

THE EFFECT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY ON WORK REDESIGN: QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL FINDINGS

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Psychological flexibility, or *flexibility*, refers to a willingness to experience any unwanted thoughts and feelings (e.g., fear) that arise, when trying to work towards one's goals and values. Previous research has demonstrated that flexibility enhances the longitudinal benefits that job control has on job performance, ability to learn a new software programme, and mental health. In addition, findings from randomised controlled trials have shown that worksite training programmes can increase this characteristic and, thereby, improve mental health and innovation efforts.

The present study was a quasi-experiment that tested the extent to which psychological flexibility increased the mental health and productivity benefits of a participative action research (PAR) intervention. The participants were call centre employees who sold mortgages, personal loans, credit cards, and insurance products for a United Kingdom financial services organisation. A total of 371 of these call centre workers completed pre- (Time 1), mid- (Time 2) and post- (Time 3) intervention measures, over 15 months. Participants were in one of two call centres, both of which sold the same financial products, just noted. These two centres were randomly allocated either to the PAR or control group. Specific initiatives implemented only in the PAR group included: reducing the number of scripts that employees had to use when speaking with customers; providing employees with greater control over how they scheduled their work, which, in turn, gave supervisors more time to assist team members; introducing semi-structured team 'huddle's; and, regular 1-to-1 meetings between supervisors and teams members.

Results showed that the PAR intervention significantly improved employee mental health, turnover, and sales figures, in comparison to the control group. These improvements in the PAR group were even greater for those who were higher in psychological flexibility. Furthermore, these moderated intervention effects (at Time 3) were mediated, to varying degrees, by increases (seen at Time 2) in job control and/or supervisor support. (The Time 2 observation point occurred six months after Time 1.)

This appears to be the first study, using a quasi-experimental design, to show that both job control and supervisor support can serve as a mediator by which a work reorganisation intervention improves mental health and two productivity outcomes. This study also demonstrates that an individual characteristic can moderate the degree to which redesigning work will actually benefit people, in terms of their mental health and productivity. This latter finding suggests an advantage of implementing a training programme that improves psychological flexibility, before implementing a work reorganisation programme.