

Improving workplace productivity and corporate culture: perceptions and experiences of the  
effects of workplace massage

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## **Student Declaration**

I, Deborah Nicola Lane, declare that the PhD thesis entitled “*Improving workplace productivity and corporate culture: perceptions and experiences of the effects of workplace massage*” is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work”.

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Deborah Nicola Lane

March 2013

## **Abstract**

Australian workers' compensation figures consistently reveal that physical and psychological injuries pose a costly burden to the Australian economy. Since the 1980s, many employers have increasingly been providing workplace massage programs to their staff as one initiative to redress this trend. Masseurs have promoted the effectiveness of this intervention for improving musculoskeletal disorders and reducing stress, and claim massage therapy contributes toward increased employee engagement with the workplace, thus resulting in increased productivity and reduced levels of absenteeism. Clearly, one of the underlying aims for employers in providing such facilities is to prevent and manage work-related injuries and stress.

However, notwithstanding these claims, there remains a paucity of scholarly literature investigating: (a) reasons why managers implement and subsidise workplace massage, (b) what employees feel are the work-related effects such programs, and, (c) the therapeutic intentions of masseurs who offer this therapy. Using three conceptually linked studies, this thesis explores the stories of managers, employees, and therapists in order to gain a greater understanding of their perceptions about the overall benefits of workplace massage.

The findings revealed that massage programs deliver more than the expected physical and psychological outcomes. Overwhelmingly, all the participants in this study believed that workplace massage provided positive outcomes for both the organisation and those taking advantage of the program. Managers perceived that massage programs provided benefits such as positive influences on corporate culture and increased productivity. Employees explained how massage relaxed and refreshed them, allowing them to focus better and concentrate at work. Therapists described how, whilst they strove to help people achieve improved physical and psychological wellbeing, they believed workplace massage contributed significantly to improved worker morale.

The outcomes of this study provide some evidence-based justification for the continuance and expansion of such programs in the workplace. Such findings imply that the effects of the program can resonate far beyond the expected physiological and psychological benefits for the participants and for the productivity of the organisation.

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## Prologue

Many people have corporate massage programs available to them in the workplace. I have often wondered why this service has been made available to them, asking myself ‘What do people get out of it?’, ‘Why do managers allow people to have massages during work time?’, and ‘What is the return on investment for the organisation?’ Although such questions were the seeds leading to these studies, and implicitly suggested what I thought might be the key concepts of the intended study, some of my work revealed other issues I had previously not considered.

For example, before I commenced this PhD, I had not really thought about how gender may or may not influence people’s attitudes. For me, people’s personal constructs rather than their gender influenced their thinking and behaviours. I do not remember really having any conscious thoughts that women in the workplace were anything other than emotionally, socially, politically, and economically equal to men. I assumed that my own reactions and behaviours resulted primarily from personally held theories and experiences, and not in any conscious way influenced by my gender.

However, undertaking this research has significantly challenged my personal understanding of the *status quo*. Because I did not enter these studies expecting that gender would significantly affect peoples’ stories, some of my findings, which indicated that men and women do seem to view the world from very different perspectives, have surprised me. During my studies, I observed considerable differences in their responses. Men and women have displayed characteristics that I would have previously dismissed as old-fashioned and stereotypical generalisations. On reflection, it seems I may have been gender-blind.

During this research, I began to realise that my personal history and experiences affected how I understood peoples’ stories. Indeed, with the advantage of hindsight, I now ask ‘How could they have not?’ According to Kayrooz and Trevitt (2005):

*The identity of the researcher is rarely mentioned in many research texts, yet their age, gender, role, position and experience can have a profound effect on the conduct of the research itself – particularly on stakeholder perceptions of bias (p. 280).*

I am a married woman with children, an employee, and a manager. In a previous career, I worked as a remedial massage therapist conducting workplace massages, which perhaps allows me to suggest that I have a reasonably balanced position in this area of study. My experiences may allow me to assert some inside knowledge about the way in which massage therapy works in organisations. However, although this thesis started with research questions about workplace massage, the lessons generated from my self-reflections have radically influenced my thoughts and approaches concerning both my personal and professional life. As Sparkes (2002) stated:

*researchers-as-authors need to indicate their positioning in relation to the research process... [and] engage in a self-reflexive analysis of the social categories to which they belong, since these enter into and shape what constitutes knowledge in any project (p. 17).*

As a result, my intention in this thesis is to present my account of the research process as openly as possible. Unlike Padgett's (2004) suggestion that "what actually happens during the qualitative study is rarely reflected in the polished product that emerges" (p. 19), I will share some unpolished bits, some aspects of which I am not necessarily proud, but which were an essential and integral part of my journey. Just as Sparkes (2002) described, during my research I have often felt "lost and ill at ease," but contrary to Sparkes' advice, many times I attempted to "ignore the discomfort and wish it away" (p. 25). Wanting to wish away the uncomfortable parts, however, felt inauthentic and disingenuous. In reality, I had to confront and explore my own difficulties and biases (both positive and negative) during the research process. Often my plans and results did not pan out as I had imagined or predicted which was difficult to accept at the time. I now realise that this experience is relatively common in qualitative investigations; indeed, Cameron (2007) reported her reflections on a failed study, which was characterised as a research project that went 'pear-shaped'. However, such recorded accounts are not common.

During some of the interviews, I found myself irritated by the statements that I was hearing. I silently and internally reprimanded myself; after all, would a good researcher not restrain her emotions and experiences, and listen without prejudgement (the internalised 'ideal researcher' speaking)? At other times, participants' stories would resonate and inspire me. The critic within constantly nagged me to remain a disinterested party, but the critic did not

always win. I battled with guilt, trying to isolate my biases and refrain from making judgements, but in the words of Schwandt (2000):

*Reaching an understanding is not a matter of setting aside, escaping, managing, or tracking one's own standpoint, prejudgments, biases, or prejudices. On the contrary, understanding requires the engagement of one's biases (p. 195).*

As a result, I do not want to make apologies for my biases, even though some part of me still feels I should. Rather, I have chosen to acknowledge and work towards understanding them, because to step outside our understanding of the world is like attempting to “step outside of our own skins” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195). I now accept my journey with minimal guilt and see it as an opportunity that allowed me to grow. I am grateful for the privilege of hearing peoples’ stories, and I understand that to relate closely to others’ stories is an experience encountered by many qualitative researchers. As Waldrop (2004) observed:

*Occasionally an interview is engaging enough for me not only to feel in tune with the other person's rhythm of speaking and thought but also to see the world through the other person's eyes. At such times I feel myself to be split, with one part functioning professionally, asking questions and monitoring responses, while another part is identified with the respondent (p. 248).*

Waldrop’s statement speaks of harmony and empathy, but the “split” she described worked equally against me. On the surface, I am confident that I acted professionally, asking questions and monitoring responses. Within, however, I was sometimes a harsh critic and had internal sanctimonious responses. As Sparkes (2002) explained:

*There may be hints that the author is concerned about various issues associated with the fieldwork, such as the ethics of different relationships as they develop between the researcher and the participants in the course of an inquiry. Such concerns, however, are not dealt with in any great depth in realist tales. In contrast, there is a tale, the confessional, that foregrounds the voice and concerns of the researcher in a way that takes us behind the scenes of the “cleaned up” methodological discussions so often provided in realist tales (p. 57).*

As any researcher intends at the beginning of a study, I discovered answers to the formal research questions and uncovered opportunities for further exploration of my research topic. However, as a personal aside, I have learnt more about human behaviour and gender differences and the way in which those things influence people’s actions.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Context of the thesis

Employers have numerous responsibilities in the workplace, one of which is their legal obligation to provide staff with a healthy and safe working environment (*Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Parliament of Victoria, 2004). Furthermore, companies whether public or private sector, must manage productivity and meet business targets while maintaining a stable workforce by attracting and retaining appropriately skilled employees. In order to meet these challenges, employers sometimes have to find innovative ways of balancing their organisational commitments with the needs of their staff. One way that employers can assist their staff is by providing opportunities for them to engage in healthy life choices. In doing so employers may reduce costs associated with poor health and maximise the likelihood for an organisation to meet corporate goals (Steffick, Fortney, Smith, & Pyne, 2006). Employees who feel supported by their organisation and who are enabled to pursue wellness activities may be more productive, demonstrate higher engagement with their work, and make positive contributions to the workplace that add to overall workplace morale (Musich, Hook, Baaner, Spooner, & Edington, 2006).

In this respect, managing and minimising the work-related stress of employees is one of the challenges that employers continually face (Lavelle, 2005; Working Carers Gateway, 2010). Stress damages the economy, organisations and individuals (Medibank Private Limited, 2008). As such, the problem of stress in the workplace is one that should cause alarm for the community and organisations alike (Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association, 2002). Stress-related problems manifest in several ways; for example, costs resulting from stress negatively affect the national gross domestic product, cause increases in workers' compensation claims, and impose direct budget impacts to businesses and corporate insurers (Australian Associated Press, 2010; Medilexicon, 2005).

People who are experiencing stress-related symptoms are often less productive at work than their healthier colleagues, and sick people place added pressures on the medical system (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Additionally, there is the human aspect of stress; that of the personal angst and suffering for the individual experiencing stress-related issues that also directly affects their families and friends (Jackson & Maslach, 1982).



The significant economic burden that work-related stress imposes upon the Australian economy appears to be growing steadily. WorkSafe Victoria (2011) reported that “stress is the second most common cause of workplace compensation claims in Australia, second to manual handling” (n.p). In the mid-2000s, Medibank Private commissioned a multi-industry research project, the findings of which cited that, “stress is costing the Australian economy \$14.81 billion a year. Stress-related presenteeism and absenteeism are directly costing Australian employers \$10.11 billion a year, and 3.2 days per worker are lost each year through workplace stress” (Medibank Private Limited, 2008). In this respect, ‘presenteeism’ is a term that has now been used to define workers who attend the workplace when they should not; this can be due to stress, depression, illness, or injury and can subsequently lead to them being unproductive (Middaugh, 2007; Working Carers Gateway, 2010).

In a separate study in 2006, work-related stress in Victoria was shown to account for approximately \$200 million in workers’ compensation claims per year (WorkSafe Victoria, 2006). More recent figures indicate that this figure has grown to an estimated \$739 million per year (Australian Associated Press, 2010; VicHealth, 2010), which is a staggering increase of over \$500 million in four years. As high as these costs appear, note that the workers’ compensation payment figures only highlight the direct costs and do not accurately represent the hidden economic outcomes associated with stress-related injuries. These other consequences are difficult to measure and can include the costs associated with lost productivity, unplanned leaves of absence, reduced employee morale, staff turnover and the costs associated with re-staffing and re-skilling the workforce, when stress leads to staff turnover (Working Carers Gateway, 2010; WorkSafe Victoria, 2006).

The signs and symptoms of stress may present in an individual as psychological (McCraty, Atkinson, & Tomasino, 2003) or physical problems (Wiholm & Arnetz, 2006), or as a combination of these (Zeitlin, Keller, Shiflett, Schleifer, & Bartlett, 2000) and can be debilitating for the sufferer. Clearly then, in the light of such overwhelming evidence for the effect of stress-related symptoms, it is not surprising that a number of strategies have been introduced by corporations to mitigate this problem (Kirk & Brown, 2003; McGlynn, McDonald, & Champagne, 2003; Yen, Schultz, McDonald, Champagne, & Edington, 2006).

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (the Act) places a shared responsibility on employers and employees to be proactive in creating safe workplaces. The Act requires that employers afford employees the highest level of protection against risks to their health and safety that is reasonably practicable in the circumstances. Certain breaches of these laws can lead to prosecution; in extreme circumstances the penalty can be imprisonment (*Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Parliament of Victoria, 2004). In this regard, achieving optimum health and safety requires more than strict compliance with government regulations; in response, many employers have implemented various organisational wellbeing programs to provide a preventative approach to illness (Aberth, 1986), to engage employees in healthy activities by improving general health (McGlynn et al., 2003), and to reduce several health risks (Anderson & Kaczmarek, 2004).

Workplace massage has been recently promoted in the popular media as an effective intervention for stress management and for reducing physical tension, and there has been some limited research carried out which supports these claims (Cady & Jones, 1997; Carcellor, 1998a, 1998b; Shulman & Jones, 1996). Further, the proponents of corporate massage cite many claims in favour of such programs, including that it relieves stress and tension (Bost & Wallis, 2006), increases productivity (Waite, 2006), improves morale (Hirschhorn, 1990), lowers health care costs (Williams, 2011), and reduces absenteeism (Hawkins, 2011). If these claims are accurate, then the reasons for employers to provide their workers with massage are clear. It is within this context that it makes *a priori* sense that employers in a number of organisations in Australia provide their staff with access to workplace massage (Thomas, 2008), thereby attempting to support their employees to manage the debilitating feelings of stress. Furthermore, the availability of massage therapies in the corporate sector seems to complement employers' legislated responsibility to provide employees with healthy and safe workplaces. Notwithstanding these claims, however, the question of whether the supposed benefits of workplace massage are justified remains uncertain.

Indeed, although corporate massage has been a growing industry since the 1980s (DeFalco, 2009), it remains a controversial intervention. DeFalco explained that when marketing corporate massage to some executives in New York "... they laughed. They asked me if I was from '42nd Street', associated at the time with sleaze and prostitution" (n.p). This

statement strongly suggests that massage continues to be associated with the sex industry, and as a result significant tensions remain regarding the distinction between therapeutic massage and sexual services. The term 'massage parlour' is often used to describe a venue for prostitution where individuals can receive sexual services. Although this might be due simply to the sex industry using euphemisms for their services to increase its respectability, it has clearly reflected badly on the legitimate massage industry. Furthermore, massage is often viewed as a luxury and a non-essential activity rather than a clinical therapy that can improve debilitating physical and psychological symptoms. Day spas and beauty venues promote massage as part of pamper packages or sell massage gift vouchers as opportunities for indulgence. Consequently, with these various negative and demeaning interpretations about what massage is, or is not, it is unsurprising that the general public has mixed reactions to the provision of workplace massage for employees (Longmore, 2011; Masanauskas, 2011).

This mismatch of interpretation is well illustrated by some recently published news articles which criticised a number of Victorian councils, including the City of Melbourne and Dandenong City Councils, for offering their staff access to workplace massage (Longmore, 2011; Masanauskas, 2011). According to the news reports, parking officers working for the City of Melbourne were provided fortnightly massages aiming to relieve stress and anxiety. A council spokesperson argued that massages provided "a new and creative way to relieve stress and anxiety" (Masanauskas, 2011, n.p). A Dandenong City Council spokesperson claimed there had been fewer injuries since the massages were introduced (Longmore, 2011). However, public responses to the reports about council workers receiving massages were unfavourable, even hostile (Lawrie, 2010; Longmore, 2011).

Similarly, in the United Kingdom there have been councils who have received public disapproval for providing workplace massages for employees on the basis that the intervention was unacceptable because municipal money was funding the activity (Baron, 2010; Lawrie, 2010). Despite the claims that workplace massage assisted with reducing employees' anxiety and stress, and that it contributed to reductions in injuries, the public response to council employees receiving massages at work was, at best, negative.

In both of these situations, the accounts given by council spokespersons assert that massage was beneficial for both workers and the organisation, yet the level of public negativity in

response to workplace massage indicated that perceptions about the utility and value of corporate massage remain divided. Many taxpayers, and by implication the shareholders in private companies, seem to regard massage as a fringe benefit that gives time off and pleasure to staff without a corresponding beneficial financial outcome for the employer (Lawrie, 2010; Longmore, 2011).

### **The research: Perceptions of workplace massage**

The organisation (that is, the corporation) was central to this study about workplace massage. Stein (2010) defined three key areas of a corporation as:

*[1] an autonomous institution [that] has rules, structure, and its own objectives . . .  
[2] a social institution that embodies and strengthens the values and beliefs of the society it serves. The corporation has to make it possible to satisfy the demands that society makes in terms of carrying out its underlying values and beliefs: equal opportunities, fairness in rewarding effort and recognition of the right of each member of society as a citizen and the possibility of him being socially fulfilled . . . [3] a social institution that contributes to the stability and survival of society (p. 68).*

With consideration for Stein's description, the term *organisation* has been used throughout this thesis to contextualise the setting and potential constraints in which managers, employees and massage therapists involved in workplace massage operate. In this regard, it becomes apparent that this investigation recognises that organisations are complex environments with extensive controls, influences and requirements including (but not limited to) laws and legislative requirements (Australian Government, 2011), community expectations (Grossman, 2005), corporate governance (CPA Australia, 2011; Ord, 2011), profits (Chen & Lu, 2011), policies (Gilliss, Powell, & Carter, 2010), performance and productivity demands (Colligan & Higgins, 2005), healthy workforces (Jepson, Harris, Platt, & Tannahill, 2010; Largo-Wight, Chen, Dodd, & Weiler, 2011; Lloyd & Foster, 2006; Seymour & Dupré, 2008), and collective and individual expectations (Earle, 2002; Estes, 2004; Hartung & Hahlweg, 2010; Hayden, 2010). There are numerous influences and demands on an organisation and upon the people who contribute to its effective operation (Figure 1.1). In the development of this investigation, due regard was given to these individually important and interacting issues.

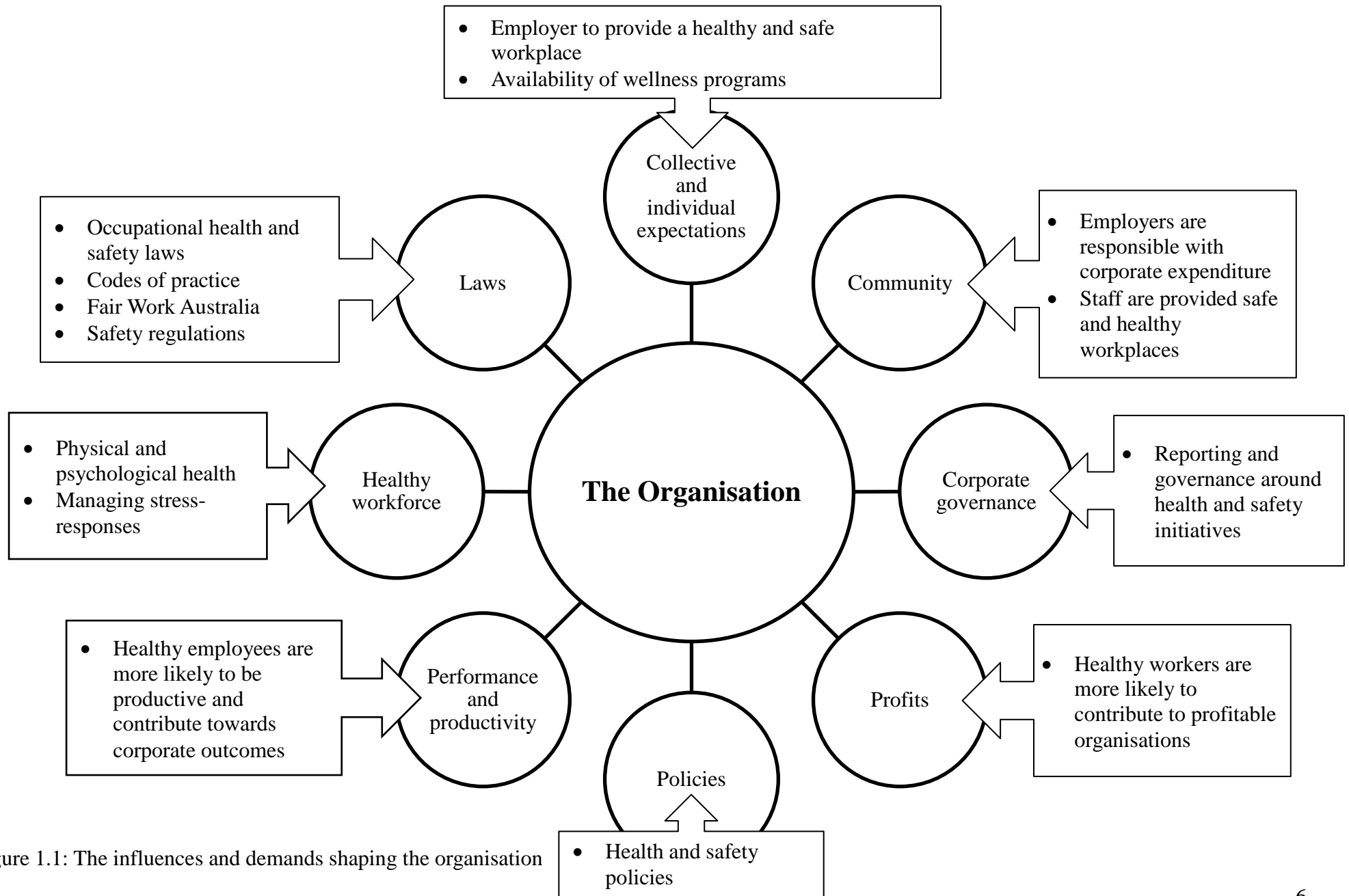


Figure 1.1: The influences and demands shaping the organisation

The underlying understanding of this investigation is that the implementation of any massage program should contribute some benefit to the organisation; hence, for the program to do well, each group (that is, managers, employees, and therapists) must play some part in the massage program's success (Figure 1.2). By implication, any negative effect the program delivers to the organisation (at any level) is likely to bring its viability into question.

The complexity of the milieu that defines an organisation in which a massage program has to operate is illustrated in Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2. These diagrams outline the contribution and responsibilities of the three respondent groups. Managers are responsible for meeting corporate objectives (such as productivity and budgets), have responsibility for staff (including health and wellbeing) and need to ensure that the massage program complies with fundamental business rules and legislation (for example, health and safety laws). Employees must meet their managers' expectations, corporate objectives and productivity targets. The massage therapists' direct goal was to provide people with a beneficial health outcome through massage therapy, whilst working within the guidelines of the organisation and the expectations of the managers and staff. Furthermore, as depicted in Figure 1.1, an organisation is influenced in multiple ways according to overarching laws, corporate governance requirements and policies. As such, the likelihood is that the individuals within each group involved in a massage program would have to consider their roles within the broader legal and industrial environments shaping the organisation.

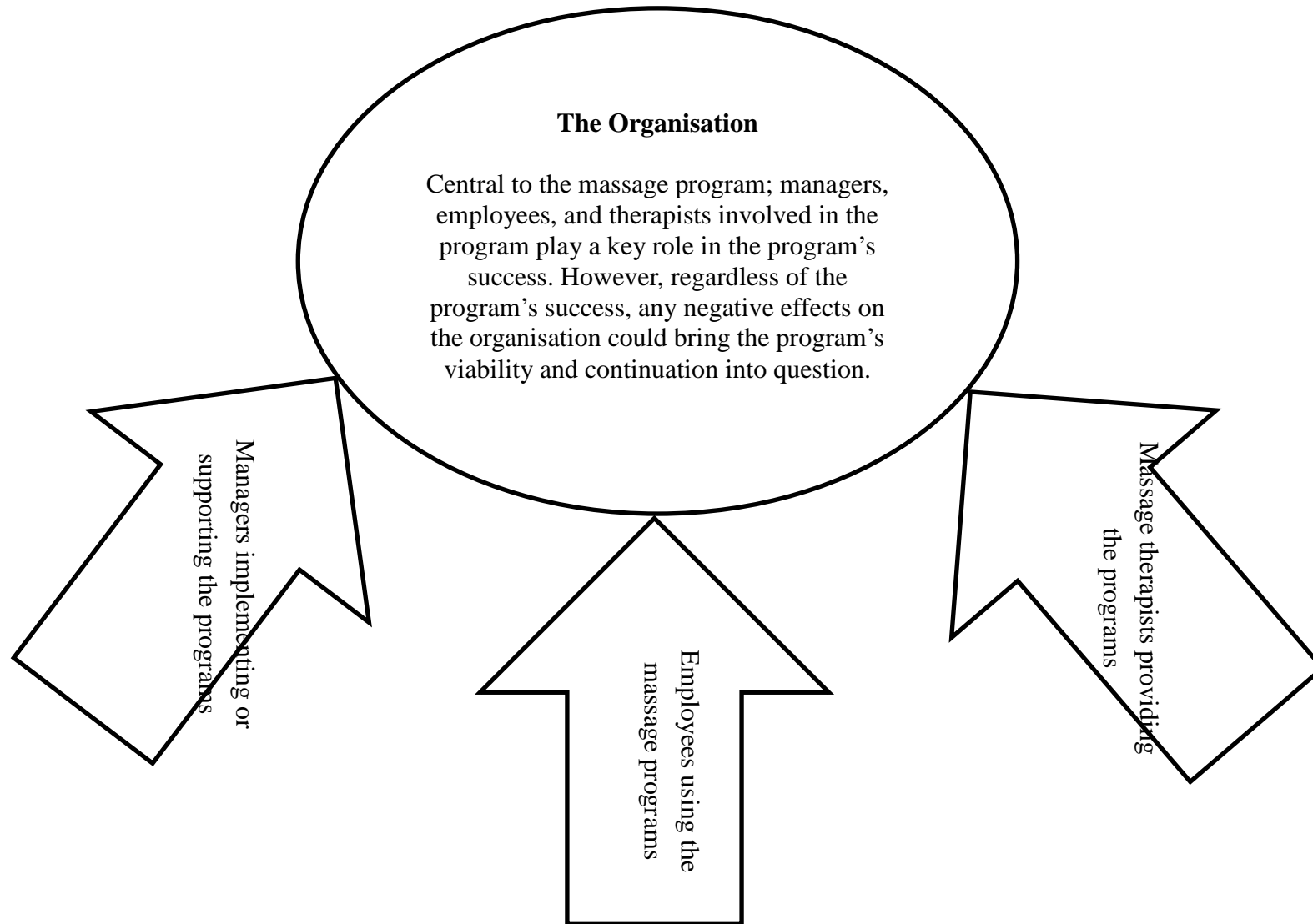


Figure 1.2: The organisation is central to the massage program

To address this complexity, the investigation draws upon the principles of constructivist epistemology to develop three conceptually linked studies designed to explore the perceptions of workplace massage programs from the viewpoints of employers, employees who use workplace massages, and therapists who provide corporate massages. The purpose of these studies was to gain an understanding from the perception of the various respondents about the advantages and disadvantages of workplace massage, the reasons that employers implement such programs, how massage affects the organisation and its employees (such as productivity and staff morale), and the psychological and physical outcomes that massage recipients report they experience. Using semi-structured interviews, managers, employees, and massage therapists provided their accounts related to this issue, and thus a multi-dimensional picture of the value, or otherwise, of corporate massage to the organisation was constructed.

The terms *corporate massage*, *workplace massage*, *massage program*, and *program* are used interchangeably throughout this thesis. Each term is used to define massage therapy which is available to staff at their workplaces, and either paid for individually by the employee or paid for by the employer (either fully or through financial subsidies).

### **Overall research question**

In order to focus the three conceptually linked studies, an overall research question was formulated that asked: What are the perceptions of employers, employees and massage therapists about the effects (either positive effects [advantages] or negative effects [disadvantages]) of workplace massage for managing aspects of employees' health, and contributing to morale and productivity in the workplace?

### **Contributing research questions**

To enable a systematic data collection and analysis approach in this exploratory study, a series of sub-questions were posed as an intermediate stage in the construction of an overall view of this area. These sub-questions, used to inform the data collection instruments, were as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of workplace massage from the perspectives of managers, employees who use the programs, and therapists who provide corporate massage?



2. What are the effects (either advantages or disadvantages) of workplace massage?
3. Why do managers implement massage programs?
4. Why do employees use workplace massage programs?
5. What do masseurs think about workplace massage programs?

### **Contribution to knowledge**

Although many organisations fund or partly fund massage programs, the effectiveness and acceptance of workplace massage in terms of stress relief, staff morale and productivity gains has not been clearly established. This investigation complements the international focus on managing stress in the workplace by exploring: (a) the effects of massage on employees' health and wellbeing, and (b) how that influences productivity and corporate culture within the organisation. Furthermore, this thesis uses a significant methodological innovation, triangulation, to explore the effects that massage has on the wider organisation from the perspectives of managers, employees, and therapists.

Much of the existing research on the effectiveness of massage has been conducted on clinical samples concerned with physiological changes, hence the underlying assumption of the existing studies has been an expectation that massage should, or indeed needs to produce physiological changes, and therefore often ignores the importance of psychological and quality of life changes. Most studies do not seek to understand workplace massage from the perspective of employers who may not be interested in or understand the physiological influences of massage; instead, their interest may relate to the overall effect that providing massages has for the organisation. Whereas previous studies focussed wholly on massage participants, this research is innovative in that it seeks the perceptions of employers and therapists in relation to organisational outcomes from the massage program, thereby providing a multidimensional understanding of workplace massage.

The results of this research can support business policy makers about the potential value of spending corporate dollars on workplace massage and the utility of massage as a component of a larger occupational health and safety plan. Finally, much of the existing massage research originates outside Australia whereas this research, conducted in Australia, provides findings directly relevant to the Australian corporate sector.

Massage programs come at a cost to the organisation; some costs are overt, but there are hidden costs associated with workplace massage. Private sector organisations are profit-driven and government organisations are highly governed entities that are held publicly accountable for expenditure and overall performance. In both scenarios, the implementation of massage programs requires sound justification. Chapter 2 examines the scholarly literature to gain an understanding of stress, the stress-response in individuals, and the broader cost of stress to organisations. Employment initiatives such as health programs and the effect on individuals and the organisation will be examined (such as morale, employee engagement, staff retention and employers of choice), contributing to this review of the literature on workplace massage and the effects of massage more generally.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Overview of this chapter**

The central focus of this thesis was to explore the effect of implementing workplace massage programs on employees' health and wellbeing and to understand how massage may influence employee morale and productivity in organisations. Although workplace massage was the focal point of this thesis, many issues (such as laws and organisational requirements) influence the implementation of health and wellbeing programs in workplaces.

This chapter commences from a broad perspective of occupational health and safety laws (OHS), which provide governance mechanisms binding employers and employees. A review of human resources literature then follows to identify and understand issues that affect the health of an organisation and its people, including (but not limited to) staff retention, employee engagement, morale, and the physical and psychological wellbeing of workers.

Stress is frequently cited for negatively influencing employees and productivity, therefore this chapter contains a section reviewing the concept of stress and how stress affects organisations and workers. Massage has been demonstrated to alleviate many physical and psychological health issues, including stress and anxiety. Although the reported benefits of massage are not isolated to stress, the potential application of massage in the workplace to reduce employees' symptoms of stress, provide the impetus to explore the physiological and psychological effects of stress on individuals. In conclusion, this chapter provides a brief history of massage, a critical analysis of massage studies and the role of massage in health and wellbeing, (particularly stress) and uses the findings from the literature to understand how massage translates into a workplace setting for the benefit of staff and the wider organisation.

### **Criteria for considering literature included in this review**

Because of the relative paucity of scholarly articles on workplace massage *per se*, the development of the thesis argument has meant that a number of areas have been used in its synthesis. As a result, there have been a number of keywords, databases and search engines used to identify the relevant literature of the various contributing areas. The following section provides an overview of the methods adopted to select the literature used.

### **Keyword and key phrase searches**

For occupational health and safety legislation, a search using the keywords or phrases *occupational health and safety, OHS, harmonisation, model work health and safety* was undertaken in any published State or Commonwealth legislation, advice or interpretation of the legislation, or reference to the harmonisation laws. Search engines, websites and databases included:

- austlii.edu.au
- comlaw.gov.au
- nla.gov.au
- ag.gov.au
- comcare.gov.au
- AGIS plus text.

For human resources literature, a search was carried out using, but not limited to, the keywords or phrases, *attracting and retaining staff, employee engagement, healthy organisations, healthy workplaces, productivity, morale, wellbeing programs, wellness programs, employee health, stress, stress in the workplace, stress responses, cost of stress, occupational stress, effects of stress (physical, psychological, psychosocial, physiological), interventions, targeted interventions, and workplace interventions.*

For massage therapy literature, a search using, but not limited to, the keywords or phrases *massage, workplace massage, corporate massage, massage programs*, drawing from published or unpublished randomised controlled trial (RCT), quasi-RCT, or work-directed interventions was conducted.

The databases and search engines used for searches to isolate relevant human resources and massage therapy literature included:

- MEDLINE
- PsychInfo
- Cochrane Review
- Academic Search Premier
- CINAHL
- Ebook Library

- Google.scholar.com
- Google.com
- Health and Society
- Health Collection
- Ingenta Connect
- PsycARTICLES
- PubMed
- Sage Premier.

### **Introduction to the literature review**

The three groups who form the basis of the investigations in this thesis (managers, employees, and therapists) each have responsibilities to the organisation in which they work. Within this context, each group has explicit and implicit accountabilities and priorities, which are specific to their workplace contribution. As identified in Chapter 1, employers face many competing legal and organisational requirements. Such challenges are far-ranging and include complying with occupational health and safety laws (*Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Parliament of Victoria, 2004), maximising productivity to meet performance indicators (Darby, 2010), attracting and retaining staff (Dainty, 2008) and managing stress (McArthur, 2008). Employees of the company are required to balance numerous priorities, such as managing their own health and wellbeing (Working Carers Gateway, 2010), being productive at work and, for many staff, to cope and deal with varying life and work stressors (WorkSafe Victoria, 2006).

