

## ***Mental health and wellbeing through work***

Katharina Näswall

Rapid societal and technological changes are placing increasing pressure on workers and organisations, contributing to rising rates of mental distress. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration across professionals with different types of expertise, and interventions at different levels. Workplaces would provide a pathway to improved wellbeing at a societal level – offering a vital, preventative complement to traditional mental health services. Each day, millions of New Zealanders are impacted by their work environment and if this impact is positive, there is potential to prevent mental health issues and promote wellbeing at scale. Empirical studies consistently show that well-designed workplaces, positive leadership, and supportive organisational climates promote wellbeing and prevent psychological harm. Conversely, poor work environments contribute significantly to mental ill-health. This talk will outline the core aspects of work that support human functioning—such as autonomy, connection, and meaningful contribution—and present an evidence-based framework for how work can actively foster mental health and wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand.



**Katharina Näswall** is Professor of Organisational Psychology at the University of Canterbury. Her research focuses on creating psychologically healthy workplaces that support employee performance and wellbeing. She collaborates with organisations in diagnosing levels stress and wellbeing, and to develop and implement initiatives aimed at increasing wellbeing and productivity at work. Throughout all collaborations she applies psychological principles and evidence-based knowledge about human behaviour and emotions. She has worked on several projects on psychosocial recovery after disasters, and investigated how organisations and managers can support employee mental health and achievement. She is director of the Postgraduate Diploma in Organisational Psychology at the University of Canterbury.