Happy-Performing Managers

THE IMPACT OF AFFECTIVE WELLBEING AND INTRINSIC JOB SATISFACTION IN THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract

This book provides contemporary means to solve an age-old conundrum in management - do happy workers perform better? Decades of research and empirical evidence have been unable to establish a strong link between affective well-being, intrinsic job satisfaction and managers’ performance. A unique methodology, fresh empirical evidence and a definitive analysis of previous theory and research are employed to support the happy productive worker thesis.

The authors test a kindred idea - the ‘happy-performing managers’ proposition, using advanced statistical techniques. Performance is measured to a previously unachievable level. New empirical evidence is used to predict how affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction influences managers’ contextual and task performance. These findings are argued to have significantly progressed our understanding of what underpins human performance at work.

The book prescribes how managers’ jobs might be changed to enhance or avoid a decline in happiness because managers’ performance is impacting as never before on organisational productivity and the economic prosperity of nation-states. Extraordinary shifts in the global corporate environment mean managers’ ‘personal troubles’ have now become ‘public concerns’. An emerging movement to Positive Organisational Scholarship is countering such forces by developing ways to create positive human and organisational wellbeing.

Happy-Performing Managers will be invaluable to academics, postgraduate students, human resource practitioners, executives and managers who are interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the factors that influence human performance in the workplace.
Introduction

Squeezing the pips – 1/2 x 2 x 3 – whereby half as many people are being paid twice as much, to produce three times more

(Handy, 1996)

In the new millennium happiness in the workplace is well and truly back in vogue. There has been an explosion of research into happiness, optimism and positive character traits. In the 21st century, effective managers’ performance is even more central to the success of organisations. So what is driving the surge of interest into employees’ and managers’ job happiness and performance?

The ‘happy-productive worker’ thesis

Few conundrums have captured and held the imagination of organisational researchers and practitioners as has the ‘happy-productive worker’ thesis. Proponents of this idea are convinced ‘a happy worker is a good worker’. Support for this ‘commonsense theory’ is based on the belief that happy workers are believed to perform better than their unhappy co-workers. A variation on the enduring debate of this happiness-productivity theme, the ‘happy-performing managers’ proposition, is tackled. Specifically, a thorough investigation is undertaken into the impact of two important aspects of job happiness – affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction – on managers’ contextual and task performance. Notwithstanding the general support for the ‘happy-productive worker’ idea, decades of research have been unable to establish a strong link between employees’ happiness and their performance. Perhaps the ‘happy-productive worker’ thesis is a self-sustaining ‘urban myth’, founded in opinion but lacking empirical support. Evidence presented in this book definitely suggests otherwise. An important shift in addressing this age old conundrum is evolving the ‘productive worker’ thesis into the ‘performing managers’ proposition.

The ‘happy-performing managers’ proposition

The metamorphosis of the ‘happy-productive worker’ thesis into the ‘happy-performing managers’ proposition is determined by the need to focus on managers’ performance in the workplace. As a butterfly is not simply a better caterpillar, the construct ‘managers’ performance’ is likewise different to ‘workers’ productivity’. As such, a manager is not simply an improved worker but is differentiated by a more complex array of roles and responsibilities informed by the function of contextual and task performance. The findings and observations in this article explain the ‘happy-performing managers’ proposition and how this intersects with the needs of organisations. The challenge is to reorientate our thinking to utilise modes of managers’ performance which are relevant and realistic for organisational success.

This article establishes the veracity of the ‘happy-performing managers’ proposition. From a broader perspective this discourse is also intended to contribute to the debate over what underpins human performance at work. Findings about employees’ affective wellbeing, intrinsic job satisfaction and performance also apply to managers who are invariably employees in some form. Whether the affect/satisfaction-performance relationship applies to managers is answered in studies by Hosie, Sevastos, & Cooper (2006); Hosie, Forster, & Sevastos (2004); Hosie (2003); Hosie, Forster, & Sevastos (2002).

