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Making a healthy change: a historical analysis of workplace wellbeing

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the precedents of current wellbeing programs, examining three historical modes of workplace wellbeing in order to analyze the way in which employees have become subjects of wellbeing discourse. In doing so, this paper seeks to illustrate the historical trajectory of the management of employee health, exploring both its disjunctures and continuities. It is argued that workplace wellbeing can be characterized in two ways. First, as an intervention into the lives of employees, becoming a means of producing 'fit for work' subjects. Second, in terms of the legitimization of this intervention through its discursive positioning as a response to prevalent social concerns. It is noted that, while wellbeing has evolved over time in terms of its rationale and its practices, it has continued to be characterized by these two features.

KEYWORDS

wellbeing; wellness;
subjectivity; Foucault;
genealogy; paternalism;
human relations

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen the issue of wellbeing in the workplace become more urgent than ever, with evidence showing that the crisis has had a detrimental impact on both the mental and physical wellbeing of employees (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2020). However, while workplace wellbeing is currently receiving much global attention, initiatives intended to manage the wellbeing of employees have a substantial, although largely unexplored, historical precedent. This paper presents an analysis of historical wellbeing discourse, which highlights a trajectory of workplace wellbeing, leading us to our present moment. In doing so, a new conceptualization of workplace wellbeing is advanced; one which seeks to look beneath particular historical manifestations of wellbeing in order to uncover how wellbeing has shaped and molded employee subjectivity.

Within contemporary management literature, workplace wellbeing is defined a 'bio-psycho-social construct that includes physical, mental and social health' (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2007, 4). The term is used to refer to a broad range of issues relating to the health of employees, but which are not considered to impinge directly upon the performance of work tasks (these more direct matters falling under the remit of occupational health and safety). Within the past two decades

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workplace wellbeing has garnered increasing concern and attention within society, and a wellbeing agenda has been advanced by governments (Black 2008; Mbanefo-Obi 2018) and championed by professional management associations (Businesses in the Community 2017; Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2016, 2021a). This has culminated in workplace wellbeing programs – concerted efforts by employers to integrate considerations of employee wellbeing into human resource management practice, combined with packages of resources intended to facilitate employees' self-management of wellbeing. While the features of workplace wellbeing programs are highly variable, a recent survey found that 40% of UK employers offered employees access to either an in-house gym or subsidized gym membership, 70% offered employees access to counseling, and 40% of organizations had a standalone wellbeing strategy (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2019). The prevalence of these features serves to demonstrate the extent to which workplace wellbeing has become a major feature of modern working life.

Understood from a managerial perspective, current focus on workplace wellbeing programs represents the latest iteration of attempts to uncover the 'holy grail' of people management (Peccei 2004; Wright and Cropanzano 2007), the so-called 'happy-productive worker hypothesis' (Peccei 2004; Peccei, Van De Voorde, and Van Veldhoven 2013; Wright and Cropanzano 2007; Zelenski, Murphy, and Jenkins 2008). Grounded in theories of social exchange, this hypothesis posits that, following the adoption of progressive HR policies, which seek to enhance employees' experience of work, 'employees can be expected to repay the organisation by working harder [and] putting in extra effort' (Peccei, Van De Voorde, and Van Veldhoven 2013, 20). In short, the managerial perspective holds that workplace wellbeing programs represent an opportunity for mutual gains for both employer and employee (Van De Voorde, Paauwe, and Van Veldhoven 2012) and that the experience of work will contribute to employees' healthy, balanced lifestyles. In contrast to this, the critical management studies (CMS) perspective has for a long time regarded the contention that work is good for the health of the employee with some suspicion. In this vein workplace wellbeing programs have been understood in terms of the production of 'fit' employees (Cederström and Spicer 2015; Costas, Blagoy, and Kärreman 2016; Johansson, Tienari, and Valtonen 2017), where fitness is understood in the circumscribed terms of being 'fit for work'. As such, workplace wellbeing programs have been analyzed in terms of the specific ways in which they incite employees to undertake self-work on the body and mind so as to attain proscribed ideals of fitness (Costas, Blagoy, and Kärreman 2016; Kelly, Allender, and Colquhoun 2007; Maravelias 2016; Zoller 2003). Adding to this, as noted by Holmqvist (2009), workplace wellbeing programs allow organizations to intervene into employees' health in order to secure a productive workforce while appearing to be acting in a socially responsible manner. As such, deployed under the banner of corporate social responsibility, workplace wellbeing programs serve as a means to pursue organizational ends. In sum, from a CMS perspective, far from holding out the prospect of mutual gains, the current fad for workplace wellbeing programs primarily serves the interest of employers by offering a socially sanctioned mechanism for securing productive employees.

The present paper contributes to critical scholarship on workplace wellbeing through examining the antecedents of current wellbeing initiatives, presenting a historical analysis of how wellbeing discourse has shaped employee subjectivity. The paper makes contributions in three areas. First, the paper advances a conception of workplace wellbeing which moves beyond the particular forms of activity usually understood to constitute wellbeing practice. The paper draws upon the later work of Foucault to assert that we need to understand workplace wellbeing in terms of employees' incitement to engage in forms of ethical self-work, rather than in terms of any particular (and historically situated) form of healthy activity. Second, the paper contributes to literature on workplace wellbeing by addressing a current lack of historical research on this topic. While workplace wellbeing has occasionally been located within specific historical contexts (see McGillivray 2005; Weiss 2005), the topic remains largely unexplored, with no little attention given to how this context has shifted historically, or to consider what these shifts could mean about wellbeing itself. Within the paper, this historical perspective is realized through engaging in a Foucauldian genealogy of workplace wellbeing, tracing the trajectory of wellbeing across a broad historical period. It is asserted that, while specific practices of wellbeing across different periods are marked by disruption and discontinuity, we can nevertheless identify within wellbeing discourse a persistent and recurring imperative for employees to manage themselves in order to ensure that they are fit for work. The genealogical method is fundamental in this regard because the identification of the disjuncture and continuity of wellbeing only becomes possible through undertaking a historical analysis of wellbeing discourse. Finally, in keeping with Foucault's conception of genealogy as a 'history of the present' (Foucault 2010a, 31), the paper contributes to our understanding of the current practice of workplace wellbeing. In situating present efforts surrounding wellbeing within their historical context, the paper contributes to the CMS perspective on workplace wellbeing, arguing that we have reason to be suspicious of the promises of improvement and empowerment proffered by the current wellbeing agenda.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In the next section, attention is given to workplace wellbeing as an object of historical study. Here the theoretical and methodological underpinning of the paper is detailed and the specific understanding of workplace wellbeing used within the paper is elaborated. In the three subsequent sections, a detailed account is developed of three historical wellbeing discourses. For each of these discourses, attention is given to the historical context in which it arose, the way in which each produced certain techniques of employee management, and, finally, the fit for work employee subjectivity produced. Following this, in the penultimate section, these three discourses are analyzed using the framework of 'relationship to the self' (Foucault 1990, 2000) in order to explore the historical trajectory of workplace wellbeing. The final section offers a conclusion to the paper, drawing together the contributions that are made.

