Perishing the publication pressure

Master thesis on the moral responsibilities
of research institutes towards the well-being
of their academic staff

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Abstract

Research has shown that PhD students and other (young) researchers are more at risk for health problems than their highly educated peers. This seems to be the result of the culture within academia. Elements of this culture are a high workload and a quantitative focus on scientific output, which leads to stress and, therefore, a decrease in the well-being of the researcher. As employers, research institutes might be able to alleviate this stress. This thesis explores the moral responsibilities research institutes have towards the well-being of their academic staff.

Our research showed that being employed plays a substantial role in the well-being of a person, both positively and negatively. Research institutes have the opportunity to contribute to the well-being of their employees by eliminating the negative influences work can bring.

Organisations are moral agents who have a moral responsibility towards promoting the well-being of their employees. Research institutes, specifically, have the moral responsibility to tackle problems like publication pressure, because these originate in the research institute or because of the academic climate. They cannot transfer this responsibility to other institutions.

Organisations are crucial to human capabilities and functionings, as their policies influence human agency. To maximize the capability of the organisation to take care of the well-being of their employees, research institutes should anchor support for their employees' functionings and capabilities in corporate policy. Research institutes, thus, have the moral responsibility to use the capability of the organisation to support their academic staff in pursuing individual sets of capabilities, thereby enhancing individual well-being.

Despite recent developments regarding the topics of publication pressure and the quantitative focus on scientific output, research institutes have not yet successfully alleviated the factor of stress. This is most likely the result of the mentality in academia. We listed advice for corporate policy, which should be used to ensure a higher level of well-being of academic staff within research institutes.

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Introduction

"Publication pressure? It is not so bad", headlines DUB, the independent news site of Utrecht University, in 2013 (Hamel, 2013). The headline is a direct quote from Hans Clevers, professor at Utrecht University and at the time president of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). In addition, Clevers claims that "As a scientist, it is your job to discover things and write them down. That is your profession". Prof. dr. Clevers compares researchers to car dealers, who need to sell cars to be considered successful in their job.

In 2016, a study by the University of Amsterdam showed that 36,5% of their PhD students are at risk of clinical depression (Daas, Munneke, Bray, Goswami & Ten Berg, 2016:5). In addition, a Dutch study in 2017 showed that in academia especially PhD students and other young researchers are at risk for health problems (De Knecht, 2018). The same study showed that 51% of the PhD students have two or more symptoms that are characterised as a risk for ill health by the *General Health Questionnaire,* which is used to measure general health. 31% even has four of the symptoms, such as sleeping problems, listlessness and feelings of depression. Compared to a reference group of other young highly educated people, PhD students are two to three times more likely to have psychological complaints than their highly educated peers (De Knecht, 2018).

Although further research on the subject is needed, there seems to be a link between the health problems experienced by the PhD students and other (young) researchers and the culture within academia. Elements of this culture are high workload and a focus on scientific output. Inge van der Weijden, a researcher at Leiden University, explains that "recently graduated PhD students experience a high publication pressure coupled with constant pressure to obtain sufficient research funding. These feelings are heightened in combination with an uncertain career perspective in a hyper-competitive working environment in which they all look for further jobs within academia" (De Knecht, 2018).

Prof. dr. Clevers is described by Hamel as a researcher with a top sports mentality (Hamel, 2013). This mentality has led him to many accomplishments and positions, making him a successful researcher. However, this mentality is a standard that can hardly be expected from every researcher. Reality is that the current culture in academia causes (mental) health

problems among researchers, with all its consequences. If there is any possibility to change this outcome, it is helpful to consider the role of research institutes within this problem.

Method

Within this thesis, the research question is "what, if any, moral responsibilities do research institutes have towards the well-being of their academic staff?" As publication pressure is a topic that is frequently presented within the available literature, it will be used as a case study for this research question throughout the text, which is also why the first chapter will elaborate on publication pressure and introduce a case study. In the second chapter, the value of well-being will be explored, as well as the importance of (mental) health within this value and the role and responsibility of organisations in well-being. The main goal of this chapter is to find out whether organisations are able to contribute to the well-being of their employees. Chapter three focuses on the topic of moral responsibility, arguing that organisations have moral status and therefore have the moral responsibility to promote the well-being of their employees. Chapter four, in addition, focuses on the capability of organisations to take moral responsibility, asking the question whether it is possible for organisations to alleviate the stress experienced by academic staff. Last, chapter five will focus on the future: given that organisations have the capability to take moral responsibility for the well-being of their academic staff, what consequences do they have to take into account, what needs to change in the academic culture, and what group of people is designated to take charge in addressing these changes.

Ultimately, we will reach the conclusion that research institutes have the moral responsibility to use the capability of the organisation to support their academic staff in pursuing individual sets of capabilities. In doing so, the research institutes enhance the well-being of the academic staff. On the level of publication pressure, focusing specifically on mental health and stress factors, using the capability of the organisation means creating better working conditions in the institute that alleviates the academic staff from focusing on scientific output rather than impactful research. Upward mobility and intrinsic motivation of the staff will in this case not be at risk, because a better working environment leads to working ability going up, leading to more (scientific) output.

Chapter 1 An introduction to publication pressure

A brief history of the importance of publications

Over the last 50 years, academia has gone through a change in their focus regarding the importance of the publication of articles in scientific journals. For a long time, promotions, hiring, and tenure decisions were based on connections in the hierarchy of institutions: if you knew the right people, you had a fruitful career to look forward to (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2012:1283). Over time, however, the focus that institutions had on the so-called *input* to science in the field shifted toward an *output* focus, which focused more on the quantity of research output (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2012:1282). Hendrik van Dalen and Kène Henkens (2012:1282-1287) identified three major reasons for this shift: first of all, the focus on output boosts competition among scientists, which goes hand in hand with the second reason, namely to give taxpayers value for their money, as they contribute to science by paying their taxes. Last, an important reason for academia to embrace publications was to break up the deadlock of the importance of network and connections, which led to increased upward mobility for talented outsiders.