These various responsibilities and requirement inevitably give rise to certain tensions within the workplace, and an important issue related to this investigation is the role of the massage therapist in easing the effects of these tensions. Hence, massage therapists who are employed to provide workplace massages must be mindful of varying elements of the corporate environment and appropriately accommodate the needs of both managers and staff when providing healthcare and wellbeing services (DeFalco, 2009). Clearly, in the light of the natural tensions noted above, meeting both employers' and employees' needs, being responsive to the overall corporate setting and managing their own business demands pose multiple challenges for massage therapists.

## **Australian Occupational Health and Safety Laws**

Australian health and safety laws have undergone major reform to unify and harmonise safety legislation across all jurisdictions in Australia (Safe Work Australia, 2010). The legislative reforms aim to enhance Australian laws that protect the health and safety of workers, and improve safety outcomes in workplaces. The unified agreement was described as:

*Commonwealth, state and territory governments [have] made a formal commitment to harmonise OHS arrangements by December 2011 through the implementation of uniform laws comprised of a model Act, supported by model Regulations and model Codes of Practice and complemented by a nationally consistent approach to compliance and enforcement policy* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, n.p).

Under the *Work Health and Safety Act, 2011* (WHS Act), which was introduced on 1 January 2012, employers have a primary duty of care to ensure the health and safety of workers, and should consult and advise employees about health and safety matters (Comcare, 2012; Work Health and Safety Act, 2011). The WHS Act was designed to be Australia's model legislation to be mirrored in all Australian jurisdictions (Safe Work Australia, 2010). The changes to the safety legislation have led to significant increases in the potential penalties for breaching safety laws in many States and Territories.

Under the new laws, employers are personally liable for the health and safety of workers. Although, arguably, employers have both a moral and ethical obligation to protect the health and wellbeing of their staff, the revised health and safety legislation will mean that managers face burgeoning levels of responsibility and accountability to ensure that workplaces meet safety standards. As such, managers need to understand those health and safety issues that affect their employees in the workplace and give appropriate attention to developing their skills and knowledge about workplace safety, including their legal responsibilities and roles in managing health and safety matters for their businesses (Queensland Government, 2010).

The penalties for non-compliance with health and safety legislation stem from a drive to reduce the number of deaths and injuries that occur in the workplace. Employers potentially face prosecution for legislative breaches of health and safety laws including receiving fines or, in serious matters, incarceration (Wheelwright, 2011). Furthermore, Wheelwright (2005) stated:

*Deaths and injuries at work are largely avoidable. Research indicates that, far from being mostly 'acts of God' or the result of worker carelessness, their causes are more often attributable to management failures, systems breakdowns, and the neglect by organisations, their senior officers and workers to take health and safety as seriously as they should (p. 471).*

Whilst the death or serious injury of a worker with subsequent prosecution action is only likely to occur in extreme instances (Wheelwright, 2011), these recent Australian health and safety laws will provide the impetus for employers to implement sound policies with strong governance around their OHS strategies. Furthermore, the existence of sound policies and procedures to reduce the incidence of workplace injuries may be beneficial to employers in multiple ways, including cost savings, both from reduced insurance premiums and compensation pay-outs for injured workers (Comcare, 2010).

Of particular interest to this investigation is a statement from the World Health Organization [WHO] (2011), which defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (n.p). By drawing upon the WHO definition when meeting their OHS duty of care, employers face a somewhat wider responsibility than the traditional notion of management of the health and safety of their staff. This extended definition will mean that as well as adopting practices that adhere to OHS laws, regulations, and codes of conduct, by offering extended health and wellbeing practices in the workplace, employers can initiate strategies that protect peoples' health and safety while proactively supporting their staff to achieve optimum health. In this regard, employers have the opportunity to build upon OHS legislation and associated materials by developing and implementing policies and strategies that support employees in their pursuit of good health.

Furthermore, involving workers in the process of improving safety in the workplace can result in higher employee engagement (Raines, 2011). Raines stated, “Studies have shown a positive link between employee engagement, employee involvement, and safety performance” (p. 36) and the introduction of proactive OHS programs may place organisations in the best possible position for achieving business outcomes. Seemingly, healthy workplaces and healthy employees underpin good human resources and overall business practices.

## **Performance and Productivity: Human Resources**

The Industry Commission (1997) described the importance of productivity as being “the key ingredient in promoting sustainable economic growth and improving the material living standards of Australians” (p. 2). Despite the complexities that organisations face to be innovative, competitive and productive (Soames, Brunker, & Talgaswatta, 2011), the link between performance and productivity seems obvious; poor performance leads to poor productivity. However, achieving high performance by workers is a complex issue. The following sections explore the numerous issues and challenges that employers face to create healthy and productive workplaces that deliver optimal corporate outcomes.

### **Healthy organisations**

It has been claimed that there is a link between healthy staff and healthy, high performing organisations (Monash University, 2011). By implication, an organisation is not likely to be high performing if it has unwell, disengaged staff, who exhibit poor morale. Therefore, the importance for employers to manage their staff’s health and wellbeing becomes overt in two ways. First, employers have a legal duty of care to their employees and face the prospect of criminal sanctions if they fail to provide a healthy and safe workplace (Richardson, 2010; Tooma, 2010). Second, for a business to perform well, success is more likely if the employees are fit, in good health, and engaged in the workplace. In this context, a *healthy organisation* could be reasonably defined as one where the organisation is performing well (that is, meeting or exceeding corporate targets) and the staff are healthy and engaged.

To create a healthy organisation, employers have multiple factors to consider. Some of the key attributes of a healthy organisation include (but are not limited to): strong leadership; the ability to attract and retain quality staff; creating and aligning good business plans; maintaining positive relationships with outside providers; and encouraging a culture of team work and quality results (Goehrig, 2008; Heathfield, 2011; Trahant, 2008). Of relevance here is that although healthy organisations are not dependent on the implementation workplace massage programs, the factors noted above that contribute to the development of healthy organisations are compatible with the implementation of such programs.

However, the implementation of workplace initiatives, particularly those which the public may perceive as controversial (such as massage), would require innovative and strong



leadership to defend and to withstand potential disapproval. For example, such criticism was directed at some Australian and British Councils regarding the provision of massage to council workers. Notwithstanding the councillors' defence that the massage programs contributed to reduced injuries and stress in their employees, they still experienced public outrage for their decisions (Baron, 2010; Lawrie, 2010; Longmore, 2011; Masanauskas, 2011). Furthermore, this criticism was made even though the councillors were able to argue reasonably that their actions supported their duty of care under occupational health and safety laws.

Heathfield (2011) identified other factors that contributed to healthy organisations, such as effective business plans, positive relationships with external providers and creating a culture of teamwork. DeJoy, Wilson, Vandenberg, McGrath-Higgins, & Griffin-Blake (2010) suggested, "creating healthier organizations should be good for both employees and bottom-line business performance" (p. 140), therefore it would seem that effective business planning would be the key to achieving sound health and safety strategies that supported workers. Furthermore, DeJoy et al., recognised that "management practices, organizational culture/climate, and organizational values [were] key organizational factors" (p. 140) to creating healthy organisations. By factoring workplace massage into organisational plans, employers potentially contribute towards creating the culture, climate, and organisational values to encourage employees to pursue healthy activities and support the organisation to meet key performance indicators. Such workplace environments are more likely to attract quality employees and to contribute to their retention within the organisation, suggesting that perhaps the provision of workplace massage is a good marketing message to both prospective and existing employees.

### **Attracting and retaining staff**

The importance of attracting and retaining quality staff should not be understated. Achieving low staff turnover, minimal absenteeism, and maximum productivity are among employers' greatest challenges. Indeed, creating and maintaining marketable and desirable working conditions requires significant human and financial investment through the implementation of strategies to connect employees to meaningful work and engaging workplaces (Dainty, 2008; Raines, 2011; Williams & Cooper, 1998). Consequently, the implementation of intervention strategies such as workplace massage provides employers with the opportunity to make the

workplace more engaging. Furthermore, by supporting staff in healthy activities managers could use this benefit as a marketing opportunity for prospective employees.

In this latter respect, apart from the recent economic downturn, a major focus of the Australian Commonwealth and State Governments has been the skills shortage and the tightening of the Australian labour market (Department of Science and Training, 2007; Reed Business Information, 2007). The reported shortage of skilled labour increases the importance (and difficulty) of employers being able to attract and retain qualified staff. The combination of a shortage of skilled labour together with Australia's ageing workforce (Parliament of Australia, 2004; Walter, Jackson, & Felmingham, 2008), makes the attraction and retention of talented staff high priorities for employers. The number of baby boomers heading towards retirement further exacerbates these labour market challenges, particularly in the government sector, where many staff are eligible to retire when they turn 55 years of age (Lowe, 2001). The workforce is ageing, and the current low population growth results in a reduced pool of people to replace workers as they enter retirement (McKinnon, 2010; Parliament of Australia, 2004; Walter, Jackson, & Felmingham, 2008). Engaging suitable employees in adequate numbers to replace retiring workers is necessary across all areas of manufacture for sustainable economic growth (Queensland Government, 2008).

Regardless of the economic climate, looking after employees makes good sense. In buoyant economic times, and based on the basic economic principles of supply and demand, employees' employability in a tight labour market places them in a powerful negotiating position. Employees need not stay in jobs where they are dissatisfied, or where the conditions may not be ideal, particularly where there is an abundance of employment opportunities. Alternatively, during economic downturns, attracting and retaining talented employees contribute to an organisation's competitiveness in the marketplace. Whatever the economic environment presents, it has been claimed that "retaining top talent is a primary concern for many organizations" (Hausknecht, Rodda, & Howard, 2009, p. 269). This places an added onus on employers to provide their staff with attractive working conditions. Such conditions represent more than simply paying staff higher salaries, since according to Branham (2005), "[inadequate] pay is not the reason most employees leave" (p. 68).

In the pursuit of securing and retaining the best employees, many employers seek to be *employers of choice*, and achieving this status requires investment in improving work practices and working environments. Branham (2005) noted that “an employer of choice recruits and engages talent through practices that address both tangibles and intangibles, focus on the long term as well as the short term, and are tailored to the organization” (p. 57). Such investments may include the need for employers to address various environmental issues, including minimising and alleviating (where possible) workplace stressors, thus making workplaces more attractive for employees in the longer term.

Some authors have suggested that employees who have limited access to stress management strategies may experience dissatisfaction in the workplace, which consequently leads to increased levels of disengagement (Portello & Long, 2001; Siebert, 2005). In this regard, according to O’Driscoll and Cooper (1994), employees reporting high negative affectivity are more likely to report stress-related symptoms than those who are not similarly affected. It would therefore not be surprising to find that employees might reasonably expect their employers to implement policies and practices that create positive working environments, thereby reducing the exposure of workers to occupational stress and resulting stress-related symptoms.

### **Employers of Choice**

As indicated earlier, the world economy has experienced a serious downturn (Altman, 2009; Mattoo & Subramanian, 2009) resulting in reduced employment opportunities. With the resulting identified tight labour market, employers are now seeking to be seen as employers of choice so that talented employees actively seek to work in organisations who have achieved this status (Gill, 2006). Organisations where employees report positive feelings about their workplaces may in turn, through word-of-mouth, contribute towards those businesses developing positive reputations with the wider public. Such highly regarded reputations may evolve for reasons other than simply because those organisations provide their employees with above average salaries.

While economic circumstances may prevail that preclude employers from increasing the wages and salaries of their employees, they might instead compensate their staff by providing other attractive benefits. Such benefits may result in employees perceiving those workplaces

as offering conditions that contribute to positive working environments. Wellness programs are, for example, one way in which employers can provide employee benefits without the financial burden of salary increases (Branham, 2005).

## **Stress**

In the past, the economic cost arising from stress to the economies of developed nations has been quite considerable and there are suggestions that this cost is still growing (Australian Associated Press, 2010; McArthur, 2008; Medilexicon, 2005). However, there may be potential to reduce the various burdens experienced by people, organisations, and ultimately economies through the provision of workplace health interventions for employees to manage the antecedents to stress. A complicating factor to stress-related symptoms, however, is that as no single strategy implemented in isolation within an organisation would be likely to provide a major reduction on the effects of workplace stress. Consequently, since the stress response in individuals can be complex and varied, employers may need to adopt a broad approach to managing workers' stress in the organisation through a combination of strategies. Of relevance here is that one such strategy could include workplace massage, not as a single cure-all to deal with stress in the workplace, but rather as part of a wider stress-management program within an organisation. As such, the following section provides some insight into the current understandings of stress, focussing on how workplace massage might go some way towards alleviating this costly, complex, and debilitating condition.

Currently, there is a substantial focus in the human resources literature on stress in the workplace (Biron, Ivers, Brun, & Cooper, 2006; Layne, Hohenshil, & Singh, 2004; McGowan, Gardner, & Fletcher, 2006), and we are particularly concerned with the way in which workplace massage programs may alleviate employees' stress symptoms. It is therefore appropriate in the first place to examine what might trigger stress and how it potentially manifests in employees.

On the Australian Government's Comcare website (Comcare, 2006), there is a description of stress as:

*A generic term that is widely used in society to describe the feeling that some people might have in response to pressures that they face in their lives. In the workplace context, stress is a term often used to describe the responses that may develop when*

*people are subjected to demands and expectations that are out of keeping with their needs, abilities, skills, and coping strategies.*

This website goes on to provide strong links between psychological injury and stress with descriptions such as:

*Many people respond to pressure they face in their lives by feeling stressed. . . . If stress is intense and goes on for some time, it can lead to mental and physical ill health. The form of injury generally associated with work-related stress is called psychological injury.*

One important distinction that should be made at this point relates to some inaccuracies about what stress is and, indeed, what it is not. The statement above that *many people respond to pressure they face in their lives by feeling stressed* might lead to a confusion between stress and nervous tension. In this respect, Selye categorically stated, “stress is not nervous tension” (Selye, n.d.), thus by rewording the statement as, *many people respond to negative stressors and situations by feeling unable to cope* might provide a more accurate description of the stress response. The relevance of this clarification to the issue of workplace message is that the effects of stress are the focus of this investigation, whilst the management and treatment of nervous tension is not usually within the remit of the massage therapist. To emphasise this distinction, whilst the terms *stress*, *stress in the workplace*, *workplace stress*, and *occupational stress* are used interchangeably throughout this thesis, none of these is intended to refer to or include the effects of nervous tension.

### **Appraisal and Coping**

As a further strategy to avoid the consequence of the possible confusions and definitional difficulties inherent in discussions regarding stress in the workplace, it was found that focussing on appraisal and coping mechanisms seems a more useful approach for people in the workplace. The need for different approaches stems from the varying cognitive appraisals of the stressor or situation, and the related reactions, by each individual (Gruen, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, 1987). Within this context, and of relevance to this investigation, is that an individual may even perceive receiving a massage in the workplace as a stressor. For example, a person may be unfamiliar with the process of massage or they may have cultural taboos about being touched, particularly by a masseur of the opposite sex.

A key issue here is at the primary appraisal stage, where an individual makes an initial judgment of a situation and arrives at a personal assessment in terms of whether it is benign-positive, or whether it is perceived as stressful. Benign-positive situations are those where individuals appraise situations as having potentially positive outcome, examples include joy, love, and exhilaration (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stressful situations are those where the individual assesses that they may experience harm, threat, or challenge (Rotenberg & Sirota, 1996). Further, people may decide that something is irrelevant because they are familiar with the situation and implicitly know that the situation poses no threat or opportunity. Such familiarisation potentially desensitises people to the situation. In these circumstances, such situations are unlikely to cause arousal or any form of negative stress reactions in people (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). People familiar and comfortable being massaged have been through the process of judging the situation and making a personal assessment about the value of massage and have consequently developed a psychological comfort at being touched.

Once individuals have undertaken primary appraisals, they are able to make secondary appraisals of the situation. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), a secondary appraisal is:

*A judgment about what might and can be done. It includes an evaluation about whether a given coping option will accomplish what it is supposed to, that one can apply a particular strategy or set of strategies effectively, and an evaluation of the consequences of using a particular strategy in the context of other internal and/or external demands and constraints (p.53).*

Once people appraise situations, they may need to initiate coping strategies. Coping is a complex process that is a “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral effort to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). Coping is influenced by personality, problem solving skills, social skills, an individual’s health, and belief systems (Cooper & Dewe, 2007; Nelson & Cooper, 2005). The ultimate goal of appraisal and coping is adaptation to the stressor. In the workplace, the ways in which people appraise and implement coping mechanisms are important in how they adapt to, and deal with, workplace stressors (Cooper, O’Driscoll, & Dewe, 2001). In this investigation, it is the individual’s coping behaviour with workplace massage, particularly in the context of stress relief that is important, and the views of workers, managers and masseur will be sought in this regard.

## **Stress in the Workplace**

In order to place this investigation on a wider canvas, some comments here should be noted about the demands placed on people at work, which reduce functionality of the affected individuals inside or outside of the workplace. This is often termed *occupational stress*. Day, Gillan, Francis, Kelloway, & Natarajan (2009) described occupational stress as:

*the cumulative pressures in the workplace that can cause psychophysiological symptoms and vulnerabilities to work injuries and disease. Stressors are concrete situations or factors that have the potential to create strain in an individual if the individual perceives the situation or factor to be stressful. That is, perceived stress reflects the extent to which an individual experiences a stressor “as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering well-being” (p. B 25).*

Clearly, the relationships between stress, performance, and organisational outcomes are complex and there have been reports that “stress in the workplace has been and continues to be a pervasive and costly problem” (Shulman & Jones, 1996, p. 160).

Jacobs, Tytherleigh, Webb, and Cooper (2007) undertook a study through anonymous questionnaires of 10,090 university employees to assess levels of stress, commitment, and health-related outcomes. The findings from this study suggested that access to resources, good communication, good working relationships, adequate pay, and healthy working conditions are all important factors in determining the relationship between stress and performance. Jacobs et al. also found that physical health, psychological wellbeing, and peoples’ commitment to the organisation in which they work are important in the stress-performance relationship. Giga, Noblet, Faragher, & Cooper (2003) reported that people who are in poor psychological or physical health are more likely to take time off from work. Furthermore, poor health can negatively influence a person’s ability to cope (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Massage research has shown that it can reduce an individual’s level of anxiety and stress (Bost & Wallis, 2006; Garner et al., 2008), has physical benefits such as reducing pain (Imamura, Furlan, Dryden, & Irvin, 2008) and contributes to peoples’ overall sense of wellbeing (Keir, 2011) suggesting that workplace massage has a valuable place as a stress management intervention.

Absenteeism places a greater demand on the employees left to carry the unattended workload of the absent worker. The extra demand itself does not necessarily translate into stress for the remaining employees, but rather as McGowan et al., (2006) pointed out, the response, such as their appraisals of the situation and the subsequent coping mechanisms of the individuals to the added demands are the markers of stress. Those individuals who possess substantial coping skills are less likely to respond negatively to the additional demands than those who have less-developed coping strategies.

Overload and chronic untreated work stress leads to burnout (O'Driscoll & Cooper, 1994). Cooper and Marshall (1976) described qualitative and quantitative overload as sources of stress in the workplace. Quantitative overload means a person has too much to do, and qualitative overload means the individual perceives that the work is too difficult. Among other sources of occupational stress are role ambiguity (lack of clarity of job requirements), role conflict (competing demands in the workplace), lack of control in the working environment, and problematic workplace relationships (Cooper, Quick, & Gibbs, 2010). Although workplace massage does not pose a solution to overload, it might prove useful as reward and to support in addressing the stress levels of staff working in a peak period where the overload is short-term.

In their study, Donald et al. (2005) found that the strongest predictor of productivity was psychological wellbeing. This large study of 16,001 people, across a number of organisations, supported the premise that stress has a negative linear relationship with productivity. The findings from this study parallel those of Jacobs et al. (2007) in that the commitment of the employees to their organisation contributes to their level of productivity. Management-initiated wellbeing programs into workplaces could be a way of gaining such commitment from employees towards the organisations in which they work. Massage has also been shown to provide several psychological benefits to recipients (Goodfellow, 2003; Moyer, Rounds, & Hannum, 2004) and therefore might prove useful as a measure to support individuals' psychological wellbeing in the workplace.

Clarke and Cooper (2000) stated that a survey conducted in the United Kingdom in 1995 returned findings that 19.5 million working days were lost due to work-related illnesses (Jones, Hodgson, Clegg & Elliot, 1998 cited in Clarke & Cooper, 2000). The highest reported



complaints were musculoskeletal problems, stress, anxiety, and depression. Cole and Wells (2002) reported that an increasing number of work-related musculoskeletal disorders are linked to workers engaged in intense computer work. These problems are associated with poor ergonomics and stress. Although workplace massage does not reduce stressors in the workplace, various studies indicate that massage can reduce pain related to musculoskeletal problems (Ernst, 2003; Field, Hernandez-Reif, Diego, & Fraser, 2007; Furlan, Brosseau, Imamura, & Irvin, 2002) and positively affect mood (Field, 1998; Field, Diego, Hernandez-Reif, Schanberg, & Kuhn, 2004). There seems a legitimate case for providing massage in the workplace to reduce pain, improve mobility, and improve mood for employees in the workplace. In turn, these benefits may translate to increased productivity of employees within the organisation.

### **Absenteeism and Presenteeism**

The detrimental effects of employees' absenteeism due to sickness on organisational productivity are clear-cut; if employees are absent from work due to illness, then their contributions to organisational productivity outcomes are negligible. A less often discussed issue regarding productivity in the workplace is 'presenteeism'. Presenteeism is the behaviour of an employee attending work despite illness (either physical or psychological illness). Although physically at work, the person is functionally impaired (Kivimäki et al., 2005; Middaugh, 2007; Shamansky, 2002). Musich et al. (2006) found that high stress levels and life dissatisfaction are strongly associated with presenteeism. The problems associated with presenteeism provide further impetus for managers within organisations to provide mechanisms for dealing with stress in the workplace, such as minimising disruptions to productivity and supporting the health and wellbeing for workers. Presenteeism directly and negatively affects productivity outcomes for the individual and the organisation. Accordingly, this issue adds another dimension for employers to consider strategies to manage the health and wellbeing of their staff such as providing workplace massage.

### **Interventions and Wellbeing Programs**

Workplace interventions are strategies employers implement to reduce risk to health and safety for employees. The levels of interventions are: (a) primary, organisational level; (b) secondary, stress management; and (c) tertiary, lifestyle changes (Clarke & Cooper, 2000; Lloyd & Foster, 2006). Tertiary and secondary interventions target the individual, and are

otherwise called wellbeing or wellness programs (these terms being used interchangeably). These programs assist the individual to improve health and wellbeing, manage stress, and address stress-related symptoms, whereas primary level interventions aim to reduce the external stressors.

Management-implemented wellbeing programs include health and fitness interventions, disease management, and employee assistance initiatives (Arthur, 2000; Gebhardt & Crump, 1990; Pelletier, 2001). Wellness programs have multiple effects on employees, particularly when used over long periods. The reported benefits of such programs include improved job performance and morale, fewer workplace injuries, reduced employee turnover, and reduced absenteeism (Gebhardt & Crump, 1990).

The need to maintain and improve productivity (which is difficult to achieve with unwell employees), combined with employers' responsibilities to look after their employees, drives the management of companies to implement wellbeing and health-promoting programs (Gebhardt & Crump, 1990; Saksvik, Nytrø, Dahl-Jørgensen, & Mikkelsen, 2002). The relationship between employee health, absences from work, and workers' compensation payments strengthens the case for implementing wellness programs into the workplace to maximise the opportunity for employees to pursue activities that will contribute to overall improved health status (Mills, 2005). Thus, the potential benefits of wellbeing programs are two-fold: (a) improved productivity for the organisation, and (b) healthier employees in the workplace.

Wellness programs are costly to the organisation at a number of levels. Employees engaged in the program spend time away from their normal duties at a cost to the organisation (either directly or indirectly). The long-term effects of wellness programs may result in reduced absenteeism and better productivity for the organisation. Goetzel and Ozminkowski (2000) questioned whose responsibility is it to pay for the program, asking whether it should be the organisation, the user, or a combination of both. Implementing wellness programs presents risks to the organisation in that they may be costly and provide little real benefit to either the employer or the employee. Many of the existing studies identify and criticise the poor evaluation of wellness programs (Arthur, 2000; Goetzel & Ozminkowski, 2000). Although there is a seemingly strong shift towards providing employees with wellness programs, the

actual effectiveness for these programs requires further examination. Perhaps the lack of evaluation suggests that part of employers' motivations and drive to implement wellbeing programs relates to their need to keep up with competitors, rather than an altruistic motivation for supporting the health and wellbeing of staff. Providing such programs may be about employers convincing themselves that they have placed a 'metaphorical tick in the box' against their obligatory health and safety responsibilities for their staff, therefore rendering thorough evaluation unnecessary.

McGowan et al., (2006) suggested that, "stress management begins with consideration of organisational issues" (p. 97). These organisational issues are complex and include, but are not limited to, leadership within the organisation, policies and procedures, workplace culture, reporting arrangements, training, and role clarity (Giga, Cooper, & Faragher, 2003; Kirk & Brown, 2003; McGowan et al., 2006). Furthermore McGowan et al. (2006) stated that many stress management interventions are ineffective, and according to Giga, Cooper, and Faragher (2003):

*Individual, person-directed stress management programs that attempt to empower workers to deal with demanding situations by developing their own coping skills and abilities are unlikely to maintain employee health and well-being in the long-term without procedures in place within the organizations for reducing or preventing environmental stressors. . . This conventional approach has been seen as being predominately reactive and biased, portraying an impression that the problem lies solely with the individual employee (p. 282).*

Silcox (2009) stated that to be successful, health promotion interventions require both an individual and organisational focus, and be embedded in the organisation's culture. Although on their own, wellness programs may not address the organisational issues previously identified as contributing to ill-health in the workplace, perhaps their implementation indicates that the management group is appraising organisational issues. Such action may demonstrate to staff that managers are taking steps towards addressing root problems.

Management teams who implement wellness programs do so at a certain cost to the organisation. Either consciously or subconsciously, such actions send a message from the management team about the value they place on their staff and about the level of commitment they have towards their employees' wellbeing. 'Organisational commitment' is the term used

to describe the commitment of employees to the organisation in which they work. Attaining organisational commitment from workers is an important component in meeting corporate objectives, so perhaps by implementing wellbeing programs into the workplace the management team demonstrates reciprocated commitment to staff with an end-gain of improved productivity (Donald et al., 2005; Jacobs et al., 2007).

Employees demonstrating a willingness to undertake wellness programs, show through their actions that they perceive benefits to them for their physical or psychological health, or both. Such individuals may consider that although they cannot change the organisation, they can empower themselves by striving towards improved wellbeing.

Unfortunately, one of the potential shortcomings of wellbeing programs is that, if poorly implemented, the likelihood is that the more healthy people are the ones most likely engage with the program. Conversely, the people experiencing poor health or in most need of participating in a wellbeing program may feel marginalised, embarrassed, or uncomfortable using the program (Saksvik et al., 2002). The success of these programs may depend on implementing them in a way that is not threatening to the less fit and needier target group.

In their study, Saksvik et al. (2002) identified that some key factors influenced the success of intervention programs in the workplace. Reportedly, companies' motivations for implementing intervention programs were not ultimately to improve employee health, but rather to increase productivity. This finding presents a potential dilemma to employers in how best to market their programs. To market programs poorly, such as a productivity-driven initiative, may result in negative employee perceptions of the organisation's motives.

Middle managers reported that when their senior managers failed to embrace workplace health and wellbeing interventions, project fatigue followed. Lack of senior management buy-in suggests that a decisive component in the success of a program lies not only in the program's implementation, but in the on-going support of managers at all levels of the organisation to maintain the momentum of the initiative. Employees also need to be engaged in a local negotiation process to support the program initiative (Saksvik et al., 2002). If employees do not believe in the program, then it is potentially doomed to fail.

The complexities of the issues identified indicate that achieving success in wellness programs, and maximising the health and wellbeing of employees mean there is no 'one size fits all' solution to the problems. Multifaceted wellbeing programs embraced by all levels of management are most likely to succeed. Pelletier (2001) highlighted that comprehensive interventions are far more effective than single-factor disease management (such as smoking cessation). The programs need to target the organisational and health problems that employees face, but for the programs to succeed they need to appeal to individuals. For example, to implement a jogging program in an organisation where many of the staff are overweight and sedentary may be pointless. Careful evaluation of the issues identified within target groups combined with specifically adapted programs to address those issues are more likely to succeed than programs implemented without such tailoring.

The importance of providing healthy workplaces cannot be overstated. The findings from this literature review support the notion that negative symptoms from psychological and physical disorders in the workplace present enormous challenges to employers. To employees and employers alike, the risk to health and wellbeing present complex issues without simple solutions. Among the negative outcomes for the individual are financial hardships from absences at work, feelings of isolation, depression, anxiety, and a range of physical illnesses.

For employers, the necessity of providing workplaces that are healthy and safe is paramount. Absenteeism and presenteeism, together with staff turnover, represents great risks to productivity outcomes, and for bottom-line-driven organisations, reduced profits. These factors alone provide a legitimate impetus for employers to strive for healthy workplaces. Further complicating these issues for Australian employers has been the tight labour market, where attracting and retaining key staff are significant to corporate outcomes. Healthy workplaces should be high agenda items for employers and employees alike. Creating organisations that achieve desired corporate outcomes (such as optimum health and safety in the workplace) requires more than haphazard implementation of wellness programs.

### **Workplace Massage**

The number of studies into workplace massage is limited and perhaps disproportionate to the growing use of this therapy in the corporate sector. In many businesses, massage is often incorporated as one aspect of wellness programs provided to employees (Bost & Wallis,

2006; Carcellor, 1998a, 1998b; Hodge, Robinson, Boehmer, Klein, & Ullrich, 2000; Katz, Wowk, Culp, & Wakeling, 1999).

According to Šiško, Videmšek, and Karpljuk (2011) musculoskeletal disorders, particularly those related to back, neck and arm pain or injury, are major causes of health-related absences from the workplace. According to Šiško et al.,

*computer-intensive office work, long exposure duration, repetitive movements, static and awkward postures, monotonous tasks with low physical demands, and psychosocial conditions are important factors in the early stages of musculoskeletal disorders, particularly when workers are exposed to several risk factors simultaneously. . . [Furthermore] Posture-related pain is one of the most common factors in the early stages of musculoskeletal disorders (p. 617).*

In their study, Šiško et al., conducted 15-minute chair massages in an office setting, twice a week for one month on 19 female participants with a mean age of 46 (only 15 participants completed the study). The study aimed to examine the participants' physical and psychological responses to chair massage by measuring their ranges of motion for selected upper body areas and through the completion of a self-reported questionnaire (Cornell Musculoskeletal Discomfort Questionnaire). The authors found that people experienced increased ranges of motion and that massage reduced participants' perception of musculoskeletal aches and pains.

According to Macdonald and Evans (2006):

*Body stressing injuries accounted for approximately 41% of compensated, work related injury and disease cases in Australia in 1999–2000 (Foley, 1996). The mean period of absence from work for such claims was 10.4 weeks (14.5 weeks for injuries to the upper body). In 2004 these figures had changed very little, being 41.7% of injuries, with a mean absence of 9.3 weeks (p. 12).*

In view of the burden that physical injuries create, both for individuals and more broadly for the employer, the importance of workplace interventions that can assist people to manage or even alleviate their musculoskeletal complaints appears obvious. Any program that reduces workers' pain or increases their range of movement is a seemingly worthwhile investment, particularly to minimise the potential risk of a cumulative effect of untreated injuries. A workplace massage program could possibly be used as a preventative measure to reduce the risk of absenteeism due to back and neck pain.

Bost and Wallis (2006) conducted a study in a Queensland (Australia) hospital to examine the effectiveness of massage therapy in reducing physical and psychological indicators of stress in nurses working in an acute care hospital. Sixty nurses were randomly assigned to two groups, one study, and one control group; the study group receiving a weekly 15-minute massage. Physiological markers, urinary cortisol and blood pressure readings were taken from the groups at weeks one, three, and five. Psychological measures of stress were taken using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory [STAI] (Spielberger, 2005; Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 2005) at weeks one and five.

The researchers found that there were no significant differences between the groups for the physiological measures. However, there was a statistically significant difference in the psychological measure between the groups. The STAI outcomes decreased for those people who received weekly massages, whereas the STAI outcomes increased over the five-week period for the group who did not receive massages. Although these results demonstrated that nurses in an acute care setting benefited from weekly massages, the stressful nature of their work may not be considered comparable to the average office worker. Nevertheless, Bost and Wallis's (2006) findings suggest that office workers could potentially use massage as a mechanism for managing stress-related symptoms.

Verhagen et al. (2003) compared four massage studies using ergonomic and physio-therapeutic interventions to treat upper extremity work-related disorders, and found no evidence that massage was effective. However, individuals who may be experiencing stress-related symptoms arising from pain and discomfort resulting from musculoskeletal disorder may potentially derive a psychological benefit from massage (Bost & Wallis, 2006).

