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Why Personnel Selection Should Target Job Performance AND Well-Being

Cornelius J. König[1] | Stefan Krumm[2] | Tanja Bipp[3] | Maike E. Debus[4] | Ute-Christine Klehe[5] | Martin Kleinmann[6] | Markus Langer[7] | Klaus G. Melchers[8] | Philipp Schäpers[9] | Anja Strobel[10]

[1]Department of Psychology, Saarland University, Saarbrücken, Germany | [2]Department of Education and Psychology, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany | [3]Institute of Psychology, Heidelberg University, Heidelberg, Germany | [4]Institute of Work and Organizational Psychology, University of Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel, Switzerland | [5]Department of Psychology, Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Giessen, Germany | [6]Department of Psychology, University of Zurich, Zürich, Switzerland | [7]Department of Psychology, Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany | [8]Institute of Psychology and Education, Universität Ulm, Ulm, Germany | [9]Department of Psychology, University of Münster, Münster, Germany | [10]Institute of Psychology, Chemnitz University of Technology, Chemnitz, Germany

Correspondence: Cornelius J. König (cornelius.koenig@uni-saarland.de)

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ABSTRACT

In this "Provocation Article", we argue that the sole focus of personnel selection research and practice on job performance criteria represents a substantial limitation. While job performance remains a key outcome, employee well-being is also relevant—both as an intrinsic value and as a predictor of important organizational outcomes such as turnover, absenteeism, and citizenship behavior. Given the solid evidence on individual differences and work-related factors that influence employee well-being, and drawing on ethical, legal, and economic arguments, we call for a paradigm shift: Well-being should be treated as an explicit criterion in personnel selection. We outline five practical pathways for integrating well-being into selection systems, including the use of well-being-related traits (which should be carefully matched to job-specific demands), person–environment fit approaches, simulation-based tools, communicating well-being priorities to applicants, and using selection insights to inform onboarding and support. We also discuss four key challenges, such as the risk of discriminatory practices, balancing multiple criteria, and faking. Finally, we sketch a research agenda to guide future work on well-being-focused selection. Overall, we advocate for multi-criteria selection systems that promote not only organizational performance but also human flourishing.

1 | Introduction

Personnel selection has been established as one of the most successful domains within industrial and organizational psychology. Over the past century, research has yielded robust evidence on the predictive validity of various selection methods for job performance or facets thereof (e.g., Sackett et al. 2022). This performance-centric paradigm has shaped both academic inquiry and organizational practice, reinforcing the idea that the primary goal of selection is to identify candidates who will excel in their roles.

However, this narrow focus on job performance represents a critical limitation. Although performance is undoubtedly important, it is not the only outcome that matters (e.g., Tay et al. 2023). Specifically, from an ethical point of view, employee well-being should be viewed as a relevant outcome in and of itself. Moreover, employee well-being has been found to predict a large set of other outcomes, such as absenteeism, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), turnover, and job performance (e.g., Judge et al. 2001; Rubenstein et al. 2018). Despite its ethical and economic relevance, the well-being of

Summary

- Selection research has focused almost exclusively on predicting job performance.
- This paper argues for integrating employee well-being as a formal selection criterion.
- Including well-being in selection seems ethically mandated.
- Well-being-focused selection supports sustainable hiring and long-term workforce health.
- We propose several ways to adapt selection tools to better anticipate employee well-being.

employees has been largely overlooked in selection research and practice.

Hence, this article calls for a paradigm shift: Personnel selection should be reconceptualized as a process that not only predicts job performance but also anticipates and safeguards employee well-being. Thus, we argue that well-being should be treated as an explicit criterion in selection practice. This expansion is not only ethically required, as it aligns with principles of human dignity and fairness, it is also legally supported by occupational health mandates and economically prudent. In the sections that follow, we outline the rationale for this paradigm shift, explore its practical implications, and propose a research agenda to guide the integration of well-being into personnel selection.

2 | Background

2.1 | The Case for Integrating Well-Being Into Personnel Selection

Well-being can be understood as a domain-specific experience of psychological functioning and fulfillment at work. It is typically conceptualized as a multifaceted construct. Depending on the theorizing behind it, well-being may comprise eudaemonic, cognitive, and affective (Ryan and Deci 2001) or psychological, physical, and social aspects (Grant et al. 2007). Narrower concepts of well-being include experiencing meaning at work, thriving at work, work engagement, and job satisfaction. In the remainder of this article, we refer to well-being in a very broad sense—as "the overall quality of an employee's experience and functioning at work" (Grant et al. 2007, p. 52). We posit that the suggestions below hold for a broad as well as a more narrow conceptualization of well-being.

