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## Designing and evaluating resource-oriented interventions to enhance employee well-being and health

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Special Issue

Editorial: Designing and Evaluating Resource-Oriented Interventions to Enhance Employee  
Well-being and Health

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*Keywords:* design, evaluation, intervention, health, resources, well-being

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## Special Issue

### **Editorial: Designing and Evaluating Resource-Oriented Interventions to Enhance Employee Well-being and Health**

#### **Abstract**

This editorial introduces JOOP's special issue on designing and evaluating resource-oriented interventions to enhance employees' well-being and health. This special issue aims to stimulate research on resource-oriented interventions by bringing together examples of original intervention research, literature reviews on specific resources, and guidelines on how to design and evaluate resource-oriented interventions. We begin with a reflection on current issues pertaining to definition, design and focus of resource-oriented interventions at work, followed by a brief outline of the papers included in this special issue. Four papers examine how resource-oriented interventions can develop personal and job resources, thereby evaluating their effect on well-being, health, and to a lesser extent, performance. Two papers provide guidance on how to design and evaluate resource-oriented interventions in the workplace. The special issue concludes with a critical reflection on the current state of the field by Baumeister and Alghamdi, which points to the challenges and limitations of resource-based intervention research, with the aim to inspire and advance future research in this field.

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**Editorial: Designing and Evaluating Resource-Oriented Interventions to Enhance Employee Well-being and Health**

We are delighted to present this special issue in the Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology on “Designing and Evaluating Resource-Oriented Interventions to Enhance Employee Well-being and Health”. The inspiration for this special issue was the 2013 European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) Small Group Meeting on resource-oriented interventions in the workplace, which we hosted in Heidelberg, Germany. More than 30 researchers and students from around the world gathered to discuss their approaches to workplace intervention research and to address and find solutions for the challenges experienced in this field. This special issue represents a next step in advancing research focused on resource-oriented interventions in the workplace and furthering the thought provoking discussions, which began at this meeting. The special issue presents high-quality, original research on resource-oriented interventions and papers that provide recommendations for intervention design, data analyses and a discussion on intervention effectiveness. Although research in this field has been promoted for some time now (Nielsen, Randall, Holten, & Gonzalez, 2010), conducting high quality intervention research remains challenging, not least due to the need to meet organisational needs in addition to adhering to rigorous research designs.

In this editorial, we provide a definition of resources and their meaning in the work context followed by a brief discussion of current issues identified in intervention research. We conclude with a summary of the articles included in the special issue.

**Resource-oriented interventions at work: Definition, design and focus.**

The concept of work-related resources is a long standing one, but has been criticized in the past for the vagueness with which resources have been defined (see Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014). While the all-encompassing nature of resources has provided ample scope for researchers to investigate them, this vagueness in

definition has also led to disparities in what has been studied, and how resources have been conceptualized and assessed. This poses challenges for researchers wishing to change resources via interventions. In this special issue, we adopt the definition of resources as “objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies” (Hobfoll, 1989; p. 516). Recently, Halbesleben et al. (2014; p. 1338) built on this definition, defining resources as “anything perceived by the individual to help attain his or her goals”. The papers in this special issue broadly address two categories of resources that are relevant in the work setting:

- Personal resources, including among others (occupational) self-efficacy (Füllemann, Jenny, Brauchli, & Bauer, 2015; Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, & Peeters, 2015), mindfulness (Hülshager, Feinholdt, & Nübold, 2015), resilience (Robertson, Cooper, Sarkar, & Curran, 2015), savoring (Lischetzke, Reis, & Arndt, 2015) and recovery processes (Hülshager et al., 2015).
- Job resources including social support (Füllemann et al., 2015), opportunities for development and leader-member exchange via job crafting (Van den Heuvel et al., 2015).

Emerging consensus suggests that the type of resource may be less important than understanding the mechanisms or processes through which an intervention enhances a resource. Given our focus in this special issue on both design and evaluation issues, we were cognizant of addressing issues of mechanisms and processes in the papers selected for inclusion. There are a number of key components to consider when aiming to design and evaluate interventions, and these are particularly pertinent to resource-oriented interventions due to their breadth and scope. In particular, it is becoming increasingly clear that there is a need to consider both process and outcome evaluations (Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2013; Nielsen & Randall, 2012b) along with issues around employee participation (Nielsen & Randall,