Verhagen et al.'s study was designed to explore the effectiveness of the massage on the specific disorder. As such, massage may have provided some benefit, which was not measured by that particular study. There is no discussion as to whether massage exacerbated the disorder, so although the massage may have not provided direct evidence of benefit, it did not cause further injury or discomfort.

Shulman and Jones (1996) conducted a workplace massage study in an organisation where the management were reducing staff numbers and provided 15-minute massages. The study included 18 massage participants and 15 participants in a control group. Using the State-Trait

Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Ritterband, Reheiser, & Brunner, 2003; Spielberger & Sarasson, 2005), Shulman and Jones measured the anxiety levels of participants and found that the massage participants experienced significant reductions in anxiety compared to the control group. The researchers conducted this study in an organisation where there had been significant downsizing, and stated, “This study assumed that participants were working in an inherently stressful environment” (Shulman & Jones, 1996, p. 165). Positive aspects of this study included the use of a control group, a post-test and delayed post-test survey. Conducting the study in a situation known to be highly stressful gives strong credence to the positive results of the massage therapy on anxiety levels, particularly with the on-going lowered state anxiety levels reported in the delayed post-test.

In Cady and Jones’s (1997) study, 52 government employees were assigned to a 15-minute workplace massage group. The results of this study showed a significant reduction in systolic and diastolic blood pressure readings of massage participants, but this study did not use a control group for comparison. This study did not address the duration of the blood pressure reduction in the recipients, nor were there any controls for possible white-coat effects. A potential confounding factor in this study was the alarm response in participants, whereby participants may have experienced a temporary elevation in blood pressure that reduced to baseline during the massage. The alarm response may have led researchers to a Type I error.

Whilst Cady and Jones (1997) did not indicate whether the massage recipients were first-time users of massage, or the heights and ages of the participants, in contrast, Cambron, Dexheimer, & Coe (2006) specifically targeted recipients who had previously used massage. They believed that people who had not experienced massage in the past might have been apprehensive about the process causing short-term blood pressure elevation, potentially distorting the results.

Katz et al., (1999) conducted a series of eight 15-minute workplace massages on 12 nurses. The rationale underpinning this study was to determine the feasibility of running a work-based massage program in a large teaching hospital for nurses. This study did not have a control group. The dropout rate for this study was 67%, although all participants completed at least four massages. The nurses reported improved overall mood state, reduced pain, and increased relaxation. Some participants reported that the effects lasted longer than one day.



Based on Moyer et al.'s (2004) review, the series of eight massages may have produced a positive cumulative effect for some of the participants. Despite the positive effects, one could speculate on many reasons for the high dropout rate, such as a high workload for the nurses, shift-times clashing with massage times, and incompatible personalities between massage therapists and participants. Examining the dropout rates seems a necessary part of this study, which the researchers left unexplored, since the participants' reasons for withdrawing from the study are, arguably, as important as the findings from those who completed the study. The incomplete understanding of prohibitive factors for people receiving massages in the workplace leaves a large gap in the understanding of massage programs. In short, a workplace massage program will struggle to succeed without adequate participation (poorly attended programs are not economically viable). Katz et al. (1999) concluded that the findings from this study supported the feasibility of an eight-session workplace massage program, although the dropout rate indicates potential long-term problems. Furthermore, without a control group it was impossible to know whether a 15-minute break from work might have had the same effect.

Hodge et al., (2000) conducted on-site workplace massages for 100 healthcare workers, including a control and an intervention group in a hospital setting. Several massage therapists provided participants with massages using a combination of techniques including traditional clothed massage, reflexology, and acupuncture. Although all participants completed the interventions, only 89 of them fully complied with completing the psychometric tests. The participants' stated reasons for not completing the tests included losing the surveys and being too busy. The findings from this intervention showed significant decreases in anxiety and depressed mood, along with improvements in sleep. The control group expressed greater job dissatisfaction than the intervention group during the study.

The findings from the above studies also suggest that the implementation strategies used to integrate a massage program into the workplace are central to the success or failure of the programs. As Katz et al. (1999) found, the dropout rate for one program was quite high. This dropout rate warranted further investigation because the underlying reasons for people dropping out of workplace massage programs may be work-related pressure or lack of management group support for such initiatives. The dropout rate raises a possible paradox; some employer-initiated massage programs to reduce employees' stress levels end up having

high dropout rates, potentially due to employees' perceptions that there is not enough time, or their workloads are too pressing, or both (in other words, because they are experiencing high-stress and high workloads). Employees may, therefore, not allow themselves time to attend massages in the workplace.

Field et al., (1999) conducted a five-week study on 26 participants, who received a 15-minute chair massage, twice a week. This study used a control group of 24 participants who were asked to relax in a chair. Each participant's EEG measures were recorded before, during, and after the massage. Findings for both groups' EEG readings showed that they relaxed, and the EEG readings in the massage group indicated that they had increased alertness. Each group undertook mathematics computations; the massage group demonstrated increased speed and accuracy, whereas the control group demonstrated no changes. The massage group also showed improvements in salivary cortisol, anxiety levels, and job stress scores. It is not clear from reports of this study the actual location of the intervention (i.e., whether in a work or clinical setting), but the findings are encouraging in favour of massage in the workplace. Employees who are more relaxed and alert are likely to be more productive in the workplace and have higher levels of job satisfaction. One might speculate that the benefits may possibly translate into reduced turnover of staff and lower absenteeism.

Despite the plentiful claims made in the popular media about the benefits of massage, research continues to return inconclusive findings. Workplace massage is one component within the greater goal of achieving optimum business outcomes by effectively managing workers' stress, improving health in the workplace, reducing absenteeism, and retaining valuable staff, but the effectiveness of workplace massage remains unclear. Workplace massage is costly in terms of person-hours lost from work, which directly affects the corporate budget, in some instances, adding to corporate expenditure through the provision of employer-funded massages.

### ***General Effects of Massage***

In the absence of extensive literature on workplace massage, the following sections explore the currently understood effects of massage on the physical, psychological, and physiological outcomes for massage recipients. The previous section examined the effects of workplace massage; however, the number of studies into workplace massage is limited. In this regard,

the following sections provide a review of the scholarly literature about massage more generally to gain broader understanding of the effects of massage and, by implication, of how those effects might translate into benefits for employees and for organisations.

Many claims made in favour of massage are that it can: (a) lower blood pressure (Bost & Wallis, 2006; Cady & Jones, 1997; Hernandez-Reif, Field, Krasnegor, Theakston, & Burman, 2000; Lund, Lundenberg, Kurosawa, & Unvas-Moberg, 1999); (b) improve mood, reduce pain, and lower tension (Field, Hernandez-Reif, & Diego, 2005; Hilbert, Sforzo, & Swensen, 2004; Imamura et al., 2008; Katz et al., 1999); (c) reduce cortisol and stress levels (Field et al., 2005; Fraser & Kerr, 1993; Jain, Kumar, & McMillan, 2006); (d) reduce heart rates (Diego, Field, Sanders, & Hernandez-Reif, 2004; Meek, 1993; Seymour, 1973); (e) improve human immune system functioning (Fraser & Kerr, 1993; Lovas, 1998); (f) help relieve symptoms of tension-type headaches (Hammill, Cook, & Rosencrance, 1996); and (g) reduce levels of anxiety, aggression, and associated stress hormones (Diego et al., 2002).

The increasing interest in massage for health and wellbeing has prompted a growing worldwide body of research investigating its efficacy (Beckmann & Garrett, 2005; Hondras, Linde, & Jones, 2005; Solà, Thompson, Subirana, López, & Pascual, 2004). A number of recent reviews and meta-analyses are available through the Cochrane Collaboration Review database (Beckmann & Garrett, 2005; Fellowes, Barnes, & Wilkinson, 2004; Furlan et al., 2002; Haraldsson et al., 2006; Marine, Ruotsalainen, Serra, & Verbeek, 2006; Underdown, Barlow, Chung, & Stewart-Brown, 2006; Vickers, Ohlsson, Lacy, & Horsley, 2004; Viggo Hansen, Jørgensen, & Ørtenblad, 2006). These reviews and analyses, together with the overall increase in the number of studies into massage reflect growing levels of public interest in it as a health care modality. The Cochrane Collaboration (2000) is highly regarded for providing a robust and rigorous framework for researchers to systematically peer-review existing research:

*[Cochrane Reviews] investigate the effects of interventions for prevention, treatment and rehabilitation in a healthcare setting. They are designed to facilitate the choices that doctors, patients, policy makers and others face in health care. Most Cochrane Reviews are based on randomized controlled trials, but other types of evidence may also be taken into account (n.p).*

The Cochrane Collaboration has published a number of reviews, and protocols for upcoming reviews, on the effects of massage on physical symptoms and psychological wellbeing (Beckmann & Garrett, 2005; Brosseau et al., 2002; Fellowes, Barnes, & Wilkinson, 2004; Furlan et al., 2002; Solà et al., 2004; Verhagen et al., 2003; Vickers et al., 2004). Although published research about the physical and physiological effects of massage is increasing, there remains little research into the psychosocial and economic effects of workplace massage (Marine et al., 2006).

Mixed findings from the Cochrane Reviews (Beckmann & Garrett, 2005; Fellowes, Barnes, & Wilkinson, 2004; Furlan et al., 2002; Haraldsson et al., 2006; Marine et al., 2006; Underdown et al., 2006; Vickers et al., 2004; Viggo Hansen et al., 2006) suggests that massage is not as effective as the authors of popular literature on the topic would have the public believe. There are numerous methodological problems associated with massage studies. Although randomisation is not usually problematic (Westcombe et al., 2003), double-blinding massage treatments is impossible, establishing comparable control groups is difficult, and controlling for variability between therapists present on-going challenges. Even where the same therapists conduct several massages, the routines will never be identical in any two treatments for reasons including the therapists' fatigue levels, their professional experiences, and the interactions between therapists and participants (Moyer et al., 2004; Reader, Young, & Connor, 2005; Wilcock et al., 2004).

Regarding the mechanisms behind the potential positive effects of massage, Chang, Wang, and Chen (2002) supported the notion that massage therapy has the potential to reduce pain based on touch, quoting the adage that "if you rub it, it feels better" (Gildenberg, 2006, p. S9). It is thought that in this respect, a competing stimulus (that is, rubbing the painful area) results in pressure fibres relaying information to the brain more quickly than signals coming through pain fibres and this can provide a subsequent inhibitory and analgesic effect (Moyer et al., 2004).

Whilst the effects of pain are multi-layered, involving physical, psychological, physiological, and psychosocial phenomena, in the workplace it is likely that painful symptoms can arise from a number of musculoskeletal conditions directly linked to physical activities associated with work tasks. For example, pain arising from poor posture while doing computer-based

work is becoming more common (Cole & Wells, 2002; Šiško et al., 2011; Wiholm & Arnetz, 2006).

What is clearly relevant here is that workplace-induced pain translates into costly outcomes for employers who have to budget for their insurance premiums, employee absences arising from pain due to injuries and potential compensation claims (Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Committee, 2009). However, employees who experience pain as a result of workplace activities might perceive (or actually experience) that they have reduced levels of discomfort if they get regular access to workplace massage. Thus, such access, which leads to improved employee outcomes, may reduce an employer's exposure to potential compensation claims or employee absences. Indeed, an individual's pain modulation strategy could significantly affect their productivity in the workplace. Therefore, massage may prove valuable to assist in reducing a person's pain, or even their perception of pain, and help improve their levels of concentration and productivity at work (Apkarian, Baliki, & Geha, 2009; Chrubasik, Junck, Zappe, & Stutzke, 1998), and this link will be further investigated in this study.

### ***Interactions between Massage Therapists and Clients***

Finally, it is evident from the literature that massage studies have rarely addressed the interactions between therapists and clients. Although these client-practitioner relationships have been widely studied and reported in psychology, nursing, and conventional medical practice (Krupat, Yeager, & Putnam, 2000; Pooley, Gerrard, Hollis, Morton, & Astbury, 2001), the literature is silent on the nature of the client-massage therapist relationship, and it is speculated that this may have significant relevance to this investigation on workplace massage issues. For example, there is reason to believe that the relationship between a massage therapist and an employee using a workplace massage program may positively contribute to the individual's massage experience. Not only is the person potentially gaining a physical benefit from the massage, but also the interaction between the two may provide a further benefit for psychological gain. The massage therapist may provide a disinterested, neutral sounding point for a person to talk to while receiving their massage. This benefit is unlikely to be easily measureable, and it is not surprising that it has not been addressed in the existing workplace massage literature.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the effects of workplace massage, the policy and industrial settings that have influenced its implementation, and the corporate imperatives that need to be considered when implementing corporate massage programs. However, the current state of knowledge about workplace massage is limited and narrow in its focus within the scholarly literature. Current research about workplace massage focusses primarily on the psychophysiological effects of massage on clients. Existing studies have largely ignored the sociocultural meanings of massage in workplace settings. Nevertheless, the findings arising from this review highlight the complex dynamics that are intrinsic to implementing health and wellbeing interventions successfully and, by implication, workplace massage programs. These factors include, but are not limited to: (a) the culture within the organisation, (b) individual engagement with and appeal of workplace massage, and (c) the support of the leadership group for the program.

No research about the perceptions of managers, employees and therapists about workplace massage have previously been undertaken in a single study. As such, this triangulation presents both an innovative and significant contribution to knowledge in this field. The findings from this study offer suggestions for future research into field of workplace massage. This work provides further insights for policy makers and managers to consider the value (or otherwise) of such programs within the context of an organisation and from multiple perspectives.

The following chapter describes the approach and methods used to undertake the three linked studies. The studies draw from the theories of reflective practice, which were developed by Argyris and Schön (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1992, 1996). The chapter provides a description of the methodologies used to conduct the research, the methods used to collect and analyse empirical data, and presents Argyris and Schön's theories, which have been used as a guide for the analysis of data and the understanding of the stories of the research participants.

## **Chapter 3: Methods, Theoretical Framework, Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations**

### **Introduction**

As discussed in earlier chapters, the implementation and on-going support for a workplace massage program come at a cost to an organisation. These costs may be overt, such as the payment of the massage therapists for providing their services, but others may be intrinsic. For example, for many organisations floor space is limited so making an area of the office within the business available for people to receive their massages becomes an imposition.

Another example is the productivity impacts arising from people having a massage during a time when they would ordinarily be undertaking their regular employment duties.

Among their various accountabilities, managers of organisations need to meet profit and productivity targets, comply with health and safety laws, attract and retain the best staff, and respond to staff satisfaction surveys. A reasonable expectation, therefore, is that the existence of a workplace massage program should afford some organisational benefit otherwise to have such a program in place would have little economic value.

In this respect, participants and their employers involved in the program should perceive that staff have gained some workplace benefit from the program; if not, there would be minimal staffing value from the exercise. Furthermore, it is possible that the employees may personally enjoy and express benefits from participation in the program, but the organisation may observe no potential corporate worthwhile gain in supporting workplace massage for staff. The scholarly literature provides strong evidence that massage may provide users with many physical and psychological benefits; however, there is limited academic research describing the organisational outcomes attained through the provision of workplace massage. Any understanding of the possible benefits of corporate massage, if any, are not well documented.

The following sections in this chapter begin with an in-depth description of the concepts of *theories of action* attributable to Argyris and Schön (1974, 1992, 1996), which has been chosen as the framework for guiding these studies. As will be noted, a key assumption in this thesis is that the personal attitudes of professional workers and managers affect their conscious and unconscious responses that shape their actions. The beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of the stakeholders within an organisation who are involved in massage programs

are explored using Argyris and Schön's *theories of action* to provide a basis for such an investigation. The subsequent sections in this Chapter describe the research design, procedures, recruiting methods, and ethical considerations, which will be grounded in the concepts and understanding inherent in this theoretical approach.

### **Aim of the study**

The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the effect of a workplace massage program from the perspective of the three stakeholder groups in order to formulate an answer to the central research question, “what are the advantages and disadvantages of massage programs conducted in the workplace?” To gain a holistic understanding of the effects of workplace massage, this research comprised three linked studies, each explained in the following sections.

### **Theories in practice and the reflective practitioner**

Research has provided evidence that recipients of massage (and to a lesser extent, recipients in the workplace) can gain many health benefits from such services. The popular media provides a plethora of general information supporting workplace massage as being beneficial for organisations. Advocates make claims that workplace massage can increase productivity, reduce absenteeism in organisations, and provide physical and psychological health benefits for recipients (Carcellor, 1998b; Thomas, 2008). However, this study was not designed to re-examine these claims or indeed to ask practitioners (employers, employees, or massage therapists) about the source of their personal theories, but was designed to explore how personally held theories affect the actions of individuals. By providing people a space to reflect on their actions, it was hoped that they could explain the value (or otherwise) of their theories and actions within the context of a workplace massage program.

### **Theories of Action in Organisations**

According to Argyris and Schön (1992), the personally held attitudes of professionals affect their behaviours and actions, as manifested in their conscious and unconscious thoughts. It has been asserted that individuals design actions in order to achieve intended consequences, subsequently monitoring their actions to determine their effectiveness (Anderson, 1994). Thus, of relevance to this investigation is the assumption that the beliefs, attitudes, and



behaviours of the people within organisations involved in massage programs drive their actions, and those actions play a part in the success (or otherwise) of workplace health initiatives. Argyris and Schön (1992) stated:

*We advanced the idea that patterns of interpersonal action were manifestations of theories of action, usually tacit, that individuals had acquired early in life and continue to hold. We distinguished these theories-in-use from the espoused theories that people are accustomed to offer as explanations or justifications for behavior. We emphasized the reciprocal nature of interpersonal action – that is, the idea that the values embedded in theories-in-use are enacted and experienced both by the actor and by those affected by the actor's behavior (p. xiii).*

The perceived relationship between thought and action that determine behaviour can be explained by individuals' *theories of action*. Argyris and Schön (1992) suggested that people often hold unvoiced personal theories of action that can, at best:

*enhance human activity, responsibility, self-actualization, learning, and effectiveness and make it that organizations will begin to decrease the movement toward entropy and increase the forces toward learning and health . . . present[ing] a view of man actively seeking to master himself [sic] and his environment in a way that makes organizations effective (p. xxxi).*

These authors also argued that a “theory is not necessarily accepted, good, or true; it is only a set of interconnected propositions that have the same referent – the subject of the theory” (p. 4). Furthermore, they stated that:

*theories are vehicles for explanation, prediction, or control. . . theories constructed to explain, predict, or control human behavior are in many ways like other kinds of theories. But insofar as they are about human action – that is, about human behavior that is correctable and subject to deliberation – they have special features . . . We can observe deliberate behavior and try to account for it as though it were the behavior of fish or tides. . . but we can also regard deliberate human behavior as the consequence of theories of action held by humans, in which case we explain or predict a person's behavior by attributing to him a theory of action (p. 5).*

By applying Argyris and Schön's theory of action, the behaviours of managers in implementing workplace massage programs into their organisations implies that their underlying belief is that the program may provide them, their organisation, or their employees with some benefits. Similarly, recipients' use of massage programs suggests that those people hold a belief that the massage will benefit them in some way. Likewise, by

providing workplace massage, therapists also demonstrate theories of actions, which moderate and drive their behaviours.

Argyris and Schön (1992) argued that, “theories of action do not hold out when they are put into [...] simple form. They depend on a set of stated or unstated assumptions” (p. 5). Furthermore, “the problems of real-world practice do not present themselves as well-formed structures. Indeed, they tend not to present themselves as problems at all but as messy, indeterminate situations” (Schön, 1987, p. 4). In this thesis, the basic underlying assumption about workplace massage programs is that people would not implement, use, or provide such services if they did not believe that massage would lead to some benefits. Otherwise, the likelihood of managers implementing, of recipients using, or of therapists providing workplace massage seems doubtful (and somewhat illogical) unless they believed that they could gain some benefit.

The conceptual framework of Argyris and Schön was developed to analyse professionals’ theories of action to “determine all human behavior, how these theories are formed, how they come to change, and in what sense they may be considered adequate or inadequate” (p. 4). Human conventions, which are reinforced and continued through human choice, create many of the behavioural constants that people experience. For example, occupational health and safety requirements in the corporate sector are not a natural phenomenon, rather, they are artificial human constructs reinforced by legislation. In this respect, Argyris and Schön argued that the “behavioral world is an artefact of our theories-in-use [. . . and] theories of the behavioral world are theories of the artificial” (p. 17).

Furthermore, Argyris and Schön’s model accounts for general characteristics, the governing variables, the action strategies, and the principal assumptions of theories-in-use of professionals. In this model, theories of action contain a number of criteria, which include internal consistency, congruence, effectiveness, and testability. The authors explicitly stated, “Theories of action exist as espoused theories and theories-in-use, which govern actual behavior. Theories-in-use tend to be tacit structures whose relation to action is like the relation of grammar-in-use; they contain assumptions about self, others, and environment” (p. 30). The ways in which people apply their theories-in-use affect their behaviours and

subsequent actions. For example, people's theories-in-use may affect the way that they implement, use, or provide massage programs.

The following sections provide a description of some of the fundamental principles that inform Argyris and Schön's theories of action (1974, 1992, 1996). This study explores individuals' personally held beliefs to understand how their implicit thinking affects their conscious and subconscious behaviours and actions. Argyris and Schön argued that an individual's belief-system influences their actions. In some instances, a person's actions will align with their implicit values and personally held theories, but at other times, people may engage in actions that contradict their personally held theories. In this regard, individuals may justify their actions (even though those actions do not match their espoused theories) so that they remain comfortable with their actions. A person's actions are influenced by complex thinking (both conscious and subconscious) involving processing internal consistencies, congruence, effectiveness, testability, and dilemmas between their theories and actions. The following sections more fully describe these processes, which are the foundations for exploring the stakeholders (employees, managers, and therapists) theories and actions with regard to workplace massage.

### **Internal Consistency**

Argyris and Schön (1992) described *internal consistency* as "the absence of self-contradiction" (p. 20). For example, a manager may implement a massage program to increase productivity, but to use the program people have to leave their workstations (and their work) to access the service. The likelihood is that using the program reduces individuals' short-term productivity while they receive their massages and, therefore, the "theory is internally inconsistent, although not logically inconsistent" (p. 21) because short-term productivity losses might turn into productivity gains in the longer term. As long as productivity does not altogether stop because massage recipients are so relaxed that they cease to function in their workplace after receiving their massages, then the inconsistency is acceptable.

### **Congruence**

*Congruence* is the outcome of individuals' theories-in-use matching their espoused theories. Argyris and Schön (1992) provided a second meaning for *congruence*, being that of when

individuals' actions express their inner feelings. For massage recipients, an example of congruence might be that the person's espoused theory is that massage is relaxing. After having a massage, the person feels relaxed (inner feelings) and then becomes calm and acts relaxed (action expressing inner feelings). According to Argyris and Schön (1992),

*The degree of congruence varies over time. One's ability to be himself [sic] (to be what he believes and feels) may depend on the kind of behavioral world he creates. A behavioral world of low self-deception, high availability of feelings, and low threat is conducive to congruence; a behavioral world of low self-esteem and high threat is conducive to self-deception and incongruence (p. 23).*

For example, a manager could implement a massage program and outwardly contend (and convince him or herself) that massage is a worthwhile health intervention. That manager, however, might have implemented the program for reasons other than his or her espoused theories (such as, an expectation to spend budget on health initiatives). This scenario presents an issue of self-deception (the manager has implemented the program for reasons other than those espoused), and the threat might be corporate pressure placed upon the manager to implement the program, in turn, leading to incongruent behaviour.

### **Effectiveness**

According to Argyris and Schön, (1992) "a theory-in-use is effective when action according to the theory tends to achieve its governing variables" (p. 24); that is, the action falls within acceptable parameters for consistency and congruence. The effectiveness of a massage program depends on the governing variables of consistency and congruence remaining within acceptable ranges. For workplace massage, each group (that is, managers, recipients, therapists), will have their own set of governing variables, and when those cease to fall within acceptable ranges then programs are at risk of people considering them ineffective. For the managers, the variables could include those governing the implementation of the program.

For the recipients, the governing variables would be their decisions to use the program in the workplace, and for the therapists the variables would include their reasons for providing the massages. If the variables fell outside the acceptable ranges, the managers might cancel the program, the recipients might cease using the program, and the therapists might decide not to provide massages in the future. Each of the above scenarios places the program at risk of ineffectiveness and subsequent cancellation or failure.

## Testability

Theories of action are “testable if one can specify the situation, the desired results, and the action through which the result is achieved. Testing consists of evaluating whether the action yields its predicted results” (Argyris & Schön, 1992, p. 25). The basis of testing theories of action is by using *if . . . then*; that is, *if* a certain situation exists, *then* certain results occur. Each of the people involved in workplace massage can test their theories of action. For the managers, *if* they implement the program, *then* they expect certain results. The results expected could be a range of outcomes such as increased morale, reduced absenteeism, or lower insurance premiums. For the massage recipients, their theories may include that massage is relaxing, improves range of motion, reduces pain, or improves their moods. The testability for the recipients could be, *if* they get massages, *then* there are improvements (psychological, physical, or both). The testability for the massage therapists could be, *if* they provide corporate massage, *then* recipients gain benefits, the therapists receive payments, or the organisations benefit. The potential testable results in each scenario are far more extensive and varied than the few examples presented here.

## Dilemmas with Theories of Action

Argyris and Schön (1992) pointed out that the development of theories-in-use and the relationship with the behavioural world can be fraught with difficulties for individuals. Each individual in an organisation may face one or more problems in regards to theories-in-use around workplace massage. Situations where such problems arise include those where polarisation between espoused theories and theories-in-use exist, where incompatibility between the governing variables evolve. These authors claim that people try:

*to keep [their] espoused theory in one place and [their] theories-in-use in another, never allowing them to meet. One goes on speaking in the language of one theory, acting in the language of another, and maintaining the illusion of congruence through systematic self-deception (p. 33).*

Corporate massage programs have the potential to create problems for people within organisations. Managers may implement massage programs, yet do so as a tokenistic gesture to health and safety in the workplace. For example, organisations have the potential to reduce their insurance premiums by providing early intervention strategies. Comcare (2010) stated

that to manage workers' compensations costs and reduce future premiums an organisation must:

*reduce its claims frequency through injury prevention and safety at work, [and] reduce its average claim cost through rehabilitation and employee support services. Effective early intervention strategies are key to reducing premium costs, along with ongoing monitoring of your agency's injury management (n.p).*

A manager may not necessarily have a strong belief in the value of workplace massage, but will implement an intervention program to demonstrate to the organisation's insurer a corporate commitment to health and safety in the workplace. In taking this action, the manager potentially cuts organisational expenditure through reduced insurance premiums, but may not feel any commitment to the program.

Second, massage recipients could use the program with an espoused theory that massage is relaxing. Yet those people may find that they become tense during or after massages because of time spent away from their workstations leading to the compounding build-up of work tasks and the related increase of stress that this implies. Finally, therapists may espouse the value of workplace massage for health benefits, but may find that their efforts are appearing to be ineffective in the workplace setting. In this way, the uncertainty in outcomes may mean that therapists' theories potentially could result in tensions for them in that their governing variables (for example, massage is relaxing, massage increases productivity) are incongruent with the outcomes they witness.

### **Relationships between theories of action and problem solving in organisations**

Argyris and Schön (1992) stated that the applicability of their model did "not seem to be restricted by age, professional status, race, income level, or field activity" (p. 81). Based on their statement, their model has relevance to, and should provide insight into, the behaviours of managers, employees, and massage therapists alike. Many authors draw from Schön's works within the context of formal learning and education (Dyke, 2006; Erlandson, 2006; Erlandson & Beach, 2008; Friedman & Rogers, 2009), but as Dyke (2006) explained, learning goes beyond cognitive and psychological processes; learning is a sociological and philosophical construct. It is within this context that the role of manager, employee and therapist engaged in workplace massage is considered within these studies. Drawing from Schön's (1987) theories of reflective practice, Sung-Chan and Yuen-Tsang (2008) argued that:

*the practitioner is perceived as a problem-solver whose competence rests on his search for the means best suited to the achievement of a fixed, unambiguous end—in medicine, the end might be health; in law, success at litigation; in business, profit (pp. 53-54).*

In the workplace, those who implement, use, or provide massage are all practitioners who are problem solvers in their own circumstances. As Dyke (2006) stated, “rapid change and reflexivity forces people to think afresh, to reflect upon, and engage with, their social world” (p.105). It could be argued that in the current economy, various legislative demands and workplace environments create situations for workers, managers and therapists that require responsiveness to multiple challenges to find innovations and solutions to problems, and the need to reflect on their actions. The implementation, use and provision of workplace massage may be considered an inventive way of managing corporate problems.

The manager as practitioner has the responsibility of ensuring that the workplace is productive and that key performance indicators are met. By implementing massage programs, the employer presumably holds a theory that the massages will achieve some positive gain for the organisation and staff. The employee as practitioner must meet the expectations of his or her employer in terms of achieving performance outcomes within the organisational setting. Seeking massage in the workplace may assist employees to reduce physical or psychological symptoms, and thus render them better able to meet their employee obligations.

The massage therapist as practitioner presumably aims to achieve the end of contributing to better health outcomes for the employee, and at the same time must consider the utility of their own business practice in providing such services. Each practitioner, therefore, has a problem with a fixed, unambiguous end: the manager to improve organisational outcomes; the employee to meet performance targets and manage personal health outcomes; and, the massage therapist to contribute towards improving the employee’s health (and, their contributions to the productivity in the workplace, all while achieving their own business requirements). For example, the therapist is running a massage business and may conclude that the 15-minute massages they have been engaged to provide employees is, from their observations, providing little or no value to the participants’ health and wellbeing.

Nevertheless, the therapist may choose to provide those services to the organisation because it is a lucrative business option for them personally. The dilemma (and integrity issue) for the

therapist becomes rationalising the internal inconsistencies, congruence and effectiveness of providing massage services that render no therapeutic value to their clients, but continuing to provide and receive payment despite the belief that the massages are delivering recipients (and the organisation) no actual benefits.

The organisation is the central link and each practitioner group, either directly or indirectly, has a role in contributing to organisational outcomes. Sung-Chan and Yuen-Tsang (2008) stated that “under this paradigm, the practitioner is expected to be the agent to systematically apply the existing knowledge to different contexts” (p.54). Therefore, each practitioner involved in the massage program has a vested interest in its success. If the program negatively affected business outcomes then it would be likely to come under close scrutiny to determine its viability within the organisation and potentially lead to its cancellation.

However, as Sung-Chan and Yeun-Tsang (2008) explained, problems are often ill-defined, and practitioners find their existing knowledge is not sufficient to address the messy and indeterminate practice situation” (p. 54). There are many implicit problems with workplace massage, such as generalised perceptions that massage is a luxury, that it is a costly indulgence that has no place in the work setting, and some confusion between massage as a clinical therapy versus massage as a sexual service. In this respect, it has been claimed that “reflection in action therefore requires flexible professionals who can think on their feet and respond creatively to new situations” (Dyke, 2006, p.112).

The situation where adverse media attention was given regarding council workers receiving massages (Longmore, 2011; Masanauskas, 2011) is an example of where managers would be likely to reflect on the action (for example, is it appropriate to provide workplace massages?), think on their feet (such as, responding to the media), and react creatively to the situation (that is, justifying the decision to provide workers with massages). Such public criticism would force managers to review their personally held theories, adjust their actions accordingly and learn from the experience. The media example highlights the “messy, complex and . . . value conflicts” (Kinsella, 2010, p. 566) associated with workplace massage, which may or may not have led affected managers to different theories or actions. Nevertheless, the situation would have provided a strong incentive for managers to re-



consider their theories and actions. Drawing from Dyke (2006), such reflective behaviour may have been perhaps more reflection *on* action rather than reflection *in* action.

Regardless of media attention, managers would be required to constantly engage in reflection-in-action (either implicitly or explicitly) to evaluate the effects of workplace massage. Such evaluation may not be directly on the massages, but on other indicators, such as anecdotal responses by employees to massages, key productivity indicators, or personal observations on workplace activities. Similarly, employees using such services would reflect in action on whether the massages were meeting their needs or expectations. For the therapist as a health professional, such reflection may go beyond the workplace into their healthcare practices. For example therapists may reflect on technical knowledge in the face of complex health cases, ethical and moral concerns (for example, gaining sensitive personal or corporate knowledge), or burnout from their own work (Kinsella, 2010).

### **Rational for the Methodology**

Each of the three studies was undertaken using qualitative methodology, namely semi-structured interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2003a, 2003b) in the belief that qualitative methods would provide a richer understanding of the participants' responses to the research questions than would have been possible using quantitative methods. Semi-structured interviews provided the framework necessary to elicit general themes and targeted issues gained through asking specific, but open-ended, questions (Kayrooz & Trevitt, 2005; Lee, 1999).

The rationale for using semi-structured interviews was to allow people the opportunity to tell their stories without overly restricting the direction of the interviews. Semi-structured interviews are flexible enough to allow discussion of emergent and, in some instances, unanticipated issues throughout the interview with the aim of understanding the perceived effects of workplace massage. The study design facilitated a multidimensional understanding of workplace massage from the varying perspectives of employers, employees, and massage therapists.