To date, ample knowledge has accumulated on antecedents of employee well-being. Indeed, meta-analytic findings have consistently demonstrated the detrimental effects of job stressors and the beneficial effects of job resources on employee well-being (for a review, see, e.g., Sonnentag et al. 2023). In light of such evidence, organizations are well-equipped with knowledge of how they can safeguard employee well-being through job design and interventions. However, we argue that it is necessary to anticipate and support future well-being already at the point of entry into the organization—in other words, through personnel selection. Specifically, our argument is based on three grounds: (a) it is ethically required, (b) it is legally mandated, and (c) it is economically beneficial.

From an ethical standpoint, the principle of humanity, as an end in itself, demands that individuals be treated as ends, not merely as means to organizational goals (Kant 1785/2011). In this regard, it is noteworthy that four in ten employees worldwide said that they experienced significant stress during much of the previous day, according to the 2025 Gallup Report on the basis of representative data from many countries (and a total sample size of 227,347; Gallup 2025). Moreover, global data underscore the high prevalence of mental health problems, with profound implications for employees and workplaces (GBD 2019 Mental Disorders Collaborators 2022). In fact, many organizations accept their ethical responsibility to consider the well-being of their employees. This is attested by the multitude of interventions that organizations stipulate to promote the well-being of their employees—ranging from employee surveys over support for mental health problems to training dedicated to foster healthy leadership (e.g., Kelloway et al. 2023; Nielsen and Noblet 2018). Such efforts notwithstanding, we argue that the ethical responsibility to foster employee well-being extends beyond workplace treatment to the very process of choosing who enters the organization in the first place.

Beyond ethical obligations, employers in many jurisdictions are legally required to safeguard the health and well-being of their employees. International frameworks such as the International Labor Organization's Occupational Health Services Convention (No. 161, in particular its Article 5) explicitly state that employers bear responsibility for the health and safety of their workforce. National laws reinforce this duty. For example, Australia's Work Health and Safety Act (2011) explicitly mandates that employers provide a workplace free from recognized psychosocial hazards, requiring the identification, elimination, or minimization of risks to workers' psychological and physical health. Similar provisions exist in the European Union's Framework Directive on Health and Safety at Work (Directive 89/391/EEC, 1989) and China's Mental Health Law (Article 15).[1] These legal standards can be understood to imply that organizations must not only respond to well-being issues reactively but also take proactive steps to prevent harm, including steps during the hiring process. Integrating well-being considerations into personnel selection aligns with these legal expectations and may help mitigate future liability.

Economically, well-being is an important driver of costly outcomes such as employee absenteeism and turnover (Rubenstein et al. 2018; Taibi et al. 2021). Moreover, employee well-being is (at least moderately) related to job performance (Judge et al. 2001). However, the economic effects of fostering well-being go well beyond employees' performance. From a signaling perspective (Bangerter et al. 2012), organizations may attract more qualified and value-aligned candidates if they visibly prioritize employee well-being during the selection process (e.g., on webpages like Glassdoor, Zhao 2024). Conversely, applicants may opt out of applying or accepting offers if they anticipate a stressful or unsupportive work environment because of experiencing strain and anxiety during interviews or other selection procedures (Dierickx et al. 2025; Melchers et al. 2021). Moreover, proactive efforts to assess and support well-being during selection are likely to be more cost-effective than reactive interventions after problems have emerged. In this

sense, fostering well-being through selection is not only a moral and legal imperative—it is also a sound investment, as it might resemble more sustainable hiring efforts.