2009, 2012a). Thus, key questions regarding resource-oriented interventions at work should also pertain to their design, mechanisms and evaluation. While early intervention research in the workplace tended to focus on outcomes rather than the process; more recently, attention has shifted to understanding the mechanisms through which interventions have their effect. There are two main distinctions when considering mechanisms; the first pertains to a theoretical understanding of the psychological processes that are impacted through engaging in an intervention, explaining how the desired change (e.g. in well-being, performance) occurs (Lippke & Ziegelmann, 2008; Michie, Johnston, Francis, Hardeman, & Eccles, 2008). The second pertains to the design of the research and the intervention themselves, and how this can have a significant impact on the outcomes of interest. For example, Lyubomirsky and Layous (2013) introduced the positive activity model proposing various mediating and moderating variables that may influence intervention effectiveness. They suggest that intervention design effects can lead to varying results, even in a situation where the same variable (i.e. resource in this context) is considered across different studies. They also suggest that characteristics of the activity (e.g., dosage and variety) and the person (e.g., motivation) may influence intervention effectiveness.

Further considerations are the boundary effects of interventions and their effectiveness. For example, it may be the case that interventions have varying effectiveness in different populations. While ideally occupational health psychology interventions address this by considering employees identified at risk, a priori, there is significant merit to taking a proactive and/or preventative approach to resource-oriented interventions in the workplace (LaMontagne, Keegel, Louie, Ostry, & Landsbergis, 2007). Resource theories provide a strong rationale for both boosting resources, as well as buffering against depletion (Halbesleben et al., 2014), which would suggest that interventions can, and likely should, address both ameliorative preventative approaches as well as those pre-identified as being at risk. A broader way of looking at this issue may be to consider the person-activity fit

(Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013), which may enhance the enjoyment and motivation an individual has to continue their participation in a resource-oriented intervention.

### **JOOP's Special Issue on Resource-oriented Interventions in the Work Context**

This special issue aims to stimulate resource-oriented intervention research by bringing together examples of original research that have implemented and evaluated resource-oriented interventions in the workplace, with reviews on specific resources, and guidelines on how to design and evaluate resource-oriented interventions to aid future research in this field. Our aim was to present a variety of studies with excellent research designs, but a variety of expected and unexpected outcomes, to give a realistic overview of this field of research and its challenges. We included reviews and theoretical papers to provide critical insight and an in-depth discussion on what can and should be improved in future resource-oriented intervention research.

Three papers present empirical research testing a specific intervention with a fourth paper presenting a systematic review to discuss ways to better design resource-oriented interventions in the workplace by considering the impact of the following design issues: (1) dosage (Hülshager et al., 2015) (2) type of participation (Füllemann et al., 2015), (3) bridging person-level and environmental measures and approaches (Van den Heuvel et al., 2015), and (4) examining or explaining both the mechanisms (Füllemann et al., 2015, Robertson et al., 2015) and outcomes of the intervention (Hülshager et al., 2015, Füllemann et al., 2015, Robertson et al., 2015, van den Heuvel et al., 2015).

The final two papers provide guidance on how to design and evaluate resource-oriented interventions in the workplace. *Briner and Walshe* develop a set of evidence-based characteristics, which may be challenging to implement but regardless, serve to reiterate design issues that should be forefront in researchers minds as they design their resource-oriented intervention research. The article by *Lischetzke, Reis and Arndt* serves as a practical guide linking intervention design with recommendations for data analysis. A particular

strength of their paper is that they distinguish three types of intervention effectiveness (general, differential and conditional intervention effectiveness), and explain how to test for each by providing model equations and explanation for the multilevel regression coefficients. This approach provides researchers with a clear road-map for how to appropriately analyze intervention studies.

The special issue concludes with a commentary by *Baumeister and Alghamdi*, who provide a critical reflection of the current state of play in the field of resource-based interventions. This commentary lays bare many of the assumptions and design flaws that we may fall prey to as intervention researchers. The dual purpose of much intervention research (i.e to conduct good research, while also addressing organizational and employee needs) presents unique challenges. However, if resource-oriented intervention research is to ‘hold its own’ with research in other applied domains of psychology, we need to pay attention to the issues discussed by Baumeister and Alghamdi in their commentary.

Taken as a whole, the suite of papers included in this special issue serve as a guide on how to conduct high quality intervention studies and at the same time draw attention to what needs to be accomplished in future studies to further develop this research field. As we know that resource-oriented intervention research is not only challenging for researchers, participants and organisations but also promising for all stakeholders, we hope that this special issue will encourage further discussion and research endeavours to advance this field.

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