In their study, Argyris and Schön (1992) undertook case studies and tape recordings in which they explained that they collected much data that were not relevant to the theory. In analysing

the data, they used comments that provided information about the governing variables, the behaviour used, and the consequences for the behavioural world. Information about governing variables was inferred from the paragraphs, which described strategy and objective, the persons thoughts, and the underlying assumptions the individual identified after studying his or her dialogue. This study drew from the concepts described by Argyris and Schön with a key difference, namely that participants were not asked to reflect upon or describe their responses to the data collected.

The design of this study did not provide for participants to review and comment on transcripts. There are two primary reasons for this, namely: (1) to minimise the imposition on the individual's time for those who participate in this study, and (2) each interview was taped and transcribed verbatim and was therefore an accurate record of the conversation. The data was sorted using the technique described by Argyris and Schön including identifying key words, and themes relevant to the research questions.

Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that in qualitative research there is “still the problem in findings that has not gone away” (p. 2). Furthermore, they contend that the

*issues of instrument validity and reliability ride largely on the skills of the researcher. . . some markers of good qualitative researcher-as-instrument are:*

- *some familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under the study*
- *strong conceptual interests*
- *a multidisciplinary approach, as opposed to a narrow grounding or focus in a single discipline* (p. 38).

In this regards, there are two key issues of note. First, the researcher declared her experiences both as a manager and as a therapist in the organisational setting and, therefore, had “some familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under the study”. Second, the use of triangulation provided “sources that [had] different biases, different strengths, so they [could] complement each other” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 267).

The following sections describe how the research for the studies was undertaken by providing a general overview before dealing with each study individually. In accordance with Victoria University protocols, a full ethics submission was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee before the commencement of the studies. The ethics application process is explained in more detail in subsequent sections.

## **Recruiting Participants**

The processes undertaken to recruit participants was a combination of convenience, purposive, and snowball sampling. To identify prospective participants, a search of the internet was undertaken that targeted websites of corporate massage businesses, thus identifying companies named in advertised testimonials. Potential companies or participants who were identified were contacted directly with the intention of speaking with the specific persons involved in the massage programs. Once the appropriate individuals were contacted, the nature and details of the research were explained to them. If people expressed interest in participating, they were emailed copies of the plain language information about the research and the relevant consent forms. Suitable times and places for interviews were arranged, ensuring that those arrangements were convenient to participants. Participants' signed consent forms were collected from them prior to the interviews commencing.

After each interview, participants were asked if they knew of any other people (managers, employees, or massage therapists) who might be interested in participating in the research. If they provided contact details, the individual was contacted and was usually successful in securing further interviews. The recruiting process was not linear; recruiting and data collection was undertaken concurrently for the three studies. The original intention had been to undertake and complete study 1 before commencing study 2 (and so forth), but recruiting participants was not as compartmentalised as anticipated, therefore interviews were based on the availability and suitability of potential participants. The recruiting and interviewing process continued until it was felt that thematic saturation had been reached in each study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; McCann & Clark, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Oktay, 2004).

When meeting participants and prior to commencement of each interview, participants were provided with a verbal overview of the research, which complemented the written material they had been sent in advance. All participants were again asked whether they were comfortable with the process and were assured that their participation in the research was voluntary. Each was then asked to confirm that they were still willing to participate in the interview. All signed consent forms were collected prior to the interview commencing and each interview was digitally recorded. Interviews were later transcribed verbatim.

## **Recruitment and Procedures**

### ***Context about the organisations in this study***

This section provides context about each of the organisations from where participants were recruited, the key business of the organisations, and a description of the settings to contextualise the working environments of the individuals and how that might influence their perceptions.

Participants for Studies 1 and 2 (employees and managers) were recruited from eleven organisations. One of those organisations was a family-run engineering company, which predominantly employed manual workers in a factory setting (there was a small front office with a few of employees, exact number not known). The remaining ten organisations included:

- a privately run transcribing company
- three government departments
- an unlisted public insurance company
- three multinational organisations
- two human resources organisations.

The nature of the work of these companies was office-based where employees engaged in relatively lengthy periods of computer, administrative or managerial functions (which are both computer-based and administrative by nature). The work-type for these employees could reasonably be described as sedentary.

In four of the organisations described above (namely the engineering company, two government organisations and the transcribing business) participants were recruited from each of the identified groups (that is, at least one manager, one employee and one massage therapist were interviewed). There were insufficient participant numbers, however, to design a workplace-based case study involving individuals across the three study groups within the same organisation.

### ***Study 1 – Recruiting participants***

The participants for this study included 11 managers (6 males and 5 females) who were, in some way, responsible for workplace massage programs. Of those managers, some were also users of workplace massage.

A number of massage businesses were contacted by phone and asked if they would be willing to facilitate introductions to their clients; however, they declined the request. An internet search was subsequently undertaken to identify client testimonials about workplace massage, and these individuals or organisations were contacted directly. In a number of instances, companies had offered massages as a one-off initiative, not as an actual program, and, in some organisations, the people approached could not even recall a massage program operating in their workplace. People in companies who had run, or continued to run, massage programs were eventually identified and the particular individuals responsible for the programs were subsequently approached directly through telephone calls.

Another recruiting method employed was that of word-of-mouth. When talking with friends and acquaintances about this research, some people gave the author contacts for managers responsible for massage programs. Again, these people were telephoned and the research explained to them. They were subsequently asked whether they might be interested in participating in the research.

During the initial telephone conversations, potential participants were advised that interviews would last approximately 30 minutes, that the interviews would be digitally recorded, and given an overview of the sorts of questions that would be asked. Prospective participants were assured that any involvement was voluntary and they were emailed a full written explanation of the research (see Appendix D), together with a copy of the consent form (see Appendix E), and confirmation details of the interviews (see Appendix F). Completed consent forms were collected from managers prior to each interview, and at the conclusion each was thanked for their participation. Managers were then asked if they knew of any employees or therapists who might be interested in participating in the studies.

### ***Study 2 – Recruiting participants***

The criteria for inclusion in this study were that participants were employees, and they had received at least one massage at work within the four-month period prior to the time of the interview. Eighteen participants were recruited for Study 2 (6 males and 12 females).

Participants in Study 2 came from a range of workplaces, including two Australian government departments, a small family-run engineering business, a large multinational organisation, a privately operated court recording company, and a Victorian insurance company.

Some managers from Study 1 contributed to the recruitment of volunteers for this study. After the completion of interviews with managers, they were asked if they knew of any employees (who were also workplace massage recipients) who might be interested in participating in this study. In a number of instances, managers were able to provide the names of potential participants, and in other cases, they made approaches to people by sending out general emails to employees who were then able to make direct contact with the researcher.

When potential participants were contacted, they had the nature of this study described to them. They were advised that interviews would take approximately 30 minutes, and they were provided with an overview of the sorts of questions that would be asked.

As with Study 1, each participant was told that the interviews would be digitally recorded, and that their participation was completely voluntary. Each prospective participant was emailed a detailed written explanation of the research (see Appendix D), a copy of the consent form (see Appendix E), and confirmation of the time, date, and place of the interview (see Appendix F). Participants were advised that completed consent forms would be collected prior to commencing the interview.

Recruiting for this study was primarily through a snowballing process. Some of the people who agreed to participate in this study also provided the names of others who, upon hearing about the study, expressed interest in participating. Others provided the names and contact details of colleagues, or friends, whom they believed might be willing to participate in the study. In all cases, the procedures detailed above explaining the study and for gaining informed consent prior to commencing the interviews were followed. Recruiting and interviewing continued until the data reached a level of saturation where ideas and themes

became repetitive and no longer provided additional information; at this point, recruiting for this study ceased.

### ***Study 3 – Recruiting participants***

The participants for this study included eight massage therapists who provided massages in the corporate sector. Of those participants, five female and three male therapists were interviewed. The therapists provided workplace massage as part of their wider massage businesses. All of them provided massages outside the corporate sector in addition to their corporate work.

The recruiting process for this study was undertaken through word-of-mouth and accessing corporate massage websites. Participants in Studies 1 and 3, together with friends and acquaintances, provided the researcher with the names of therapists who they thought might be receptive to the idea of participating in this study. As potential recruits were identified, they were telephoned and given an explanation of the research. Many asked for some further time to think about the invitation to contribute to this study and requested that the researcher phone them after they had taken time to consider the information and whether they wanted to be interviewed. When they were followed-up, many people often declined the invitation to participate as they were not interested, or stated that they did not have time. Either way, the outcome was the same: no interview.

For those people who expressed interest, they were advised that is that the interviews should take between 30 minutes and one hour and that the audio interview would be digitally recorded. They were given an overview of the sorts of questions that would be asked during the interview. Each was advised that their participation was voluntary. Interested people were provided with relevant correspondence (by email or post at their discretion) containing a detailed explanation of the research (see Appendix D) and a copy of the consent form (see Appendix E). During the telephone call, suitable times and places for the interviews were arranged. Confirmation was provided about the interview arrangements to each participant prior to the meeting (see Appendix F). Most therapists preferred to receive correspondence via email. Each therapist was thanked for his or her time at the conclusion of each interview.

### ***Limitations of the Snowball Sampling Technique***

The limitation with using snowball sampling for this study was that it led to participants being drawn from multiple organisations. As such, this technique compromised the ability for the researcher to draw comparisons across the three categories of interviewees because confounding variables (such as, the types and regularity of the massages received, the varying techniques applied by differing therapists, the work type of the organisation, or the reasons participants sought massage). However, due to the sensitivities of these studies, the snowballing technique was the only method enabling a sufficient number of participants to be recruited for the study. During the recruiting phase potential participants exhibited professional suspicion and resistance about being involved in this study. For example, massage therapists were protective about their client base and oftentimes chose not to participate in the study. The benefits of using the snowballing sampling technique were particularly useful in making contact with hidden and specific populations, but resulted in non-probability sample groups drawn from multiple workplaces.

### **Coding and analysis**

#### ***Study 1***

In Study 1, Argyris and Schön's (1992) *theories-of-action* was used as the overarching framework for undertaking a thematic analysis on the interview data. The data are presented in Chapter 4 as *fictional representations* (Sparkes, 2002), that is, pen-portraits of two managers. Although the pen-portraits are fictitious, they represent aggregate images of two different but actual persons, based on the collective information gathered from the managers interviewed. To create the aggregate case studies, words and experiences drawn from several interviews were used to create whole persons, rather than present a series of fragmented quotations.

To develop the stories, the transcriptions of the interviews were grouped into common themes and then brought together where they reflected a common issue (Richardson, Andersen, & Morris, 2008). The criteria used to guide the data analysis were drawn from the managers' interview guides, including specific or implied terms relating to:

- perceived advantages or disadvantages of workplace massage;
- influences on morale or perceived stress levels of workers;



- productivity outcomes;
- business outcomes (for example, corporate culture, attracting and retaining staff);
- occupational health and safety;
- absenteeism;
- compensation claims;
- employee feedback about the program; and,
- managers' general observations about the program.

Using the criteria described, themes were then used to construct the aggregate managers' perceptions. While analysing the data, regular reference was made to the interviews and transcripts to ensure accuracy and context. The procedure of data reduction and analysis involved several stages.

During stage one, each transcribed interview was read in its entirety and text that seemed relevant was cut and pasted into an *Excel* spreadsheet. The guiding principles used to identify whether data was irrelevant and subsequently removed from the data collection included conversation that was not relevant to the research questions or overall concepts of the study. For example, conversations that were between the researcher and participant that were obviously rapport building, pleasantries, general conversation or people answering phone calls during the interview. This process was repeated in all three studies.

The managers' initials were recorded next to their words and the researcher's comments and thoughts about the text were presented in a corresponding column. Using similar principles described above, data was further audited for information that was obviously irrelevant and was removed from the texts, which reduced the volume of data collected from the interviews. For instance, some data that was considered irrelevant included comments, thoughts, or issues unrelated to the research questions.

Following a review of the reduced data from stage one, stage two commenced to sort data into raw data themes, the coding of which produced further data reduction. During this stage, further data reduction was achieved by removing anything that seemed irrelevant based on the research questions and interview guides (See Appendices G, H, I) on massage therapy in

the workplace. The following quote, taken from an actual interview, is an example of relevant data resulting from this process:

Manager: *It was just an idea that originated in our HR department as a staff incentive . . . we did some promoting within the company as an initial staff incentive.*

Here the raw data theme was labelled, *providing massage as a staff incentive*. As the data analysis continued, any similar data was subsequently coded under the same label. This process of free coding continued for the entire data set, which resulted in the development of suitable labels for each of the raw data themes until all the managers' interviews had been completed. The principles for coding the data were based on a combination of identifying themes, ideas, key-words-in context or key phrases (in context), for example the phrase *staff incentive* within the context of discussing workplace massage identified it as relevant text. The criteria included whether the data related to the staff, their health, the workplace massage program, or aspects of the organisation (for example, employees incentives, productivity, morale, stress). This process was replicated in each of the studies.

Once the data had been reduced to relevant quotes, a similar process was undertaken to identify any quotes or data where similar terms or phrases were used and collated into first order themes. This resulted in 146 verbatim transcriptions coded under 36 first-order themes (Table 4.1).

In stage three of the coding, the first-order themes were analysed in detail to establish higher-order themes, and then general dimensions were created from those higher-order themes. As this process continued, the researcher recorded notes in a reflective journal of ideas and thoughts about the managers and some of the issues identified. Through this process, it became apparent that female and male managers discussed similar issues about massage in the corporate setting; however, the way in which they spoke about their perceptions and experiences seemed to be articulated differently depending on their gender. Whereas the females often spoke about how people *felt*, the male managers' language seemed more influenced by the physical outcomes of massage. This apparent but distinct difference in the use of language between the male and female managers influenced the decision to create the two aggregate stories to present the data, one of a male manager, the other of a female.

Gender was not a specific lens used for analysing the data but it was identified as a significant finding in this study and, as such, is discussed in detail in later chapters.

As Richardson, Andersen and Morris (2008) explained, aggregate fictional representations serve a number of purposes, such as protecting individual identities and combining parts of several participants' stories into a coherent whole. Furthermore, as Richardson et al. stated, "a case study, even an aggregate one, tells a tale about how an individual . . . might fit, and not fit into his or her culture. If we have constructed a case study well, then that person's experiences may point to something universal" (p. 113). By adopting Richardson et al.'s technique, 11 managers' stories were presented by using "interviews as aggregate case studies, combining the interviews to create a smaller number of fictional narratives based on the actual lived experiences of the [interviewees]" (p. 99).

One person spoke of several issues and had ideas that were not representative of the other managers. Although her story was different in a number of ways from those of the other managers, it was important to consider her story and this has been presented as a portrait of a "real" case study. That section is titled *Odette: The odd one out*. Her tale was important to share, even though this manager's views were unique. In instances where Odette expressed opinions that were common to the other managers, her words have been used to build the fictional tales.

Argyris and Schön's (1992) theoretical framework guided the data analysis of the aggregate fictional managers and was considered a suitable approach to support the analysis of the data while protecting the privacy of organisations and the managers (as representatives of those organisations). As a number of the organisations were either multinational or government businesses, the importance of protecting the privacy and exercising appropriate sensitivities relating to the organisations was paramount. As such, the use of aggregate fictional representations posed no obvious tensions with the framework of Argyris and Schön (1992). The consistencies of experiences described within the male manager group and the female manager group mean that theories-in-action and theories-in-use of was a valid framework from which to draw. Only one female manager's views were divergent from the broader participant group and, therefore, her story was de-identified and presented separately.

## Study 2

Each interview transcript was read and analysed, and all seemingly relevant content identified. The relevant quotes were entered into an *Excel* spreadsheet and employees' initials noted next to their statements. Any comments and or thoughts of the researcher arising about the text were placed into a corresponding column, and this process was continued until all the data from the employees' interviews were charted. This information sorted the data into raw themes. For example, one participant stated:

*By having it at work [massage] it's easy for me to get to, so I don't have to go on a weekend or organise an appointment after hours or before hours to do it. So, it's accessible.*

Using the principles of inductive content analysis, each quote was examined to identify themes arising from the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). The above quote was labelled, *getting massage at work is convenient*, and any similar data was coded under the same heading. A suite of labels was developed for each of the raw data themes until all employees' interviews were completed. This process continued with on-going monitoring of ideas and thoughts about the themes, by note taking and journaling.

Coding resulted in 119 verbatim quotes, from which 19 first order themes were created. Those first order themes were assigned to eight higher order themes. Similar themes and ideas were grouped together to produce three general dimensions. These dimensions were: (a) psychological factors, (b) physical factors, and (c) situational factors (Table 5.1).

A picture emerged from the analysis of the participants' interviews about the psychological and physical benefits that employees gained by having massages at work (participants described few disadvantages). In Chapter 3, brief overviews and descriptions of each general dimension are provided. These sections present ideas expressed by employees, which were representative of most massage recipients interviewed. Unlike the managers in Study 1, few differences between the themes and ideas expressed by males and females emerged. Accordingly, the themes are presented and discussed as representative of the group of participants as a whole, rather than as aggregate stories or gender-specific tales.

### **Study 3**

In Study 3, participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews to guide the interview process. The interview guide allowed participants the freedom to raise and discuss any issues that were important to them about the topic (Kayrooz & Trevitt, 2005). All participants for Study 3 were interviewed either in their workplace or in their home at their request. In some cases, the participants worked from home and had a massage treatment room set up at those premises for massaging their clients.

Each transcript was read while listening to the recordings of each interview with the goal of becoming immersed in the interview data. Once all interviews had been reviewed, the transcripts were again read, but this time without simultaneously listening to the audio. Relevant quotes were highlighted and sections of data that seemed to address the research questions or were interesting and warranted further consideration were identified. Once this process was completed, the relevant quotes were cut and pasted into an *Excel* spreadsheet. Labels were assigned to each quote and notes of thoughts or observations were recorded in a corresponding column within the spreadsheet.

The next steps in analysing the data were to print out the spreadsheet and read the quotes and labels to assess whether appropriate labels had been assigned to the data. This process was time consuming and revealed labels to quotes and data that on reflection were either inappropriate or inaccurate. Furthermore, random quotes that neither answered the research questions nor added value to the work were removed from the data sets. By reviewing the research questions as the data was examined, a further reduction was made to the data and quotes resulting in capturing those only of relevance or of particular interest. At the end of this procedure, the raw data themes had been established. Using the principles of inductive content analysis, the data was collated into first order themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). For example, the following quote was identified and assigned to the first order theme, *improves workplace morale*:

*I know the employees appreciate it [massage]. The feedback that I generally get is very positive. Just that they really enjoyed it, it was just a great way to break up their day.*

Once the first order themes had been established, similar themes were collated into like-groups and labelled with higher order themes. The higher order themes that were identified provided the final framework to create general dimensions (Table 6.1). Through this process, 150 verbatim transcriptions were identified and from that 22 first order data themes were developed. First order themes were assigned to 10 higher order themes. Similar themes and ideas were grouped together with a final product of four general dimensions. The four dimensions were: (a) psychological factors, (b) physical factors, (c) situational factors, and (d) disadvantages (Table 6.1).

### **Challenges with Coding and Analysis**

Choosing a method to analyse the data was challenging and one of those times that researchers find they may want to wish away the discomfort (Sparkes, 2002). Sparkes suggested that researchers could embrace the “creative potential generated by the tensions, contradictions, and hesitations that currently characterize qualitative inquiry in several disciplines” (p. 25). Based on this, the studies draw from several qualitative frameworks and step beyond the constrictive boundaries adhering to that for which only one framework might present. This approach provided the freedom to explore peoples’ experiences without the shackles of a single concept. Furthermore, as Fowler (2006) asserted, “it is not uncommon for qualitative studies to be based on more than one theoretical framework, as researchers often find that no single framework adequately explains all their data” (p. 55). As such, this study draws from a few frameworks, including realist tales (Sparkes, 2002), thematic analysis (Joffe & Yardley, 2004), and fictional representations through aggregate case studies (Richardson et al., 2008), to create themes, subjective personal accounts, stories that reflected the researcher’s understanding of the data as a whole, and the participants’ individual accounts in particular. As Sparkes stated:

*Realist tales are characterized by extensive, closely edited quotations. These are used to convey to the reader that the views expressed are not those of the researcher but are rather the authentic and representative remarks transcribed straight from the mouths of the participants (p. 44).*

Using the criteria specified earlier in this chapter, thematic analysis was used to create the higher order themes, which are presented in detail in Table 4.1. As an overview to the approach, the following guidelines were adopted. Drawing from the procedures described by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), each interview was reviewed several times while the

researcher read the corresponding transcript. The method for coding and thematic analysis was undertaken using the following steps to code the data: (a) while listening to and reading the interviews, a printed copy of the research questions and interview questions were kept at hand; (b) relevant quotes from each interview were selected by assessing the text against the research questions for each study and copying them into an *Excel* spreadsheet, with a notation about whether a female or male manager had made the comment; (c) repeating ideas were identified and grouped them together as emerging themes; and (d) emerging themes were organised into more general themes.

As the relevant quotes were identified, it became apparent that there were differences between *how* females spoke when contrasted against *how* males spoke, even though the content and themes emerging may have been the same. Quotes were recorded against the relevant themes, but were distinguished by the gender of the participants, and then by drawing upon the themes and quotes the fictional representations of one female and one male manager were created, that of Matthew and Elizabeth

As Barone (2000) explained, the use of realist tales provides the researcher with the opportunity to use creative non-fiction to draw upon real people and real events where the characters and setting must be actual, not virtual. In this regard, Study 1 draws upon the real events and perceptions of managers in the corporate setting to describe workplace massage. The interview transcripts provided *actual* quotes to inform the stories of fictional managers. By using the combination of thematic analysis, fictional representations, and realist tales, the manager's stories of Elizabeth and Matthew were developed. Although they are fictional characters, the themes and stories are real and based on actual quotes, and real workplaces and events.

### **Rigour and Trustworthiness**

One of the criticisms of qualitative research is what Silverman (2000) described as “anecdotalism, revealed in the way in which research reports sometimes appeal to a few, telling ‘examples’ of some apparent phenomenon, without any attempt to analyse less clear (or even contradictory ) data” (p. 10). Each person has his or her own reality. In this regard, researchers are coloured with their own realities. As Sparkes (2002) explained:

*There are multiple positions from which to know and standards of truth are always partial, context dependant, and embedded in webs of power relationships . . .*

*qualitative researchers writing about social life must grapple with the epistemological challenge that knowledge can never be understood and textualized from a fully objective sphere (p. 11).*

Researchers often describe how they came to the particular topic, and the difficulties faced during the process, and Travers (2002) explained that a distinctive feature of qualitative research is “the emphasis placed on reflexivity or engaging in reflection about the research process.” (p. 137). Ryan-Flood and Gill (2010) asserted that reflexivity is central to the research process and stated:

*It has long been used as a means of examining the ways in which identity, intimacy, affect and power shape. . . the wider research process. . .[and] reflexive engagement can be understood as an expression of academic rigour, where the social encounter, insights and emotions inspired by the research process are useful in the interpretation of data and critical reflections on research praxis (p. 5).*

A contextualising statement was included of the prologue of this thesis, where the researcher declared familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under the study. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), such an understanding is an important component of good qualitative research. However, Ryan-Flood and Gill (2010) cautioned that “too often papers start with what seems to be little more than a ritual incantation of the identities occupied by the author with little or no attempt to reflect on the *significance* of those positions for the research” (p.5). In this regard, the significance of the researcher’s position was stated up front to: (a) provide a framework for personal reflection to explore how that familiarity potentially influenced the analysis and interpretation of the data, (b) allow the researcher to use that understanding to test the findings for rigour and trustworthiness with the research team, and (c) to allow the reader to understand the position of the researcher and the significance of that position.

Miles and Huberman (1994) acknowledged the difficulties of assessing the “quality of qualitative studies” (p.294). As such, they provided several guiding principles to achieve rigour and trustworthiness in a study and its “confirmability, dependability, credibility, and potential transferability to other settings” (p. 294). They recommended:

- explicitness and openness about the inevitable biases and ensuring that the conclusions are dependent “on the subjects and conditions of the inquiry rather than on the inquirer” (p. 278)



- ensuring that the process of the study is consistent and stable over time
- using a process for “checking, questioning, and theorizing, not as a strategy for establishing rule-based correspondence between our findings and the ‘real world’” (p. 279)
- describing actions and interpreted meanings by connecting them to theoretical networks beyond the immediate study, and
- understanding “what the study does for its participants, both researchers and researched – and for its consumers” (p. 280).

Furthermore, Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended using scrutinised structure around documentation and reflection. They stated that advanced thinking during the early phases of project design and running through a checklist assists researchers to avoid problems. Using the expertise of and consulting with senior researchers, a study team, or trusted third parties can be used to test tacit assumptions.

The principles espoused by Miles and Huberman (1994) for achieving rigour and trustworthiness were adopted during the study. In the early phases of the project design, the questions were developed collaboratively with the senior researchers. Prior to undertaking any interviews with participants, the researcher then engaged in mock-interviews with the senior researchers to identify and address biases in language or questioning techniques. The documented project design ensured that the process of the study remained consistent and stable over the period of the study. On-going mentoring and supervision processes were used to check, question, and theorise about the data, the analysis, the emerging themes, and the findings. The actions and interpreted meanings were connected to theoretical networks and were guided by the overarching theoretical framework of Argyris and Schön (1994), but also with reference to literature in the fields of massage, human resource management, and stress management interventions (Cooper and Dewe, 2007, Cooper et al., 2001, Cooper et al., 2010, Burke and Collins, 2001, Hernandez-Reif et al., 2000, Field et al., 1999). The findings of the study were given with implications for what they meant for the participants and organisations. In support of the processes described, the researcher engaged in self-reflection and on-going consultation with senior researchers through the duration of the study.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The three studies undertaken for this thesis involved semi-structured interviews with employers, employees, and massage therapists to identify both the advantages and disadvantages of massage programs. As with any study that involves human participants, there were inherent risks. According to Kayrooz and Trevitt (2005), interviews have the potential to be one of the most “explosive, emotive and exploitative . . . [because they] may evoke past traumas for the interviewee . . . This will be exacerbated particularly in organisations or communities where the levels of trust are low for some reason” (p. 201). There were instances during this research where interviewees expressed negative thoughts and emotions about their employers, or experiences about their employment conditions, of which they appeared quite sensitive.

Although no explosive situations arose during interviews, the concerns expressed by Karooz and Trevitt (2005) are valid considerations in research processes. Preceding these interviews, a detailed ethics application was submitted to the Victoria University Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development Ethics Committee and identified potential risks along with strategies to address those risks. No interviews were conducted until the ethics application received approval, and subsequently all of the appropriate measures for informing participants and procedure for assuring anonymity were followed.

In the process of the interviews with employers, one of the risks was that despite any acknowledged benefits that employees derived from the programs, employers might have identified issues they had not previously considered (for example, the cost of the program in lost productivity outweighing the benefits). These identified disadvantages might have raised perceived conflicts of interest (for example, to cancel the program subsequent to the interview or continue the program regardless of the cost to the organisation) and consequently may have caused employers to experience stress or internal conflict during and after the interviews.

As with all interviews, there was a potential risk that participants might have experienced stress from taking time from their normal workday activities to participate in the interviews. There was a potential that employees could have felt uncomfortable criticising massage programs funded or partly funded by their employers. Another risk was that employees might

have perceived some level of pressure from employers to participate (coercion). This perception may have arisen if employees felt that because their employers were providing them with the opportunity to access massage in the workplace that they were under an implied obligation to participate in research on the topic sanctioned by their employers.

Preceding all interviews, participants were reminded about the voluntary nature of their involvement. All participants knew that that they did not have to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable. All participants received an information form (see Appendix A for Managers' Introduction Letter; Appendix B for Employees' Introduction Letter, and Appendix C for Massage Therapists' Introduction Letter) prior to the interviews, with the names of the principal researcher, co-researchers, and a psychologist whom they were entitled to contact (without any associated costs) for support or to discuss their interview experiences. Each participant was reassured that all information disclosed would be treated as confidential, and that anonymity was assured.

Employees might have potentially experienced negative reactions during the interviews (or after). Such reactions might have included employees' peers or employers resenting perceived advantages employees gained from participating in the massage program (for example, time away from normal workday activities creating greater workload for employees who did not receive workplace massages) if this information were disclosed.

To the knowledge of the researcher, no participant answered any questions or engaged in any conversation that caused them distress, discomfort, or made them feel compromised in any way. During these studies, no participant raised any concerns with me regarding negative experiences (for example, psychological, social, legal) in response to the interviews, nor did anybody choose to withdraw at any time.

## **Conclusion**

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide the findings and discussion arising from the participants' interviews. As explained earlier, Chapter 4 provides two fictional representations, that of a female and a male manager. There is a separate case study of *Odette* and her story is shared

because it was distinctly different from the views of the other managers. However, to exclude her story would have provided an incomplete picture of the findings. Chapters 5 and 6 are thematic analysis and, therefore, are presented accordingly.

## **Chapter 4: Study 1 – Managers' perceptions of workplace massage**

### **Introduction**

'Wellness programs' are the umbrella under which workplace massage services generally sit. As discussed in the literature review, there is a growing body of research examining the effects of massage, but specific reasons why managers introduce massage into the workplace remain unexplored and poorly understood. Existing massage studies focus on participants, primarily examining the psychological and physiological effects of massage on employees (Inagaki, Yoneda, Ito, & Nogaki, 2002; Moyer et al., 2004). In contrast, much of the popular literature and advertising material report outcomes such as reduced absenteeism, improved productivity, increased efficiency, and boosted morale (Carcellor, 1998a, 1998b). Little systematic research exists to support many of the claims made in the popular literature about the benefits of workplace massage. These outcomes, which the popular literature and massage therapists commonly assert to be true, often appear to be marketing material based on unexamined assumptions or, possibly, no more than claims based on beliefs and the wishful thinking of the authors.

However, it remains that middle-to-senior managers of many organisations provide their employees with opportunities to use workplace massage, which suggests that those managers have decided that such programs will afford the corporation some benefits. This notion follows because wellness programs and workplace massage are costly to the corporate sector, and while employees are engaged in wellness activities they are not undertaking their normal workday responsibilities, potentially resulting in lost productivity to the company.

### **Background and aims of Study 1**

As indicated above, many companies fund or partially fund massage programs, yet the effectiveness of workplace massage has not been established and the managers' reasons for supporting massage initiatives remain unclear. There appears to be mixed views about the value of workplace massage with, at an extreme level, some people within the community voicing dissatisfaction that certain employees have access to workplace massage. These concerns raise questions regarding the justification for the expenditure necessary to provide workplace massage and even the deservedness of employees to such *privileges*, particularly where public monies are involved (Baron, 2010; Lawrie, 2010; Longmore, 2011; Masanauskas, 2011). Nevertheless, the rise in popularity of massage as a workplace

intervention indicates that certain managers and decision makers within organisations believe that there is some merit in providing their staff with massages. The reasons underlying such thinking remain unclear as the scholarly literature provides few insights. Yet, the investment to provide such programs (both in overt and hidden costs) is significant and warrants a better understanding on the value of workplace massage and the outcomes it returns for the organisation and its employees. To this end, Study 1 seeks to explore the motivations and rationales for managers providing massage programs into the workplace.

### **Research Questions for Study 1**

The central research question for the overall study was “what are the advantages and disadvantages of massage programs conducted in the workplace?” To enable a systematic data collection and analysis approach in Study 1, a series of sub-questions central to this study were posed. These questions were tailored to elicit the perspectives of the managers during the interviews and were:

1. What are the various motivations and rationales for managers implementing workplace massage programs?
2. What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of workplace massage for employees and the organisation as a whole?
3. What factors do managers perceive as valuable in evaluating the effectiveness of the massage program?
4. How do the results of this study fit (or not fit) within the framework of theories-of-action (Argyris & Schön, 1992).

### **Methodology**

As described in Chapter 3, semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data. Managers were interviewed in their workplaces and each interview was recorded. The participants for this study included 11 managers (6 males and 5 females) who were, in some way, responsible for workplace massage programs. Of those managers, some were also users of workplace massage. Copies of all material provided to Study 1 participants and the interview guide used to interview managers are appended (See Appendices A, B, E, F, G).

## **Background to analysis and findings**

In Study 1, after performing a thematic analysis on the interview data, Argyris and Schön's (1992) theories-of-action were used to understand participants' stories. The data has been presented using fictional representations (Sparkes, 2002) as pen-portraits of two managers. Although the pen-portraits are fictitious, they represent images of two different but aggregate persons, based on the collective information gathered from the managers interviewed. To create the aggregate case studies, managers' words and experiences were used to create two fictitious managers, one male and one female. One other manager is presented and she is a real, but de-identified manager. Her story was compelling but did not fit with the general views expressed by the other managers. In this regard, her story was materially different to the other managers, but was seen as being equally important. As discussed in earlier chapters, aggregate fictional representations provide a mechanism for protecting individual identities while presenting concepts expressed by several people into a single coherent story.