Why do we publicize scientific articles?

Publications are a very effective communication channel for scientists to share their work, ideas, difficulties, and achievements (Guraya, Norman, Khoshhal, Guraya & Forgione, 2016:1563). Furthermore, publications are important because they bring researchers professional development and progress in the scientific community. There are also a lot of non-intrinsic reasons to publish. Examples for this are monetary incentives, publication being a requirement for promotion or recruitment, or compulsory regulatory obligations by institutions (Guraya et al., 2016:1563).

Publication pressure

The "subjective pressure resulting from the feeling that one *has* to publish" (Woolf, 1986:254), is what among researchers is called publication pressure. A negative attitude towards the current publication climate is present across academic ranks and disciplinary fields, however, the largest amount of publication stress is perceived amongst postdocs and assistant professors (Haven, Bouter, Smulders & Tijdink, 2019:4). Various studies on perceived publication pressure among researchers all over the world show that a majority of the rates

the publication pressure as "too high" (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2012:1285; Tijdink, Verbeke & Smulders, 2014:64; Tijdink, Vergouwen & Smulders, 2013:2).

Multiple reasons for publication pressure can be identified. First of all, the strong emphasis on scientific productivity that is put on researchers may increase the sense of publication pressure (Tijdink et al., 2014:64). Scientific productivity, or scientific quantity, is often evaluated on the basis of performance indicators such as the Journal Impact Factor (amount of citations a journal has in the past 2 years) and the Hirsch-index (article citation scores to measure individual researchers). These indicators measure scientific output, but not scientific quality. Van Dalen and Henkens (2012:1283) described this phenomenon as living in an *attention economy*, meaning that visibility is an important part of the equation of academic success. The content of the publications, they claim, is taking a backseat in academia. A second reason researchers may perceive publication pressure is linked to the first one: quantitative measures of scientific output determine status and prestige and, therefore, serve to rank universities as well as individuals (Tijdink et al., 2013:1). Additionally, institutions tend to award grants, funding, or promotions to those who publish in prestigious journals. Individual researchers, therefore, feel the urge to publish more because of this reason, leading to a higher perceived stress level.

Intended consequences of using scientific output to rank researchers and institutions thus include upward mobility and increasing individual productivity and aggregate output (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2012:1283). Unintended consequences of publication pressure comprise amongst other things scientific misconduct (plagiarism, fraud, manipulating data, etc.), the jeopardization of other academic activities such as clinical practice and education, the widespread publication of non-significant research, poor research involving an increase in retractions, a decreased willingness to share data with colleagues and solely publishing positive results, and less orientation towards policy issues (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2012:1291; Tijdink et al., 2014:67-68; Guraya et al., 2016:1563-1565). On top of that, Tijdink et al. (2013:1) found that the association between burn out symptoms and level of perceived publication pressure is significant and strong. The current publication climate is thus contributing to a decrease in the well-being of researchers all over the world.

Case study

Throughout this thesis, a case study will be used to apply insights from the chapters to. Our case involves a research institute that is doing well in the rankings for scientific output but has a high percentage of researchers experiencing stress-related health symptoms as a result of the pressure the institute puts on them to preserve the ranking spots. The institute wants to create a better work environment for its employees but is unwilling to give up their place in the highly prestigious worldwide rankings. When applicable, more details about the case study will be revealed in the chapters.

Chapter 2 Well-being as a value and the role of (mental) health

Well-being is considered an important value in human life. It is, therefore, often named in policy-making and continuous goals of organisations. This chapter explores what well-being is and what role (mental) health has in the well-being of a person, as well as what role being employed has on both health and well-being. Our main goal is to find out whether organisations, such as the research institutes in our case study, are able to contribute to employee well-being.

What is well-being?

Well-being is a term that is used differently in philosophy than it is used in public discourse. Outside of academia, the term well-being usually relates to (mental) health. In philosophy, however, the definition that is generally used for the term well-being is "the notion of how well a person's life is going for that person" (Crisp, 2017). This notion could thereby include (mental) health as one of its constituents. The use of the term is thus broader in philosophy. Most people care about their well-being, and policy advisors and governments often use it as a value that is used to evaluate and design policies.

Within the definition of well-being, 'for that person' is an important qualifier, as it implies that well-being is a personal value rather than a public value. This also correlates with the term *self-interest*. Derek Parfit stated in his book Reasons and Persons that well-being answers the question "what would be the best for someone, or would be most in this person's interests, or would make this person's life go, for him, as well as possible?" (Parfit, 1984:493). This emphasizes that the person's own interests are key to answering the question of what, for him, constitutes well-being.

Does (mental) health contribute to well-being?

As discussed earlier, health[1] could be one of the constituents of well-being. To substantiate this claim further, we will take a look at a well-known well-being theory, namely the objective list theory, and the capability approach, which claims the freedom to achieve well-being to be

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[1] Health, from now on, is defined in line with the WHO definition for health: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organization, 2012).

of primary moral importance and that this freedom is to be understood in terms of people's capabilities (Robeyns, 2016).

Objective list theories list a number of items that are generally good for people and, therefore, contribute to the well-being of a person. These items on the 'list' are always there, regardless of whether an individual desires them or not. What the list looks like is a continuous process and is based on reflective judgement (Robeyns, 2016). Once someone shows that the reference list is unsatisfactory because, for example, an item should be added to the list, the list changes. It seems contradictory that an objective list is based on subjective reflection or even intuition. However, the argumentation part is what brings us closer to the truth of what the list looks like.