Well-being aspects are related to, but clearly not synonymous with, performance. For example, job satisfaction and performance correlate at $\rho = 0.30$ (Judge et al. 2001), meaning at work and performance at $\rho = 0.33$ (Allan et al. 2019), and work engagement and performance at $\rho = 0.43$ (Christian et al. 2011). Thus, selecting high performers does not necessarily mean selecting individuals who will experience well-being at work. In fact, a correlation of 0.30 would imply that when selecting 100 candidates who are in fact "high performers", only 65 of these high performing individuals would be satisfied with their job (according to binomial effect size display and considering a dichotomous approach to performance and job satisfaction; Rosenthal and Rubin 1982). Initial recent evidence suggests that, when employees work so hard that they put their physical condition at risk, well-being and performance may be negatively related (SimanTov-Nachlieli et al. 2025). Thus, the prevalent approaches to personnel selection, targeting performance as a criterion, will not automatically include predictors of employees' future well-being. Rather, such predictors need to be specifically incorporated.

2.2 | How Selection Procedures Could Incorporate Well-Being

Before we actually delineate how selection procedures may be designed to foster and safeguard future well-being, we would like to stress what organizations should *not* do. That is, the paradigm shift presented here should by no means exempt organizations from their responsibility to create and maintain healthy work environments. Once applicants are hired, organizations are ultimately responsible for employees' well-being, regardless of prior selection outcomes. In light of the aforementioned organizational benefits of increasing employee well-being, we suggest that organizations view personnel selection as a way to complement—but not to replace—existing efforts to maintain and increase well-being. For ethical and economic reasons, we expect organizations to prioritize well-being at every stage of an employee's career.

A seemingly obvious first approach to design personnel selection procedures in a way that fosters and safeguards future well-being would be to include predictor variables that were found to be related to well-being. Such variables include, but are not limited to, positive affectivity, learning goal orientations, and need for cognition, whose potential as predictors in selection processes remains largely untapped (e.g., Alarcon et al. 2009; Anglim et al. 2020; Bipp et al. 2020; Zerna et al. 2024). However, we caution against a "one-size-fits-all" rationale in adopting such predictors for personnel selection. As Judge and Zapata (2015) have demonstrated, the validity of personality traits may differ depending on the requirements of a given job. This may be even more true for predictors of well-being. That is, certain traits may only predict well-being under specific job conditions—or even exhibit an inverted U-shaped relationship with well-being (cf. Lievens et al. 2025). Moreover, predictors of well-being will be contingent on the well-being dimension that is targeted by organizations. Hence, we call for a differentiated approach in which organizations map established predictors of well-being (from extant studies) on the specific requirements of a given job. Again, this is not to say that organizations should not tackle job requirements so that they are more supportive for employee well-being. However, there may be a job-inherent limit for doing so (e.g., customer service personnel may need to deal with customer complaints).

Second, person–environment (PE) fit-based approaches may be utilized. Such approaches emphasize the importance of aligning individual characteristics with job and organizational features. PE fit has been shown to be related to both job performance and employee well-being (van Vianen 2018), but the PE literature faces challenges due to taxonomic inconsistencies, domain ambiguities, and methodological limitations (Barrick and Parks-Leduc 2019). In practice, "selecting for fit" might often rely on hiring managers' intuitive judgments during interviews—judgments that are only weakly correlated with actual fit (Cable and Judge 1997). Moreover, most studies assess fit retrospectively, based on employees' perceptions after they have entered the organization. In contrast, *anticipatory* PE fit—how well applicants expect to fit into a role or organization before joining (Ostroff and Zhan 2012)—remains underexplored, despite its likely relevance for both applicant decision-making and long-term well-being. By explicitly incorporating well-being into selection criteria, organizations can move beyond vague fit intuitions and toward more systematic, evidence-based approaches to fostering sustainable alignment between people and their work environments. We thus argue that incorporating well-being into selection can also be achieved by extending existing fit-based approaches, particularly those focused on value congruence and needs–supplies fit. Value congruence refers to the alignment between an applicant's personal values and those espoused by the organization. When such alignment exists, individuals are more likely to report being satisfied with their job (McCulloch and Turban 2007). Similarly, needs–supplies fit captures the extent to which the job and organization provide what the individual needs to thrive—such as autonomy, feedback, or opportunities for growth, which are constructs associated with well-being outcomes (van Vianen 2018). Both forms of fit could be assessed during selection through, for example, structured interviews or value inventories, allowing organizations to move beyond vague notions of "fit" and instead to foster a more deliberate alignment that supports both performance and well-being.