## **Study 1 Results**

From the analysis of the participants' interviews emerged a picture of the overarching corporate objectives sought by managers who implemented massage programs. When talking about workplace massage, managers spoke of the need to balance corporate priorities whilst also supporting their staff. In an effort to maximise the effectiveness of the organisation, managers perceived that by providing the programs they achieved multiple business outcomes. Four dimensions arose from the interviews, which were: (a) corporate health, (b) corporate drivers, (c) psychological factors, and (d) situational factors (Table 4.1).

The following sections provide brief overviews and descriptions of the four general dimensions. These general dimensions present the overarching principles that managers expressed, which (in the main) were representative of the wider group. These dimensions, together with the higher order themes (supported by quotations from the participants' interviews) guided the development of the aggregate and gender-specific managers' tales of 'Matthew' and 'Elizabeth', followed by the case study of 'Odette'.

Table 4.1: Managers' Perceptions about Workplace Massage

First Order Themes	Higher Order Themes	General Dimensions
Managers meet their occupational health and safety responsibilities	Occupational Health and Safety	Corporate Health
Lack of program evaluation to understand actual occupational health and safety benefits		
Injury Management		
Workplace massage program supports employees' wellbeing and encourages employees to participate in healthy activities		
Employees seek advice about health concerns		
Reducing compensation claims		
Culture of staff managing their work priorities with having a massage	Corporate culture	Corporate drivers
Massage is part of the organisational culture		
Employees and managers brag about workplace massage to friends and colleagues		
Employees support the massage program		
Advantages of the program are that it positively affects corporate culture		
Organisational culture is influenced by massage program		
Improves people's perceptions of the organisation		
Minimising organisational risks by supporting health in the workplace		
Expectation of managers for employees to prioritise workload with massage time		
Massage improves productivity	Productivity	
Massage provides stress relief and aids productivity		
Providing workplace massage leads to increased productivity		
Productivity gains by the organisation		
Cost benefit - return on investment		
Higher morale in organisation leads to better productivity		
Improves productivity through supporting employees' wellbeing		
Increasing productivity by offering workplace benefits		
People with less pain have higher productivity		
Using the massage program to demonstrate benefits of organisation	Attracting and retaining staff	
Making the workplace attractive to employees, to be an employer of choice		
Offering workplace massage to attract and retain staff		



Employer-provided staff incentive		
Massage is one of the employee benefits provided		
Having workplace massage positively affects their attitudes	Morale	Psychological
Staff 'love' the massage program		
Employees' responses to massage are positive and have positive effects on the wider group		
Morale is positively affected by providing workplace massage		
Inequities in staff accessing the program due to work logistics	Disadvantages	Situational
Disruptive in the workplace		
Manager gets annoyed about the disruption in the workplace		

### General Dimension 1: Corporate Health

General Dimension 1 contained only one higher order theme, that of *occupational health and safety*. Managers provided workplace massage programs for staff, but the reasons for doing so were not straightforward. There seemed consensus among managers that they wanted to support their employees and that they did so by providing them with opportunities to pursue health-related activities (such as workplace massage). The managers acknowledged that the massage programs provided forums where employees could seek advice about any health concerns from allied health professionals. Managers, however, had to balance employees' access to wellbeing programs with the needs of the organisation. As one manager summarised, "we do have a duty of care as an employer."

The duty of care (to which the manager referred) legally obliges employers to provide healthy and safe workplaces for their staff. The manager's one brief sentence covered each of the first order themes with the occupational health and safety higher order theme, except the failure to evaluate the program. The use of the expression *duty of care* appeared to represent the manager's understanding of the legal obligations of employers. This statement, however, also hinted at a personal belief system (theory-in-action) innately tied to the manager's value system (Argyris & Schön, 1992).

### General Dimension 2: Corporate Drivers

When discussing massage programs, managers focused extensively on issues related to general dimension 2. Three higher order themes emerged in the data: (a) corporate culture,

(b) productivity, and (c) attracting and retaining staff (Table 4.1), and their relationships with each other were closely intertwined.

These higher order themes emphasised and reinforced the significance of the corporate outcomes driving the managers' actions. Through their words, managers indicated that corporate drivers were important factors (possibly the most important) in providing employee benefits. Managers suggested that they aimed to influence the corporate culture by providing programs and employee benefits which included workplace massage. Furthermore, they suggested that by enhancing the corporate culture through incentives and programs, they fostered an environment that motivated employees. The managers implied that increased engagement in the workplace should translate to higher outputs from employees and productivity gains for the organisation. A manager reported that:

*Having that incentive in place [workplace massage] creates more motivation of course for our staff. The benefits of the massage are the increased levels of productivity.*

Another advantage of attracting and retaining the best staff was the reduction in longer-term organisational costs, and as another manager put it:

*[Providing massage programs] is all part of staff retention. Replacement of staff is a very expensive process from the point of view of recruitment and training knowledge. Attracting and retaining staff is important and senior management here see it as a very important issue.*

This manager's words indicated that the high expenses involved in hiring staff and providing them with the requisite skills to undertake their work is common corporate knowledge. To minimise corporate expenditure, employers, therefore, have to hire the most suitable people for the positions and then ensure they retain those employees for a sufficient period to benefit corporately from the expenditure.

### **General Dimension 3: Psychological Factors**

General dimension 3 contained only one higher order theme, *morale*. Within *morale* were five first order themes. This dimension of psychological *factors* closely related to the previous dimension, *corporate drivers*, because managers perceived that the morale of the

staff within the organisation affected productivity. Managers used the program as both an incentive for staff and to provide stress relief (both psychological and physical), and they often reported that staff who used the massage program “loved” the program. One manager confided:

*My hope is that staff will find it relaxing, which will help their stress levels. I also hope, because they're physical workers that it will reduce the fatigue in their shoulders and neck area, and I hope it makes them feel happier about working here.*

Another provided his understanding about the relationship between morale and productivity by stating that:

*With these sorts of things [massage programs], we try to get a win-win in terms of lifting morale by providing something of benefit to the employee, while at the same time improving productivity and performance for the organisation.*

This manager's phrase *win-win* suggested the necessity to balance the needs of the organisation with those of the employees without introducing tensions or negative outcomes. By providing these employee programs, which in some way contributed towards people's happiness, the manager anticipated productivity gains and, therefore, everybody could enjoy the benefits (management and the staff).

#### **General Dimension 4: Situational Factors**

General dimension 4 contained one higher order theme, *disadvantages*. Within the higher order theme of *disadvantages* were three first order themes. In general, managers did not see many disadvantages with their programs. One manager stated:

*I think there is an effect on productivity both ways I suppose. On the day, it's very disruptive to the productivity of the office.*

This manager acknowledged the potential for reduced productivity on the actual day of the massages because people were taking time away from their duties to attend their massages. The loss of productivity on the day, however, may have translated to productivity gains in the days following the massage sessions.

Another manager explained that not all of their sites provided massage programs, by reporting that:

*The disadvantage is that we don't have a program that is widely accessible, or the time to coordinate it. We share this building with another company so we piggyback off that company's system.*

In this situation, the manager had described how they had implemented the program at one site because an opportunity had arisen to share the program with another organisation that tenanted the same building. He indicated that although he supported the program, had there not been a situation where the organisation could program-share they would not have had the capacity to organise or facilitate such a program.

### **Overview of the Aggregate Stories**

The following sections present the aggregate stories of Matthew and Elizabeth. Both managers worked in national organisations. Their stories represented the six male and four female managers interviewed for Study 1.

After Matthew and Elizabeth's stories, is the case study of *Odette – The Odd One Out*. Odette was the fifth female manager interviewed, but her story was markedly different in a number of ways from the other females. Her story is presented separately to those of the other managers. Although her story was unique in many ways, it was considered that if her case study had been left out of this thesis, there would be a diminished picture about workplace massage.

The managers' interviews were all analysed and presented within the context of Argyris and Schön's (1992) *theory-in-action*, with a subsequent general discussion following each individual's story. Argyris and Schön's theories provide "the foundations for understanding and explaining features of human action, especially as they occur in social systems such as organizations" (p. xi). By drawing from notions such as internal consistency, congruence, effectiveness, and testability, the analysis will look for evidence of how individuals' espoused theories align (or conflict) with their theories in action, and how their tacit theories affect their actions. These variables will allow for more insightful discussions about issues relating to the stories of Matthew, Elizabeth and Odette.

## **Matthew's Story**

Matthew is a fictitious person. His story is an aggregate emerging from the real quotes and stories that male managers shared with me during their interviews in Study 1. Matthew was a middle manager in a large multinational organisation. He was responsible for human resources functions, including matters of occupational health and safety. At the interview, Matthew was wearing a dark business suit and tie, and he had the corporate-look commonplace during working hours in the central business district of Melbourne, Australia, which suggests that he was a person with relatively conservative views.

## **Occupational Health and Safety**

Matthew started the interview with an overview of the organisation's health and safety policies. He linked these policies to their massage program and other employee benefits. When he had commenced working in the organisation, Matthew had identified the need for additional policies, and he had contributed to the development of a number of new occupational health and safety guidelines. Matthew described the introduction of some of the organisation's processes:

*When we moved into this building, we really didn't have any support programs or organised programs around O H&S, so we had to develop policies and various programs including massage, flu shots, and access to the gym.*

Matthew talked about his organisation and explained some of the benefits made available to employees. His role had involved leading the development of human resources policies and programs. Right from the outset of the interview, even before the topic had been broached, he raised the issue of occupational health and safety (OHS). In Australia, OHS legislation governs the requirement for employers to provide safe workplaces, and at this time workplace safety laws have become an integral part of work life. For example, WorkSafe Victoria (the Victorian Government's enforcement agency for OHS) actively advertises on commercial television and public billboards, and produces numerous publications to assist employers and employees in meeting their safety obligations (WorkSafe Victoria, 2010). That he had spoken of occupational health and safety within the first minutes of the interview perhaps demonstrated that his sense of responsibility for the health and safety of employees was at the forefront of his mind. He continued to talk about his organisation's policies:

*I think the massage program is consistent with our occupational health and safety policies, and it's certainly consistent with our, I think, work-life policy and the values of our organisation in terms of valuing its employees.*

Matthew seemed to understand his (and the organisation's) responsibility in terms of health and safety, but the policies may have extended beyond merely meeting OHS laws. Matthew explained how the OHS policies complemented the company's work-life policies and contributed towards the values of the organisation. Through his conversation, Matthew appeared to be confident about the organisation's policies. He explained about the existence or otherwise<sup>1</sup> of the various policies that had been developed to support health and safety in the workplace. Having developed these policies, he was able to understand and explain how the massage program fitted within the wider corporate health initiatives.

Multiple issues influenced the introduction of wellbeing programs and other offers of employee benefits within the organisation. Matthew described other external factors that contributed to the implementation of wellbeing strategies, explaining how such programs provided multiple benefits because they simultaneously benefited the organisation and the employees. Matthew continued:

*Massage is part of a strategy to reduce compensation claims and, at another level, in terms of our OHS policies; we support and encourage staff to look after their health. More broadly, we promote initiatives from our company insurer, such as the 2006 World Day of Safety and Health at Work, where we are asked to promote health and wellbeing issues.*

Here was an example of the potential for multiple beneficial outcomes from the program. For employees, the availability of workplace massage (along with other wellbeing initiatives) provided them with the opportunity to proactively look after their health and possibly enjoy improved health outcomes. By using the workplace health initiatives (including massage), and in striving to become healthier, those people could have, perhaps, gained numerous benefits in both their workplaces and their private lives. Such benefits may have included better physical and psychological health, improved quality of life outcomes, and improved job satisfaction.

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<sup>1</sup> Managers indicated that in many instances there had been a lack of existing policies and therefore they had often been required to develop them to fill an identified gap.

For the employer (the organisation), the massage, together with the other health initiatives, may have led to productivity gains resulting from people's health improvements. Other benefits for the organisation may have included reduced expenditure (such as through reduced compensation claims and reduced insurance premiums). Wellbeing programs are a way in which organisations can work towards reducing insurance premiums and overall corporate expenses by reducing insurance claims frequency through injury prevention and by improving safety at work.

This organisation had policies in place and supported those policies with programs. The existence of wellbeing programs (and the massage) demonstrated management's commitment to the health and wellbeing policies, and more generally a commitment to the overall culture of the organisation.

The organisation's health insurer may have benefited through the reduced likelihood of insurance pay-outs due to fewer work-related health issues. People who actively look after their health may be less likely to initiate health-related compensation claims than those who do not look after themselves. Matthew stated:

*Not that there was a WorkCover situation, people were just feeling a bit niggly, and I guess massage was our way of trying to prevent injuries.*

Matthew was not waiting for an adverse workplace incident, or for somebody to suffer an injury, before acting. The massage program provided Matthew with the opportunity to initiate a health care scheme, and in doing so, he (and the organisation) supported the staff's wellbeing. Furthermore, there were potentially other benefits: (a) the workplace insurer gave organisations financial incentives to reduce injuries and claims; (b) some people had indicated that they were experiencing musculoskeletal discomfort (the warning signs of possible future injuries), and (c) any injuries incurred may have resulted in expenses to the organisation (for example increased premiums, compensation costs, absenteeism due to injury, reduced productivity, added costs to the organisation associated with return-to-work issues). Matthew explained his approach further by suggesting:

*It's about providing people with an opportunity to address any little niggling soreness or injuries that they get or feel that they're getting from just sitting all day in the work place.*

The massage program provided people and the organisations with benefits arising from addressing health concerns. Occupational health and safety seemed intrinsically linked to the corporate culture. When talking about OHS, Matthew described (among many things) policies, productivity, responding to people's health issues, and valuing people.

### **Corporate Culture**

Matthew seemed proud of his organisation and of its culture. He described how the massage program, in part, contributed to the organisational spirit. He relayed how the staff spoke (and bragged) to friends and family about their workplace and the massage program. Matthew continued:

*By providing massage, our company is seen to be doing something. By providing benefits, staff can see that this company is saying "we care for you; you are the most valuable asset". I do know that early in the piece, people said, "Oh, I told someone you provide massage, and they said, 'what a place to work!'" As you can see, it's so good here that even our staff brag about this organisation. I actually think that we, as an organisation, probably do a little bit better than other organisations on retention.*

He reported that the staff boasted about the massage and this seemed to provide him the supporting evidence that the employees enjoyed a healthy corporate culture. During the interview, Matthew used the term *employer of choice*, and the massage program provided tangible evidence for Matthew to illustrate how this organisation worked towards developing that image. Furthermore, not only did the program probably contribute to the positive image of the organisation, it may also have highlighted management's commitment to its staff. His words implied the importance of the organisation's image, and perhaps he personally believed that he and his staff worked for the *best* organisation.

His statements seemed to represent pride in his organisation, but they also hinted at a form of competition, implying that he worked for a better place than others did. Even describing how the staff bragged, sounded a bit like competition, competing with friends and family about their benefits and their workplaces. After all, it is commonplace human behaviour to strive to exceed and perform better than one's rivals. Not only did this organisation provide massage, the staff apparently reinforced the positive image of the organisation through their conversations with friends and family. With managers competing and staff competing, perhaps the spirit of competition was a positive contributor to an overall positive corporate culture.



Offering employees terms and conditions worthy of talking about implied that this organisation had developed (or was, at least, actively working towards) a positive corporate culture. Matthew described a number of tangible benefits available to staff. In isolation, these benefits did not necessarily indicate a great corporate culture, but that the employees were *bragging* about their terms and conditions provided some evidence of an organisation whose efforts seemed to be paying off.

### **Productivity**

There were many complex corporate and economic drivers underpinning the implementation and on-going support of workplace massage programs. Matthew explained that the massage program was not a given in the organisation. Although he believed that employees did benefit from the massage program, there was, nevertheless, a requirement to show corporate gains as well. Matthew stated:

*We have to show benefits, and yes, the massage does definitely provide a benefit to our staff. We are here to run a business, and it has to have some sort of productivity, linked productivity, or enhancement of the business.*

When asked how the organisation evaluated the program and what aspects of the program were important, Matthew explained that nothing formal had been undertaken to date, other than informal feedback. In the absence of a formal program evaluation of workplace massage, Matthew relied on anecdotal feedback he had received from supervisors, OHS officers, and staff to determine the value of massage. As long as business outcomes fell within acceptable parameters for productivity and feedback from employees continued to be positive, Matthew seemed unlikely to consider that there were any significant problems with the program or that it hampered productivity. He explained:

*We haven't done anything formal as yet. I know the OHS officers have talked about it and have talked to our staff using the massage program. The people using the program seem to want to avail themselves of the opportunity to provide feedback when it comes in. Informal feedback, I think, is a big thing.*

Although there was value in the anecdotal and informal feedback Matthew received about the massage program, he and his colleagues could only get a full insight into the benefits or disadvantages of the program after they evaluated the program against variables deemed

important for the organisation. His conversation indicated that some potentially important variables may include things such as (but not limited to) productivity gains, occupational health and safety improvements (perhaps reduced incidences of musculoskeletal injuries, or reduced compensation claims), or good responses to staff satisfaction surveys (he had stated that staff were the company's most valuable asset).

As long as the program was not interfering with the work (the productivity), Matthew expressed no urgency to evaluate the program. The anecdotal feedback had been good from those receiving massage sessions, and there had not been any complaints about the program, but he was unable to state how it actually affected productivity. Matthew continued to explain how and why the management team supported the massage program:

*By having the massage program, it's saying the management and the organisation understand that staff do get stressed, and we want to assist at that level, and we also support it through regular emails and support, and we encourage staff to attend.*

Matthew continued by sharing his ideas about how employees who were experiencing poor health might negatively affect productivity. He included some of his personal beliefs in the quote below. He stated:

*We provide accessibility to the massage program, which is one option that we feel can help our staff to cope with their work. I'm not a doctor, but in terms of productivity, obviously if you've got someone who is unwell or feeling stressed or a combination of both, that can impact on productivity, can lead to time off work, compensation claims, and can impact on other staff because they're not functioning.*

Matthew's personal beliefs seemed evident here. Unwell people are less productive than healthy people. People in poor health can cost the organisation in multiple ways. Throughout the interview, Matthew pointed to productivity as a key corporate driver for the organisation. The implementation of wellbeing programs contributed towards a number of important corporate outcomes, such as improved productivity, reduced absenteeism, and reduced compensation claims. Productivity equalled profits and meeting key performance indicators. Absenteeism equalled fewer people at work, lowered productivity, and possibly not meeting key performance indicators. Compensation claims meant any number of things for the business such as, increased premiums, potentially fewer employees in the workplace due to

injury or personnel returning to work on light duties (lowered outputs), which for the business all equates to the same outcome, that is, reduced productivity.

Matthew frequently used the word *productivity* during the interview and in doing so seemed to emphasise its importance. He also spoke about people's health and wellbeing, so there appeared to be two clear objectives in providing workplace massage, the health of the people and the health of the organisation. Healthy people were more likely to be productive and contribute to the success of the organisation; it was a *win-win*.

Matthew explained some further potential gains, beyond productivity, that he perceived the organisation gained by providing workplace massage to employees and potential employees:

*We seek to gain two main outcomes, productivity is one of the outcomes; employees' wellbeing is the other. Another thing is, when we want to attract people to this organisation, we are saying that we are a modern, flexible organisation that appeals to Gen Y. If you are recruiting younger people, that generation is likely, in my view, to have more interest in going to the gym, going for a run at lunchtime, or having access to a massage program. But, I've got to be careful there, it's just my view, there's a whole range of people that actually access the program.*

### **Attracting and Retaining Staff**

To attract the best employees to the organisation, Matthew and the management team implemented a variety of strategies (including workplace massage). One of the aims of this approach was to increase the organisation's marketability and competitiveness, and therefore, increase the likelihood of attracting a wide range of prospective high-calibre employees. The organisation wanted to appeal to younger people by providing various employees benefits that they may consider valuable. Again, the corporate driver for this strategy seemed primarily to maximise productivity, but by providing these services the organisation and the employees all gained. The organisation may have increased its appeal to many demographics within the employment market by offering various services. In this way, the organisation increased its chances of attracting the right people to the company and, once employed, retaining them.

From all that Matthew had said, the ingredients for a positive corporate culture seemed to be present in the organisation. People had access to a number of benefits, including massage,

and they had the full support of management to use these benefits. Employees could leave their desks and have a massage without fear of retribution. Time, apparently, was not an issue because Matthew had explained that, in his experience the employees had a strong work ethic and balanced their employment duties with their massage time responsibly. The culture the management espoused might seem quite attractive to a potential worker. A prospective employee at an interview with the employer would most likely learn about the workplace and that this company provided a range of employee benefits along with the position. The organisation provided a great culture, with access to the gym, flu shots, workplace massage, in addition to access to massages during work time. For those already employed with the organisation, such benefits might discourage them from changing workplaces. The employee terms and conditions offered at this organisation might also make it difficult for other organisations to compete. He explained:

*It's all part of the staff retention. Replacement of staff is a very expensive process, from the point of view of recruitment, training knowledge, it's important. Senior management here see it as a very important issue, in fact so much so it is a key report that is delivered at the monthly meeting. Senior management focus on staff retention, who is leaving, and if it goes beyond a particular number then you had better find out what is going on. Why are staff leaving, and why don't they want to stay in the organisation? Management want us to be seen as the employer of choice.*

Matthew's words highlighted the complex corporate and economic drivers of organisational life. Retaining staff was important for a number of reasons. Drivers included minimising replacement costs associated with hiring new employees, ensuring those employed were adequately trained (such as induction processes and on-the-job training), reducing the chances that the person employed was not the most suitable applicant for the job, and balancing corporate objectives (productivity, profits) with employee needs (happy, healthy, productive workforce). The organisation's focus was to achieve equilibrium where workers were satisfied and the organisation met productivity targets, all while complying with legislated obligations (for example, occupational health and safety laws). If the management team were able to achieve such equilibrium then they would enhance the image of the organisation. The outcome of the team's efforts would result in creating an organisation where staff were cared for, where they had access to employee benefits (which were not necessarily available in *other* organisations), and where the organisation was much *better* than the competing organisations and a highly desirable employer.

## Morale

In the time leading up to the interview, Matthew had sought feedback from supervisors within the organisation about the effects of the massage program on staff. Supervisors advised him that employees' demeanours were positive after massages, which seemed to imply that an organisation full of people with good demeanours may have improved corporate culture. He described the mood of the office after people received massages:

*I spoke to them last week in the lead up to you coming in, and they said generally the people that get massages seem to feel uplifted throughout the rest of the day. They seem to be sort of a bit light hearted, in a good mood. When it's occurring in the workplace it tends to lift the heaviness out of the office.*

Matthew described how the mood-lifting effect extended beyond positively affecting only the people who received the massages. He described how he perceived the program affected the people within the organisation more widely:

*I think that if you can provide opportunities where people are getting the chance to do something a little different out of their normal duties with the people they work with, it has a bonding and a social effect. It breaks down some barriers because we still are an organisation that has levels. So, it breaks those down a bit and helps open up communication.*

Although not everybody used the program, Matthew reported that the effects of the massage program went beyond those immediately benefiting from it. He spoke of the bonding and communication effects to which the program indirectly contributed. Matthew attributed these effects partly to getting the opportunity to do something out of the ordinary in the workplace. Perhaps the combination of the added variety in the workplace and the mood-lifting effects on the massage recipients meant that they interacted differently with their work peers after the massage, with a flow-on effect even on those who did not choose to have massages. Matthew seemed certain that massage affected more than just the recipients, because it lifted *the heaviness out of the office*. Matthew continued to explain how he believed providing employee benefits, such as massage, contributed to the morale of the organisation:

*We like to be seen to support employees in the workplace. Our staff might see this in a number of ways. Management is aware of, and values, the contribution of staff, and this is a way of acknowledging their contribution in the workplace. Massage is a form of reward and showing how the organisation values its staff and the staff's input. I think it's something that is going to bring a degree of comfort and probably a bit of*

*variety into the work day of the staff. I think this all leads to increased productivity and efficiency. I think we're quite progressive and very aware of the need to have a safe and comfortable work environment for our staff. Massage is a service that contributes to making employees more relaxed and comfortable in the workplace.*

Working towards creating an environment where staff experienced high morale and felt valued was apparently all part of the end goal. Matthew highlighted that the organisation actively supported staff to pursue health-related activities during work time. They were trusted to balance their massages with their work responsibilities, and perhaps this was an indirect message from management that they were empowering people. Matthew described how employees balanced their work with massage, and how having the program carried out on the premises benefited all concerned. He explained:

*I certainly know my employees are conscientious. If you are not well, then go and get it fixed in that time; it's all part of the service to get well. So, to me, it's more beneficial from a company point of view that the service is available here so they don't have to worry about the extra time or trying to make up extra time when they are too tired to be doing so. This is an opportunity to increase the morale. From the point of view that the staff member does not have to worry about taking the extra time off work to get to where they are going and then get back again.*

Furthermore, Matthew continued:

*Staff know that massage is available, and that there is no criticism if you need it. There is no issue in having to take the time off. It is there and available to you as an employee, and there is no need for them to justify having their massages to supervisors, "well, why haven't you gone yet?" or "why haven't you asked for the time off." Well, there is no need to do that. You don't need to be concerned in taking the time off. They are just taking the time off. It is almost part of their employment conditions that they do that.*

Matthew's viewpoint appeared to be that the massages were implemented to support staff. As such, he was completely at ease using the program held no reservations in using it during working hours. Apparently, using the program was part of the accepted corporate culture.

## **Disadvantages**

Matthew spent a lot of time during the interview explaining how the program contributed to wellbeing initiatives and enabled employees to pursue health-related activities in the workplace. He described how the program linked in with the occupational health and safety policies of the organisation and how he perceived the general advantages of the program to be

in line with corporately sought outcomes (for example, good corporate culture, productivity, morale). Towards the end of the interview, Matthew responded to questions about any disadvantages with the program. He paused and seemed to be searching for something to say, and then he responded:

*Ah, nothing. Nothing at the moment. I mean, I think it's all good. I think if we had a huge increase in demand that might present a problem from a monetary point of view, but I don't see any negatives there.*

Throughout the interview, Matthew had espoused the benefits of the program for the organisation and the staff. He seemed convinced that the massage program was a positive initiative for his organisation; *it's all good*.

### **Theories-of-Action: Matthew's Story**

Argyris and Schön (1992) explained that individuals hold tacit theories that they generally acquire early in life and to which they continue to hold. These theories are thought to affect individuals' world-view and therefore determine all deliberate human behaviour. The authors note that "We explain or predict a person's deliberate behavior by attributing theories-of-action to him" (p. 6). In the following sections, an account of how Argyris and Schön's model has been explored in the context of Matthew's story is given. This is presented in order to understand how the tacit theories that individuals hold about workplace massage have contributed to their approach to workplace massage programs.

*Theories-in-use* include "assumptions about self, others, the situation, and the connections among action, consequence, and situation" (Argyris and Schön, 1992, p. 7). Occupational health and safety presents a relatively straightforward context in which to explore workplace massage programs. Matthew (as a manager) had presented himself in a certain way. He was corporately dressed and, therefore, projected an air of professionalism of himself to the outside world. Possibly, this projection of himself is the initial insight to his "assumptions about self, others, and the situation" (Argyris & Schön, 1992, p. 7) surrounding him. He may have had thought processes, which were similar to *I am a manager in a corporate setting, therefore I should present myself a certain way with a particular image, behave a given way, and contribute to situations in the workplace*.

### **Theories-of-action: Occupational Health and Safety**

Australia has extensive legislations governing health and safety in the workplace. When the interview commenced, Matthew reflected on the concept of occupational health and safety (OHS), and his conversation about health and safety was congruent with those laws. With such stringent OHS requirements placed upon employers, a number of governing variables may have underpinned Matthew's actions to contribute to OHS policy making, and this seemed in line with the notion that:

*When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However, the theory that actually governs his actions in his theory-in-use, which may or may not be compatible with his espoused theory (Argyris & Schön, 1992, pp. 6-7).*

Matthew's contribution to OHS policy development within the organisation demonstrated that his theories-of-action were compatible with his espoused theory. Governing variables in this case (Argyris & Schön, 1992) could include complying with the law and adhering to policy guidelines (that Matthew had contributed to developing). Although Matthew seemed genuinely concerned about employees' health and safety, there existed overarching OHS legislation requiring the organisation (and in turn, Matthew) to provide the employees with a healthy and safe workplace. Heavy pecuniary penalties can apply to people and organisations found guilty by a court of law for contravening OHS legislation (WorkSafe Victoria, 2010). These governing variables (for example, the law, penalties for failing to comply with the law, an obligation to provide employees with safe and healthy workplaces) probably strongly influence managers' behaviours and organisational policies.

Matthew's contribution to health and safety legislation within his workplace may represent theories-of-action that extend beyond the workplace itself. More broadly, Matthew's adherence to the OHS law may have demonstrated something about him as an individual and his personally held theories. Argyris and Schön (1992) suggested that we could predict a person's behaviour by attributing a theory-of-action to the individual, and that the person often develops such theories early in life. In the case of Matthew, he may have developed his theories about the law when he was young. These underlying theories may have then guided, in part, his behaviour towards his responsibilities in the workplace towards OHS.



The situation under discussion was occupational health and safety. Matthew's action was his role in policy development. There were multiple consequences of his role in policy development. As a manager, he had a (legislated) responsibility to the staff in terms of providing a safe and healthy work environment, but his words about his staff suggested more than simply obligation to the law because he used language such as valuing staff. His active role in policy development together with the wellbeing strategies for which he was responsible, appeared to demonstrate that his personal theories aligned with his espoused theories.

### **Theories-of-action: Corporate Culture**

Matthew was keen to share stories about the staff bragging about their workplace to others. These reflections seemed, in some way, to confirm personally that he was part of an organisation where the culture was healthy, and the general spirit was high. Whilst his words indicated competitiveness in the corporate sector on a number of levels, this had a positive connotation. First, the staff bragged, so this provided him with evidence that the staff were, in some way, competing outside the immediate work environment. Second, he had stated that he believed that his organisation "probably did a little better than other organisations on retention," which was another example of competition in the corporate sector (i.e., competing to retain staff). Third, he spoke about how his organisation cared for the staff (perhaps suggesting that his organisation would care for staff more than the competitors might).

According to Argyris and Schön (1992), "individuals privately compare themselves with others, without open testing" (p. 82) and establish relationships that emphasise competitiveness. Matthew displayed a high degree of competitiveness when he spoke about corporate culture, and he privately compared his organisations with others. The issue of staff bragging seemed to be another instance of private comparisons. Staff had possibly compared themselves with other people, determined that they were *winning* and subsequently bragged about their workplace benefits. Perhaps even by reporting this situation, Matthew was also demonstrating this positive aspect of competitiveness.

He did not talk about openly testing his theories to confirm (or otherwise) whether the areas that he identified as markers of a good organisational culture held true. His statements seemed to be congruent with his theories-of-action, that is, he believed his organisation was

competitive and he cited indicators such as high levels of employee retention, evidence of staff bragging, and expressions by management of valuing staff as measures of success.

### **Theories-of-action: Productivity**

While discussing massage and productivity, Matthew's words suggested that he held two strong beliefs about the organisation and about the program. First, the people within the organisation had to be productive. Second, there had to be some demonstration of the link between the massage program and productivity benefits.

He articulated during the interview, "we are here to run a business, and it [the massage program] has to have some sort of productivity, linked productivity, or enhancement of the business." His words provided further insight into his theories-of-action. Matthew referred to "we," so he apparently believed he was part of a group within the organisation responsible for productivity. He was not required to achieve the organisational goals in isolation. His language suggested that he was team-oriented and that he, together with the unnamed group of people, ran the business and worked towards ensuring its productivity. His approach to organisational life appeared to be based on a theory, which Argyris and Schön (1992) called "a formulation of the human relations approach to interpersonal, group, and organizational action, emphasizing the achievement of consensus among potentially conflicting views and a participatory alternative to conventional authoritarian concepts of management" (p. xii).

The indicators of his theories included words and language such as *we*, *enhancement of the business*, *benefits*, and *benefits to our staff*. His language was not authoritarian. Instead, he used language that indicated participation, group harmony, and consensus. Matthew considered how the program would provide dual benefits, for both the organisation and for the employees.

When discussing the massage program, Matthew was explicit that the program had to have some sort of *linked productivity*, but to-date nobody had formally evaluated the program. Matthew's stated assumption about the massage program was that it provided benefits, but the effects of the massage program had not been specifically assessed. When asked about the evaluation of the massage program, Matthew explained that he had received informal feedback and had explained how that such feedback was important. He suggested that a

formal evaluation of the program would be used to explore how the massage affected variables such as productivity gains, occupational health and safety improvements, reduced injuries and reduced compensation claims.

Of interest here is that Matthew's assumptions about the program based on informal feedback appeared to be internally inconsistent. Although he repeatedly stated the importance of organisational productivity, he (or indeed anybody within the organisation) had not implemented any formal evaluation to assess the program. Hence, it is possible that the massages may have met all the intended outcomes that Matthew expected, but because one of the key variables was productivity and this aspect had not been evaluated, the massage program may arguably have negatively influenced the organisation's productivity. Without some form of independent evaluation, Matthew could not have obtained a comprehensive understanding of the effects of the program.