Looking at health, it seems reasonable to assume that the topic would make the list of items that constitute well-being. If someone's health is damaged, and for example causing them to be neurodivergent or disabled of bodily functions, they are generally worse off than able-bodied or neurotypical individuals. We can, therefore, conclude that health belongs on the list of items that constitute well-being. It might occur that a neurodivergent person, for example a person with an autism spectrum disorder, reasons that their condition benefits them in their work. However, the objective list theory labels them as worse off than a neurotypical individual, because it takes every aspect of life into account.

Now, let us take a look at another theory that is not always mentioned immediately as a well-being theory, but is built around the value entirely: the capability approach. The capability approach holds that we have the freedom to achieve well-being, which is to be understood in terms of people's capabilities, that is, their opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value (Robeyns, 2016).

The capability approach distinguishes functionings and capabilities. Functionings can be described as 'beings and doings', which are most easily explained as the state an individual can be in (e.g. being educated, being depressed) and activities an individual can undertake (e.g. voting, travelling). A capability, then, is an individual's real freedom or opportunity to achieve functionings (Robeyns, 2016).

Putting forward the notion of health again, we can conclude that being healthy or unhealthy is a functioning that is a straightforward example of a feature a person can possess. The

capability of a person to achieve the functioning of being healthy depends on the resources this person has access to good food, a safe neighbourhood to exercise, money to pay for a gym membership, access to a psychiatrist, and so on.

The capability approach as a whole focuses on conditions for well-being. Above, good health was described as one of the functionings that contributes to achieving well-being. However, this conclusion does no honour to the importance of health in the daily life of an individual. If we are not healthy, this impacts all of our other functionings and capabilities. That is why health can be regarded of vital importance to the well-being of a person.

What role do work and organisations have in well-being?

We have now seen that health is, important when it comes to the well-being of a person. That is why we will now take a closer look at the role of work in both health as a value and the well-being of individuals.

Nordin (2015:2-11) described multiple reasons why work is an important aspect in human life. First of all, she describes that humans live in groups, and without the group, we would not survive because as animals, we are relatively slow and weak. Contributing to the group, which we do by working in a certain profession, creates a feeling of belonging, which in turn leads to feelings of being confirmed, cared for, and loved, but foremost: safety (Nordin, 2015:3). This sense of belonging to a group with all its benefits is crucial for our well-being (Nordin, 2015:2). Apart from fulfilling the need for belonging, work also provides economic safety and the possibility for development and identification (Nordin, 2015:3). Work, however, is not only positively associated with well-being. Certain jobs demand high physical commitment, others bring risks because of the substances that are worked with, such as highly contagious micro-organisms. Nowadays, however, the most prominent work-related risk factor for ill health is stress (Nordin, 2015:3). In chapter one, we have seen that individual researchers feel the urge to publish scientific articles because many research institutes focus on scientific output, leading to a higher perceived stress level. Employees at research institutes thus are at risk for ill health because of the environment they work in.

Let us suppose that an organisation wants to improve the well-being of its employees. What would be in it for the employers and the corresponding organisations? In 2008, Kuoppala, Lamminpää and Husman conducted a systematic review that studied the association between

work health promotion and job well-being, work ability, absenteeism, and early retirement. Work health promotion targets work contents, workplace health, and work environment. What was found is that there is moderate evidence health promotion causes a decrease in sickness absences and increased work ability. Furthermore, having work health promotion at the workplace also seems to increase the mental well-being, but not the physical well-being of the employees (Kuoppala, Lamminpää & Husman, 2008:1216-17). It is thus beneficial for organisations to look into improving the well-being of its employees.

Is well-being a personal or public value?
Given that well-being is a personal value that is composed by the self-interest of an individual, a logical question to ask would be whether others, either people, organisations or other actors, *should* contribute to the well-being of individuals. Organisations might be *able* to contribute to the well-being of their staff, but that does not necessarily imply that they should, or have a moral responsibility to do so. This topic will be further explored in the upcoming chapters.

Research institutes: how do they contribute to well-being?
In this chapter, we concluded that (mental) health is an important factor in the overall well-being of a person, if not the most important factor of all. Being employed, as the academic staff at the research institute is, has the potential to be a positive factor in the well-being of individual employees. However, as Nordin concluded, stress is one of the most prominent risk factors for ill health. From the facts and figures as presented in the introduction and chapter one, we can see that stress, for example stress and pressure to publicize articles, is often reported by PhD students and other academic staff, meaning that their well-being is at risk. It would be beneficial for research institutes to reduce the stress experienced by its staff by lowering expectations: less stress would likely result in a decrease in sickness absences, an increase in work ability, and so on.

In Austria, research was conducted on the best way to promote the mental health of employees. The key success factors to better mental health in the workplace include a focus on overall health, openness, transparency, employee involvement, personal engagement, and strengthening of self-confidence (Burkert, Muckenhuber, Großschädl, Sprenger, Rohrauer-Näf, Ropin, Martinel & Dorner, 2013:144). These are all possibilities for research institutes to contribute to further contribute to their academic staff's well-being.

In summary

In this chapter, we have seen that health is an important factor when it comes to the well-being of a person. We have also seen that work and work circumstances play a substantial role in the well-being of a person, and should therefore not be overlooked. Organisations are able to contribute to the health, and therefore well-being, of their employees, and it is beneficial to the organisation itself as well. Although well-being is a personal value that is composed of the self-interest of an individual, health is something that contributes to every person's well-being. Organisations are able to enhance the well-being of every staff member, but the question remains whether they should. In the next chapter, we will dive deeper into the question whether organisations have a moral responsibility to enhance the well-being of their employees.

