The negative health and behavioural outcomes caused by employment such as cardiovascular disease, reproductive health, obesity, suicide, alcohol and drug use are also discussed.

In Chapter 3 we focus on job satisfaction, one of the common criterion variables within organizational psychology research. The recent developments in job satisfaction research are reviewed, including its measurement and theoretical basis, and its relationship with job performance, absenteeism and turnover. Common individual antecedents of job satisfaction such as gender and personality characteristics are also discussed. Chapter 4 reviews two psychosocial work characteristics in detail: job support and job control, and assesses the impact each has on the development and maintenance of psychological well-being. The chapter discusses both the direct relationships and the moderating influence of these constructs in their respective relationships with well-being. Chapter 5 describes recent advances in occupational stress, coping and psychological burnout research. The chapter specifically reviews the Job Demands–Resources model, proactive coping strategies that can be adopted to manage occupational stress and the measurement of burnout. The chapter also discusses the effectiveness of stress management interventions and identifies the common problems associated with these programmes. Chapter 6 reviews the growing research literature on work–family balance. The chapter discusses the definition of work–family balance, reviews its common causes and consequences, and assesses the influence of organizational policies such as parental leave, supervisor support and flexible working arrangements.

Chapter 7 examines work addiction (also referred to as workaholism) research, which is a relatively new field of enquiry. The chapter describes the different types of workaholics and explores the impact of organizational and national culture as antecedents of work addiction. The chapter discusses the consequences of working long hours in relation to individual outcomes (such as personal relationships) and organizational outcomes (such as job performance). Chapter 8 reviews research on workplace violence and aggression, which is another area of increasing interest for
organizational researchers. The chapter explores the theoretical models which underpin this research, and identifies how employment changes, such as the growth of the service industries, are associated with increasing incidents of workplace violence and aggression. The chapter also discusses the common forms of workplace aggression such as harassment, as well as newly identified aggressive behaviours such as upwards bullying. The chapter also assesses common organizational policies employed to manage workplace violence and aggression.

The final three chapters focus on the advances in three relatively new fields of research. Chapter 9 reviews the impact of new technology on the health and well-being of workers, specifically focusing on information and communications technology such as electronic mail and the Internet. The chapter discusses the adverse outcomes associated with these technologies such as technostress, technological anxiety and frustration, and the impact of these outcomes on individual perceptions of control and mastery. Chapter 10 explores the new field of executive coaching, and describes the coaching process. The chapter also reviews both the antecedents and consequences of coaching and explains how coaching research methods could be improved to further advance this field of enquiry. Finally Chapter 11 provides a review of the current organizational fitness and counselling research. The chapter defines what is meant by a psychologically healthy workplace and describes the work characteristics which create an unhealthy workplace, including high job demands, excessive workloads, and a lack of work support. The chapter also reviews the methods by which workplace health can be improved including the issues of employee growth, development and involvement. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the common organizational fitness programmes including employee assistance programmes, exercise programmes, and anti-bullying programmes.

The book therefore provides reviews of the principal theories and considerations in each of these eleven contemporary topics and serves as a reference source to the current issues concerning organizational researchers. This book celebrates the emergence of occupational health psychology as a research field and we anticipate that the topics described within these chapters will increase in relevance for both workers and researchers over the coming years.