Workplace wellbeing as an object of historical study

This section of the paper will provide an overview of the methodological and theoretical underpinning of the historical analysis, which forms the main body of this study. Within the paper, a genealogical approach (Foucault 2000, 2010b, 2010c) is adopted in order to

conduct a ‘historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognise ourselves . . . as subjects’ (Foucault 2010c, 46). This definition of genealogy draws our attention to its two key dimensions: the historical and the subjective. Within this section these dimensions will be addressed in turn.

History

In an essay written at the time when he was moving away from the archeological method and toward the use of genealogy, Foucault (2010b) states that genealogy is fundamentally concerned with history, understood as a study of the ‘emergence’ of the present and ‘descent’ from the past. The intent of the genealogical project is to

identify the accidents . . . that gave birth to those things which continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents. (Foucault 2010b, 81)

Thus, while the genealogical method is avowedly anti-teleological – rejecting notions of progress and ascent – it is fundamentally an attempt to uncover how we arrived at our current condition; it is, therefore, a ‘history of the present’ (Foucault 2010a, 31).

Framed in terms of the current paper, the genealogical method is used to explore workplace wellbeing as it has been practiced in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In doing so, the paper identifies three ‘periods’ of wellbeing; two of these periods are linked to preexisting and well-known managerial theories – paternalism and human relations theory, while the third has been identified using the term ‘managed autonomy’. These periods have been arrived at as a result of identifying instances where significant efforts have been made to proscribe to employees forms of self-conduct designed to ensure a healthy – and therefore productive – workforce. In the case of each of the periods, it is argued that they are marked by a specificity and internal consistency, while also being distinguished from each other by discontinuity and a shifting focus. It is not claimed that the periods identified within the paper represent the only attempts to proscribe the conduct of healthy employees during the period of study, rather that they are deemed to be among the most notable ones.

Given the necessary constraints of the journal article format and the scope of argument advanced in this paper, the presentation of the periods identified in the paper is necessarily partial. In order to represent them, the ideas and programs of key figures understood to be emblematic of these periods have been identified and subjected to scrutiny. In the case of paternalism, these figures are mostly prominent industrialists whose actions generated attention during their lifetime and subsequently captured the interest of historians of business and management. In the case of human relations and managed autonomy, the figures discussed are mainly researchers and theoreticians who are renowned for ideas, which contributed significantly to changes in management practice. In presenting these ideas, the paper has referred to original sources, as well as a variety of monographs and articles based within the traditions of business and organizational history, as well as industrial and employment relations. These sources were identified through keyword searches within key journals, as well as the library databases of the institution where the author is based.

The paper proceeds through the analysis of discourses associated with each of the historical periods identified, as such it is important to note the ontological status of these discourses. As pointed out by McKinlay et al., Foucault's analysis consisted of tracing the 'history of a way of thinking ... not a social history' (McKinlay, Carter, and Pezet 2012, 5). This history is captured through examining the architects of these modes of thought – most famously Bentham – and their intellectual projects. Nevertheless, it is imperative to keep in mind that these figures are significant precisely because their ideas shaped social institutions; in other words:

the fact that ... real life isn't the same thing as the theoreticians' schemas doesn't entail that these schemas are therefore utopian, imaginary ... this type of programming didn't just remain a utopia in heads of a few projectors ... They are fragments of reality which induce ... particular effects in the real. (Foucault 1991, 81-82)

Thus, it is not claimed that the ideas espoused by the historical figures presented here are directly representative of the day-to-day reality of the working age populations during the periods described. Rather, these ideas and theories represent a way of thinking about wellbeing, which have influenced its practice within society and shaped the subjectivity of employees.

Subjectivity

As noted above, within the present paper, the genealogical method is utilized in order to trace the trajectory of workplace wellbeing across different historical periods. However, it is important to recognize that 'workplace wellbeing' is a term of relatively recent invention and one that would not have been recognized during the periods addressed here. In making use of this term, the intention is not to anachronistically project current normative understandings back into the past, but rather to explore the management of employee health over the course of different historical periods. In order to do so, the paper advances a conceptualization of wellbeing which is detached from historically contingent and socially situated manifestations of wellbeing, which narrowly confine its meaning. Thus, as it is used within the paper, the term workplace wellbeing does not refer to specific practices relating to employee health; rather it refers, more broadly, to the process whereby the management of employee health induces practices of self-conduct, linked to particular forms of ethical subjectivity. In order to substantiate this use of the term, it is necessary to locate the place of subjectivity within the genealogical method.

In the course of his later writings, Foucault retrospectively defined his work as fundamentally being concerned with identifying the manner in which individuals turn themselves into subjects (2000). Within this project, there were three possible axes of the genealogy of the subject: the subject of knowledge, the subject of power and the subject of ethics; these axes roughly trace the trajectory of Foucault's writings. Of these, ethics is concerned with 'the manner in which one ought to "conduct oneself" – that is the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject' (Foucault 1990, 26), it is 'the kind of relationship you ought to have to yourself' (2000, 352). The ethical subject is concerned with a kind of self-relationship and is thus clearly differentiated from the subject of power, understood as the means by which 'we constitute ourselves as subjects acting *on others*' (Foucault 2000, 262, emphasis added). The formation of the ethical subject takes place in

relation to morality, that is the ‘set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies’ (Foucault 1990, 25), as such, the relationship between the ethical and the moral is fundamental for understanding Foucault’s conception of ethical subjectivity. In developing his ethical genealogy, Foucault posited a framework that identified constituent elements of the ethical subject (1990, 2000), he referred to these four elements as the relationship to the self, or ‘*rapport à soi*’ (2000).