Chapter 3 The moral status of organisations

In the previous chapter, we found out that organisations, and therefore research institutes, are able to contribute to the well-being of their employees. Being able to do so, however, does not directly imply that they also *have* to do so. In this chapter we will discuss the moral status of organisations, asking the question if organisations have moral responsibilities, and if so, what that moral responsibility would consist of in research institutes.

What is moral responsibility?

Responsibility as a term is often used in a variety of contexts. Geoff Moore (1999:330) uses the analysis of Velasquez (1985) to describe the different meanings of responsibility. First of all, he describes that the term responsibility can mean 'trustworthy' or 'dependable', describing responsibility as a character trait. Second, responsibility can be a duty or obligation, implying that the agent who is responsible has a forward-looking sense. Third, responsibility can be described as the attribution of an action or the consequences of that action. This implies a backward-looking sense (Moore, 1999:330).

The backward-looking sense can be further categorised into three categories. First, X can be the cause of Y, for example the mental health problems PhD students face are caused by the hyper-competitive working environment of academia. This is referred to as a causal responsibility. Second, X can be responsible for paying compensation arising from Y. An example of this is a parent paying for their neighbours' broken window because their child hit a baseball into it. This is also called a compensatory sense. In the third category, X intentionally brought Y about, or X did nothing to prevent Y from happening. This kind of responsibility cannot be transferred to others, and can only be the act of an agent who acts on reason (Moore, 1999:330). The judgment that someone is responsible in this sense is thus linked to attributing certain powers and capacities to that agent (Talbert, 2019). This kind of responsibility is referred to as moral responsibility.

Do organisations have moral responsibility?

Apart from moral responsibility itself, moral personhood and moral agency are terms that are used while referencing the moral responsibility of individuals. Before we start reasoning whether these additional terms can be used when talking about organisations, we must define moral personhood and moral agency and their relation to moral responsibility.

The terms moral person and moral agent are often used interchangeably. Moral personhood or being a moral person refers to individual beings who are moral agents. Moral agents engage in behaviour that can be classified as moral or immoral. If the behaviour of a moral agent is a result of an intentional action, they can be held accountable and therefore morally responsible for it. Adult humans with full mental capacity are generally classified both moral persons and moral agents (MU School of Medicine, 2020).

In law groups or organisations can be referred to as persons. This is also called corporate personhood. Collier (1995:146) stated that if organisations are persons in the legal sense, it implies metaphysical personhood as well, since it is impossible for the law to create anything that does not exist in some prior sense. French (1984:32), one of the main proponents for attributing moral agency to corporations (Moore, 1999:331), argues that the legal and metaphysical notions of personhood are also closely related to moral personhood. Manning (1984:77-8) agrees to this by arguing that the concept of moral personhood itself might be beyond what we can attribute to organisations, but moral agency, which is not limited to individual humans, allows us to attribute moral responsibility to organisations. To prevent misunderstandings in the usage of terms, we will now continue to use the term 'moral agency' and 'moral agent' to describe actors who are morally responsible for their actions.

French (1984) and Manning (1984) both described conditions for corporate moral agency. French starts by stating that moral agency requires a notion of intentionality: corporations have reasons for doing what they do, and this is not based on the intentions of the individuals who work for the corporation (French, 1984:40). French argued that corporations capture their intentions in so-called Corporation's Internal Decision (CID) structures (French, 1979:211-12), which involves a flow chart on power structures within the organisation and corporate decision recognition rules (French, 1979:212). The CID structure of a corporation also incorporates the acts of biological persons, which allows the *mens rea* of employees to be an attributing factor in decision-making (French, 1979:215). Additionally, French described three crucial capacities to be classified as a moral agent. First, a moral agent is to be able to act intentionally. Second, there is the ability to make rational decisions and the ability to consider rational arguments concerning the intentions. Third, moral agents can respond to events and ethical criticism, for example by altering their behaviour if this behaviour is considered detrimental to own interests (French, 1995:12). Manning (1984:82) described a

similar pair of conditions for corporate moral agency. First, there must be a causal responsibility between the act of the corporation and the faulty outcome. Second, the moral fault is not "analysable as the mere sum of the moral faults of individual members of the corporation" (Manning, 1984:82), meaning that the fault must lay in the corporate policy rather than the actions of employees. In conclusion, French and Manning both argue that corporations can be regarded moral agents.

The most prominent counter-argument against attributing corporations moral agency is provided by Velasquez (1985:117-20), who argues that French is wrong because "corporate acts do not originate in the corporation but in the corporation's members" (Velasquez, 1985:117). Velasquez argues that moral responsibility for an act can only be attributed when the act originated in the agent's own body, and further specifies the parts of the body over which the moral agent has direct control. As corporations act via their employees, who have bodily autonomy and are therefore not under the direct control of the organisation, they cannot be held morally responsible for their actions. In addition, Velasquez argues that the intentions of the corporation are not carried out by the corporation itself, but by the people working for the corporation, which means that the act is not carried out by the same agent that formed the intention.

Although Velasquez makes an excellent point, he seems to be referring to moral personhood rather than moral agency in his argument. If we discuss Velasquez' arguments from a moral agency perspective rather than a moral person perspective, the body the act originates from Velasquez mentions can be linguistically compared to the corporation. Additionally, the CID structures of a corporation are formed by the intentions of its employees, who eventually also carry out the acts. The acts are thus carried out by the same agents who formed the intentions of the corporation. The only difference between the intention of individuals and the intention of the corporation is that the latter is a collective intention rather than an individual one, but by no means is this a less valid intention.

Organisations do have moral responsibility because they are moral agents. However, this does not mean that employees within the corporation are free of individual moral responsibilities as moral persons, as corporate moral agency is solely based on the intentions and responsibilities of the corporation.