Comprehensive and robust evidence was found to support the existence of a definite relationship between managers’ job-related affective wellbeing, intrinsic job satisfaction and performance. Specific indicators of affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction were found to be reliable predictors of certain dimensions of managers’ contextual and task performance. Insights are supplied into how positive affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction are related to enhanced managerial performance, whereas conversely, poor affective wellbeing indicates diminished performance. In addition, the structure and substance of managers’ contextual and task performance is established to a standard previously unachievable.
Someone Keeps Moving the Goal Posts

Pressures to manage within increasingly complex local, national and global workplace dynamics are greater than ever before. Restructuring, deregulation, tariff reductions, outsourcing, rapid uptake of technology, and internationalisation are just some of the competitive forces that continue to drive organisations to intensify workplace productivity. Long working hours, necessitated by ‘downshifting’ as organisations move from ‘lean to mean’, are impacting on individual performance and organisational productivity from the ‘shop floor to the top floor’. The consequence of these pressures is that fewer managers are doing considerably more work in an effort to maintain and improve organisational output.

Seismic shifts across all sectors of the workplace have led to a more insecure work environment where managers are expected to efficiently perform a wider range of complex functions. Increasingly, knowledge creation and the management of knowledge workers are a particularly challenging aspect of the ever expanding roles expected of managers. These unsettling and relentless changes to the work environment are having a major impact on managers at all levels in the workplace which are in turn flowing through to the employees. In combination, pressures for change and the propensity of organisations to maximise short term financial and capital gain are impacting on the wellbeing of managers. Not surprisingly, this scenario is a potential source of considerable anguish for managers as well as for the organisations who rely on their performance. So, how do these developments relate to the emergence of the ‘happy-performing managers’ proposition?

Successful organisations are dependent on managers who are capable of achieving and fully maintaining high levels of individual job performance. Individual and collective levels of managers’ performance are therefore critical to the survival and prosperity of small and large scale organisations alike. In this ultra competitive marketplace, the capacity of organisations to be productive and profitable is highly reliant on managers creating a work environment where employees are fully engaged, contributing and committed.

Otherwise Engaged

A negative outcome of ignoring managers’ affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction is the alarming and counterproductive increase in actively disengaged and demotivated employees. Diminished performance resulting from disengaged employees is very costly to organisations. Attaining and sustaining the optimal individual and collective performance of employees in this dynamic environment is impacting on the happiness and performance of managers.

Increased pressures to lift individual performance in organisations have reached critical mass. Managers are now expected to produce higher quality goods and services with fewer resources. The result of economic rationalisation and globalisation is directly attributable to the high incidence of stress, burnout and depression amongst employees and managers. These dramatic and ongoing changes to the macro economic environment have driven substantial changes in managers’ roles and their performance.

Managers are now expected to perform in a business context where significantly increased performance is demanded. These circumstances have given rise to a generation of managers who are both ‘time poor’ and ‘wellbeing poor’. Eventually, declines in managers’ performance will hamper the capacity of organisations and national economies to create wealth. In short, these changes in the workplace emphasise the need to understand how managers can retain their positive affective wellbeing by working smarter and faster, rather than harder and longer.

Happiness is Back in Town

In January 2005, *Time* magazine published an entire issue on the ‘New Science of Happiness’. Philosophers, neuroscientists, pharmacologists, political scientists, geneticists, linguists and all manner of ‘new age’ gurus are contributing to this timely dialogue on happiness in the workplace. Seldom has an academic quest come into play so quickly and deliberately.

Curiously, most interest about happiness is being generated at the edges of the two ‘dismal sciences’ of economics and psychology. The worlds of this ‘dreary duo’ converged in 2002, when the Nobel Prize for Economics was awarded for the first time to a psychologist. Princeton Professor Daniel Kahneman received the laurel for investigating a phenomenon known as the ‘hedonic treadmill’ which explains why money can buy happiness but does not continue to keep people happy (Bagnall, 2004). Economists of various persuasions are now furiously devising equations for putting a dollar value on the stuff that relates to happiness.
London School of Economics Professor Lord Layard (2005), author of *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, provides evidence of the relationship between increasing wealth and decreasing happiness in the developed world. Layard contends that economic growth does not automatically increase social harmony. Instead, Layard argues for the unpopular position that increased taxes can improve the work-life balance of citizens and increase overall wellbeing in a society. Likewise, Paul Martin’s (2005) book *Making Happy People: the Nature of Happiness and its Origins in Childhood* argues that people are not always motivated by financial incentives, and in some cases, financial incentives can actually reduce motivation instead of increasing it.