Argyris and Schön (1992) stated, "dilemmas of inconsistency arise when governing variables, in a theory-in-use/behavioural-world interaction, become less and less achievable over time, finally reaching the point at which they fall outside the acceptable range" (p. 31). At the time of the interview, people within Matthew's workplace received massages because the management team believed that massages provided a benefit to staff and the organisation. Nevertheless, despite the internal inconsistency between the aims of the program and the potential for the program to have an adverse effect, the level of productivity within the organisation must have been falling within acceptable parameters. Productivity outputs must have been meeting, exceeding or falling negligibly short of set targets. Therefore, the perceived need for evaluation was not a high priority for Matthew. As long as the program was not clearly interfering with the work (the productivity), Matthew was unlikely to consider that there was any urgency in evaluating the program.

Matthew expressed theories about how employees who were experiencing poor health might negatively affect productivity. He spoke about how stressed people, or those who were generally unwell, could negatively affect productivity by taking time off work or accessing compensation claims. The massage program was one way in which the management team could contribute towards supporting and enhancing human activity and decreasing organisational entropy (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

The massage program, however, was not a substitute for the corporation examining the cause of the stress. As Argyris and Schön (1992) stated, “we become selectively inattentive to the data that point to dilemmas” (p. 33). The principles of Australian health and safety laws require employers to eliminate hazards at the source or to reduce them as far as possible. Matthew acknowledged that people experienced stress, and the organisation responded by implementing a massage program. Massage, however, might only mask symptoms of something else that may have been affecting staff in their workplace. Possibly, the stress that Matthew described was not work-related, but without some form of evaluation, the management team could only make assumptions. Nevertheless, the feedback he had received about the program was positive, and he stated that massage was only one option available for staff.

### **Theories-of-action: Attracting and Retaining Staff**

The company’s corporate goals appeared to underpin Matthew’s espoused theories when he discussed the issue of attracting and retaining staff. He voiced the company’s rationale for not wanting to lose staff from the organisation, and his language expressed company policy and the corporate drivers for senior management. Perhaps Matthew’s responses reflected more about his personally held theories about managerial and working life than they did about the relationship between the massage program and staff retention. He spoke in generic terms about the senior managers in the third person and did not use *I* or *we* statements, suggesting that he did not have strongly held personal theories. Instead, Matthew responded to the issues by stating what the senior management thought. Senior management wanted the organisation to “be seen as the employer of choice and focused on staff retention.”

Matthew’s approach to describing the corporate goals did not necessarily suggest that he did not support them or the senior management team. The way he phrased his language suggested that he held a personal theory and that he took the words of the senior management team seriously and felt responsible for meeting the expectations of that group. Staff retention was important to the senior management team therefore Matthew’s allegiances to his employer meant their goals were important to him. He was responsive to his employers’ needs so, consistent with what Argyris and Schön (1992) had previously observed in the action of others in his position, “the answers he usually [gave were] his espoused theory of action for

that situation. This [was] the theory of action to which he [gave] allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicate[d] to others” (p. 7).

Perhaps because the senior management team supported the massage program, Matthew did not question its value or push for an evaluation of the program. Indeed, Matthew went further to actively espouse the benefits of the massage program. Notwithstanding this concordance of beliefs however, the organisation may have materially benefited by evaluating the value and outcomes of employee benefits to understand the effectiveness of them. In this way, the organisation could respond to problems or issues while they were small rather than waiting until the program possibly failed to find out what (if any) problems were existing. It has been observed that employees often resign for reasons related to their working conditions within the organisation (Estryn-Behar, van der Heijden, Fry, & Hasselhom, 2010; Poulston, 2009) and the massage program may have had the effect of increasing employee loyalty and morale, which may have translated to lower attrition and higher productivity.

Matthew’s theories-in-use appeared congruent with his espoused theories. Even though he distanced himself from the corporate goals by referring to senior management in the second person, his espoused theories about the massage program itself did not cause him any personal dilemmas. Had Matthew not held a personal view that the massage program provided a benefit to the organisation or the staff, he may have struggled to find consistency between his espoused theory (i.e., the company goals) and his personal theories. Whether or not he thought the massage program was effective in achieving the governing variable of sustaining employee retention did not appear to matter because he did not hold any expressed (or implied) concerns about the program itself.

### **Theories-of-action: Morale**

Matthew stated that he received feedback that employees felt *uplifted*, *light-hearted*, and *in a good mood* after they received their massages. He did not seem to question these terms and accepted them on face value, suggesting that Matthew held a personal theory that massage had a mood-lifting effect on the people who received it. As Argyris and Schön (1992) stated, theory is not necessarily true, but is used to predict human behaviour. Possibly, because Matthew held this tacit theory, he accepted the feedback without question. The massage program may have had a limited lasting effect on participants’ moods, and may not have had

any influence on the wider morale of the organisation. However, Matthew accepted that massage positively affected the individuals receiving it, so had no difficulty in extending the theory to perceive that massage could influence people who did not participate in the program.

Based on the findings of existing research, the likelihood is that (in the main) the people who received the massages experienced various positive psychophysiological outcomes. Whether this mood-lifting effect influenced the morale or mood of the other workers is questionable. More broadly, the availability of massage in the workplace, combined with other employee benefits, may have had a greater influence on morale than simply providing massage in isolation.

He explained that employees were not criticised for going to have a massage and that it was almost a part of their employment conditions. Perhaps knowing that management supported looking after their health may have contributed to the overall morale of the workplace. The organisation possibly gained a benefit through this empowerment because by allowing people to take ownership for their work time (and outputs) such employees may have responded through increased loyalty towards the organisation.

The governing variable in this instance was morale. Matthew explained that he believed that affording people the opportunity to access a variety of employer-provided, non-work-related activities contributed to improving workplace communications and social bonding. He supported his espoused beliefs because his theories-of-action were to provide workplace massage. His theories were compatible and, therefore, congruent causing him no dilemmas. Matthew did not perceive that the program negatively affected morale; rather, he believed it had a positive influence.

### **Theories-of-action: Disadvantages**

Matthew's tacit theories became most evident when asked about the disadvantages of the program. He had really not considered whether there were any disadvantages to workplace massage, and was focussed upon describing the many benefits that he perceived massage offered to the organisation and his staff. In this respect, he spoke about health benefits, morale, productivity, and occupational health and safety. Apparently, Matthew held strong

theories-of-action that suggested workplace massage was good for the organisation, and for its people.

### **General Discussion about Matthew's Story**

Overall, Matthew did not demonstrate any self-contradiction in his espoused theories. His theories-in-use matched his espoused theories because he expressed attitudes towards massage that seemed to reflect his inner feelings. Matthew seemed convinced that massage was a valuable program for the organisation that contributed positively on a number of levels. Many of the aspects of the program that Matthew discussed, however, had not been tested or evaluated. Neither Matthew nor any of the senior management team had deemed such evaluation necessary because the massage program had not apparently presented any issues or concerns. He generally considered the program effective, and as Argyris and Schön (1992) stated, “a theory-in-use is effective when action according to the theory tends to achieve its governing variables” (p. 24). Based on Matthew's views, one could argue that the program was successful because it did not overtly negatively affect the governing variables. For example, the organisation must have (within acceptable parameters) been meeting productivity targets; the general feedback was good, and Matthew seemed satisfied that the occupational health and safety, and corporate drivers were being satisfactorily achieved.

The problem with these assumptions is that the management team could have relatively easily tested the program against any number of the governing variables. Argyris and Schön (1992) suggested specifying: the situation, the required results, and the action to test whether the theories hold true. However, testing the program was unlikely since there seemed to be a notion that evaluation was only justified if the program became associated with poor outcomes, or the company's overall performance or budget fell outside acceptable parameters. Oftentimes, chaos or crisis is the catalyst for change. While the program was not causing problems, change was unlikely, and from Matthew's perspective, the program was working well.

### **Elizabeth's Story**

Elizabeth, like Matthew, is a fictitious person. Her story is an aggregate created from the interview data and actual quotes of the female managers who participated in Study 1.

Elizabeth was a middle manager in a large corporation with responsibility for human resources functions.

### **Occupational Health and Safety**

Elizabeth commenced the interview by explaining how massage became part of the corporate health program in her organisation. She explained briefly who introduced the program and how it evolved into its current form:

*The CEO [Chief Executive Officer] decided that it would be a good health program for employees and that was about five years ago. It really started from him thinking it was a really good idea for employees, to reduce stress and also something to reduce WorkCover costs.*

Elizabeth provided a detailed snapshot of the sorts of benefits offered to the organisation's employees. The company provided several benefits to staff to support them in pursuing health activities. Possibly, they offered such a varied array of choices (including massage) to appeal to a wide cohort within the workplace. Occupational health and safety seemed to be important within the organisation. Elizabeth stated:

*There's a certain responsibility that an employer has to look after the welfare or the wellbeing of its employees to ensure that they are coping, and so there's a number of activities that we provide here.*

Further, Elizabeth described the range of activities and services that the organisation made available to employees. She continued:

*Massage is part of our health and work-life balance program. Staff get access to lots of talks about healthy living, how to eat, what to eat. We do some cooking classes occasionally; we do golf sessions, yoga sessions. We run sessions at the local fitness area and other activities in the workplace.*

Her earlier references to WorkCover and reducing company insurance costs implied that occupational health and safety was an important consideration in the corporate sector. This organisation's response to health and safety seemed to go beyond obligatory compliance with OHS legislation, because the range of health initiatives that Elizabeth reported was both diverse and comprehensive. Her discussion suggested that managers were acutely aware of their (and the organisation's) occupational health and safety responsibilities. She continued



with her story and mentioned the legal responsibilities binding organisations, as well as some ethical considerations she believed employers faced:

*From a legal perspective, it's important that we're seen to be doing something like that. But, from us, just as a good employer perspective, I think it's also a nice sort of paternalistic way of helping employees to help themselves.*

Elizabeth described how the organisation needed to be *seen* to do something and further contextualised what she said by affirming her belief in the organisation's health program. Perhaps her personal theory was that the organisation should support employees regardless of any legal obligations. The phrases '*legal perspective*' and '*nice sort of paternalistic way*' presented an interesting dichotomy. In one sense Elizabeth was explaining how the organisation was legally obliged to take care of people, but she then went on to talk about looking after people from a paternalistic perspective. The reference to paternalism perhaps revealed something about her implicitly held beliefs or of the organisation for which she worked.

At the most obvious level, here was a female manager using gender-specific words, paternal rather than maternal. The masculine word could have hinted at disempowerment for females (and males) in the organisation, perhaps this was a male-dominated organisation, at least at the powerful end of the organisation (i.e., the senior management). Alternatively, paternalism could have suggested an organisation where people were cared for and protected in a fatherly way. Elizabeth used the word *nice* when she spoke of paternalism, hinting at an image of management protecting the staff. She had spoken of "helping people to help themselves", which possibly indicated that paternalism in this context was similar to that of a parent helping a child to develop.

Elizabeth apparently considered massage programs in the workplace to be worthwhile. She used the program herself, so she was able to share her story about massage from the perspective of both manager and recipient. Despite describing how much she personally enjoyed the program, and how she believed the program benefited her, she expressed reservations about the extent that the massage program aided workplace wellbeing:

*I personally love it, and it does a lot for me in terms of just releasing tension in my shoulders and down my back, and I sit at a computer pretty much all day or, you*

*know, sit talking to people all day. So it's helpful to me to get that kind of manipulated and moved, and you know, released.*

Clearly, Elizabeth was personally convinced about the value of massage. She described the physical benefits she gained from receiving a massage in the workplace and then continued with the psychological benefits she experienced. She relayed a positive experience she had once had after a massage:

*We introduced massage in the interstate office. I used the program myself, and walked out of a room after receiving a massage. One of the staff members approached me in the hallway to have a discussion, and she burst into tears, she was hysterical. I still recall feeling incredibly calm through that whole conversation. It was a meeting that would have normally have been quite stressful and tense for me. But, because I'd just walked out of the massage and into this situation, I felt very calm.*

Elizabeth expressed support for the existence of the massage program in her workplace. With such a glowing personal report on her own workplace massage experiences (both psychologically and physically), she may have been biased about the benefits of massage. Despite her personal *love* of the program, she seemed relatively objective. Massage was, after all, only one aspect of a greater program aimed at promoting employee health and wellbeing. She acknowledged that whether people enjoyed massage was highly personal and not one that many people embraced. Elizabeth shared some specifics about one of the employees who had been experiencing musculoskeletal injuries:

*One of the employees actually has been here for a long time. She has a foot and a knee problem, and she is on worker's comp. She religiously uses the massage therapist to massage those particular spots. She has told me that the massage is quite a help to her to have that regular upkeep.*

Elizabeth was able to relay several stories about her staff during the interview that indicated a high level of involvement with (and interest in) them. She was able to describe in detail about this particular staff member and of her physical problems. Her knowledge about this person was not an isolated incident where she knew details about her staff and their involvement in the massage program. She continued to talk about her staff and some of the reasons she felt they might not have embraced the program:

*Not everybody liked the massage. Some staff didn't like the actual experience of going in there and having someone who they didn't know touch their bodies. We employ a*

*variety of people from several cultural backgrounds here. Some people are married, and it is possible that it is against their religions for a female to touch their bodies, even if it is for massage.*

Elizabeth gave the impression that one of the priorities in her position was to focus holistically on her employees. Her description of how people could feel about their individual situations extended to marriage, religion, culture, and gender. She considered many aspects of her staff's personal attributes and did not appear to focus solely on corporate outcomes. Her consideration for the wellbeing of the organisation's staff extended beyond offering them a workplace massage program. She seemed genuinely concerned for her staff in a comprehensive way. Not only could she recall their individual health issues, but she had empathy for their personal situations and was able to explain how being touched could negatively affect them. Elizabeth acknowledged that health and wellbeing included all aspects of people's needs, including their particular circumstances.

### **Corporate Culture**

The management team undertook a workplace survey once every two years. One of the measures in the survey was that of culture. Elizabeth reported that her workplace performed well, and she provided a brief explanation about the survey. She enthused:

*Although we've never specifically evaluated the massage program, the workplace culture in the surveys that we've done, is very, very high. Compared with similar businesses, we're in the top quarter in the survey. We run the survey once every two years so we do very well.*

The massage program was one of a number of benefits offered to staff. Even from a personal perspective, Elizabeth was apparently proud of her organisation and had spoken to people not related to the business about the benefits. She reported:

*I've spoken to people outside of work, and people can't believe that we get massages provided.*

She continued to discuss the engagement people had with the program and some of the difficulties that they faced in securing appointments. The massage program was popular among the staff to the point where they expressed frustration to her about its administration, and continued:

*They love it. It's so positive. I had an email from someone who was trying to book in, and he was frustrated; "Liz, I can't book in. Can we increase the hours? It's just constantly full, or can you stop people from booking three massages in advance?"*

She went on to explain how the program was ingrained into the organisation's culture. Many people within the organisation extensively used the program. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the company appeared to lead the way by using the program, which probably had a significant influence on the way people viewed the program. She described the CEO's involvement:

*You know, our CEO goes and has massages, and people know that he goes off for his massage. People just know that they can have a massage during work time, and nobody is going to raise an eyebrow.*

The CEO attending the program seemingly gave the employees tacit approval to get massages during work time. Elizabeth highlighted the CEO's participation as though his attendance was the ultimate seal of approval for the program within the organisation. From the top down, people embraced the program. The CEO receiving massages appeared directly to influence the general perception about the program (and possibly contributed to the overall culture).

## **Productivity**

When Elizabeth started talking about how massage affected business outcomes and productivity in the workplace, she did not seem quite as engaged as she had been when talking about the culture. Up to this point of the interview, she had spoken about her personal perceptions on culture, the staff survey, and people's engagement with the program, but nothing to substantiate that massage had any measurable effects on productivity. Her focus remained on the people rather than the business. She seemed to imply that if you look after the people then the business looked after itself. Elizabeth described some of the benefits she perceived people gained from the massage:

*Massage probably gives people half or an hour to get away from their desk to relax. Although it's not rehabilitative, it does reduce muscle soreness. There are people who have regular weekly massages because they know that perhaps the way they work they get muscle tension. So I think it's about relaxation; it's about reducing anxiety if they have any. It's about reducing the pressure that they feel they're under. When they walk out of the massage room, they're feeling better and more alive.*

When she spoke about people receiving a massage in this context, she did not qualify her statements with any identified productivity outcomes gained by the organisation by allowing people to have their relaxation time. Elizabeth believed that massage made people feel better. Unlike Matthew, she did not infer that having muscle tension potentially caused staff to be less productive because they were experiencing pain. She spoke of people feeling *better* and *alive* without any stated expectation for productivity gains. Perhaps Elizabeth was placing value-judgements about massage based on her own experiences. She had earlier described how massage had helped her to cope and remain calm in the face of a stressful situation. The effect of massage on productivity was uncertain because nobody had evaluated the program. Just as Matthew had described, anecdotal feedback and patronage of the program were the measures of success. Elizabeth explained:

*I think all the feedback I need is that the same people always book the massages. There's the regular users who have massages, but then over a month you'll also have a huge variety of other people accessing the program.*

Without a program evaluation, nobody would be able to unequivocally articulate the value of the program. In this situation, anecdotal evidence was the only data supporting how massage benefited staff and the organisation, but this seemed a sufficient basis for Elizabeth and the organisation to continue to support the program. She praised the program and suggested how it helped people, and how it potentially affected productivity. There was little doubt that Elizabeth firmly believed in the value of operating a workplace massage program in her organisation, but the reality was that there was little support available for this claim. As it had been with Matthew's organisation, patronage of the program was one of the main measures of its value, and indeed this measure should not be ignored. At a more fundamental level, perhaps the management team did not consider a formal evaluation of the program to be an essential requirement to understand its effectiveness for either the employees or the wider organisation.

### **Attracting and Retaining Staff**

Elizabeth remained pragmatic about the extent that the massage program contributed to business outcomes. Although she had praised the massage program and had spoken of the advantages that the program had provided to her personally and to her staff, she remained

cautious about attributing any major business outcomes to the massage program alone. She shared her ideas about how the program might affect staff retention:

*Well, you attract better people; you keep better people; you keep people happier; you reduce accident, injuries, and illness. So I mean there's a whole host of things, but it is difficult to directly attribute to that massage program.*

The massage program was only one of a multitude of benefits offered by the company, and isolating the direct effect of the program was difficult in the absence of a formal evaluation. Although Elizabeth and the CEO were keen supporters of the program, Elizabeth did not market it 'as all things to all people'. She often placed caveats around her thoughts, and shared her ideas about how the program contributed towards getting the best graduates:

*When you're recruiting graduates, I think to be able to say we have full-time massage therapists, along with other programs, gets you the competitive edge to get the best graduates.*

Elizabeth, however, did not make definitive statements about the effect of the program on attracting and retaining staff. She explained that she *thought* having massage therapists along with other programs provided the competitive edge.

## **Morale**

Elizabeth had earlier discussed the positive staff survey results. These results quantifiably demonstrated that the workplace had a healthy culture, and this probably extended into the overall morale of the organisation. She spoke passionately about the value that staff placed on the program. She expressed no doubt that people embraced workplace massage. She laughed as she stated:

*You do know the staff would kill you if you dared to take the massage away. It's driven throughout the organisation, and if someone dared take it away from the staff, they'd be very upset.*

Although she made this statement with joking exaggeration, she possibly used the mock drama to emphasise her perception of the importance of the program to staff. Her words implied that management were unlikely to cancel the program because it would be too distressing to the staff, and the result of cancelling the program could negatively affect business outcomes.

Her use of the word *upset* again suggested that the feelings of the staff were important to Elizabeth. Perhaps she considered people's feelings to be as valuable as business outcomes. Conceivably, Elizabeth believed that by looking after the people and providing them what they wanted would translate to meeting corporate objectives.

Knowing that the staff would get *upset* seemed to demonstrate that Elizabeth was in touch with her staff and was able to talk about specific staff issues. Her motivations for having detailed knowledge about her staff were not clear. Whether the issues were complaints, compliments, or just observations about the program, Elizabeth had a level of communication with her staff that enabled her to understand the general feelings within the organisation and the overall corporate culture.

### **Disadvantages**

When asked about disadvantages, Elizabeth paused. She had spent a lot of time discussing the various benefits she perceived about the program. She confessed: "I don't see any disadvantages other than you say how you justify the cost benefit".

Elizabeth, however, had cited issues during the interview that possibly were disadvantages. For example, (a) some people had not engaged with the program for cultural or personal reasons, including a reticence toward strangers touching them in a workplace setting and (b) the booking system and administration of the program had frustrated other people.

The cost of the program must have been important for the organisation for Elizabeth to mention it, but not such a burden that they had seen any need to cancel the program. Matthew had also mentioned the cost of running the program. In both cases, the actual benefits of the program were unknown. The only thing certain was that the people *loved* the program.

### **Theories-of-Action: Discussion of Elizabeth's Story**

Elizabeth positioned herself centrally into the story of the corporate massage program. By involving herself in the story at a personal level, rather than reporting about the program from an observer perspective, she provided a comprehensive view of her theories-of-action. She discussed the massage program from an organisational viewpoint, and she took time to weave her own views and experiences about the program to describe what it meant to her personally.

### **Theories-of-action: Occupational Health and Safety**

The message from both of the managers, and the underlying principles which Argyris and Schön (1992) called “the general characteristics, the governing variables, the action strategies, and the principal assumptions” (p. 63), seemed similar in both organisations. As it had been with Matthew, Elizabeth spoke about occupational health and safety early in the interview. Both of the managers seemed to reflect that the government’s initiative to educate the public and organisations about their responsibilities around occupational health and safety was translating into Argyris and Schön’s ‘governing variable’ for managers’ behaviours. People appeared to be paying attention to the workplace safety messages.

From the details of Elizabeth’s story, it seems evident that the massage program appeared to be aligned with her personal theories. According to Argyris and Schön (1992), congruence shows “an integration of one’s internal (what one who is aware of my feelings and beliefs would perceive) and external (what an outsider who is aware only of my behavior would perceive) state” (p. 23).

Elizabeth was able to cite specific incidences of how the massage had affected people, both in positive and negative ways, whereas Matthew had not really talked about staff as individuals. By comparison, Matthew had spoken in far more generic terms about the effect of the massage program on people.

### **Theories-of-action: Corporate Culture**

When Elizabeth told her story regarding talking about the availability of massage to her friends outside the workplace, she revealed something about her personally held theories. Her organisation provided the workers with corporate massage during work time. She used her story as a measure of the culture, because she was privately comparing herself with other people (Argyris & Schön, 1992). Her workplace measured up well in her private world because she had something available that possibly was not available to her friends.

Furthermore, a corporate survey provided tangible evidence that her organisation measured up well compared with similar workplaces. Argyris and Schön (1992) described how people exhibit competitive behaviours in certain relationships. The workplace is an arena where life can become competitive for many reasons including pursuing pay increases, better



conditions, and promotions. Having the survey results confirmed that much was good in this organisation.

Notwithstanding these positive indications, Elizabeth's personally held theories possibly interfered with her objectivity at times. When talking about the individual frustrated by the booking system, she focused on the massage program being routinely full. This measure, in some way, confirmed her belief that the program was worthwhile. This thinking was inconsistent with the situation she presented in the interview. Although the program was full, thereby supporting her theory that it was popular; the other side of the situation was that people were missing out on access to the program. As Argyris and Schön (1992) stated, "we become selectively inattentive to the data that point to dilemmas; we simply do not notice signs of hostility in others" (p. 33). The individual unable to readily access the massage was showing signs of frustration, yet Elizabeth perceived the situation in a positive light (i.e., the program was popular and successful).

### **Theories-of-action: Productivity**

Elizabeth commented that aligning business outcomes with the massage program was difficult, but did not acknowledge the shortcomings of operating a program without understanding its effects or consequences. Argyris and Schön (1992) explained "a theory-in-use is effective when it achieves its governing variables" (p. 23). We do not know if the massage program in Elizabeth's organisation was achieving its governing variables because patronage of the program was the only measure, and as she had stated, "I think the massage program speaks for itself in that it's always booked out. That's my evaluation of it." If, however, Elizabeth's organisation was not seeking any particular business outcomes from the program, then evaluating the program would not be important. Elizabeth had spoken about issues such as attracting and retaining the best staff, reducing injuries in the workplace, addressing workers compensation claims, and helping to make people feel better. A program evaluation could assess the effect of the program of such variables.

If it is to be assumed that the use of the program was the dominant governing variable, then apparently the program was effective. Elizabeth, however, had described a number of variables, and use of the program did not seem to be as important as the business-driven

variables. Evaluating a massage program based on patronage alone may not be the most effective measure of its value within the organisation.

When Elizabeth talked about one individual's experience when trying to book a massage, she seemed to confuse the meanings between love of the program and frustration with it. Argyris and Schön (1992) stated, "the protagonist may act on his world so as to make it take on characteristics that are either conducive or resistant to the internal consistency of his theory" (p. 22). The email she described that she had received did not express loving the program nor did it express positivity. Instead, the content of the email sounded more about a person who was frustrated by the booking system.

The business outcome for a person annoyed with the processes of the program may have resulted in different emotions than Elizabeth believed that people were feeling. Perhaps the employee enjoyed receiving massages when able to get one, but he was telling her about *not* being able to get one. Elizabeth did not specify how many other people, if any, were experiencing some inconvenience with accessing the program. According to Argyris and Schön (1992):

*We tend to adopt strategies to avoid perceiving that data do not fit, that behavioral reality is progressively diverging from one's theory of it that one's theory is not testing out. . . . The repertoire of devices by which we try to protect our theories-in-use from dilemmas displays great imagination (p. 32).*

Elizabeth did not seem acutely aware of the potentially frustrating effect the massage program could have on people. Her theory-in-use was that employees using massage relaxed, and were happy and productive. The data before her demonstrated that the massage program could lead to employees becoming dissatisfied, annoyed, and unproductive. Her perception was that because it was fully booked out people must have been feeling satisfied with the program. An evaluation of the program may have revealed any number of unfavourable aspects about the program. The potential for incongruence in this scenario was high.

### **Theories-of-action: Attracting and Retaining Staff**

Elizabeth had identified a number of governing variables that she believed were important, including attracting and retaining good staff, improving psychological states (for example, keeping people happy), and injury management. These markers seemed important to her and,

based on the interview, were important business outcomes for the organisation. People may have frequented the massage program with enthusiasm, but that did not necessarily equate to any positive business outcomes for the organisation. The reality may have been that massage did contribute towards the desired business outcomes for the organisation, but with no evaluation of the program, there was nothing to prove or disprove these concepts. Elizabeth explained that the organisation had undertaken workplace culture surveys, but these were not designed to evaluate massage.

The workplace survey apparently provided Elizabeth and the management team sufficient data to speculate on the value of the program and continue their workplace practices. Evaluating the workplace every second year possibly provided opportunities for the managers to implement various strategies within the workplace, by allowing the processes to bed-down before surveying the results. Such a lag-time between implementation and evaluation presents both advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages may have included allowing the program to become fully established within the organisation before assessing its values. A disadvantage of the two-year timeframe may have been that if the program was not working then it had been in place for a significant period. An evaluation of the program conducted relatively soon after its implementation may have provided the organisation's management team with a more accurate and specific picture than a culture survey conducted once every two years. In this way, management might have been able to maximise the benefits (and possibly reduce costs) by identifying (and dealing with) any negative issues early.

By her observation, Elizabeth stated that it was difficult to speculate about the value of the program in terms of attracting and retaining staff. She simply highlighted her personal theory that it provided an advantage over other organisations. Both Matthew and Elizabeth had suggested that offering programs to potential employees was an added bonus in attracting and retaining the best staff. Elizabeth said, "I think" in relation to attracting graduates, so she had not tested her ideas. For example, by using the testability concepts described by Argyris and Schön (1992), *if* massage programs were in place, *then* the company would have the competitive edge. She had apparently not tested the basis for her reasoning that massage programs provided a competitive edge to her business. Elizabeth may have found that graduates did not use the massage program. Another test could have been *if* the company implemented massage programs *then* newly hired graduates would actively access massages.

### **Theories-of-action: Morale**

Argyris and Schön (1992) explained that professionals' attitudes affect their behaviours in the workplace. Elizabeth stressed that she believed employees would be *upset* if the management team cancelled the massage program. She had demonstrated throughout the interview that she was generally aware of people's situations and feelings. Her attitude seemed to be that of a person who cared about people's feelings. She would be unlikely to initiate anything in the organisation that might unnecessarily upset people. The governing variable for Elizabeth appeared to be people's happiness in the workplace, and this influenced her behaviour.

### **Theories-of-action: Disadvantages**

There were internal inconsistencies in her perceptions about the program. She supported the program because people *loved* it, yet described a number of instances where the massage program could potentially have disrupted the morale of the organisation. She mentioned cultural and personal responses to the massage program, which had not been positive, but she appeared to overlook or put a positive slant on them. Her own theory-in-action often seemed clear during the interview. She personally enjoyed the massage program; she spoke about the program outside of her workplace, and she appeared to interpret somebody's irritation about the program as a positive.

Argyris and Schön stated, "the degree of congruence varies over time. . . if one helps create situations in which others can be congruent, his own congruence is supported" (p. 23).

Elizabeth supported the massage program for staff where they could receive treatments to gain physical and psychological benefits, but she also described a staff member who was becoming frustrated. If this situation affected more people, with an outcome that growing numbers of employees became dissatisfied with the program, then the resulting uneasiness may have triggered a change in her theories. The incongruence, once "discovered [can] provide a stimulus for change" (Argyris & Schön, 1992, p. 24).

### **Odette: The Odd One Out**

The following story is a single case study. Odette's views were in many ways unique when compared with the other managers. Her story is presented to highlight the contrasts between Odette's story and those of 'Elizabeth' and 'Matthew'. Her experiences were revealing in that she raised issues which did not emerge during the other interviews. Odette focused on a

number of dilemmas she perceived about the program as well as disadvantages that she had experienced. She was not as supportive of the program as any other of the interviewees had been, but she raised some pertinent and interesting issues, which have been presented in the following section.

Odette was a young manager who was new to her supervisory role in the organisation. Prior to holding her current position, she had been one of the workers. Along with her promotion, she inherited the existing massage program. Subsequent to progressing to the new role, she decided that the program was too costly and made moves to scrap it. She had considered options of alternatives to massage and the possibility of ending the program. Odette shared her thinking:

*I'm responsible for all the money that goes through, and I have to sign up for everything, and the general manager's always wanting us to come up with cost savings and keeping costs down and all those kinds of things. I'm conscious that the massage costs \$400 or so, every three weeks. I could get rid of it and save \$400 every three weeks. That's easy savings. Then I think that in this industry that we're in, for the typists that's what they do all day. They have high physical stress levels because they're just tapping away. I know the offices here, and the interstate offices, have massage programs. So, I think it is one of those things that has generally been accepted over the years as a positive.*

Some of Odette's concerns stemmed from an apparent sense of inequity in the workplace and her personal experiences. The program used by a small component of her workforce, which clearly influenced her thinking. She continued:

*Only a handful of people utilise the massage, because not everybody likes it, and not everybody wants one at work. Like for me personally, I don't want to get a massage at work. Not that it's uncomfortable, but it's just not for me. I don't feel relaxed enough to be getting undressed and having a massage at work, having a half-hour massage and then coming back. I end up feeling a bit like a zombie, and for me, it just breaks up my day. I just want to go home after that because I'm all like zonked out. So, when I took on my role, I was looking at the fact that it's not a perk that everybody can be a part of. I did a little survey on the people who got them, how much they enjoyed it, and what they got out of it. I wanted to know if it was something they would miss. I also spoke to the people who didn't get a massage, to see whether they would want it taken away and replaced with a different staff benefit. I thought about utilising some of the money but putting it towards a benefit that more people could enjoy.*

Perhaps Odette's managerial inexperience contributed to her uncertainty about the massage program. Argyris and Schön (1992) stated, "dilemmas may be created suddenly, as conditions

shift in the behavioral world, or they may emerge gradually through the cycles of interaction” (p. 32). Her theories-of-action seemed unclear, possibly because she was relatively new to management. Odette had moved to the role of managing people who had previously been her peers. This situation had shifted her behavioural conditions in that she had previously been a subordinate, and she now confronted the need to understand this area as a manager.

It is possible (given this initial self-description) that Odette’s personal and espoused theories may have included: (a) managers need to reduce organisational expenditure; (b) managers control the workplace environment (for example, health and safety, morale); (c) employees deserve equity in the workplace, and; (d) massage makes me (and probably many others) sleepy and unproductive.

Applying these theories into a theory-in-use context meant that she saw a quick and easy opportunity to reduce the organisation’s budget. Ending the massage program would have been an efficient way to save the business money but, by cancelling the program, she faced several dilemmas. Odette’s difficulties included: (a) the massage was costly; (b) her personal experience had been that she felt like a “zombie” after the massage; (c) few people used the program; (d) the work for the typists was tedious and physically demanding; (e) the massage was the only perk available to staff, and; (f) how could she better spend the budget.