Research institutes: what moral responsibilities do they have?

As established before, being morally responsible means that the moral agent cannot transfer the responsibility to another. Referring back to the case study discussed in chapter one, what does the moral responsibility of research institutes consist of towards, for example, the publication pressure that is experienced by the academic staff? Having a moral responsibility as an organisation means that the organisation needs to do everything that lies within its powers and capacities to do the right thing. The right thing, in this case, would be to take care of the well-being of the academic staff. To ensure this, research institutes have the moral responsibility to lower stress levels of their employees, for example by lowering the pressure to publicize a minimum number of articles in a limited timeframe. In chapter four, the capacities of organisations to carry this out will be further discussed.

Doing nothing is not an option. A research institute intentionally bringing publication pressure about or doing nothing to prevent burn out symptoms from happening is considered morally unjust, as they have the moral responsibility to take care of the well-being of their employees. This responsibility is theirs and cannot be transferred to others. Furthermore, as a moral agent being aware of this issue, they should be able to respond to the criticism on the academic culture by altering their intentions and patterns of behaviour. After all, their current policy is detrimental to their interests, as lower employee well-being is disadvantageous for the research institutes as we have seen in chapter two.

In summary

In this chapter, we have established that in addition to individuals, corporations or organisations are moral agents as well, meaning that they do have moral responsibilities. Moral responsibility is a kind of responsibility that cannot be transferred to others, and can only be the act of an agent who acts on reason. An example of a moral responsibility that research institutes have towards their employees is to alleviate the stress caused by the focus on scientific output, which is a means to the end of increased well-being of employees. Doing nothing about the issue would be morally unjust, as the research institutes are aware that publication pressure exists and that the fault may lay in corporate policy. Therefore, they should do everything in their powers and capacities to create a better situation. In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at the actual capability of research institutes to improve the current situation.

Chapter 4 The capability of organisations to take moral responsibility towards the well-being of their staff

In chapter two, we concluded that organisations are able to contribute to the well-being of their employees. In the previous chapter, we concluded that organisations are moral agents and, therefore, have the moral responsibility to promote the well-being of their (academic) staff. This means that the organisation needs to do everything that lies within its powers and capacities to address the issue and to take steps to solve it.

That brings us to the question if research institutes are able to take steps towards solving the issue alleviating stress, for example by tackling publication pressure. To answer this question, we will first revisit the capability approach.

The capability approach applied to organisations

As earlier explained in the chapter on well-being, the capability approach is "a broad normative framework for the evaluation and assessment of individual well-being and social arrangements, the design of policies, and proposals about social changes" (Robeyns, 2005:94). The approach focuses on the capabilities and functionings of individuals to achieve individual well-being. Additionally, Drèze and Sen (2002:6) have argued that the capability approach is a 'people-centered' approach which puts human agency at the centre of the stage. Opportunities to expand this human agency, then, are crucial, as it enhances both well-being and freedom. However, the opportunities that arise to enhance human agency are often strongly influenced by (social) circumstances and (public) policy (Drèze & Sen, 2002:6). Organisations, who generally work with policies, thus do have a role in human capabilities, but are for once not put at the centre of the stage, meaning that organisational interventions are merely a means to the end of enhancing a person's agency.

Evaluating organisational practices by using the capability approach is not uncommon. The approach is often used to measure policy effectiveness according to their impact on people's capabilities (Robeyns, 2005:95). This evaluation merely focuses on the question whether the means or resources necessary for a person's capabilities are present. In case the individual's capability for health is evaluated, the capability approach asks whether the person has access to clean water, doctors, and is protected from harmful substances. But apart from these, other dimensions of human well-being are evaluated by the capability approach as well. Examples

for this are having access to education, participating in community activities and the ability to create and maintain friendships (Robeyns, 2005:95-6).

Robeyns (2005:94-5) summarises Sen's argument on the usability of the capability approach regarding policy analysis by stating that "evaluations and policies should focus on what people are able to do and be, on the quality of their life, and on removing obstacles in their lives so that they have more freedom to live the kind of life that, upon reflection, they have reason to value". If we translate this statement to organisations in general, this means that organisational policies should focus on the resources employees need to achieve their capabilities and functionings. An example of this could be providing employees access to sports facilities close to the workplace.

As organisations do contribute to individual well-being, the question we should ask is how exactly organisations can contribute to the capabilities and functionings of its employees, as it would provide us with a framework on what organisations can and should do to promote the well-being of their employees.

'Powers and capacities' in relation to capability

An important aspect of moral responsibility is that a moral agent has to do everything in their powers and capacities to do the right thing. The phrasing 'power and capacities', however, is not elaborated on much in literature. This is why, in this section, we will use the capability approach itself to assess what actions organisations could undertake when it comes to meeting their moral responsibilities. We thus regard organisations as individuals to find out what capabilities they have to act on their moral responsibilities. The phrasing 'powers and capacities', therefore, will be a synonym for 'capabilities' in this section.

Again, functionings can be described as 'beings and doings', which are most easily explained as the state an individual can be in (e.g. being educated, being depressed) and activities an individual can undertake (e.g. voting, travelling). A capability, then, is an individual's real freedom or opportunity to achieve functionings (Robeyns, 2016). To illustrate the capability of organisations, we will use the case study from chapter one as an example.

We assume that research institutes, just like individuals, can have functionings. To name a few examples, they can have beings (being inclusive, being open about leadership structures and money flows) and doings (engaging in politics, impacting the local community). The capability

of the research institute to achieve these functionings, however, often depends on the people working within the organisation. If the research institute, for example, employs people who are keen on activism and engaging with hot topics in politics, the chances of the organisation having the capability to show their engagement in politics are higher. If the research institute employs an HR manager who is racist, the chance that the research institute hires a person of colour might be lower. However, not all capabilities depend on the people within the organisation. An example of this is having adequate financial resources to support employees in their needs.