Layard and Martin both pay homage to Jeremy Bentham, the great 18th century utilitarian philosopher. Bentham (1776) argued that the purpose of public policy should be to maximise the sum of happiness in society, as expressed by the famous utilitarian doctrine of ‘the greatest happiness for the greatest number’. This assertion led economists to focus on the utility of happiness which was assumed to be measurable and comparable across people. Noted economists of the late 20th century, such as Paul Samuelson in the USA, and John Hicks from the UK, spawned the movement to transform economics into a ‘hard science’.

An unfortunate consequence of this fundamental shift in direction of thinking was that it encouraged economists to abandon the ‘pursuit of happiness’ for the more narrow ‘pursuit of wealth’. Increased personal wealth was naively assumed to lead to enhanced individual happiness. In the process, a mythical rational being, the ‘economic man (sic)’ was created in an attempt to help economists deal with their dark quantitative condition of ‘physics envy’. In a History of Happiness in Economics, Luigino Bruni (2005) alerts us to the economists’ long held misunderstanding that all humans are rational beings who find happiness in maximising their personal utility. Clearly, happiness is back on the public policy agenda. Some devilish elements in popular media have also picked up on the interest in wellbeing in the workplace.

**Stress is no Laughing Matter**

Interest in employee affective wellbeing has reached the level of public recognition where parodies are beginning to emerge. An amusing but somewhat disturbing example is Edwards’s (2004) satirical book, *Stress in the Workplace – How to Cause it*. In the foreword Edwards posits that ‘mental anguish is the precursor of productivity and claims to have exploded the myth that a ‘happy company is a productive one’. Inventive and imaginative ways are provided in his book to ensure that employees will reach their full potential in a work environment that is ‘bereft of comfort and languor’. Fierce competition between employees is argued to be a great motivator, and those who feel good are berated for being too placid. Edwards’s tongue in cheek position reverses contemporary advice about the preference and desirability of harmonious workplaces.

In David Williamson’s play *Influence* (2005), Ziggy Blasko, a ‘shock-jock’ radio announcer poses the question, ‘Stress – we all have stress in our lives. So what’s new?’ Ziggy is enraged by this ‘stress is bad talk’, angrily proclaiming that, ‘All this rubbish about stress and depression is just a way to keep thousands of so-called mental health gurus making a good living’.

Another pertinent example comes from the television series *The Office* (BBC, 2005; Gervais & Merchant, 1995). The central character is David Brent, the ‘boss from hell’ who is a ‘legend in his own lunchbox’ who is portrayed as an overtly happy manager who specialises in facilitating a cheerful working environment by being an ‘entertaining manager’. He delights in telling gratuitous off-colour jokes and is blissfully unaware of the effect of this obnoxious behaviour on those around him. Despite the obvious misery wreaked on his hapless employees, Brent is convinced he is performing exceptionally well as a manager by using a self-professed skill as ‘professional entertainer’ to create a happy working environment.

Maybe the unpalatable reality for workers is the realisation that miserable managers, who adopt oppressive work practices, are just as effective as happy ones! But this position flies in the face of the evidence that overbearing attitudes, appalling communications and toxic personalities all have a major negative effect on employee motivation. Certainly, evidence in this book provides a clear positive link between managers’ happiness and their performance.

**Magnitude of Mental Health Problems in the Workplace**

Organisations that do not take care of workplace happiness ultimately experience diminished individual performance. Over the last decade, mental health problems in the workplace have increased substantially for both industry and government. Approximately one in ten employees is estimated to be suffering from depression, anxiety, stress or burnout in Australia, the European Union, USA and Canada. Some 3–4% of GNP worldwide is estimated to be expended on mental health problems in the workplace, which are rapidly becoming the most common reasons for allocating disability pensions and for people opting to retire early.
By 2020, it is estimated that depression will be the most common health problem in the workplace. In addition to workers’ compensation claims, employers who fail to address workplace mental illness can expect to pay increased higher compensation and insurance premiums. Other problems in the workplace resulting from neglecting to look after managers’ affective wellbeing are: disengagement, absenteeism, higher staff turnover, higher accident rates, reduced productivity and morale.