The first of these aspects regards the *mode of subjection*. This pertains to ‘the way in which the individual establishes his [sic] relation to the rule and recognises himself as obligated to put it into practice’ (Foucault 1990, 27). This aspect is concerned with the identification of the ‘moral obligations’ (Foucault 2000, 264) which drive ethical subjectivity. The second aspect is the *determination of the ethical substance*, this concerns the question, ‘which is the ... part of myself or my behaviour which is concerned with moral conduct?’ (Foucault 2000, 263). This aspect relates to the manner in which societal morality is translated into ethical self-conduct. The third aspect concerns the *elaboration of ethical work* which one must undertake ‘not only in order to bring one’s conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one’s behavior’ (Foucault 1990, 27). In other words, this aspect identifies the form of self-conduct the individual must engage in. The final aspect is concerned with knowing, ‘which is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way?’ (Foucault 2000, 265), this refers to the ultimate goal or *telos* of ethical conduct.

The present paper is interested in workplace wellbeing as offering a means of understanding the genealogy of the healthy employee, that is as ‘a history of the forms of moral subjectivation and the practices of the self that are meant to ensure it’ (Foucault 1990, 29). Viewed through the lens of the relationship to the self, workplace wellbeing can be understood as a process whereby employee health – an extraneous variable which employers must factor into the equation of productive output – is connected to moral ‘problems’ within society and thereby transmuted into an imperative for employees to conduct themselves in a ‘healthy’ manner. In the following three sections, this conceptualization of workplace wellbeing is operationalized, through presenting a historical account of three periods of workplace wellbeing. Following this, we use Foucault’s framework in order to identify how each of these periods can be understood in terms of the four aspects of ethical subjectivity.

Paternalism: wellbeing as infantilization

During the nineteenth century, the transition from feudal society into an industrialized one can be characterized by the poverty and squalor, which formed the lived experience of the working-class poor, who’s labor drove this transformation. During this period, in Britain, large sections of the population were ‘living the most marginal, and indeed subhuman, kind of existence’ (Owen 1964, 134). The prevalence of these conditions led to the perception that government was ill-equipped to mitigate the effects of rapid industrialization and it is in this context that some employers gained fame through their efforts to ameliorate the effects of poverty upon their workers. These employers instigated a form of management known as paternalism, a name which derived from the duty of care exercised toward employees, likened to that a parent displays toward a child.

During this period, paternalist employers framed employee wellbeing in terms of moral improvement. In doing so, they discursively constituted an *infantilized* employee subjectivity, based around the employee's passivity. This in turn legitimated strict managerial control within the workplace, making employees subservient to the will of the paternalist employer.

Numerous authors have pointed to the intrinsic power disparity within the paternalistic employment relationship (e.g. Anthony 1977; Jeremy 1991; Morris and Smyth 1994; Newby 1977). As a system of management, paternalism legitimates this disparity through using poverty to frame the relationship between employer and employee in terms of moral inequality. Thus, the employee's poverty is taken as proof of his or her moral weakness, framed in terms of lack of self-control and inability to exercise self-interest. Conversely, the privileged position of the paternalist employer – factory owner, respected member of society, pillar of the community – is evidence of the ability to exercise moral responsibility. This supposed moral inequality positions the paternalist to intervene in the life of the employee under the guise of providing moral tutelage, controlling workers and thereby supposedly acting in their best interest. Evidence of the way which moral tutelage became a cornerstone of the paternalist employment relationship can be seen in some striking examples. For instance, in 1890, William Lever delivered an address to his employees summarizing his intentions regarding their wellbeing:

It would not do you much good if you send [wages] down your throats in the form of bottles of whisky, bags of sweets, or fat geese at Christmas. On the other hand, if you leave the money with me, I shall use it to provide for you everything that makes life pleasant – viz nice houses, comfortable homes, and healthy recreation. (Lever, quoted in Bradley 1987, 187)

In contrast, a gentler, but no less pious attitude, can be seen in the factories run by Richard Cadbury, where 'endeavours were made to teach the girls habits of order and pleasant manners which might reach beyond their work hours to their homes and families ... virtually every employee from the mere force of quiet example was teetotal' (Windsor 1980, 81). While these accounts demonstrate that Cadbury and Lever clearly exhibited differing ways of relating to employees (see also Dellheim 1987; Hatcher 2013), nevertheless, both employers provided an template of moral conduct and appropriate behavior from which employees were expected to learn.

The moral tutelage delivered by paternalist employers is fundamentally concerned with the employees' 'good character' – in other words, that the employee *be* a certain kind of person. As such, workplace wellbeing, conceived of from a paternalist perspective, involves a form of self-work whereby the employee undertakes their own moral improvement. Upon close examination it becomes apparent that this moral improvement served two functions. First, and in direct response to the material reality of poverty, self-improvement was intended to address specific employee behaviors which proved detrimental to their physical and mental health and, by implication, their ability to be productive members of the workforce. In this manner perceived licentiousness, intemperance and idleness became evidence of bad character and poor morals. Second, and more significantly, the rhetoric of moral improvement contained a legitimation of the right of the employer to command obedience from workers. In this manner what constitutes 'good character' was defined by the employer and in this way the paternalist was able to 'inculcate ideologically "correct" evaluations and moral attitudes which would

legitimate his [sic] own power . . . particularly in the area of defining rights and obligations' (Newby 1977, 65). Thus, while it is clear in the examples above that Lever and Cadbury provided direction to employees regarding specific behaviors, it also becomes apparent that the paternalist relationship serves to legitimate the idea that the employer knows what is best for the employee in all matters, and for this reason their authority must be obeyed.

While paternalism is so named because of the duty of care apparently displayed toward employees, examination of the employee subjectivity, which paternalism constructs highlights a different aspect of this relationship. In these terms, the practice of employees' moral improvement works to constitute a particular form of subjectivity where the employee is *infantilized* – cast as a wayward child who is to be made passive and subservient to their employer. In this manner, the infantilization of employees enables 'power relationships to become moral ones, so that not only would workers believe that their employers *did* rule over them, but they felt that they *ought* to do so' (Newby 1977, 65, emphasis in original). Ultimately, the infantilization of employees legitimates the power of paternalist employers within the workplace, realized though the strict management control intended to secure a productive workforce. In this case, having established their moral superiority over their employees, paternalists perceived a right to expect unflinching subservience in the workplace. Thus, according to Anthony,

Many nineteenth century employers saw themselves as inheriting a squirarchical authority and responsibility, exercising a religious obligation to control, reward and punish, to exercise care and responsibility and to expect dutiful obedience. . . . These employers justified the need for a wise and benevolent concern by reference to the dependence of their workers whom they perceived as illiterate, uneducated, drunken and wayward. (Anthony 1977, 74-75)

