



Honors Research Assistant Program

Title: Promoting Worker Well-being Through the use of Intervention Techniques such as Respite Activities and Mindfulness Training (with Professors Glomb, Duffy, Bono)

Description of the Research: This study examines the growing public health concern of worker stress and well-being, and strategies for reducing the extent to which work stressors negatively affect employee physical (e.g., elevated heart rate, headaches) and psychological (e.g., depression, anxiety) health. Existing research documents the negative effects of work stressors on employee health and wellbeing (e.g., Schnall & Landsbergis, 1994). However less is known about how individuals can reduce stress and promote well-being and flourishing at work. To date, intervention research in occupational health tends to focus on changing the work environment to eliminate stressors (such as reducing noise levels) or helping employees cope with feelings of stress. It is only recently that researchers have examined the role of respite activities in recovery from work stressors (e.g., Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005; Trougakos et al., 2006). In the psychological literature, there are several lines of research suggesting that simple interventions, such as expressive writing (Pennebaker, 1997), gratitude writings, etc. can have powerful health effects, reducing stress and illness, and increasing wellbeing. In other literatures, mindfulness training has been promoted as a way to improve health and cognitive functioning. These interventions have also caught the attention of organizations and the media (see “Soothing Software,” The Economist series Intelligent Life, 2006), but rigorous research linking such interventions to employee health in work settings is lacking. We have completed research in which we examine the link between specific stressful work events (conflict, deadline pressure, negative feedback) and cardiovascular arousal (heart rate and blood pressure) and whether a short reflective writing task (i.e., write about three good things that happened at work) can reduce the extent to which negative work events spill over to influence employee health and wellbeing in the evening. We are interested in continuing this line of research by investigating alternative interventions such as positive refocusing, mindfulness, meditation, gratitude writings, etc. can also reduce the spillover of work stressors into one’s life.

Responsibilities of the Student: The primary responsibilities will involve a literature search and article summary. This literature search is likely to be multi-disciplinary—spanning business, psychology, medical, occupational health, and other literatures.

The student will provide updates on his or her progress (approximately bi-weekly) to discuss the ongoing search and fine tune the literature search.

Approximate Number of Hours/Schedule:

10-15 hours/week; Hours flexible

Honors Research Assistant Program, Fall 2009

Qualifications:

Interest and enthusiasm for the topic

Exceptional writing/summarization skills

Organizational Skills

Background in organizational sciences, psychological sciences, or as a research assistant a plus