Third, selection procedures may be specifically designed to mirror well-being-related aspects of future jobs, thereby enabling candidates to gather information about their future job and their future well-being. This approach is actually in line with recent calls to understand applicants as active gatherers of information about their fit with the future job (Marcus 2024). Simulation-based tools such as assessment centers (ACs), situational judgment tests, or work simulations may be particularly promising, as they can mirror real job demands and resources (e.g., Lievens and Breil in press). Applicants could try to anticipate their future well-being based on crucial aspects of the targeted job that are mimicked during the simulations. Especially in high-fidelity simulations, applicants may also base such anticipations on their momentary well-being during selection (e.g., while performing in a role-play as part of an AC), as such in-situ perceptions may relate to later well-being on the job.

Likewise, organizations may implement ways to gauge not only applicants' performance during simulations but also their momentary well-being.

Fourth, organizations may choose to make their well-being-related goals explicit before or during personnel selection. One way to do so is by providing applicants with formats that offer a realistic preview of the job—similar to Realistic Job Previews (Landis et al. 2013), but extended to include aspects relevant to well-being, such as typical stressors, available resources, or support structures. Such formats can help candidates to form realistic expectations about their future work experience and assess whether the role aligns with their personal needs and values (Marcus 2024). This transparency can have several beneficial effects for organizations (e.g., increasing organizational attractiveness). Candidates, in turn, may also benefit when these goals are openly communicated. For example, candidates may be more inclined to actively seek and use information about their anticipated well-being (see Zhao 2024). They might also begin to prioritize their own well-being over merely getting the job, applying this mindset to future applications and selection procedures. We view this approach as pivotal when designing personnel selection in ways that foster and safeguard future well-being, ensuring that applicants can make informed decisions about their future well-being (again, without shifting the responsibility for their future well-being away from organizations).

Fifth, we emphasize the complementary nature of organizational interventions and personnel selection. That is, insights gained from personnel selection should ideally inform subsequent personnel or organizational development initiatives. This is particularly relevant for well-being-related insights, which can serve as a valuable basis for individually tailored prevention approaches—initiated hopefully before employee well-being begins to deteriorate. Thus, we argue that the beneficial effects of a well-being-focused selection process can extend far beyond the selection stage itself.

2.3 | Four Foreseeable Challenges

If personnel selection is to target both job performance and well-being, a key challenge is a potential overreach by directly assessing well-being during selection. If well-being itself becomes a predictor variable in personnel selection, there is a risk that organizations may begin to favor only those applicants who appear psychologically robust, thereby discriminating—intentionally or not—against applicants with a history of mental health issues. Evidence suggests that such discrimination is already a reality in hiring contexts (e.g., Baert et al. 2016). In fact, what we know about discrimination in selection comes from typical selection procedures that are designed to predict job performance (e.g., Morgeson et al. 2008). Thus, regardless of whether the criterion is performance or well-being, it is essential to break it down into the personal qualities that truly predict the outcome (e.g., through job analysis) and to assess these qualities in ways that are as unbiased and fair as possible.

A second challenge lies in determining how to balance well-being and performance criteria. Treating them as mutually exclusive would be a false dichotomy, yet prioritizing one over the other (without justification) will undermine the broader goal of sustainable employment. A promising approach in this regard is to apply principles of Pareto optimization. This allows for the simultaneous consideration of multiple objectives without requiring one to be maximized at the expense of the other (De Corte et al. 2008), thereby achieving an optimal balance between performance and well-being for a given job. This approach encourages more nuanced decision-making and acknowledges that optimal hires are those who perform and experience well-being.

As a third risk, industries that usually come with poor working conditions may see this paradigm shift either as not applicable to them (since they seemingly cannot prioritize well-being) or may even use it as an excuse to maintain poor working conditions, while prioritizing the selection of individuals who can cope with these working conditions. Considering this risk, we call for including information during personnel selection that enables applicants to anticipate their future well-being (Marcus 2024). This will likely result in more applicants declining to accept such job offers, thereby increasing the need for industries that usually come with poor working conditions to make every effort to change such working conditions.