To this end, paternalism can be understood as a system of management which makes employees fit for work through their infantilization, a subjectivity made possible through the legitimacy of moral improvement. Several accounts of paternalist employment practices recall the way in which the infantilization of employees allowed the implementation of various management techniques, utilized in order to maintain the productivity of a compliant workforce. One famous example of this is the silent monitor developed by Robert Owen, a device consisting of a block of wood with four sides painted a different color. A silent monitor was placed next to each workstation and provided a marker of the employees behavior; at the end of the day the behavior of the employee was recorded in a 'book of character'. The silent monitor was thus a technology, which enabled the management of employee conduct. However, while it superficially bears the hallmarks of disciplinary power (Foucault 2010a), evidence suggests that the silent monitor was put toward rather more crude ends. In this regard, McKinlay is quick to point out that 'there is no evidence that the [records were] aggregated, far less categorized, analysed and used as the basis for managerial intervention . . . the immediate and visual value of the "silent monitor" far outweighed the long-run and calculative' (McKinlay 2006, 92). Instead, it becomes clear that the silent monitor was a far blunter instrument, essentially used to humiliate employees into compliance, rather than to measure and configure the factory population in relation to itself, in the manner envisioned by the architects of disciplinary power.

A more sophisticated example of the legitimated control of employees enabled through paternalist management comes from Edward Cadbury. In this, Rowlinson (1988) and Rowlinson and Hassard (1993) have compellingly accounted for the combination of benevolent paternalism alongside sophisticated techniques of scientific management in the Cadbury factory at Bournville. According to these authors, several measures were put in place to monitor the productivity of employees toward the goal of ensuring that work was carried out efficiently. One of these measures reviewed the work of so-called 'slow workers', a class of female employees identified under the company's piece-rate wage system. These slow workers had been identified as being unproductive, earning less than the minimum wage for their 'class of work' (defined in terms of job role and age). Following the identification of slow-workers, a report was made to the company board proposing solutions to this issue. Unsurprisingly, the main finding of the report was that the poor living standards of workers, leading to ill-health, was a main cause of slow work, while also noting that the moral character of the workers was a contributing factor. For example, the report stated that 'sometimes the habits of the girls [sic] cause them to be inefficient, such as staying up very late at night' (report on 'Slow and Inefficient Girls', quoted in Rowlinson 1988, 379). Subsequent to the report, several slow workers were discharged from work, while those that were kept on were expected to improve their habits in order that their work rate might increase. In addition, Rowlinson (1988, 380) notes that, in the case of slow workers (as well as other types of worker identified as having problematic moral character), the administrative procedures that made possible the effective provision of welfare also took on a secondary function, becoming part of the very process, which enabled their identification. Eventually, these same administrative procedures led to the development of employee selection criteria, designed to ensure that the workforce would be as efficient as possible. Thus, the case of the slow workers compellingly illustrates the way in which techniques of scientific management were combined with paternalism's moral framework and power dynamic in order to secure a productive workforce, premised upon the improvement of employees' moral character.

The examples of Owen's New Lanark and Cadbury's Bournville reveal the extent to which paternalist management was premised on the subordination of the employee to the needs of production. As such, these examples demonstrate the production of an infantilized employee subjectivity; an employee who understood both the strict delineation of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, as well as the employer's right to make this delineation. In this manner, paternalist wellbeing served to legitimate techniques of management control over the employee and enforced a unitarist thinking upon the employment relationship. The turn of the twentieth century saw the rise of pressing societal concerns different from the poverty which gave rise to paternalism, as such a new wellbeing discourse supplanted moral welfare and served to legitimate a new form of employee subjectivity.

Human relations: wellbeing as adjustment

The First World War caused rapid social upheaval, leading to the decline of paternalism. In its place, human relations theory established a new understanding of the employment relationship, which recognized that employee attitudes did not necessarily coincide with those of management. Corresponding to this new understanding, a new wellbeing discourse emerged within the workplace, intended to offer a means of adjusting employee attitudes to align them with organizational goals.

Those working in the munitions factories during the War experienced a physically grueling work regime, with 100 hour working weeks becoming widespread. In addition, those returning from the front line had undergone a relentless and shattering experience, leaving many suffering from nervous exhaustion. In response, in 1921, noted industrialists in Britain – including paternalist employers such as the Cadburys and Rowntrees – funded the establishment of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology (NIIP). This institution, along with the Tavistock Clinic, founded in 1920, helped to reshape the employment relationship in the inter-war period (Rose 1999). The NIIP's founding goal was to formulate a way of addressing the harm, which had been inflicted upon individuals during wartime. In accordance with this, a new, psychological understanding of the workforce was advanced, with Charles Myers – the director of the NIIP, noting in 1927 that

the physiological factors involved in purely muscular fatigue are now fast becoming negligible, compared with the effects of mental and nervous fatigue, monotony, want of interest, suspicion, hostility, etc. The psychological factor must therefore be the main consideration of industry and commerce in the future. (Myers, quoted in Rose 1999, 65-66)

To this end, focus shifted toward psychological experiences – for example workers in factories undergoing nervous breakdown and soldiers experiencing shell-shock – which had affected so many during the War. This shift was reinforced by increasing concern over growing social discord; with the burgeoning trade union movement and the 1917 Russian revolution prompting fears of a working-class uprising. In this regard, it was hoped that the focus on workplace psychology would offer a means of quelling social unrest, understood to be a result of psychological factors at play in the workforce (Burnes and Cooke 2013).

While it would be misleading to say that paternalism was oblivious to employee psychology, its approach was quite different from that advocated by human relations theorists. As such, human relations' shift toward understanding the inner life of the employee is marked by the belief that psychological factors could not simply be suppressed or supplanted through an appeal to moral authority, but instead needed to be taken into consideration. Under such thinking, any factors proving detrimental to psychological wellbeing needed to be mitigated through careful employee management. This new understanding of the psychology of the employee had important implications when seeking to understand the employment relationship. Thus, while paternalism operated through a unitarist line of reason, where the employee was not recognized as having any interests separate from their employer, a fundamental insight of human relations was that these interests were divergent and thus required effective management. In these terms, human relations can be understood as a school of thought, which arose as a means of managing the plurality of interests within the workplace. This shift in attitude recognized that: 'the worker was [not] a mindless brute . . . but an individual with a particular psychological make-up in terms of intelligence and emotions, with fears, worries, and anxieties, whose work was hampered by boredom and worry' (Rose 1999, 67). In practical terms, human relations theorists proposed that psychological distress caused by poor working conditions was generating increasing hostility to management and that this hostility needed to be addressed. To this end, in Myers – the director of the NIIP – pointed the finger at recent developments in the organization of work as a cause of psychological harm, which was liable to cause problems, noting: 'industrial specialization tends to

reduce [the worker] to the status of a small wheel working in a vast machine ... towards which consequently he [sic] is apt to develop apathy or actual antagonism' (Myers, quoted in Rose 1999, 67).