According to Argyris and Schön (1992):

*All dilemmas share certain characteristics: there is conflict between some element of the prevailing theory-in-use and some criterion applicable to the theory. The protagonist experiences this conflict as a central one- that is, the values he [or she] places on the elements of theory-in-use and the criterion are central rather than peripheral; in the cycle of interactions between theory-in-use and behavioral world, the conflict gets progressively worse (p. 32).*

The prospect of getting rid of the program was unpopular with staff (even with the staff who did not use the program). She recognised that she was managing an area where people enjoyed few benefits and stated that massage was the only “perk” offered to staff. Nevertheless, Odette described that despite the stress people experienced in the working environment, she had considered removing a well-received and thoroughly entrenched stress-relief program from her staff.

Perhaps the answer was in her personal experiences. Odette had been one of the workers within the organisation prior to her promotion. Her own experiences of the program did not sound particularly positive. She did not like the necessity of taking her clothes off at work and felt “like a zombie” after the massage. Her interview revealed a complex web between her experiences prior to her promotion and then in her new role. When she spoke she seemed to oscillate between describing her experiences as a worker and then at other times as the manager. She explained the disruption to productivity in the workplace due to the massage:

*I think there's an effect on productivity both ways I suppose. On the day, it's very disruptive to the productivity of the office in a number of ways. The massage takes everybody out of the production for half an hour. So, as soon as one person's out they come back and tag the next person. Because of the way the office runs, they end up playing catch up the entire day. As soon as one person goes out to get their massage, their work gets behind. They come back, and okay they catch up a bit, but then someone else is out and that makes them fall behind.*

In her time working on the floor, Odette would have been one of those employees supporting the workloads of the people receiving the massage. Her experiences placed her in a difficult position. She had explained her perceived understanding of the musculoskeletal benefits people gained after receiving massages. Based on her experiences from her time as a worker, perhaps she held residual concerns about the extra workload employees had to carry because of the flow-on effects of the massage program. As a manager, she may have been empathising with the silent workers who may have been feeling the same as she had at the time. Her new role provided an opportunity to reconsider the effectiveness of the massage program in terms of productivity and, perhaps, within the context of her previous personal experiences. She seemed to have contemplated the options about the program and shared:

*I'd have to say the advantages do just outweigh the disadvantages. I mean the only reason I wouldn't scrap it would be the backlash that would come from the staff if I did. They would get upset. There is something to be said about the effects that it has on people psychologically. They know the company is doing something for them and that they get that benefit just by working here. I think that's a positive. Of course, I do think it helps physically, especially with some of the older people that wouldn't go and get their own massage. Some have said, “you know, before this came on board, I just felt so much worse, and now it's really good.” I think that might help with longevity and being able to work, you know, longer in the company.*

Her reasoning processes in her conversation continued. As a manager, she appeared to want to support the staff, reduce their musculoskeletal discomfort, and assist with staff retention. She talked of the negative effect on productivity, but also spoke of retention and about the

positive effects that the massage had on morale. Increased morale and reduced physical discomfort would potentially positively affect productivity, perhaps not on the actual day of the massages, but maybe thereafter. She continued:

*Well, the disadvantages of the program affect me I suppose, more so than to the actual people themselves. I guess I can see those problems because I can see the overall picture. I think the main thing, as I said before, is the disruption and the effects on the daily productivity. I don't think there's any resentment from the people who don't get massages. Their responses about the program were that they are generally impartial. If they were up in arms about it, I would have found out when I asked everyone personally what they thought about it. So, that was a good thing that people who don't get massages aren't upset. That's more of a personal choice, and they think, "Well I don't want it; it's not for me, but everyone else shouldn't miss out." Apart from that, I think the main issues for me are the costs associated with the program and the disruption and distraction of it all.*

Despite her dislike for aspects of the massage program, there were some areas, which showed close parallels between her and Elizabeth. Odette was able to cite examples of how the massage program had affected individuals since she was conscious of employees' circumstances. She assessed the value of the program and had decided, "it didn't end up to be a good idea to get rid of the massage, because it would have created more of an upset than a gain".

Just like Elizabeth, she was concerned with her staffs' feelings. They would have become *upset* if she had cancelled the program. Although her evaluation was that the program was disruptive, negatively affected productivity, and that only a small number of people used the program, she had not cancelled the program because she had not wanted to *upset* people. Her consideration for the people seemed to outweigh her concern for the business outcomes. Furthermore, perhaps she had some sense that upsetting people could result in significant negative business outcomes. She expressed her apprehensions:

*But at the moment, I'm always reluctant to upset everyone, or upset you know, fifteen or so people. It's been in place for such a long time; it's not just something that's happened overnight, so to take it away would upset people.*

Perhaps Odette just wanted people to like her. She had given many reasons why she did not value the program, but she was not prepared to cut it out of the workplace. She had stated that from her viewpoint, the program had presented many disadvantages, but regardless, she



allowed it to remain in the organisation. Despite their different opinions about the massage program, Elizabeth and Odette both valued people's feelings and were reluctant to upset people.

### **Study 1 General Discussion**

The results of Study 1 demonstrated that corporate drivers such as corporate culture, productivity, and attracting and retaining staff were the dominant motivators for managers overseeing massage programs. Argyris and Schön (1992) stated, "theories of action exist as espoused theories and as theories-in-use, which govern actual behavior" (p. 29). The results of Study 1 demonstrated that for each manager their actions, espoused theories, and theories-of-action fit within Argyris and Schön's framework of theories-of-action.

The managers' used the massage programs in an attempt to achieve any number of goals, including complying with occupational health and safety laws, positively influencing corporate culture, maximising productivity, and attracting and retaining staff. Consider the statement made by one of the male managers where he defined a number of corporate goals:

*By providing workplace massage, we were trying to achieve a couple of things while trying to get a win-win, in terms of a morale-lifting program and something of benefit to the employee, while at the same time, improve productivity and staff performance.*

Argyris and Schön (1992) explained that individuals adopt a process of defining the goals and trying to achieve them, maximizing winning and minimising losing, and minimise generating or expressing negative feelings all while appearing rational. In this statement, the manager presented a nice example of how managers can moderate their language and behaviours to ensure congruence with their personal theories and theories-of-action. He clearly defined the goals of improved productivity and performance, and linked these directly to the implementation of a massage program as a strategy to achieve those defined goals. He stressed the importance of winning suggesting that if there is a "win-win" then nobody loses, and further avoided generating or expressing negative feelings by using positive language that included words such as "win-win. . . morale-lifting. . . benefit. . . improved productivity."

Even though Odette was the odd one out, she too moderated her language and behaviours consistent with Argyris and Schön's framework. Odette found the massage program

disruptive in the workplace, and it irritated her for a number of reasons. She confided her annoyances about the program:

*I wonder if I can afford to have the massage program in place because what happens, people disappear for half an hour. It irritates me more because I'll be looking for somebody and, for example, if the receptionist isn't there for half an hour because she's off having a massage it leaves the phones ringing unanswered. I don't know where she is or what's going on. Has she gone to lunch? Even though you'd think it would be obvious to figure out what's going on because she's having a massage. You can't knock on the door while people are getting their massages and ask who's in there because they're busy. So somebody else ends up answering the phone. When you need to be able to speak to people and the one person you want to speak to is actually in there getting a massage, it is annoying. It's a bit irritating on the massage day because it disrupts productivity. It hampers certain lines of communication, because you've got to wait until they've finished their massage even if you really need to speak to somebody.*

Despite Odette having the authority to cancel the program, she chose not to do so. Her personal belief system was that massage was disruptive and negatively affected productivity. Yet in an effort to be rational, Odette justified the program to herself. Throughout her interview, she did not disguise her dilemmas with the massage program, yet she managed to align her personal theories and her theories-in-practice so that they ceased to be incongruent. Odette explained that:

*Mmm, I suppose I'd have to say the advantages do just outweigh, or else. I mean the only reason I wouldn't scrap it would be probably, the backlash that would come from the staff. The staff would be upset.*

Maybe Odette made the situation acceptable to herself by working to avoid the expected backlash against her if she chose to cancel the program, arguing that the people who had the massage must have gained a benefit along with the organisation. She appeared to suppress her own negative feelings by justifying the value of the program and allowing the program to continue. Odette's actions possibly showed that she had become, as Argyris and Schön (1992) presaged, "fearful of being vulnerable. . . [and had] defensive interpersonal and group relationship[s]" (p. 68). The anticipated backlash may have been short-lived, with improved productivity gains, but Odette's behaviour meant that she did not evaluate the program and allowed her vulnerability to guide her actions.

## **Program Evaluation**

The findings from this study demonstrated that the managers who were interviewed did not formally evaluate their massage programs. The managers' rationales for choosing to not evaluate their programs formally were that the staff extensively used the programs (indirect sign of success) and that the anecdotal feedback from staff was good. The managers did not seem to need any further validation about the program than on-going patronage and staff feedback.

However, the lack of formal program evaluation may be problematic on a few levels. First, such programs are expensive to operate, even the user-pay arrangements (because employees not attending to their duties are a cost to the organisation). Second, during tight economic times, in organisations where the company pays for the massages, managers may feel pressure to terminate programs due to the expense. Also, a reasonable formal evaluation would have added extra costs, an added tension for organisations trying to reduce or minimise expenditure. If the program had been successfully contributing to productivity and morale of employees during buoyant times, then during tight economic periods (when people start to worry about job security) such programs might prove useful for maintaining productivity and morale. The largely informal program evaluation (patronage and staff feedback) meant that organisations may not have known whether the outcomes from such programs are beneficial, neutral, or possibly detrimental to company goals (for example, productivity, being seen as an employer of choice, staff retention, lower absenteeism).

## **Male Manager, Female Manager**

Van Emmerik, Euwema, and Wendt (2008) stated that "leadership behaviours originate in the socialisation processes, whereby individuals learn to conform to societal expectations about their gender role" (p. 299). The findings from Study 1 indicated that gender influenced the attitudes and responses of managers about workplace massage. Although exploring gender influences on managerial styles was not part of the research question or design, the findings returned such strong differences between the male and female managers that it is worthy of acknowledgement and discussion. Being male or female certainly appeared to affect aspects of the managers' perceptions about the program, and in this regard, the significance of gender becomes relevant.

The men who made up 'Matthew' used *we*, rather than *I*, statements. Their language possibly suggested that *we* described the collective management team within the organisation. None of them said, '*I care*'. Perhaps, *we* statements represented their feelings of being team players and having a shared sense of corporate responsibility. Unlike the female managers, and this included Odette, they did not cite individual cases or speak about specific employees' situations. Although the male managers may have been concerned about their employees' feelings, they did not overtly talk about their workers' emotional states. The female managers used far more emotive language than their male counterparts had done. Not one male manager in Study 1 used the word *upset*.

According to Burke and Collins (2001), there has been an on-going debate about whether gender affects management styles. During the 1990s, the dominant view emerging from the management literature was that gender made no difference to leadership. Subsequent to this, Burke and Collins undertook a study using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MFLQ; Bass & Avolio, 1990 ) of 1,031 accounting managers. The results of this study showed that female managers' self-reported leadership styles:

*Differ[ed] somewhat from the management styles emphasized by male accountants. Small but significant, gender differences were found in the self-ratings of all three management styles: transformational, contingent reward, and management-by-exception. Female managers are more likely than male managers to report practicing transformational behaviour, the most effective leadership style (p. 250).*

Burke and Collins (2001) explained, "transformational leaders develop positive relationships with subordinates in order to strengthen employee and organizational performance" (p. 245). Furthermore, Linstead et al., (2005) stated that:

*Women appear to harbour a different more relational vision of the future, and their methods contain elements of a more socially oriented nature, but the effects of the simple pragmatism of the client relationship and the persistence of patriarchal cultures in organizations mean that they still work in constrained ways (p. 545).*

In their descriptions of their organisations, the female managers demonstrated, in several ways, perceptions of patriarchal systems within their workplaces. Their language was constrained, and they appeared to be quick to acknowledge the input of others into the program, such as that the male CEO had initiated the massage program. Linstead et al. (2005)

stated that “mainstream management theory is actually more accurately labelled ‘malestream’” (p. 564), and the female managers said little during their interviews to dispel this view.

### **Corporation versus Cooperation**

The distinction between the male and female managers was in their apparent differences in governing variables. For men, the main driver seemed to be productivity. Their priorities appeared to be directed at ensuring their organisations generated the correct numbers and qualities of outputs within specified budgets. The word *productivity* appeared repeatedly through their interviews, which may have reflected their personal theories about organisational priorities and outcomes. If the male managers had perceived that the massage programs were negatively affecting their productivity outcomes, then their attitudes towards the program, most likely, would have been markedly different to the responses given.

In her study, Nicolaou-Smokoviti (2004) found that male managers were more competitive and directive than female managers, but women were more likely to have a democratic leadership style than men. The males in this study seemed to demonstrate traits of competitiveness, particularly when speaking of *doing better than other organisations in retention*, and that their *staff bragged* about the availability of massage in their organisations. Odette, however, had (democratically) decided not to cancel the massage program because it would have been an unpopular decision. Likewise, Linstead et al. (2005) stated that women are more likely than men to be democratic and participative. In the case of the other female managers, their enthusiasm about using the massage program was, perhaps, a sign of willingness to participate.

Female managers spoke sparingly of productivity, and their interviews suggested that making people feel good, both psychologically and physically, may have been a source of personal motivation for them. Their primary concern seemed linked to the workers’ feelings and ensuring that their employees were happy. Their underlying assumptions might have been that happy, healthy employees were productive. Therefore, the provision of workplace massage was an advantage if it made everybody *feel* better. Female managers seemed to speak in a more nurturing way than their male counterparts did. Odette did not appear to overly value workplace massage, but she was still concerned about the potential for upsetting

her staff if she ended the program. Her belief that staff would react adversely to the removal of the program strongly influenced her decision to allow it to continue. She came to this decision even though workplace massages caused her irritation. For Odette, on balance, the advantages outweighed the disadvantages, and this decision seemed to be made largely on how she thought removing the program would affect people's *feelings*. Alternatively, she could have made the decision based on productivity targets. Even though she expressed a view that the massage did (in some ways) negatively affect productivity, she was more interested in keeping harmony in the workplace.

Linstead et al. (2005) noted that females tended to adopt a people approach rather than a systems approach, and to show local connectedness or social awareness in their workplaces. The female managers, including Odette, with their abilities to talk readily and confidently about individuals and their situations, and their knowledge of the individuals working for them, appeared to demonstrate their underlying concerns about their employees.

### **Answers to the General Research Questions**

In response to the research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, the motivations and rationales for managers implementing workplace massage had two overarching themes, namely, maximising productivity in the workplace and improving the corporate culture.

Managers believed that by providing workplace massage, employees had the opportunity to support their health through the program with the implicit premise that happy and healthy employees are more likely to be productive and engaged. Some of the advantages cited were: (a) attracting and retaining the best staff; (b) being seen to be an employer of choice; (c) reducing compensation costs; (d) reducing the musculoskeletal discomfort of employees; and (e) contributing to the positive culture of the organisation. They indicated that by supporting employees in the workplace the organisation was likely to achieve productivity outcomes and improved corporate culture. The overall response from managers was that the advantages of their massage programs outweighed the disadvantages and of note was that most managers interviewed did not see any disadvantages.

Managers were questioned about the factors that they perceived as important when evaluating the effectiveness of the program. Universally, these programs were not evaluated and

therefore the managers had not given much thought to key measures of success. As stated earlier, managers generally held a view that patronage of the program equated to its perceived success, and given the current speculative nature of massage programs in the workplace, perhaps this measure is valuable in itself. Nevertheless, based on the motivations driving the implementation of the programs, it could be asserted that the measures would include staff engagement and productivity outcomes.

### **Conclusion to Study 1**

When recruiting for Study 1, gender had not been a driver for the research; the final numbers for male and female managers was unplanned. However, the results of Study 1 have indicated a strong gender focus based on the outcomes of the interviews, which was not part of the original conceptualisation. As a consequence, for Study 2, the influence of gender was considered during the analysis of the data.

Argyris and Schön (1992) stated that “all behavior is shaped so as to keep all variables within an acceptable range” (p. 15). The managers interviewed for Study 1, through their actions, behaviours and espoused theories showed that they strove to keep those variables within an acceptable range. They supported the massage program because they perceived that it achieved (or at least did not interfere with) a number of outcomes such as complying with occupational health and safety laws, enhancing corporate culture, and contributing towards improved productivity. Interestingly, interviews with all the managers seemed to fit within Argyris and Schön’s framework of theories-of-action, which suggests that the managers espoused theories that complied with the corporate expectations and consequently acted to align their tacit theories with these expressions.

Study 1 raises further questions that are beyond the scope of this thesis to explore. Based on the advantages cited by managers, perhaps future researchers may consider how to measure the effectiveness of massage programs, or workplace wellbeing programs more generally, using the areas identified by the managers in this study.

Chapter 5 explores the perceptions of workplace massage from the perspectives of employees. As with Chapter 4, the theories of Argyris and Schön (1992) are used as the primary lens through which the data is understood.

## **Chapter 5: Study 2 – Employees’ Perceptions of Workplace Massage**

### **Introduction**

As reported in the literature review, previous researchers have focused on quantitative methods, which included self-report questionnaires and physiological measures, to examine the effects of massage in the workplace. Whilst studies where researchers use physiological variables, such as blood pressure and heart rate, appear to be relatively logical because the results provide direct quantitative health-related evidence of the effects of massage, studies using quantitative measures such as standardised self-report questionnaires provide less direct information. Self-reporting measures built upon quantitative feedback scales do not easily present opportunities for participants to share their personal reasons for receiving massage, or let them describe the effects of their massage experiences. Considering the intimate nature of massage therapy, it is perhaps surprising that there are relatively few qualitative studies that have focused on the stories of employees, or aspects of massage that the recipients themselves feel are important.

### **Background and aims of Study 2**

Although massage programs may benefit individuals either physically and psychologically (Shulman & Jones, 1996; Šiško et al., 2011), the organisational gains of such studies remain unknown. Study 2 fills the current gap in the literature by allowing massage recipients to not only provide their perspectives of the personal benefits of massage programs, but to gain an understanding from their personal perspectives of how they believed that the provision of such services affected the organisation.

### **Research Questions for Study 2**

As described in earlier chapters, the central research question for the overall study was “what are the advantages and disadvantages of massage programs conducted in the workplace?” To enable a systematic data collection and analysis approach in Study 2, however, a series of sub-questions central to this study were posed. These questions were developed with the intention of exploring the perceptions of the employees who use workplace massage. The guiding questions were:

1. What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of workplace massage for individual employees?



2. How do employees perceive that massage affects work performance and productivity for themselves and others?
3. What are the perceived physical and psychological benefits of workplace massage, within the job setting and in everyday life?
4. How do the results of Study 2 fit (or not fit) within the framework of theories-of-action (Argyris & Schön, 1992)?

## **Methodology**

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study in the belief that they would provide the framework to gain a richer understanding of the participants' responses to the research questions. Employees were interviewed in their workplaces and each interview was recorded. Eighteen people participated in Study 2 (six males and twelve females). Copies of all material provided to Study 2 participants and the interview guide used to interview employees are appended (See Appendices B, D, E, F, H).

The criteria for inclusion in this study were that participants were employees, and they had received at least one massage at work within the four-month period prior to the time of the interview. Participants in Study 2 came from a range of workplaces, including two Australian government departments, a small family-run engineering business, a large multinational organisation, a privately operated court recording company, and a Victorian insurance company.

## **Background to analysis and findings**

In Study 2, after performing a thematic analysis on the interview data, Argyris and Schön's (1992) theories-of-action were used to understand participants' stories. A picture emerged from the analysis of the participants' interviews about the psychological and physical benefits that employees gained by having massages at work (participants described few disadvantages).

Table 5.1 provides brief overviews and descriptions of each general dimension of the interviews. These sections present ideas expressed by employees that were representative of most all massage recipients interviewed. Unlike the managers in Study 1, few differences between the themes and ideas expressed by males and females emerged. Accordingly, the

findings and discussion are based on the themes that arose from Study 2 and are representative of the group of participants as a whole, rather than as aggregate stories or gender-specific tales.

Table 5.1: Workplace Massage Themes from Employees' Perspectives

First Order Themes	Higher Order Themes	General Dimensions
Relaxation	Indulgence	Psychological
Reward		
Pamper		
Sense of relief after massage	Mood	
Rejuvenation		
Reduced stress		
Morale		
Improved perception of employer and employee	Perceptions of workplace and employer	
Workplace massage does not have a cumulative effect	Expectations	
Employee perceives that it is a management responsibility to provide access to OHS facilities		
Future anticipated use of the program		
Increased mobility	Musculoskeletal benefits	Physical
Managing injuries		
Pain reduction		
Program used in response to physical discomfort		
Tension	Convenience	
Getting massage at work is convenient	Disadvantages	
Location of program - office space / ambience / privacy	Management Influences	
Organisational policies influence uptake of the program		

### General Dimension 1: Psychological

General Dimension 1 contained four higher order themes (Table 5.1) relating to how massages made people feel about themselves, about their general health and wellbeing, and about their employers. Participants also expressed their overall expectations and limitations of massages on their health and wellbeing.

Although participants often described massage as an indulgence, individuals perceived that massage positively affected their moods. Interviewees partly attributed the mood-lifting

effects as a result of being proactively engaged in improving their general wellbeing, which in turn made them feel better both psychologically (for example, improved mood) and physically (for example, reduced pain and discomfort). Participants placed particular emphasis on the psychological benefits they experienced from massage.

Many respondents described how having access to workplace massage improved their opinions of their employers. Participants perceived (and held expectations), however, that their employers, in some way, had a responsibility to support employees' efforts in maintaining their health. Such statements suggested theories-of-action (Argyris & Schön, 1992), perhaps underpinned by Victoria's overt (and well-advertised) occupational health and safety laws.

### **General Dimension 2: Physical**

General Dimension 2 had one higher order theme, which is termed *musculoskeletal benefits*. Massage therapy is a complementary therapy aiming to improve musculoskeletal symptoms such as pain, range of motion, and injury management (Back, Tam, Lee, & Haraldsson, 2009; Bost & Wallis, 2006; Haraldsson et al., 2006). Participants in Study 2 confirmed that in their experiences, workplace massages led to improvements in nagging physical symptoms, such as reduced pain and discomfort, improved range of motion and decreased muscular tension. Such accounts paralleled many of the findings reported in the literature about the outcomes of massage.

### **General Dimension 3: Situational**

General Dimension 3 contained three higher order themes, which related to the disadvantages and convenience of massage and the influences that managers have over the programs. One appeal of using workplace massage was its convenience, but some participants reported associated disadvantages with the services. These issues included privacy concerns with having massages at work, and the relevance of ambience within office settings.

Some participants suggested that organisational policies and attitudes of the management teams in workplaces influenced the uptake of massage programs (both positively and negatively). People reported that when they knew that the managers themselves used or supported the programs, they felt comfortable about using the services.

## **Presentation style of the findings**

The following sections are presented using the general dimension followed by the respective higher order themes. Each of the higher order themes is explored using direct quotes from participants with relevant explanation and context to those quotes. Following those sections is analysis of the of each higher order theme using the theories of Argyris and Schön (1974, 1992, 1996) as the framework for analysing and understanding the data and findings. Following the analysis section is a general discussion and conclusion to the chapter.

## **Psychological Factors**

During the interviews, participants indicated that they were busy with life and work commitments, and that perhaps there was not much spare time for personal reflection. Employees did not seem to have much *me time* in their worlds. They did not indicate that this was necessarily a bad thing, nor did they seem frustrated, angry, or disappointed by their situations. They reported objectively about how their lives were for them. Participants shared their experiences about how receiving massages were part of balancing their work and individual responsibilities. Recipients viewed massage (for the most part) as a pleasurable activity with added psychophysiological benefits.

## ***Indulgence***

Employees spoke about massage as an indulgence that they used to pamper, relax, and reward themselves. Taking the time to have a massage at work gave employees some time out. One of the participants matter-of-factly described aspects of his life as being busy in many ways, and taking time out of his hectic schedule to get a massage seemed to afford him a moment for introspection. He explained some his reasons for participating in the massage program:

*Two reasons really. Firstly, for me personally, I think being kind of late you know, forties, male, parent, husband, breadwinner, and all that sort of stuff, I think one of the observations of my life over time is that it's less and less about me, and more and more about being a parent, husband, breadwinner, et cetera. So, it's just an opportunity to indulge myself I suppose, which is something I've lost the knack of over time. So, I find it relaxing, I just like being able to take a break out of my own space and you know, it also helps... there's an emotional, mental benefit but also there's the physical benefit of just being relaxed and being pampered. From time to time, I have specific things that need work on, but more often than not, it's just to take away any tension and whatever, so there's a kind of emotional and physical benefit.*

Through his words, this employee painted a picture of how, over time, his responsibilities had been ever-increasing. Along with those added responsibilities, he seemed to have lost certain things in his life, because it was *less and less* about him. He had a responsible job (he was in a managerial position), and, in his private life, he had many obligations. By seizing the opportunity to have a massage at work, he was taking the time to do something just for himself, away from his other responsibilities; this was a moment to *indulge* himself. Another participant expressed similar sentiments about how having a massage provided him with a small indulgence. He stated:

*You know, growing up, you go from sort of 100% self-indulgence to, it feels like, almost zero self-indulgence. And, just to be able to do something that's kind of pampering yourself, physically and emotionally, is not a bad thing.*

Perhaps during the massage session, participants suspended, just for a moment in time, being someone's partner, parent, manager, or staff member. When an employee received a massage, he or she became the most important individual in the world. During this time, it seemed that they may have felt they were not responsible for providing for anybody or anything, not their partners, children, staff members, or employers. Instead, the massage therapists provided for the recipients. The therapists may have nurtured, pampered, and in some way nourished people's physical and emotional wellbeing, allowing them to relax and reinvigorate.

Another participant described how his emotional and spiritual self was, perhaps, as important as his physical being. He described how massage gave him time away from everything for some mental space, by stating:

*On a spiritual level, just having almost like some meditation space, because you know the phone is not going to ring; no one's going to talk to you. I mean, a lot of what we do involves conversation, either listening or talking. So, having an hour where you are almost ring-fenced from never having, you can choose not to communicate for a whole hour.*

This participant's situation meant that his demanding life roles seemed to leave him little personal time. His responsibilities for others, such as his staff and his employer, indicated that his life was largely about providing for, or contributing to, other people's needs. Another participant echoed his words:

*I feel as though I, as a person, have been given some attention, and I feel as though I, as a person, have been made important. I feel you lose your identity here in this organisation. As long as you do everything that you're supposed to do, it doesn't matter, but there's no person attached.*

Apparently, as long as this person was producing adequately towards business outcomes, he felt that he had little, if any, individuality within the organisation. Massage sessions seemed to give some people a place to suspend their realities, to meditate, be pampered, and to be attended to as individuals.

During their massages, people could temporarily disengage from their responsibilities if they chose. Employees could *choose* to leave their phones behind (and all that phones signify), while being pampered and indulged. Massage time maybe helped people feel that they were back in control of their own life. They could choose whether to speak, whether to listen, or whether to take their phones with them during their sessions. Massage recipients could also choose what type of massage to receive. Massage time seemed to empower employees by providing them with opportunities for choices. Some participants reported that they used this time to switch off emotionally and psychologically. One person referred to powering down during his massage and stated:

*It's just like an opportunity to switch off, power down, and come back.*

His massage time gave him an opportunity, perhaps a rare one, to relax in a life normally filled with various responsibilities. He could go into the massage room and *switch off*, and separate himself from all of his work issues for a brief time. By *powering off*, he could recharge his emotional batteries to *come back*, refreshed. Several participants said that massage sessions provided them time to relax. As one participant succinctly put it:

*After the massage I feel, I mean relaxed.*

Participants described how massages were important to how they felt, both psychologically and physically. Despite massage being a physical therapy, the experiences participants described focussed often on how massages made them feel relaxed, both emotionally and physically. Another participant described the relaxing effect of massage:

*There's a psychological element for me in terms of it's something that makes me feel relaxed mentally as well and physically.*

Massages provided people with a luxury that they used to relax and reward themselves. Although many participants described the therapeutic aspects of massage, others felt that massage represented more than just a health treatment. Recipients spoke about the importance of relaxation. Massage time appeared to allow individuals to recharge, and to cope with their worlds. People seemed to indicate the opportunity to relax (for example, power down) supported them in functioning well. Employees also described using massage as a form of reward. As one person put it:

*I can go and reward myself and have a massage.*

Participants were clear about the importance of relaxation to them. Their massage sessions provided people with opportunities for time out from busy schedules. This interval provided employees a period to reflect and to put some space between them and their responsibilities. One participant saw her sessions as a chance to reconnect to herself. She described how she used the time for introspection, and for living in the moment. Her massages left her feeling relaxed, perhaps letting her put the demands of her life into perspective. Maybe being relaxed allowed her to cope with her life circumstances without becoming overwhelmed, or too tense. She confided:

*The massage just allows me for half an hour to take, or if I need it longer, to not even think about what's happening out there but to be totally inward and just enjoy the mood as it's being done. It allows my mind then when I get off the table, and reconnect myself to be totally relaxed in a certain way so that when I go back into what I am doing, it doesn't matter. It's fine, everything is really good.*

Massages provided people with time out to relax, reflect, and enjoy. People viewed massage as a luxury or reward, and a moment to enjoy being pampered. Most participants interviewed expressed the importance of relaxation and how massage, in some part, helped them to achieve it.

## ***Mood***

Participants reported that massage had a mood-lifting effect, and gave them feelings of relaxation, rejuvenation, reduced stress, and increased morale. After their massage sessions, people described their sense of relief, both in terms of their physical and their psychological experiences. Participants made frequent references to their lifestyles when they talked about massage. People frequently inferred, and referred, to their active and hectic lives. One person explained how massage allowed her to cope with her *mad life*, and shared:

*Massage is something I do for myself, and it's very important. I'm going to do it 'cause then I can face the world again and come back to my mad life.*

As other participants reported, they enjoyed their massage sessions for more than the relief of musculoskeletal issues. Massages seemed to give people time to themselves, and they often implied that personal time was scarce. Their sessions allowed them to clear their minds, improve their moods, and assisted them in managing their busy lives. As another participant explained, even getting to the massage session could be a scurry:

*At the end of the day, you're probably rushing to get there, and then you just sigh just a big relief of, "ahhh" now I can be in someone else's hands and can, you know, pamper me, and I just lie here and yeah, feel good.*

As was apparently the case with most participants in this study, this employee probably had many demands in her life. She gave an account that created an image of an office worker rushing to complete work, hurrying to meet deadlines, racing around the workplace, and whisking out of the office at the end of the day to get to her massage. For her, the opportunity to be in someone else's hands warranted a sigh of relief. Her words highlighted the relationship between the physical and emotional components participants often described when discussing massages. Although massage was physical, it seemed to have a mood-lifting effect, and it provided her with a sense of relief and *feeling good*.

During the massage, participants could choose to abrogate all responsibilities, just lie down, and let their therapists nurture them. For the period of the massage, recipients had no cares, responsibilities, or worries. While lying there, they could temporarily escape reality and enter a different world, a world where their therapists were responsible for their physical and



psychological wellbeing. The massage therapist became the carer, the nurturer, and for a passing moment, somebody else who took control.

Another person used the metaphor of cleaning a whiteboard to explain how his massage left him feeling. He spoke of feeling refreshed after the massage, as though it somehow distanced him from his busy schedule. He defined his experience about the effects of massage:

*It just feels like, I just feel literally refreshed. It's like rubbing out everything that's on the whiteboard, and you just kind of, it just feels like you've had a break. It's not dissimilar coming to work on a Monday morning. You know, after a good weekend, you're kind of like back into it, but you know you feel like you've put some distance between when you were last at the desk.*

The metaphor of rubbing out the whiteboard seemed similar to the previous participant's description of her situation. This interviewee's mind was the whiteboard; busy, hectic, and crowded. Before his massage, perhaps his psyche was crowded and laden, but after his massage, he felt serene and calm, able again to face the demands of work. The massage put some space between him and work, allowing him to take stock.

Seemingly, massage sessions gave recipients opportunities to regroup their thoughts and mentally prepare to tackle their daily demands. People seemed to appreciate their massages as time to defer their responsibilities, just for a moment. This little bit of time and space apparently kept people able to deal with their private and professional business.

Often, people made close links between their physical and psychological states. When people experienced pain, it affected their mood. Getting massages helped them with their physical discomfort, and, in turn, they experienced improved mental states. Participants talked about how massages made them "feel." For example, they regularly used phrases such as, *feel better, feel good, feel refreshed, and feel rejuvenated*. Apparently, the way that massages made people *feel* was important. Relieving pain and discomfort appeared to result in improved mood.