Organisations can thus have capabilities, but the execution of the capabilities mostly relies on the people working in the organisation. The organisation, however, is responsible for creating corporate policies. To ensure the maximization of using the capability of the organisation, it would be beneficial to anchor certain practices, such as programs to support academic staff in pursuing individual sets of capabilities and functionings, in corporate policies. Thereby, the contribution of the organisation to the well-being of its employees is maximized.

Research institutes: perishing publication pressure

Above, we have argued that research institutes should anchor the capabilities of the organisation in corporate policies in order to meet their moral responsibilities. How should the research institute from our case study proceed to lower the stress levels of their employees?

In order to get rid of publication pressure within the organisation itself, a few measures can be taken. In chapter one, we have seen that publication pressure has three major reasons: first, most research institutes have a strong emphasis on scientific productivity (Tijdink et al., 2014:64), second, quantitative measures of scientific output determine status and prestige and serve to rank universities and researchers (Tijdink et al., 2013:1), and third, grants, funding, and promotions are often rewarded to those who publish in prestigious journals. If the research institute wants to take their moral responsibility and lower the publication pressure, components of the corporate policy should include ways to avoid these practices. An example of this could be that the institute decides to re-evaluate their conditions for promotion and to ask applicants for a portfolio on their full academic work instead of an overview of scientific output.

What is important to note about this is that every employee is still in charge of their individual functionings and capabilities. The role of the organisation is solely to provide its employees with equity in opportunity to act on their capabilities in a working environment.

In summary

In this chapter, we have asked the question whether research institutes are able to take steps towards taking their moral responsibility and promoting the well-being of employees, for example by solving the issue of publication pressure. To answer this question, we revisited the capability approach and concluded that organisations play a crucial role in the human capability to achieve well-being. The corporate policies should, therefore, focus on the needs of employees, so that they can achieve their capabilities and functionings. Organisations can do this by anchoring support for employees' functionings and capabilities in corporate policy. Thereby, the capability of the organisation to contribute to well-being is maximized. Summarized, research institutes have the moral responsibility to use the capability of the organisation to support their academic staff in pursuing individual sets of capabilities.

So far, we have seen that organisations are able to contribute to the well-being of their employees, that they are moral agents and, therefore, have moral responsibilities, and that they have the capability to act on these moral responsibilities. However, up to now, we have focused on what a single organisation (or research institute) is able to do. In the next chapter, we will take a look at the bigger picture that is the academic world as a whole, and discuss what consequences the research institute and the employees from our case study might face when no other research institutes take their responsibility.

Chapter 5 What are the consequences of taking responsibility and how do we change the academic culture?

Research institutes have the capability to act on their moral responsibilities, and therefore they should do everything in their powers and capacities to contribute to the well-being of their academic staff, for example by alleviating publication pressure within the organisation. Despite recent developments regarding the topic of publication pressure and the quantitative focus on scientific output in general, research institutes have not yet accomplished to successfully change their corporate policies to solve the issue of publication pressure. In this chapter, we will explore the current developments in academia on the topic of creating a better work environment. After that, we will discuss whether these initiatives are enough to inflict the change that needs to happen within academia. Last, we discuss what changes need to happen within the academic culture to make sure that the well-being of employees in research institutes goes up.

Current developments

Science in Transition

The four initiators of Science in Transition believe that science is in need of fundamental reform. This Dutch initiative has kindled a debate among researchers and policymakers in The Netherlands. Together with representatives from the KNAW, NWO, and VSNU, important actors for research in The Netherlands, an agenda for change was created (Science in Transition, 2013).

On the agenda for change, seven topics are presented: 1) The image of science, which expresses the underlying values and sets the standard to which people practicing science have to conform in order to arrive at valid statements; 2) Trust in science, especially since science is internally organised on the basis of scepticism and mistrust; 3) Quality of science, assessing whether the current system is still adequate for measuring quality; 4) Fraud and deceit, which cannot be ruled out among scientists and raises the question whether there is a need for a research integrity institute; 5) Communication, asking the question who publications should reach and how their research should be communicated to the public; 6) Democracy and policy, asking the question how politics should be involved in science; and 7) The connection between

education and research, addressing that the level of science education is and that education is not always a priority (Science in Transition, 2013).

Science in Transition got more publicity than the initiators expected. At first, the group received a lot of criticism from, among others, board members from the NWO. They believed that the Science in Transition initiative would cause a bad reputation for science, and that they would pay the bill. On the other hand, a large group of researchers was happy and relieved that the illusion was finally broken. In the end, the idea of Science in Transition gained a prominent role in current science policy. The system of rewards and appreciation is now regulated nationally in The Netherlands, but there is still a direct relationship between the way researchers are assessed and how the money available for research is distributed. This approach is shifting towards a focus on societal impact instead of impact factors, but we are not there yet (De Knecht, 2019).

Young Science in Transition

Young Science in Transition was established in 2018 by 15 young researchers from the UMC Utrecht. They give a voice to the needs of young researchers within the organisation. The UMC Utrecht had announced that they would acknowledge and appreciate the work of the academic staff in a different way and implemented a new model for research evaluation, but the researchers from Young Science in Transition felt that young researchers, such as PhD students, fell by the wayside using this model. They designed a new evaluation process for PhD students that is implemented in more and more places within the organisation (De Knecht, 2020).

Young Science in Transition found that 'four publications for a thesis' was dominant within the UMC Utrecht, but no one knew why. The focus on the number of publications as a measure of excellence also sends the wrong message, as young researchers learn that more is always better, the interviewees from Young Science in Transition say in ScienceGuide. In the PhD evaluation Young Science in Transition developed, in addition to planning for the PhD thesis, attention is also paid to the personal development of the PhD student (De Knecht, 2020).