In addition to its new understanding of employer–employee relations, human relations theory also held important implications in terms of thinking about the formation of collective identity, or solidarity, with other workers. This, in turn, had implications for the discord growing within society. In this regard, both the pioneering work of Henry S. Dennison and the research carried out in the Hawthorne studies – made famous by Elton Mayo – pointed to an understanding of the workplace as a social organization, where group association held key significance in forming collective identity (Bruce 2006). Such an understanding made sense of the rapidly growing trade union movement, and it was feared that employees' increasing tensions with management was leading to a corresponding identification with other workers. This concern was reflected in a memorandum written by the Tavistock Clinic, which directly quoted Mayo, arguing that 'the main problem of industry to-day is to "restore the spontaneous cooperation of the worker" i.e. to build up and maintain morale within individual industrial concerns and in industry as a whole' (Tavistock Clinic memorandum, quoted in Burnes and Cooke 2013, 781), thus mitigating a perceived 'revolutionary discontent' within the workplace (Tavistock Clinic memorandum, quoted in Burnes and Cooke 2013, 778). In short, according to human relations theorists, what was required was harmony and a sense of belonging – both in the workplace and, through attaining this, within society. It was proposed that this harmony could be achieved through managing the psychological needs of employees in order to bring them into alignment with organizational goals. In these terms, the effectiveness of management could be gauged by the extent to which the apparently differing interests of employee and employer were reconciled, and collective identification took place on an organizational – rather than class – basis. The key to fulfilling these promises lay in utilizing employee psychology in order to develop new techniques of management.

Human relations theorists' interest in the psychology of the employee has been referred to by Davies (2015) as inaugurating an era of 'therapeutic management'. As a wellbeing discourse, therapeutic management suggested that organizational harmony could be achieved through a process whereby employees learned to reconcile their interests with those of the organization. In this manner, according to Bruce, one of the key insights of human relations pioneer Henry S. Dennison was that

like the necessity of balance and well-being of the different specialized functions of a living organism, a business organization ... must also see to it that ... individuals are similarly in balance and in harmony with each other for the organization to achieve its goals. (Bruce 2006, 191)

In achieving this harmony, therapeutic management gave rise to mental hygiene as a form of wellbeing practice. Mental hygiene shares much common ground with normalization (Foucault 2010a), whereby individuals are configured in relation to others in a given population, leading to the self-imposition of homogeneity. Thus, mental hygiene involved managers highlighting 'correct' attitudes and behaviors, while linking these to sanctioned organizational values. This compelled employees to reconcile their own values with those of the organization, and to manifest this change through their conduct. The

result of therapeutic management was to produce an *adjusted* employee subjectivity – an employee who had aligned their attitudes and behaviors to organizational interests. In doing so, these employees took on a fit for work subjectivity whereby they became *adjusted* to the employment relationship. On the other hand, those employees who, for various reasons, did not correct their behaviors were classified as *maladjusted*; these workers were understood by their employer to be belligerent, antagonistic and recalcitrant. Implicit within this classification was the contention that the presence of the maladjusted employee pointed, not to the limits of mental hygiene as a technique of managing employee wellbeing, but to the failure of the employee to be managed and made fit for work. As such, mental hygiene served to pathologize those employees whose attitudes and values didn't align with the organization. In summary, therapeutic management enabled human relations' framing of organizational discord as an issue of employee psychology. In these terms, it was the maladjusted employee's unwillingness or inability to correctly adjust to the conditions of work, which was positioned as a source of organizational unrest.

Managed autonomy: wellbeing as empowerment

The period following the Second World War saw new fears emerge concerning the wellbeing of the working population, turning the tide on therapeutic management and the emphasis on proscribing specific employee behaviors in-line with management goals. This resulted in the emergence of a new wellbeing discourse, which sought to delegate autonomy to employees in order that they exercise freedom in the pursuit of organizational interests. In the period after the Second World War a number of those who had fought during the war returned to a home life they found difficult to adjust to, summed up in a sense of disaffection and postwar malaise (Christiansen 2013). In the United States, this mood was portrayed in fiction books such as Sloan Wilson's (2002) *Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, published in 1955, and Richard Yates' (2007) *Revolutionary Road*, published in 1961. In these stories, veterans who had fought for their country in the Second World War returned to find the American dream hollowed out by meaningless work and consumerism. At the same time, US society was reconciling itself to the emerging Cold War with the USSR, resulting in an effort to differentiate the United States from the Soviet Union and the collectivism it was seen to represent. The societal response to postwar disillusionment and communism came in the form of a re-emphasis of the traditional values of individualism and independence, and this was translated into the workplace through the management literature of the time (Christiansen 2013). Writing in 1956, William H. Whyte captured these ideas with his diagnosis of 'organization man' (sic). Organization man was a person who not only works for an organization, but 'belong[s] to it as well' (Whyte 2002, 20). Significantly, Whyte directed his ire toward those who had previously sought to remedy employee wellbeing, namely the human relations school. Thus, Whyte railed against the 'therapeutic treatment of the worker and the turning of problems into subjective, individual problems' (Christiansen 2013, 207) which, 'comes perilously close to demanding that the individual sacrifice his own beliefs [in order] that he may belong' (Whyte 2002, 51), while leaving employees 'imprisoned in brotherhood' (Whyte 2002, 30). Against this, Whyte advocated an attempt to swing the pendulum back, in order to discover 'individualism *within* organization life' (2002, 30, emphasis in original).

The period that followed the publication of *Organization Man* did indeed see a return to individualism within the organization, legitimated through the rise of a new wellbeing discourse which advocated the individual's self-fulfillment through work. However, this was a form of individualism markedly different from that which Whyte had anticipated. Whereas Whyte believed that the organization suffocated the individual and starved them of meaning, this new discourse of self-fulfillment proposed that organizations could nurture individualism and autonomy among employees for organizational benefit. Unlike moral welfare and therapeutic management, which were wellbeing discourses attached to specific management theories, the discourse of self-fulfillment grew out of a number of disparate ideas, collectively referred to here as 'managed autonomy'. Managed autonomy was marked, first, by the idea that, work held the key to employee wellbeing. In this sense managed autonomy differed markedly from previous management theories, which understood the employee's wellbeing to be something distinct from work activity. Whereas previously it was thought to be necessary to manage wellbeing *in order* that the employee could work effectively, here work became a *source* of wellbeing. Second, managed autonomy held that the key to unlocking work's potential wellbeing benefits lay in inciting employees to engage in managing their own work in a manner, which created meaning for employees, while simultaneously increasing productivity.