International estimates of the cost of depleted mental health show a consistent and disturbing trend. The incidence of mental health problems in the workplace is an issue that has reached alarming proportions. The resultant cost to organisations and nation-states is unacceptably high and is increasing exponentially. This has led governments in developed countries to begin to legislate to force organisations to accept the consequence of inappropriate management decisions on employee health. Deteriorations in managers’ affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction can lead to disillusionment and burnout, which is likely to result in severe reductions in individual job performance.

All this bad news about diminished mental health in the workplace needs to be countervailed by good news. Evidence of this can be found in a new movement rapidly taking hold – Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS).

**POS – Putting the Head Back on the Body**

The last decade has seen a growing movement in psychology to abandon the exclusive focus on the dark side of human existence with a preference to explore a more positive view of the mind. This article contributes to the emerging movement of POS; a health model based on the premise that understanding and enabling human potential will create a positive path to human and organisational wellbeing.

There are sound social and economic reasons for promoting happiness through healthy workplace practices. Numerous studies have shown that happy people are successful in many aspects of life, including friendship, marriage, income, health and job performance. A link between happiness-success is evident where positive affect engenders success (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). In essence, the POS movement is metaphorically reattaching the head on to the body of Organisational and Occupational Psychology. Likewise, this article confronts the challenge to explore new models, theories and ideas about managers’ that contribute to enhancing affective wellbeing and performance in the workplace.

**Findings**

A Partial Model of Managers’ Affective Wellbeing, Intrinsic Job Satisfaction and Performance (‘Partial Model’) shown in Figure 1 was developed from the literature to investigate the research questions and test the hypotheses.

![Figure 1: A Partial Model of Managers’ Affective Wellbeing, Intrinsic Job Satisfaction and Performance (‘Partial Model’)](image-url)
Of particular importance was the development and testing of the Measurement Model of managers’ job performance. An 8-Dimensional Measurement Model of managers’ performance, derived from the contemporary literature, was tested to differentiate the structure of managers’ contextual and task performance. The job performance construct was found to consist of four contextual dimensions (Endorsing, supporting and defending organisational objectives; Helping and cooperating with others; Persisting with enthusiasm and extra effort to complete task activities successfully; Following organisational rules and procedures) and four task dimensions (Monitoring and controlling resources; Technical proficiency; Influencing others; and Delegating to others).

Managers’ self-report of affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction was related to superiors’ ratings of managers’ performance to ensure the independence of the measures. Specific indicators of affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction were found to be reliable predictors of certain dimensions of managers’ performance. Affective wellbeing (Positive Affect, Intrinsic Job Satisfaction) was found to be positively associated with a dimension of superiors’ reports (i.e., downward) on task performance (Influencing).

Positive Affect is a personality trait characteristic associated with extraversion, a personality characteristic that is central to managerial jobs in dealing with peers, superiors, subordinates and external constituents. Positive Affect is an ‘activation based’ affect which enables managers to influence decisions from which they derive considerable Intrinsic Job Satisfaction, which has a substantial cognitive component. Possibly, the opportunity to influence decisions within an organisation may also result in enhanced Intrinsic Job Satisfaction and heightened affective wellbeing. Thus, managers who have elevated Positive Affect and Intrinsic Job Satisfaction are more likely to influence decisions.

A more complex relationship was found between affective wellbeing, intrinsic job satisfaction and performance. Positive associations between dimensions of self-report for affective wellbeing (Positive Affect, Anxiety and Relaxation) were found to be negatively associated with dimensions of superiors’ reports on managers’ task performance (Monitoring) and contextual performance (Following).