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment

The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) was developed in 2012 during the annual meeting of the American Society for Cell Biology. Over time, it has become a worldwide initiative covering all scholarly disciplines and stakeholders in science. The DORA

recognizes that there is a need to improve how the outputs of scholarly research are evaluated (The American Society for Cell Biology, 2020).

The declaration itself consists of a set of recommendations for various stakeholders in science, and it can be signed to show support by institutions as well as individuals. Three major themes run through the recommendations: 1) the need to eliminate the use of journal-based metrics in funding, appointment, and promotion considerations; 2) the need to assess research on its own merits rather than on the basis of the journal in which the research is published; and 3) the need to capitalize on the opportunities provided by online publication (The American Society for Cell Biology, 2020).

Specific recommendations for institutions are to be explicit about the criteria used to reach hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions, to highlight that the scientific content of a paper is of primary importance, to value and impact of all research outputs in addition to publications, and to consider a broad range of impact measures, such as the influence of the research on policy and practice (The American Society for Cell Biology, 2020).

The DORA is signed by the VSNU (Dutch Association for Universities), representing all universities in The Netherlands. On top of that, Utrecht University and Maastricht University have separately signed the DORA, as well as individual researchers from multiple universities in The Netherlands.

Other initiatives

Apart from the Dutch Science in Transition initiatives and the DORA, many other journals and individual researchers have addressed the question on how to assess research quality and make sure science does the right things (Science in Transition, 2013).

Despite these initiatives, mainly being active from 2012 onwards, we have seen that especially PhD students and other young researchers are at risk for ill health, and thus a decrease in well-being. In the case study that follows, we will illustrate a problem that young researchers can encounter in academia.

Research institutes: leaving one research institute for another

Let us suppose that the research institute from our case study recognizes its moral responsibilities and decides to take measures to alleviate the publication pressure for their academic staff. The corporate policies are altered in such a way that the institute's potential

to contribute to employee well-being is maximized. Promotions are no longer awarded to those with the highest scientific output, excelling in other academic activities such as teaching are being encouraged, and the societal impact of the conducted research has higher value within the institute than the quantity of research. As a result, the stress levels of employees have dropped, the overall health went up, and therefore the overall well-being went up as well.

Employee A, who is a former PhD student and now postdoc at our research institute, is happy in her career. Her projects have a profound impact on society. During her PhD, she publicized two articles in journals with an average impact score, and during her time as postdoc (which she has been working in for two years) another two publications were added to her list of publications. Recently, her partner has been offered a job in another country, and she is willing to move there as well. As a result, she needs to quit her job and find a new one at another institute in her new country of residence.

Research institute B, the biggest research institute in employee A's field of expertise in her new country of residence, is not impressed by the curriculum vitae employee A provided. Her amount of publications is relatively low for the years of experience she has, and the journals she did publicize in do not impress research institute B enough to offer her a job. Employee A feels disadvantaged by her former choices.

Young researchers bite the bullet

What we have seen in our case study is that pioneering as a research institute by removing the emphasis on scientific output can be disadvantageous for employees who eventually want to leave the research institute to work somewhere else. This is especially the case for young researchers, who do not yet have an established career with a permanent contract at one research institute. Although the working conditions within the research institute maximize employee well-being, young researchers in particular do not have the steadiness more experienced or 'accomplished' employees have. They often work under one-year contracts or other forms of temporary contracts, living in constant uncertainty about their employment.

The DORA and Science in Transition have admirable goals that certainly push science in the right direction, but these initiatives do not alleviate the publication pressure in the end. As long as not every research institute in the world adopts the changes in their corporate policies,

researchers will feel the need to publicize articles in order to be considered interesting by certain research institutes as employees.

Consequences of taking moral responsibility

In the case study above, we can see that one institute taking moral responsibility is not always favourable for individual researchers. If they want to leave research institute A that did not excessively focus on scientific output for research institute B that does, chances are that they are not valued enough by research institute B to get hired.

Looking at the situation on the short-term, employees might not choose to start their professional life at the research institute from our case study, because it can be disadvantageous if they ever want to transfer to another institute. However, in the long run, the research institutes that do take moral responsibility might be better off. By being a good employer and taking care of the well-being of the academic employees, chances are high that talented researchers prefer this institute over other institutes. As the employees are feeling well, their work ability goes up, leading to more (scientific) output. In the end, the outcomes will be roughly the same, but the difference is that the researchers are significantly feeling better because of the working conditions.

Change in the academic culture

If it seems so obvious that research institutes can benefit massively from taking their moral responsibility, why is it not happening yet? To answer this question, we go back to prof. dr. Hans Clevers, who was introduced in the introduction of this thesis. Clevers, an accomplished researcher and professor, is described as a person with a top sports mentality. Apart from running a research group, he has additional positions such as being in (corporate and editorial) boards and non-profit organisations. He has over 500 publications and was awarded multiple awards for his work, that has had an enormous impact in the fields of molecular genetics and cell biology.

Without claiming to know the intentions of prof. dr. Clevers, we can conclude from his curriculum vitae that he put a lot of time and effort into his career. His mentality has led to important breakthroughs in his fields of expertise. Science needs people like Clevers to advance rapidly, which is especially crucial when the world faces an urgent threat, like we currently do with COVID-19. However, the current culture in academia presses almost every researcher who wants job security into adopting this mentality as well, unnecessarily leading

to a decrease in the overall health, and therefore well-being, of these researchers. Not everyone is able to adopt a top sports mentality, let alone willing to adopt one. The people at the top of most research institutes, however, generally do have this mentality, and they (unintentionally) expect others to have this mentality as well.