Managed autonomy can be traced back to humanistic psychology movement – popularized by the writings of Carl Rogers, Eric Fromm, Fredrick Herzberg and Abraham Maslow. These thinkers advocated an eudaimonic understanding of wellbeing, based upon 'the actualisation of human potentials' (Ryan and Deci 2001, 143). Within management circles, a number of these ideas (most notably those of Herzberg and Maslow) were adopted within the framework of intrinsic motivation that was developed under human relations, but with an emphasis which shifted from the collective toward the individual. The concept of job satisfaction, which gained prominence through the work of Fredrick Herzberg (1971) and his two-factor theory of motivation, differentiated between two sets of variables related to motivation. Crucially, Herzberg argued, the only way that employers could attain high commitment and performance was by engaging employees in work which satisfied an underlying need for autonomy. Likewise, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954) pointed to self-actualization as the pinnacle of the individual's development. Through its appropriation into the workplace, self-actualization came to mean that employees needed undertake work that fulfilled them; in other words, managers needed to ensure that work was interesting for the employee, utilized a range of skills and facilitated the development of new ones. As with Herzberg, Maslow's theory accorded a crucial role for the autonomy and empowerment of the employee in the achievement of self-fulfillment. During the 1970s, these ideas were further developed in the quality of working life (QWL) movement, which advocated that work should be humanized by paying increased attention to empowering the employee (Rose 1999). In this regard, the QWL movement was responsible for advancing the ideas of humanistic psychology in a radical direction which

understood work as a means for employees to emancipate themselves from the shackles of managerial authority. Perhaps unsurprisingly the QWL remained a largely academic preoccupation, which petered out at the start of the next decade.

While hitherto the strands of thought which composed managed autonomy had focussed attention on employee's self-fulfillment – citing improved productivity as a secondary benefit; the 1980s once again bought managerial interests to the fore. During this time, Peters and Waterman's book *In Search of Excellence* (1982) sparked a management revolution by stipulating that employers could inspire 'excellence' through the management of organizational culture. This was a form of management, which encouraged employees to engage in self-directed working, guided by the articulation of strong corporate values. Whereas managers previously exerted direct control through rules and regulations, culture management required employees' self-expression of organizational values – shaped and guided by managers, but rhetorically based on employee autonomy and empowerment. Thus, according to Peters and Waterman, management-defined values provide the framework which enables self-directed work; as such 'autonomy is a product of discipline' (1982, 322). While it is clear that, for Peters and Waterman, shared values kept employees in-line with managerial interests and organizational goals, it is equally clear that they envisage that this form of work is one which will allow employees to flourish. Thus 'by offering *meaning* as well as money, they [i.e. "excellent" companies] give their employees a sense of mission as well as a sense of feeling great' (Peters and Waterman 1982, 323, emphasis added). While *In Search of Excellence* remained the pinnacle of excellence management, the trend of managed autonomy was continued in Peters' future work, including his famous *Liberation Management* (1992), where he proposed that employees need to be free to bring 'themselves' into the workplace (Fleming 2013), thus furthering the potential for self-fulfillment within the confines of work. Shortly after the turn of the millennium, managed autonomy received an update in the form of positive organizational behavior (POB). Developed from positive psychology, largely under the auspices of Fred Luthans, POB seeks to position the organization as a space, which fosters employees' 'positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace' (Luthans 2002b, 59). The link between managed autonomy and POB is made clear in the way in which autonomy is woven into the concept of 'positive psychological capital' – comprising confidence, hope, optimism and resilience – which underpins POB (Luthans, Luthans, and Luthans 2004). Thus, according to POB literature, hope is defined in terms of individual's capacity to exercise 'agency' through both willpower and waypower (understood as the ability to identify pathways toward achieving objectives) (Luthans 2002a, 701). While the quality of resilience has been explicitly associated with employee autonomy in POB literature (Luthans 2002a; Luthans, Luthans, and Luthans 2004). According to its advocates, the performance improvement potentials of POB are unlocked by means of employers training and managing employees in order to cultivate the qualities of positive psychological capital. In doing so, organizations are positioned so as to enable employees to gain a sense of 'who [they] are', through 'personal and organisational goal alignment and job fit' (Luthans, Luthans, and Luthans 2004, 46).

The collection of management practices grouped under the banner of managed autonomy are united in positioning the organization as a place where employees' self-fulfillment can be realized through self-directed working. As such managed autonomy gives rise to an *empowered* employee subjectivity, whereby employees are primed to direct their autonomy toward organizational ends. This empowered subjectivity is underpinned by an apparent paradox, manifested in the simultaneous intensification of autonomy *and* control. As such, managed autonomy can be understood in light of the concept of governmentality, a configuration of power relations, which enables the management of others' autonomy by means of 'government at a distance' (Miller and Rose 1990, 9). In this manner, the actions of 'individuals are regulated and shaped such that they willingly and freely pursue political goals' (Jeaclea and Parker 2013, 1088), and yet this process remains one that 'requires the willing, active participation of citizens, employees or consumers' (McKinlay, Carter, and Pezet 2012, 9–10). Governmentality is premised on a subjectivity which is simultaneously empowered *and* constrained in its autonomy; as such individuals are enabled to exercise freedom but only to the extent that this furthers institutional objectives. Thus, under managed autonomy, the empowered employee enacts choices regarding their work; however, these choices exist within a field of organizationally legitimated actions which are circumscribed so as to direct autonomy toward organizational ends. In other words, as Willmott notes, 'by defining autonomy as obedience to the core [organisational] values ... the meaning and imagined possibility of freedom is tightly circumscribed' (Willmott 1993, 527).

Managed autonomy marks a fundamental change in the relationship between the individual and organization. Thus, contrary to how Whyte (2002) had understood the employee–employer relationship, the organization is no longer to be understood as a threat to individual autonomy against which the individual must struggle. Rather, under managed autonomy, the individual is empowered by the organization. This shift in the way in which the organization was positioned with regard to individual autonomy is emphasized by Rose, who notes, 'the individual is not to be emancipated *from* work ... but to be fulfilled *in* work, now construed as an activity through which we produce, discover, and experience ourselves' (1999, 103–104, emphasis in original). Implicit in this empowerment of employees is a sense that the individual is constituted by the organization rather than in opposition to it. That through enabling self-actualization, individuality is a product of work. As such the locus of individual subjectivity is seen to shift away from the employee and toward the organization. This is a point forcefully made by Willmott: 'autonomy is represented as a gift that can be bestowed by [organisations] upon employees rather than something that individuals struggle to realize' (1993, 527).