Negative Affect and Enthusiasm were negatively associated with the performance variable Technical but positively associated with Monitoring and Following. This indicated that high arousal (Positive Affect with Negative Affect) was present, but these
administrative job tasks were not found to be particularly motivating, as indicated by negative Enthusiasm but positive Relaxation. This finding indicates that managers will experience a degree of arousal but low distress when undertaking administrative or transactional roles. Managers with high Positive Affect are likely to experience elevated anxiety but have opportunities for relaxation that lead to acceptable levels of affective wellbeing when undertaking work involving Monitoring and Following.

An alternative explanation for these associations may be that aspects of managers’ jobs requiring essentially transactional or administrative roles (negative Technical, with positive Monitoring and Following) may lead to high arousal with Positive Affect and Anxiety, but provide opportunities for Relaxation in conjunction with negative Enthusiasm and Negative Affect. A positive association with Monitoring and Following indicated that these performance characteristics require vigilance and consequently high arousal (Anxiety and Positive Affect with the attendant Negative Affect), but do not lead to a motivating environment (negative Enthusiasm).

Notably, managers reported Positive Affect, a personality trait, to be the only variable common to both dimensions of contextual and task performance, indicating that it is a prerequisite for managerial jobs. From this finding it could be inferred that successful managers will have a positive disposition to work.

Methodology

An empirical case study was used to explain how to apply advanced statistical techniques for field research. A cross-sectional questionnaire was administered to managers from a range of private, public, and third sector occupational groupings in 19 Western Australian organisations. An empirical methodology was used to test the hypotheses to enable the research questions to be answered and to develop the Partial Model.

Items for the questionnaire were derived from established affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction scales. Managers’ contextual and task performance scales were devised from the literature. Self-report data were used to measure affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction, while superiors’ ratings (by the person to whom managers report) provided an evaluation of managers’ contextual and task performance. The statistical techniques employed are explained in enough detail to permit critique and replication.

Of particular interest to Occupational and Organisational Psychology researchers is the methodology used to develop the Measurement Model of Managers’ Performance. Testing of the Measurement Model of Managers’ Performance is described in detail, including Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis, multigroup analyses, and accounting for the biasing effect of method, as illustrated in Figure 3:

![Figure 3: Measurement Model of Managers’ Performance](image-url)
Advanced statistical techniques are used to analyse these important managerial issues by measuring the substance and structure of job performance to a standard previously unachievable. Another distinctive contribution to the field is the use of Canonical Correlation and Standard Multiple Regression to analyse the multifarious relationships between managers’ affective wellbeing, intrinsic job satisfaction and their contextual and task performance.

Implications for research and practice

Findings in this study are intended to progress the debate as to how work might be structured to improve managers’ affective wellbeing and performance. Managerial and practitioner recommendations are provided, followed by a close examination of the implications for Strategic Human Resource Management. A better understanding of how affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction influence managers’ behaviour has the potential to enhance aspects of their performance.

Pressures, strains and stresses on managers in the workplace have been identified as an important determinant of a person’s mental health. Individual levels of affective wellbeing, intrinsic job satisfaction and performance have the potential to eventually impact on organisations’ productivity. More importantly the personal cost of the demise in affective wellbeing to an individual’s life is immense. An improved understanding of the way in which changes in affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction impact on performance will assist in identifying what can be done to promote a healthier and more productive work environment for managers.

Managers are in the front lines of ever shifting, difficult and dynamic business landscapes. Increased calls for efficiency gains, cost cutting, and improved employee performance, including their own, require managers to simultaneously cope with workplace stress, fatigue, and burnout. Managers seem to be unaware of the factors that influence individual performance which results in organisational productivity. A better understanding of ‘performance levers’ that managers should be pulling, and encouraging others to pull, to improve workplaces is needed.

Workplace problems attributed to ‘stress’ may actually be symptoms of depression and anxiety. Job stress can lead to poor mental health. The terms stress, mental health and burnout are often used interchangeably in the literature. Stress and burnout are mainly used to describe work-related outcomes, while mental health may be context free. As a result, research on the construct of stress informs our understanding of affective wellbeing. Job satisfaction has also been found to be an important contributor to psychological health in the workplace.