The current culture in academia has ensured that a group of very talented, devoted (mainly young) researchers and academic teachers has left academia. An example is Suze Zijlstra, who wrote she was terminating her 'relationship' with the university that gave her the feeling she was never good enough for 'marriage' (Zijlstra, 2020). Zijlstra describes that in order to be recognized by her institute, she should have sacrificed her friends and family, because her work cost her all her free time and energy. She eventually decided, with another temporary contract ending, she had had enough, and went to look for a job outside of academia. Posting this story on social media, many of her colleagues commented that they were very sad to see her go, but that they understood completely and that they often thought about doing the same thing.

What academia needs if they truly want to take care of their employees is a change in culture. Although it is not to be taken lightly, it is possible to change a culture, and one organisation pioneering is enough to start this change. Regardless of the perspective adopted on organisational change, organisation culture researchers agree that top managers are powerful members of an organisation's culture. Their power grants them attention, which leads their behaviour to become a role model for others (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013:185). This is an important opportunity for the research institute from our case study: its leaders, who in all probability also have a voice in corporate policies, will have to speak up on behalf of the younger generation of researchers and make sure that lasting changes to ensure a higher level of well-being are made.

In chapter two was described that work has several important roles in human life: 1) contributing to a group; 2) safety; 3) and development and identification. Policy adjustments that fit these values could, therefore, be: 1) providing a sense of community and unity and higher appreciation for the work that is done; 2) providing economic safety by introducing more permanent contracts; and 3) more attention for personal development of (young) researchers and building skills outside of doing research, such as leadership or science communication.

In summary

Current developments in changing academia for the better, such as Science in Transition and the DORA, do not remove the factor of stress that employees in academia experience. However, by pioneering, taking moral responsibility and providing academic staff with good working conditions, one single research institute can make the difference for academia in general. In the long run, the research institutes that do take moral responsibility might be better off. By being a good employer and taking care of the well-being of academic employees, chances are high that talented researchers prefer this institute over other institutes.

Overall improvement of the situation requires a cultural change that is hard to start. Organisation culture researchers acknowledge that the top managers have powers that grant them attention and the possibility to become role models for others. The leaders from research institutes, then, will have to speak up on behalf of the younger generation of researchers and make sure lasting changes are made. Examples of changes that can be made to enhance employee well-being are 1) providing a sense of community and unity and higher appreciation for the work that is done; 2) providing economic safety by introducing more permanent contracts; and 3) more attention for personal development of (young) researchers and building skills outside of doing research, such as leadership or science communication.

Conclusion

The academic staff in research institutes is at risk for ill health as a result of the culture within academia. In this thesis, the aim was to find out what, if any, moral responsibilities research institutes have towards the well-being of their academic staff. The focus of this research question was on (mental) health, as health is an important factor in the overall well-being of individuals.

Work and work circumstances play a substantial role in the well-being of a person. Research institutes, therefore, have the opportunity to contribute to the well-being of employees. Three important roles work has in human life are safety, being able to contribute to a group, and development and identification. However, work is not only positively associated with well-being. The most prominent work-related risk factor for ill health is stress. Academia ranks its researchers based on scientific output, leading to stress and pressure to publicize articles. The publication pressure, therefore, leads to a decrease in the well-being of the academic staff.

Organisations are moral agents who have a moral responsibility towards promoting the well-being of their employees. This responsibility cannot be transferred to others, and the judgment that someone is responsible in this sense is linked to attributing certain powers and capacities to that agent. Research institutes have a moral responsibility towards tackling problems like publication pressure, because these originate in the research institute itself or because of the academic climate. They cannot transfer this responsibility to other institutions.

Organisations are crucial to human capabilities and functionings, as their policies influence human agency. To maximize the capability of the organisation to take care of the well-being of their employees, research institutes should anchor support for their employees' functionings and capabilities in corporate policy. That way, employees can maximize their well-being with the help of their employer. Research institutes, thus, have the moral responsibility to use the capability of the organisation to support their academic staff in pursuing individual sets of capabilities, thereby enhancing individual well-being.

Despite recent developments regarding the topic of publication pressure and the quantitative focus on scientific output in general, research institutes have not yet successfully alleviated the pressure and stress that comes with it for its employees. This is the result of the culture in

academia. Although cultural change is not to be taken lightly, organisation culture researchers acknowledge that the top managers have powers that grant them attention and the possibility to become role models for others. In the following section, tips are listed to help research institutes make lasting changes in their corporate policies.

Policy advice

Top managers, highly respected professors and researchers, and board members within research institutes have the level of power and attention to be role models for others and to propose changes in corporate policy. These leaders, therefore, have a crucial role in speaking up on behalf of their less influential colleagues. In order to ensure a higher level of well-being for the employees of research institutes, they should advocate for:

1) Providing a higher level of (economic) safety for all employees, for example by introducing more permanent contracts and not requiring a minimum number of publications each year;
2) Creating a sense of community and unity among researchers, for example by focusing on employee involvement and personal engagement, as well as celebrating and appreciating the work that is done;
3) More attention for personal development of (young) researchers to build their self-confidence and to create the opportunity to build skills outside of doing research, such as leadership or science communication.

Research opportunities

In the extension of this thesis, several research opportunities are available to gain more insight into the role of organisations in the well-being of employees. First, the notion 'power and capacities', in relation to acting on moral responsibility, can be further elaborated on. This would provide academia with a concrete framework of their possibilities to enhance employee well-being. Second, it would be interesting to look further into the application of the capability approach to organisations, and to determine whether organisations themselves have capabilities and functionings that they can use to ensure both their own well-being and the well-being of employees.

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