In sum, managed autonomy emerged as a response to fears surrounding the decline of individualism following the Second World War. Through this, organizations were able to position themselves as being uniquely able to respond to this fear by promoting forms of autonomous work, which enabled employees to attain self-fulfillment. In practice, managed autonomy instantiates government at a distance, whereby individuals' attitudes are aligned with organizational objectives, thus necessitating minimal direct intervention into employee behavior. As such, employees' self-fulfillment simultaneously becomes a means of their subjection.

Workplace wellbeing as relationship to the self

It is now possible to draw together the three modes of workplace wellbeing, discussed thus far, in order to outline the historical trajectory of wellbeing discourse. In doing so the paper makes use of the conceptualization of the relationship to the self (Foucault 1990, 2000) in order to analyze the process whereby employees have become subjects of wellbeing.

Our analysis begins with the *mode of subjection*, in other words, the identification of the moral imperatives – derived from societal concerns – which provide the driving force toward ethical self-conduct. In the case of paternalism, we can see that the discourse of moral welfare gained its imperative from concern regarding the plight of the urban poor. Likewise, human relations' therapeutic management responded to fears regarding class-based social discord. Finally, managed autonomy's discourse of employee self-fulfillment arose in reaction to fears surrounding the societal malaise resulting from a rise in consumerism. Attention now turns to the *determination of the ethical substance*, that is the aspect of self-conduct, which is the target of wellbeing discourse. Here we can see the manner in which workplace wellbeing functions as a mechanism whereby moral imperatives – identified in the mode of subjection – are transmuted into problems of employee conduct through framing them in terms of workplace wellbeing. In the case of moral welfare, poverty was framed in terms of individuals' moral weakness and poor character, as such wellbeing came to be defined in terms of employees' self-control. Subsequently, therapeutic management positioned societal discord, not as a problem of social inequality, but as a neuroticism resulting from the failure of employees to properly identify with the interests of their employer. In the case of managed autonomy, the discourse of self-fulfillment shifted attention away from problems resulting from mass consumerism, and instead argued that the workplace needed to promote a form of individualism that would allow employees to develop a strong sense of self-identity. The third component of the relationship to the self relates to the *elaboration of ethical work* with which the subject must engage. In this regard, each wellbeing discourse established specific wellbeing practices – derived from the determination of the ethical substance – which were to be undertaken by the employee and managed by the employer. Because of the employees' apparent inability to act in their own self-interest through exercising self-control, paternalism advocated a practice of moral improvement. This involved the employee accepting moral tutelage in order to improve their character, but had the corollary effect of legitimating their obedience to their employer. Therapeutic management proscribed mental hygiene, a practice through which employees corrected their neurotic dispositions by adopting organizationally sanctioned attitudes and behaviors. Finally, under managed autonomy, forms of self-directed working meant that work itself became a wellbeing practice, directed toward employees' self-fulfillment. The final component is concerned with the ultimate goal or *telos* of ethical conduct. For each wellbeing discourse the *telos* has formed around the constitution of a particular kind of fit for work employee subjectivity corresponding to the specific understanding of the employment relationship promoted under each theory of management. Thus, while paternalism is usually defined in terms of the parental care discharged toward employees, the infantilized employee subjectivity emphasizes the other side of this relationship. In this manner, attention is given to the degree to which the discourse of moral welfare enabled the control of

employees through legitimating their subservience. Under human relations, employee's thoughts and beliefs became an object of management for the first time. This gave rise to the adjusted employee subjectivity, where employees aligned their attitudes with organizational interests. Finally, self-fulfillment was to be realized in an empowered employee subjectivity, where management's implementation of self-directed work allowed the employee to exercise their autonomy in the pursuit of organizational goals. A summary of this analysis is provided in [table 1](#).

The three historical periods identified in the paper have been presented in terms of their relationship to workplace wellbeing. While the particular practices witnessed in each of these periods are distinctly different, they are nevertheless manifestations of a recurrent logic whereby employees are incited to engage in self-conduct in order to become fit for work. Examining these periods across the framework of relationship to the self highlights historical continuities in the functioning of workplace wellbeing in two significant ways. First, it uncovers the process whereby wellbeing discourse has constituted 'fit for work' subjectivities, thus manifesting in the intensification of power relations within the workplace. Thus, in the *mode of subjection* and *determination of the ethical substance*, we see a perceived threat to productivity – i.e. poverty, social discord, conformity – translated into a problem regarding employee conduct. Through the *elaboration of ethical work*, we observe the establishment of practices of wellbeing, each prescribing a particular form of self-work for employees to engage with in order to become fit for work. Finally, in the *telos*, we witness the apotheosis of each wellbeing discourse, the constitution of a subjectivity which has been made fit for work through the self-regulation of behavior. The illustration of this recurrence across three modes of wellbeing adds a historical dimension to extant critical analysis of workplace wellbeing, demonstrating the extent to which wellbeing discourse produces subjects which 'reflect and reconstitute managerialist values that promote hegemonic relationships' (Zoller 2003, 199). Second, each mode of wellbeing has received legitimation through being positioned as a response to a specific social concern, as captured in the *mode of subjection*. This demonstrates the extent to which social concerns have served to legitimate intervention into – and management of – the lives of employees. Again, this adds a historical dimension to extant critical analysis, demonstrating that 'by clothing an activity as "socially responsible" ... organizations may accomplish an essential task in a very sublime and efficient way: that of managing its environment in terms of desired and appropriate human behaviors' (Holmqvist 2009, 68). In sum, a historical perspective on workplace wellbeing demonstrates the extent to which understandings of what it means to be a 'healthy employee' – as well as the practices required to become healthy – has evolved

Table 1. Summary of wellbeing discourses in terms of the relationship to the self

Wellbeing discourse	Management theory	Mode of subjection	Determination of the ethical substance	Elaboration of ethical work	Telos ('fit for work' subjectivity)
Moral welfare	Paternalism	Poverty	Self-control	Moral improvement	Infantilized
Therapeutic management	Human relations	Social discord	Neuroticism	Mental hygiene	Adjusted
self-fulfillment	Managed autonomy	'Organization man'	Self-identity	Self-directed working	Empowered

in accordance with prevalent management theory. Additionally, the historical perspective reveals a recurrent logic whereby employers have capitalized upon social concern in order to increase control over employees.