Providing more rigorous measures of performance has the potential to guide the implementation of human resource development initiatives to improve individual managers’ performance. Timely feedback about affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction may assist organisations to monitor and implement changes to managers’ jobs in order to sustain and improve their performance. More refined assessments of performance may facilitate managers’ self-development, as they indicate what managers need to do in order to enhance their potential and to perform with sustainable effectives.

Insights in this research will make it possible to predict how deterioration, or an improvement, in affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction impacts on managers’ performance. Management practices that increase managers’ affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction may result in corresponding reductions in workplace tension and improved efficiency. Evidence is disclosed on how affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction interact with managers’ performance which will be valuable for determining job designs and organisational level interventions. Changes to the design of jobs can be enacted and embedded to enhance, or to avoid a decline in affective wellbeing, intrinsic job satisfaction and performance. Such an understanding has the potential to translate into improved managerial practices, which can impact on the performance of managers.

Conversely, this study also shows how the individual consequences of diminished affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction can be disastrous. Diminished affective wellbeing will ultimately translate into the bottom line of organisational effectiveness, productivity, profitability and share prices. Such information may be used to develop interventions for promoting healthier and more supportive work environments. These findings are also intended to progress the debate as to how work might be structured to improve all employees’ performance.
Conclusion

This study emanates from an enduring stream of research into individual performance and organisational productivity. Contemporary and classic theories and models and research are employed to inform an age-old mystery in management – do happy workers, or in these cases managers, perform better, or worse, or does their affective state make no difference? Extrapolations are made from the interrelationships between the various interconnected disciplines, theories and models in the field. Implications of the research are of relevance to the body of management theory and practice.

Despite the mixed research findings of over half a century, there is support in the literature but scant empirical evidence to suggest that a link exists between happiness and job performance. A thorough re-assessment of the ‘happy-productive worker’ thesis, and its development into the ‘happy-performing managers’ proposition, is undertaken by investigating the relationship between managers’ affective wellbeing, intrinsic job satisfaction and performance.

Managers’ performance was found to be multi-dimensional and consist of two components: contextual and task performance. Certain indicators of affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction were found to reliably predict dimensions of managers’ contextual and task performance. A more sophisticated understanding of how the relationships between affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction interact with managers’ performance has resulted in a better understanding of the ‘happy-performing managers’ proposition.

There are many advantages to improving managerial practices in relation to affective wellbeing. Circumstances that might otherwise lead to a managers’ dismissal or burnout may be less likely to arise if there is a means to identify managers ‘at risk’. Such information can be used to assist in identifying defective organisational practices that have the potential to damage managerial affective wellbeing and intrinsic job satisfaction.

Interest in the ‘happy-performing managers’ proposition can be seen within the broader context of the trend to POS. Insights from POS movement give cause for great optimism. POS has an affirmative bias towards the health model’s capacity to discover and maintain ways that organisations can improve people’s working lives. From this perspective, employee health and wellbeing are seen in terms of the presence of the potential for growth, optimism, contentment and actualisation – not simply as the absence of dysfunctional behaviour. The time has come to move away from the negative forms of psychology (based on a ‘deficit model’) and affirm managers’ future by embracing the ‘happy-performing managers’ proposition.

About the Authors

Dr Peter J. Hosie is a CBS Post Doctoral Research Fellow at Curtin Business School, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia. Peter has published over 50 articles and reports which have been widely cited in international articles, papers and reports. His primary research interests include the relationships between managers’ job-related affective wellbeing, intrinsic job satisfaction and performance, crisis and security management, and Technologically-Mediated Learning.

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Professor Cary L. Cooper CBE of Lancaster University Management School has been ranked 12th in Human Resources Magazine’s ‘Top 100 Most Influential in the World’ listing. Writing about Professor Cooper’s ranking of 12th in the world, HR Magazine says, “A media favourite, Cooper has written over 100 books on occupational stress, women at work and industrial and organisational psychology. He has been an adviser to the World Health Organisation and been awarded a CBE for his contribution to organisational health. He is currently visiting professor at the universities of Heriot-Watt, Sheffield, Exeter and Liverpool.” (www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/news/7882/).
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