A fourth challenge is that introducing well-being as a selection criterion may also increase the risk of faking or strategic self-presentation (see, e.g., Melchers et al. 2020). Applicants tend to tailor their responses based on what they believe organizations are looking for—a process shaped by their implicit theories about the selection context (Jansen et al. 2012). If well-being becomes a salient criterion, candidates may feel compelled to present themselves as especially resilient, stress-resistant, or emotionally balanced, regardless of their actual experiences. This could be particularly pronounced among overqualified applicants (Debus et al. 2023) or those with high ability to identify criteria (Kleinmann et al. 2011). Moreover, faking may not be limited to applicants: organizations, too, may attempt to present themselves as psychologically safe and supportive, even when internal realities suggest otherwise (e.g., Langer et al. 2019). Such inauthenticity—on either side—can distort anticipatory person–environment fit and ultimately undermine both well-being and performance (Dürr and Klehe 2017). Addressing this challenge requires careful design of selection tools and transparent communication to reduce the incentives and opportunities for misrepresentation.

2.4 | Avenues for Future Research

Integrating well-being into personnel selection opens up a wide array of research opportunities beyond testing the five suggestions that we outlined above and beyond addressing the three aforementioned challenges. This shift introduces conceptual and methodological complexity, requiring new approaches across the selection process, levels of analysis, and measurement strategies.

On the predictor side, a key question is which methods are best suited to forecast well-being-related outcomes. Beyond the simulations already discussed, the broader psychological toolbox could be leveraged, including emerging technologies such as AI-driven tools like voice or behavior analysis (e.g., Langer et al. 2022). Another important avenue is to explore traits that mutually predict well-being and performance and to

examine the interaction between individual traits and job characteristics relevant for employee well-being.

On the criterion side, researchers should examine not only the well-being of new hires but also the downstream effects of personnel selection decisions on colleagues and subordinates. For instance, selecting the wrong leaders can harm the well-being of both peers and subordinates, particularly when individuals with "dark" traits are promoted (e.g., Roth and Klehe 2025). Another example is when organizations put too much emphasis on well-being in their hiring decisions, which may result in new employees who perform worse than previous hires. Existing staff may then need to compensate for this performance gap, potentially reducing their own well-being (cf. Tims et al. 2015). Faking and self-presentation also remain critical concerns, and future studies should explore whether well-being-oriented predictors are more or less susceptible to faking, and how applicants' assumptions about selection goals influence their responses (e.g., Melchers et al. 2009).

Similarly, applicant and manager reactions warrant attention. For candidates, key questions include whether they perceive well-being-focused selection as fair and how strain experienced during selection relates to later well-being at work. For managers, it remains to be explored under which circumstances they support the implementation of well-being-focused selection implementation and to what extent they incorporate well-being-related data into their decision-making (cf. Matić et al. 2025).

Finally, the implications for diversity and post-hire practices deserve scrutiny. If well-being predictors show smaller subgroup differences than traditional selection measures, they may enhance fairness. Moreover, selection results could inform targeted onboarding, training (e.g., stress management), or even job redesign or job crafting initiatives—creating a more adaptive and supportive work environment from the outset.

3 | Conclusion

This "Provocation Article" has argued that personnel selection should be reimagined as a process to not only predict job performance but also to anticipate and support employee well-being. Our call to include well-being as a criterion in personnel selection aligns with a growing body of work that positions well-being as central to organizational science. Tay et al. (2023) argue that well-being should be considered the *ultimate* criterion in this field, reflecting its foundational role in both individual and organizational functioning. Similarly, the well-being of others—particularly subordinates—has been increasingly recognized as a core leadership responsibility (e.g., Inceoglu et al. 2018). Some organizations likely already consider this implicitly in selection decisions, and a few scholars have explicitly advocated for its inclusion as a criterion (e.g., Robertson and Flint-Taylor 2009). In this article, we bridge the previously distinct research streams of well-being and personnel selection, provide ethical, legal, and economical arguments for integrating well-being as a criterion into personnel selection, outline practical pathways for integrating well-being into selection systems, and acknowledge key challenges—such as balancing multiple criteria, avoiding exclusionary practices, and understanding the role of faking. Ultimately, we call for a shift toward multi-criteria selection systems that promote not only organizational effectiveness but also human flourishing.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Endnotes

[1]The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Act (1970, Section 5, General Duty Clause) mandates that employers provide a workplace free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm. Thus, the Act primarily addresses physical hazards, but mental health hazards that could lead to serious physical harm, such as suicide or severe physiological consequences, may also be subject to regulation under this provision. However, mental health risks are not explicitly included and enforcement related to psychological hazards seems limited. Consequently, the U.S. stands as an exception compared to other jurisdictions that explicitly encompass mental health within workplace safety laws.

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