Looking to the present, historical analysis of workplace wellbeing has much to say about how we might characterize our current preoccupation with workplace wellbeing. First, as will be apparent, claims that the current emphasis on workplace wellbeing and the working age population mark a new direction for society (Black 2008; Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2016) should be regarded with suspicion. As has been shown, workplace wellbeing, understood as a systematic attempt to intervene in and manage the health-related behaviors of employees, enjoys a long history. More pointedly, analysis of the continuities within the historical practice of workplace wellbeing gives us pause for thought regarding our own mode of wellbeing. As such, present concern over lifestyle and health behaviors can be read as a mode of subjection whereby individuals are incited to monitor and modify their behaviors in order to guard themselves against the perils of ‘lifestyle diseases’, such as obesity and heart disease (Lupton 1995). Viewed within the context of society’s predominant neoliberal discourse – marked by hyper-individualism and free-market rationality – wellbeing thus comes to be understood as an asset to be invested in so as to ensure maximum economic return. This mode of subjection has, in turn, prompted organizations to offer employees wellbeing programs geared toward practices, which encourage understanding wellbeing as a means of optimizing productive potential (Harvey 2019; Hull and Pasquale 2018; Kelly, Allender, and Colquhoun 2007; Maravelias 2016). As a result, we have seen the creation of an entrepreneurial employee-subjectivity, whereby being fit for work involves framing health as an asset to be utilized in the service of productivity. Ironically, this imperative to deploy health in the service of productivity can short-circuit this relationship and, as such, employees may seek to become productive at the cost of their wellbeing (Wallace 2019). In sum, historical analysis shows that our present mode of workplace wellbeing marks a continuation of the recurrent logic, which has underpinned these interventions since they were inaugurated through the industrial revolution.

Conclusion

This paper has looked to the antecedents of our current wellbeing programs, describing three historical modes of workplace wellbeing, in order to analyze the ways in which employees have become subjects of wellbeing; in doing so the paper has made three contributions.

First, the paper has contributed to the theorization of workplace wellbeing. It was argued that we need to look beyond particular instantiations of wellbeing, which unhelpfully confine its meaning, in order to appreciate what is most fundamental about this concept. In this regard, the paper looked to the writings of Foucault (1990, 2000) in order to advance a conceptualization of wellbeing in terms of a framework of ethical subjectivity. In doing so, the paper contends that we need to examine the recurring yet also evolving incitement for employees to engage in forms of self-conduct, which are intended to ensure that they become fit for work according to the particular needs of

production. The paper thus advances our understanding of workplace wellbeing by framing it in terms of its 'forms of moral subjectivation and the practices of the self that are meant to ensure it' (Foucault 1990, 29).

Second, the history of workplace wellbeing remains largely unexplored, with no little attention given to how this context has shifted historically, or to consideration of what these shifts could mean about wellbeing itself (see McGillivray 2005; Weiss 2005). To this end, the paper contributes to literature on workplace wellbeing through offering a much-needed historical perspective. The lack of attention to the historical precursors of our recent interest in workplace wellbeing is likely the result of the conflation of the term with current practices (e.g. the current proliferation of healthy eating programs and mindfulness sessions); things that have only been introduced into the workplace in recent years. The present paper had redressed this gap through using the conceptualization of wellbeing as ethical self-work as the basis of a genealogy of workplace wellbeing. In doing so, the intention has been to examine wellbeing in terms of both its continuity and discontinuity; examining the particular circumstances and contexts which gave rise to certain practices of wellbeing, while also uncovering the underlying rationale which is perpetuated and carried forward. To this end, the paper presented an analysis of the trajectory of wellbeing discourse through developing an account of three successive modes of workplace wellbeing; each described in terms of its ethical imperative, its form of self-work, and the 'fit for work' subjectivity it strives to produce. The first of these, paternalism, responded to the problem of poverty by framing wellbeing in terms of employees' moral improvement, thus producing an *infantilized* employee subjectivity – an employee who is positioned as a child within the employment relationship. Second, human relations theorists addressed the issue of social discord by advocating the practice of mental hygiene; this led to the production of an *adjusted* employee subjectivity – an employee required to manage themselves so as to align their conduct with organizational objectives. Finally, a collection of management practices, referred to here as 'managed autonomy', have sought to respond to perceived social malaise through promoting the workplace as a place of self-fulfillment; this has resulted in an *empowered* employee subjectivity – an employee whose freedom is simultaneously amplified and constrained. It is argued that, while each wellbeing discourse and each corresponding employee subjectivity has a localized form – arising from specific societal concerns and located within a given historical context, it also becomes clear that wellbeing can be characterized in terms of a recurrent rationale. In characterizing this rationale, it is argued that each of the modes of wellbeing discussed in this paper is legitimated through its positioning as a response to societal concern regarding wellbeing, while manifesting as a technique for intensifying power relations within the workplace

Finally, the paper has made use of the genealogical method in order to write a 'history of the present' (Foucault 2010a, 31), using historical analysis to develop our understanding of workplace wellbeing in the present day. In doing so, the paper has presented 'a series of troublesome associations and lineages [in order to suggest] that institutions and practices we value and take for granted today are actually more problematic or more "dangerous" than they otherwise appear' (Garland 2014, 372). Specifically, in examining the historical conditions whereby particular employee subjectivities arose out of specific social concerns, it becomes possible to further situate our present mode of wellbeing. As such, through demonstrating a connection between societal wellbeing concerns and

employee subjectivity, this paper lends weight to extant literature (e.g. Hull and Pasquale 2018; Kelly, Allender, and Colquhoun 2007; Maravelias 2016) which seeks to locate our current preoccupation with employees' self-investment in wellbeing within a particular neoliberal rationality. This study of the historical 'emergence' of our present becomes even more pressing as we again begin to see a shift in the focus of wellbeing, away from our recent concerns, and toward novel problems resulting from our new ways of working during the COVID pandemic. In this regard, the future of wellbeing holds much uncertainty, with attempts to adapt current wellbeing practices, for example through the management of mental health in digital working environments (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2021b), while also navigating uncharted territory such as the purported 'death of the office' (Nixey 2020). As the management of wellbeing seeks to respond to these new threats to employee productivity, we are reminded that the past has much to teach us in our understanding of how employees have been taught to conduct themselves in a 'healthy' manner.

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