One participant described how reducing pain improved the way she felt psychologically. She explained how she was able to think more clearly, suggesting that when her back was not causing her discomfort that she was better able to concentrate. She stated:

*Well, if my back's feeling better, I'm just thinking more clearly because I'm not concerned about the damage I could be doing to my back, so I just feel better mentally.*

Participants expressed that their physical states directly affected their moods. One person explained that improvements in his range of motion, and the physical sense of wellbeing afterwards, led him to feel “rejuvenated.” His language implied more than physical improvements, and he responded to his massages with feelings of reinvigoration, again reinforcing the idea that physical wellbeing led to improved mood states and psychological wellbeing. He stated:

*It takes away the tightness of the muscle, makes it feel a lot freer and you just feel rejuvenated because of it.*

The link seemed clear; feeling physically well was important for people’s psychological wellbeing. Interviewees felt emotionally well by addressing their musculoskeletal health. One person summed up his experiences of massage up by saying:

*I feel refreshed and rejuvenated and re-energised.*

Throughout their interviews, employees spoke about how massage alleviated stress. When asked what stress meant to them, employees’ interpretations seemed broadly to indicate where they experienced physical tension, psychological pressure, or a combination of both. One participant described stress as:

*Being overworked. Pressure to meet deadlines, that kind of thing.*

This interpretation did not seem to infer that the demands on this person exceeded his coping skills. Instead, he implied that he was functioning in an intensive work environment with a heavy workload. No participants described being unable to cope, or that their workload exceeded their coping abilities. Massage appeared to be a health care option available to employees, which they accessed to manage their physical and emotional wellbeing. People seemed to perceive that by managing their health they were better equipped to deal with their various pressures. Another explained that, for her, stress meant:

*Stress could be, I guess, my opinion of stress is psychological and physical, and they may be inter-related. But, I find that massage helps both psychologically and physically.*

Throughout many interviews, participants suggested that they experienced various pressures: from work, personal, or family-related stressors. Massage provided people with a way to manage proactively their psychophysical responses to such stressors. Employees appeared to relate relaxation to reduced feelings of stress, and an increased ability to focus. One employee described how massage took away her stress:

*I get massaged, and the stress is taken out of me for a short while. I can be totally relaxed in work time and then go and finish off my day and feel really good about it.*

When employees felt relaxed, with reduced stress levels, they reported being able to concentrate on their work. People used massage (in part) to manage their psychophysical responses to perceived stressors, and possibly improve their concentration. One employee spoke about his massages:

*The advantages would be as I mentioned before, reduction of stress levels, and I think perceived improvement in focus and energy levels.*

In one instance, an employee described stress as weighing her down. For this interviewee, her stress-response appeared to manifest physically. Her imagery was vivid; before her massage, she was carrying a heavy burden, but afterwards she was so light she “floated.” She shared her feelings:

*Oh, you can just feel the stress moving away from you, and it's as though the weight's been taken off you. In fact, you nearly float out of the room.*

Participants seemed to imply a strong causal relationship between the relaxation-inducing effects of massage and their perceived reduction of “stress.” Employees described how massage had mood-enhancing effects, and how it was useful for inducing relaxation and reducing their perceived stress levels. One participant used massage regularly to manage her stress levels, and balance her mood. She stated:

*It's just a regular, on-going maintenance thing for me that I enjoy. It helps me with stress levels, and just relaxation and feeling good.*

Having opportunities to experience massage at work provided participants with a window during the week where they could engage in an activity that was unrelated to their employment duties. One participant enjoyed the break, and stated:

*I have massage as a stress relief thing, and also it's a nice break in the week.*

Perhaps for employees, the massage sessions provided them with dual benefits, changes in their work schedule during the week, and means for them to manage stress. Possibly, the massage itself did not directly affect their stress levels. Instead, the break in routine may have contributed to any perceived reductions in stress levels. Regardless, people seemed to agree that massage helped them to relax.

Corporate massages appeared to influence the way that recipients approached their workplaces. Participants shared how they felt, going back to their workplaces, after their massages. There seemed widely held views that reduced pain, improved mood, and “feeling better” translated (at a minimum) to coping better with their work and other challenges. In only a few cases, employees perceived that workplace massages resulted in improved office morale and higher productivity.

In Study 1, one manager reported that massage “*lifts the heaviness out of the office,*” and one of the participants in Study 2 echoed that statement when she reported:

*Overall, I think productivity goes up. Well, for me, I'm a happier person after a massage, and when you work in an office environment, it just brings a little bit of happiness to the office.*

Perhaps this employee believed that being happier and having high morale in the office resulted in improved productivity. Massage made her happy, and she seemed to believe that happier people felt better about their workplaces; therefore, they possibly worked harder because morale was higher. She also revealed that access to workplace massages influenced how she felt about her employer, but this did not seem to be a generally held view. She explained:

*Well, I feel happy that my employer is thinking about looking after me.*

Another participant shared his thoughts about the value of massage. He enjoyed massage, and talked about how offering massage in the workplace may contribute towards promoting the benefits of it. He perceived such programs could positively affect morale, but discussed his ideas from a hypothetical viewpoint, rather than from his experiences or observations. He shared some of his beliefs:

*I hear of organisations that provide quick massages at your desk or in a chair or things like that. I know from time to time it's happened here at our call centre, but I think things like that would definitely improve morale and promote the benefits of massage.*

An employee shared her thoughts about the general feedback she had heard about the program from her colleagues. The people who used the program had done so on more than one occasion. She equated the engagement with massages as a positive indicator of its value, however confessed that not many people used the program. Upon reflection, she shared:

*It's all been positive. I think everyone that's used it has used it more than once, which indicates to me that it's been beneficial, 'cause obviously you wouldn't go back if you didn't think it did anything. There aren't a great deal of people who have used it in the organisation. There's probably a handful, but they have all been giving very positive feedback every single one of them so that's good.*

Even though the employees who used the program seemed to enjoy massage, the limited involvement with it probably meant that it was unlikely to have much effect on morale. Overall, morale did not seem to be a primary concern for employees when they discussed workplace massage. There appeared to be a widely held view among interviewees that massage provided them with significant mood-lifting effects.

### ***Perceptions of workplace and employer***

Having workplace massage programs may have affected participants' perceptions of their employers. They were interested in proactively looking after their own health and wellbeing, and their employers provided them with opportunities to access massage in the workplace, which allowed them to pursue health and wellbeing activities. The availability of workplace massages seemed to translate to multiple benefits for the employer, as well as for the employees. One participant confided the importance of the availability of massage as part of her work life:

*I remember having a conversation personally with a head-hunter and what he was offering me, and I said, “Well that is more than what I am on,” but I needed to quantify in my mind what the value of the flexibility and the massages and all those things mean to me, and they actually mean a lot to me. I’m not sure I could put a dollar figure on that.*

In this situation, the employee had caught the attention of a “head-hunter.” The presumption was that this senior person, who was working in a multinational organisation, was a high-achiever, an asset to her employer, and not somebody you would like to lose to a competing organisation. A recruitment person somehow found this employee and was now courting her to commence employment with a competing organisation. Money for her, however, was not the driving force. This employee made her decision to stay with her present employer based on several factors, and workplace massage was one of them.

One participant believed that prospective employees would view the employer favourably based on the whole package offered to staff, stating:

*I also think massage just adds to making a more compelling offer for people who are choosing whether to work here or somewhere else.*

Employees’ decisions about where to work, and why to work there, were complex and considered. One participant shared:

*All these little things add up. [The organisation] provides a number of employee benefits, whether it’s providing access to the local gym, or the masseuse, or the canteen, which is subsidised, or whatever it is. All these things add up to employee satisfaction, and this is one of them I believe.*

Workplace massage was one of a number of reasons that contributed to employees’ favourable perceptions of the organisations for which they worked. The management team of the organisation sent a message to its employees that they had shared values about health and wellbeing by providing the massage program. This shared value system potentially provided employees some evidence that their wellbeing mattered to their employers. The participants’ stories about their employers reflected some of the male managers’ viewpoints from Study 1.

One manager had suggested that keeping people healthy contributed to maximising productivity. A massage recipient seemed to express similar views, and stated:

*It's a positive. As I said, the employer is not just thinking about output, but also thinking about your wellbeing. . . for me looking after my health is an important value for me, and so working for an organisation that recognises that, in tangible ways, is good.*

For employees, the provision of such services sent a message that the organisation supported them in maintaining healthy life choices. This support seemed to make people feel good about their employers.

Retaining the best employees remains central to achieving desired business outcomes, regardless of economic forces. In a buoyant economy, competing organisations can poach talented staff. In contracting economic times, organisations still need to keep their best employees to enable the organisation to achieve targeted outputs (with reduced budgets and fewer staff). In either situation, keeping good employees is, apparently, a key component for organisational successes. Employees acknowledged that the program contributed towards them feeling positive about their employers. As one person put it:

*I feel happy that my employer is thinking about looking after me. It's the one preventative measure that we have at work, for workplace injuries. Yeah, I think it's just being treated like a person.*

For organisations, workplace massage provided a program to support staff with their physical and psychological wellbeing. The existence of the program seemed to send a message to employees that management had their best interests at heart. The availability of workplace massages seemed to make employees feel that their employers, in some way, acknowledged them. Participants in one organisation perceived that management considered employees as more than numbers, and not just as expendable commodities. A massage program in the workplace seemed to influence people's thinking and contributed towards many having positive views about the organisation. One person confided:

*They're [massages are] little rewards, little benefits. I've worked at places, and they give you nothing. You're just a number, and once your number's up you're out the door.*

One employee expressed an opinion, which was contrary to the widely held view. She considered that her employer was responsible for providing access to occupational health and

safety facilities. The massage program did not influence her views about her employer. She shared her opinions about her employer's responsibility:

*I just figure that it's their responsibility to make sure that their staff are comfortable and well. So, it doesn't make me more look at them in a more positive light because I really think it should be basic responsibility.*

Generally, participants did not seem to hold this view. Rather, most employees interviewed seemed pleased that their employers provided access to the program, and believed that their employers supported staff to pursue health and wellbeing activities. Many participants gave the impression that they held their employers in high regard, and a contributing factor seemed to be the availability workplace massage. People appreciated the massages for how they made them feel about themselves (both physically and psychologically), but also about how it made them feel about their employers.

### ***Expectations***

Employees did not report lasting effects from their massages, nor did they express any expectations for long-lasting effects. One participant specifically stated that she had two massages each week to maintain the benefits she gained. She reported that two massages per week were her standard routine to manage her musculoskeletal issues, such as reducing pain and getting rid of "knots." That particular employee progressed from one massage a fortnight to two per week. Her actions suggested that massages did not have a cumulative effect, as other interviewees had indicated. One employee reported:

*I can't say I noticeably hang onto the feeling for the next few days. Maybe some people do.*

Another person expressed similar sentiments when he explained that the effects of massage only lasted a few days and described massage as a short-term fix. He shared:

*It's not lasting, and it's probably more short-term than anything I think. I think the effects of the massage that I have are probably gone within 2 or 3 days. Yeah, it's a short-term fix.*

Overall, participants held conservative expectations about what their massages could provide for them. People seemed content to receive massages, and expected that any gain or benefit they derived would last for a relatively short time. Some described feeling relaxed after their



massages, and some talked about how they used the massages to address twinges and aches. No-one, however, seemed to expect the results to last longer than a few days.

### **Physical Factors**

Despite employees' frequent references to (and stated importance of) the relaxation aspect of massage, they also sought workplace massages to therapeutically address physical issues. Some people perceived that workplace massages were valuable for them to manage aches and pains. They described massages as getting rid of "niggles" and "knots," and felt that reductions in pain led to improved concentration and productivity.

### ***Musculoskeletal Benefits***

Workplace massages were convenient and relaxing, but maintaining good health seemed to underlie employees' rationale for receiving massages in the workplace. As well as enjoying massages, people explained that massages were part of their wider health routines (to achieve and maintain their physical and psychological wellbeing). Participants appeared, sometimes, to need further justification to warrant their use of the program beyond simply enjoying massage as an indulgence. Perhaps this need stemmed from a perception of what others (who were not using the program) might think. One participant described an organisation where she previously worked, and the negative response the massage program in that company received:

*I worked in one place in Sydney for two years. When the manager of that company and myself introduced massage there, (because we had both worked here), because we both had come from this environment where massage is entrenched. The flack we got from those people about, "This is bullshit. You come to work, you know, going off and having massages at work, it's crap." And, actually to the point that they were actually threatening people in their teams that you do not do this stuff.*

She continued to explain that massage was an important part of her health and wellbeing. She believed that massage kept her fit to do her work and manage her musculoskeletal issues and explained:

*I actually think that it gets me fit for the job, and I'm very comfortable saying to people, "I can't meet you at this time because I have a massage".*

This employee had experienced the dissatisfaction and contempt of other staff members who were not engaged in the program. Apparently, not everybody embraced the concept of employees darting off in the middle of the day to receive massages during work time. She further explained some of the demands in her current work-life. She was a senior manager who was expected to travel overseas for work frequently. She described how long-haul flights left her with back pain and general musculoskeletal discomfort. Massage provided her with an opportunity to manage her health and reduce her aches and pains, without encroaching excessively into her work time. For her, the program provided her with a win-win. She could pursue her health, go to the gym, and complement her general health goals with massages. She felt the need to look after her health to help her perform well at work. She explained:

*If I want to be at the top of my game in this job, I know massage is actually part of that. I've always got so many knots and things in my body, but it's also because the hours I work and the travel I do. So, I think it's just in terms of being able to try and keep fit, try to eat reasonably well, and I think massage is just such an important part of that, as well. When this place first provided massages, it was like, "Great I'm into this," and I've gone from once a fortnight to two a week now that I have and it. It really complements the work I do in the gym and stuff like that. So, you know, any the knots that you get, and I particularly miss it when I'm away travelling, and when I get back always need another massage because I've been on long haul flights.*

Enjoying quality health meant that people were free to focus on their work. Massage was part of an overall regime to achieve optimum health. People considered that caring for their wellbeing was integral to performing well at work. Another employee explained his thoughts about the relationship between good health and effectiveness at work, and said:

*Well, I think people work effectively when they are free of distractions, when they are enjoying good health. I think to be able to devote time to caring for themselves just affects people's overall effectiveness. They are just more efficient machines if they're well-tuned. Everyone here is paid for the quality of their thinking, and I think if you are more, well, more relaxed and at ease then you're more likely to make better decisions.*

This employee implied that he (and he suggested that others) worked effectively when they enjoyed good health. He used the analogy of machines, perhaps to illustrate the point that machines left without maintenance eventually become inefficient or break down. Broken machines can be expensive to repair and maintain, and perhaps the point he was making was that unhealthy people also do not work well (at a potential cost to the organisation). He

seemed to perceive that when people are in poor health, then those issues dominated their thinking.

The concept of massage being part of health maintenance was common to those who used the program. Other participants made similar comments to the previous quote, including, “Massage is a way of just, I suppose, getting your body to function better”, and another reported, “It’s just a regular, on-going maintenance thing for me.”

For most participants, their health (both physical and psychological) was an important consideration for using the program. A number of participants interviewed seemed to suggest that massage formed part of their health routines, which contributed to their relaxation, rejuvenation, and management of musculoskeletal aches and pains. Many of the participants described eating well, exercise, meditation, and various other initiatives that they used in conjunction with the massage program to maintain their health and wellbeing. In some cases, employees used massage to treat and manage injuries that resulted from their fitness routines and sporting activities. One participant was a regular cyclist and stated:

*To me massage is more an aid for recovery in my fitness program in my exercise routine.*

Another employee described his health program. He used massage as maintenance in his fitness activities, and reported:

*I’m a pretty active, so I’m into the gym or running or playing basketball every couple of days anyway. So, massage is just a regular on-going maintenance thing for me that I enjoy.*

Massages seemed to complement people’s general health management. They used the program to manage injuries and maintain their wellbeing. One participant perceived that massage accelerated his recovery from injury. He explained that in his experience:

*I find injuries can hang around a lot longer, so if you have a massage you have less complications.*

People appeared to perceive that massage provided them multiple benefits, from injury management to psychological wellbeing. Programs provided different things to different

people, but the broadly held view was that massage was useful in supporting people's general wellbeing and contributed towards them feeling happy about themselves.

Some descriptions of massage were, paradoxically, that of a pleasure and pain experience. People sought to be both relaxed by the massage and to get relief from muscular aches and pains. Perhaps the treatment was painful during the massage because people were already experiencing muscular discomfort, but they experienced relief after the massage was over, which led to a sense of relaxation. One person described her massage experience:

*She [the massage therapist] gets into the muscles that are tense, so I just feel a general all over, more relaxed once, you know I've got over getting off the bed.*

This person's reported experience suggested that immediately after the massage she was so sore that she struggled to get off the massage table, that is, "*once I've got over getting off the bed*". A number of people reported similar experiences that massages could be quite painful. Many attributed this to their tight and tense muscles. Another explained that although she sought massage for relaxation, it ended up being more than that, and as one participant said:

*It's [massage] partly relaxation, although it never ends up being relaxing. I've got so many knots and things in my body.*

Perhaps participants often seemed to feel the need to rationalise having a massage for reasons beyond relaxation. This participant was possibly justifying the relaxation aspect of the massage because it ended up causing her discomfort. Many others had described massage as an indulgence. Maybe people needed to experience pain to justify relaxing and indulging themselves. She continued:

*Well, probably just on the massages, that's when I think we identified the problem. I'd had back pain for years and years and years, and one of the massage therapists said I'm going to do your glutes. I'm like "Oh, God! It is the most excruciatingly painful thing I have ever been through" . . . The impact that had on my lower back was like, "Bloody hell, if I'd known this is what was causing it". I'd had chiro's and physios, and what have you. My back's bad at the moment because I was away for two weeks travelling, and what have you, and lying on uncomfortable seats and things like that, but I know that once I get into a massage that will sort it out.*

Despite the suggestion that massage was relaxing, she was willing to undergo a painful massage experience to relieve muscular pain. The participant seemed to accept, without question, that the massage needed to be “excruciatingly painful” to result in reduced back pain. This participant had spoken of using the massage time to switch off from the world, and perhaps the pain experienced during the massage was a distraction from her normal realities. A massage recipient would be unlikely to think of much else during their massages while experiencing such self-reported pain. Conceivably, the pain of the massage initiated an endorphin release, which triggered a sense of wellbeing and relaxation for the recipient. Another participant stated:

*I find them [massages] very relaxing, but also, actually, they're quite physical. So, it's not like aromatherapy light massage, they're quite, sort of deep, the massages here.*

She spoke of “light” massages as though they were in some way inferior to “deep” massages. There seemed an expectation that deep massages that caused pain, were better (or more therapeutic) than gentle massages.

Another reason that participants sought massage was to improve their mobility. Sitting at a desk all day every day came at a cost. For employees, the physical outcome of office and computer work (and other sedentary occupations), seemed to be stiffness and reduced mobility. Receiving massages helped to improve their range of motion and straighten them up, temporarily. Some reported feeling taller and “straighter”, and better able to move after the massage. Increased mobility and injury management were drivers for participants to use the massage program in the workplace. This employee explained:

*Well, I feel that I sit up straighter. I feel I can sit up straight with my shoulders back, instead of like an old lady at a funeral sort of thing. I tend to hunch over a little bit. It might sound funny, I feel more alert.*

Again, the relationship between the physical and psychological aspects of massage became evident. Feeling better physically by addressing musculoskeletal issues seemed to have an added effect of improving psychological aspects of individuals, such as feeling “*more alert*”.

Employees commonly reported that their massage experiences were painful, but seemed to perceive that painful massages were part of the process. There appeared to be a ‘no pain, no

gain' philosophy among many of the massage recipients. Repeatedly, participants cited experiences of painful massages, which resulted in pleasing post-massage results. As the following employee explained:

*I used massage when I had a stiff shoulder and I assumed it was from my work. She was really good she worked me like crazy and it hurt, but apparently I had knots up there it had to do with stress, but once she worked me I felt fantastic.*

When reporting about the physical effects of massage, one person stated:

*If I've had a good neck massage, my neck is free straight away, you know.*

Another participant explained that:

*It's about getting out the tension and straightening my back up again.*

The massages appeared to improve the posture and ranges of motion of recipients temporarily. Participants used analogies to describe their improvements, but there seemed to be a general perception among massage recipients that they gained physical improvements from massage.

People frequently used massage to treat musculoskeletal complaints. Commonly held views included that massages were useful for reducing pain, managing injuries, and improving ranges of motion. Among the descriptions used, recipients reported that they felt "lighter", "straighter", and "freer" to explain the physical benefits they experienced from massage.

### **Situational Factors**

The general dimension labelled 'situational factors' follows. These factors included how participants considered that massage at work was convenient, and why that mattered to them. The disadvantages of workplace massage were explored and the perceived influence that management exerted over the programs is presented.

#### ***Convenience***

Recipients of the programs valued the convenience of having access to massages in the workplace. Often during the interviews, participants reported that convenience was one of the

features of the program that was most beneficial to them. Having a massage program available at work had several benefits from participants' perspectives. There was a crossover between what participants said about workplace massage and comments made by the managers in Study 1. For instance:

*I had twinges, like sort of, I didn't know if it was muscular, and after a couple of days when it didn't get better and I knew the massage service was there, it's convenient, I made an appointment.*

Her use of the word “twinges” indicated that at the time of seeking the massage, she had been experiencing musculoskeletal discomfort (or pain). Exactly as the managers had suggested during their interviews, having the program at work meant that employees could access it quickly and easily to address any issues. For the employees, this meant not leaving the workplace, while still having the capacity to address any potential health concerns.

Furthermore, people receiving massages potentially used the program as an early intervention for injuries, or perhaps more endemic conditions. For the employers, it meant reduced time away from the workplace, and possibly decreased the chances of more lengthy absences from work due to injury. One shared that:

*It's convenient because at work I don't have to make an appointment to leave work and not rush because I've got an appointment outside of work. I can just get up from my desk and say “I'm going downstairs for a massage”, and treat that as my like a lunch break because they're so flexible here.*

Again, these comments mirrored those of the managers. Just as the managers had predicted, the availability of workplace massage motivated people to use the service. The program allowed them to address aspects of their wellbeing without leaving the work site. Staff minimally interrupted their productivity by staying close to work, and could address twinges with little delay.

Employees potentially reduced the chances of their issues becoming serious musculoskeletal injuries that could lead to prolonged absences by dealing with their aches and pains early. If they were in some way unwell, or not at their peak, then productivity could potentially suffer. Alternatively, by attending to the condition (aches, pains, twinges etc.) in a timely way,

productivity may not necessarily be adversely affected because of people taking time off work. For example, one person explained:

*By having it at work, it's easy for me to get to. So, I don't have to go on a weekend or organise an appointment after hours, or before hours, to do it so it's accessible.*

For employees engaging in workplace massage, a bonus was that they did not have to use time on the weekend dealing with health issues. This convenience allowed them more time for leisure and family activities. Employees may be inclined to look after their health and wellbeing more proactively if their employers made doing so convenient through programs that allowed them to focus on their healthcare issues. Another person reported:

*I think an advantage is that a lot of people don't make the time to go out and get massages. But the minute you relate it to their work and basically, you know, any aches and pains that they may have received you know, have, as a result of work they think, "Oh yeah, there's someone downstairs". It's convenient, it's easy, and it's quite cheap, so they're happy to go down there. If I did it near home, I'd have twice as much travel time.*

One participant explained that he would get a massage even if he had to do it outside of working hours, but the convenience, combined with the price of the workplace massage, was a benefit. He stated:

*I would do it anyway, outside of work so just for me it's a convenience thing, and it's cheap, but it is the convenience.*

Most participants reported that the program provided them with convenient access to massage, which allowed them to return to their work without fuss. Another explained:

*The convenience of being here, you don't have to go very far to have it done. It's only down to the ground floor to have it done. It's close, handy, and you're able to go back [to work].*

Although some people interviewed had suggested that they would get massages even if they were not available at work, they seemed convinced that the accessibility meant that they used the program more often and addressed physical ailments quickly because of the ready availability of the program.



Participants reported that the convenience of having a massage therapist regularly available at work appealed to them. Having access to the therapist at work allowed them to save time travelling to a massage centre out of business hours, and maximised leisure time (i.e., time away from the workplace) for other priorities. One risk to workplace massage recipients was the assumption that the therapist's level of expertise and diagnostic capability was sufficient to identify potential health issues. For matters beyond the therapist's abilities, a referral to suitably qualified healthcare professional would be appropriate.

### ***Disadvantages***

When participants spoke about the disadvantages of workplace massage, they often paused before answering. They seemed to struggle to think of any disadvantages. For people actively using the program who were advocates of the facility, it was not necessarily an issue that they would have considered before being interviewed and invited to comment. Participants had been describing all the advantages that they believed they gained through workplace massage.

Apparently, the participants interviewed for this study were firm believers in the value of massage. After the usual pause, participants generally explained that they could not really think of any disadvantages. After they took a moment to ponder the potential disadvantages, some suggested that the ambience for the massage program could be better, but they accepted that in a workplace setting this was unlikely. Massage participants were enthusiastic about the benefits of the massage programs, but did identify some disadvantages.

The location of the program caused some problems, although participants viewed these problems as minor issues. Office space was of concern because; (a) spaces in the work environment were at a premium, (b) the ambience of the massage space was not as inviting as it might have been at a private practice, and (c) participants expressed awareness of potential privacy issues, such as undressing at work. Overall, although these disadvantages did not rate highly during these interviews, they are included to provide a full picture. One participant explained:

*I suppose that's a downside with work. It's not quite as nice as the environment that they can provide elsewhere but, quiet, sometimes they have ambience with music and incense or whatever but generally quiet and probably not too fluorescent lit.*

Another person described her shift in thinking from when she first started getting massages at work, to her current acceptance of the program. Initially, she felt uncomfortable with the idea of removing her clothes at work to receive massages, and felt a potential vulnerability about the possibility of co-workers seeing her in a state of undress. Over time, however, she had become more comfortable with the process and commented that employees who were not getting a massage might be envious of those who were, saying:

*When I first started doing it [getting massages] it was bizarre, you sort of think; "Shit, I'm stripping at work". I've often wondered whether people in the other buildings have got binoculars and are looking at us, as well. But, once you get over that it's just, and it's actually interesting because the massage room is up here, further up the floor and there's two seats outside and it's interesting to hear the number of people walking past and talk to the person sitting on the chair who's waiting to go in and go, "Oh, I wish that was me", and people stop for a chat.*

Participants did not raise privacy as a significant issue, but some aspects of workplace massage could possibly have breached privacy legislation. Depending on the soundproofing of the massage room, passers-by could potentially hear about health information to which they were not entitled. The participants, however, did not indicate that they were concerned about the privacy of their health or personal information. Massage therapists (as healthcare service providers who collect and store health information) should be aware of their lawful responsibilities towards their clients' privacy rights (The Office of the Privacy Commissioner, 2009a, 2009b).

Although participants were convinced about the merits of massage, some mentioned that some of the senior managers had suggested reclaiming the office space used for massage. In this situation, the managers did not cancel the massage program to provide more office space. Apparently, therefore, even those managers who believed that office space was at a premium chose not to terminate the program to make more room. One participant explained:

*We've got a real problem with office floor space . . . one of them [managers] suggested that we get rid of the massage room and I said, "Do that at your peril" (laughter). . . but the suggestion of the massage room fell on deaf ears. No-one would do that.*

The bias of the participants in favour of the program seemed evident. Interviewing people who did not engage in the program might have provided a more balanced view about whether

office space was more valuable than a massage area. Nevertheless, the management team chose to keep the massage room in preference for cancelling, or changing the room from where the program was operating. The message the management team seemed to be sending was that massages were important.

### ***Management Issues***

Senior management teams influenced the acceptance and patterns of use of the massage program through their leadership and organisational policies. Managers using the program and leading by example increased the acceptance of the program. Some people used the program during their lunch breaks, some used the program after hours, and some others used flexible working arrangements to attend their massage sessions. Where employees observed that the senior managers used the program, the acceptance of the program was high in those organisations. Some participants expressed uncertainty about the acceptance of the program by their managers. One person stated:

*I don't know what the perception of most managers would be at this place. Some have been more open to it than others, so that can be a dicey thing to play with.*

In this particular organisation, getting a massage was “dicey”. The level of acceptance for leaving work to get a massage during work time was, in some cases, often dependent on the manager to which a person reported.

In contrast, another participant described how the most senior person in the office used the program, so this provided tacit approval for massage. The attitudes of the managers influenced people’s engagement with the massage program. Another participant explained:

*Our country head has massages and people know that he goes off for his massage, so I do think that's really important in helping people feel that it's allowable.*

In the organisation where this employee worked, the massage program was well entrenched with massage therapists on site every day of the week. Conversely, the previous employee worked in an organisation that had a small program. The therapist attended fortnightly and only a few employees attended the sessions. The difference between the two organisations seemed to be the attitude of the managers towards massage. Seemingly, managers largely

influenced the uptake of a massage program. The following quote from one of the employees in this study who held a management position sums up the situation about the acceptance of massage in the workplace:

*I think it's one thing as a leader to speak out, but if you are visible in walking the talk, it's also more powerful. So, I think people seeing me having massages encourages them to do the same.*

When people saw their bosses engaging in the program, the implicit message went out that massage at work was acceptable. His words suggested that from his point of view actions spoke more loudly than words.

### **Workplace massage: Through the lens of Argyris and Schön's theories-of-action**

The following section use the theoretical framework of Argyris and Schön (1974, 1992, 1996) to analyse the higher order themes identified and presented in the preceding sections.

#### **Theories-of-action: Indulgence**

When participants initially talked about massage, they often used the word *indulgence* to define their experiences. One participant described his many responsibilities, such as his marriage, work, and parenting roles. Others expressed similar sentiments when discussing their life experiences, their commitments, and their various responsibilities. Some people described massages as an indulgence, others saw theirs as *pampering*; nevertheless, participants expressed similar opinions. When, however, people provided further detail about the reasons for having massages, they provided complex and detailed rationales behind their decisions to engage with the program. Many talked about the importance of relaxation in terms of their physical and psychological wellbeing. For example, among the common phrases and themes participants expressed, were “emotional and physical benefit”, “physically and emotionally”, “meditation”, and feeling “mentally as well as physically”. Participants valued their physical and psychological wellbeing. On the surface, massage was an indulgence, but for these people, it supported their efforts in striving for positive psychological and physical health.

As Argyris and Schön (1992) explained, congruence “show[s] and integration of one’s internal (what one who is aware of my feelings and beliefs would perceive) and external

(what an outsider who is aware only of my behaviour would perceive) state” (p. 23). Their choices of words suggested that massage was, in some way, a treat or extravagance, rather than a necessity. For these people, their personal theories seemed to hold that that massage, although providing them with pleasure, was beneficial for them in the pursuit of good health. Using *indulgence* to describe massage was incongruent with the underlying reasons they expressed for receiving massages. This incongruence appeared to relate, perhaps, to what others may perceive about their behaviours (i.e., people who get a massage at work are indulgent), in contrast to their personally held beliefs (i.e., massage assists me in maintaining good physical and psychological health).

During Study 2, one participant stated her thoughts about what she believed people perceived about massage:

*Unless they've got a serious injury, they see massage as just a recreational, pampering type thing.*

Despite stating that massages were indulgent, participants' willingness to engage with the program demonstrated internal consistency between their actions and beliefs. People explained that receiving massages provided them with mental and physical benefits. Accordingly, they acted on their personally held theories by having massages at work, and their actions (i.e., having massages) expressed their inner feelings (i.e., massage benefits me physically and psychologically). Even for people who believed that massages were indulgent, their actions and beliefs were not self-contradictory. Interviewees considered massages as luxuries, but they provided participants with self-defined health benefits.

The testability for massage recipients was complex. According to Argyris and Schön (1992), theories-of-action “are testable if one can specify the situation, the desired result, and the action through which the result is to be achieved. Testing consists of evaluating whether the action yields its predicted results” (p. 25). To test their theory, people could specify their situations, such as to experience indulgence and pampering, have massages and then evaluate whether that had been achieved. In such a scenario, there were multiple governing variables, including indulgence, pampering, and achieving mental and physical wellbeing. From the accounts of the participants in Study 2, they achieved their predicted results; notwithstanding, there were many limitations. For example, within the organisations there may have been any

number of people who had received massages and not achieved their desired outcomes, or *predicted results*. Those people were not interviewed as part of this study. Furthermore, as Argyris and Schön (1992) explained:

*A more challenging problem has to do with the testing of norms or values themselves. Can we test the governing variables such as 'stay healthy'? In one sense, the answer to this question must be no, because governing variables are not if . . . then . . . propositions and make no predictions. But if one looks at the entire range of variables – the entire field of constancy involved in a theory-in-use – it is meaningful to ask whether, over time, these values will become more or less internally consistent, more or less congruent with the governing variables of espoused theory, and more or less effectively realized. For example, a set of governing variables that includes 'stay healthy' . . . may turn out to become increasingly incompatible . . . The second basic problem of testing theories-of-action is their self-fulfilling nature (pp. 25-26).*

For example, one participant said earlier that during his massage time “on a spiritual level, [massage is] just having almost like some meditation space, because you know the phone is not going to ring, no one’s going to talk to you”, and another described massage as an opportunity to “power down”. In these examples, the massage participants were unlikely to have their mobile phones with them (or have it turned off) and to tell the massage therapist (or at least behave in such a way that implied) that they did not want to talk during the session. In these cases, the theories-of-action became self-fulfilling in that the phone would not ring, and the therapist probably remained silent, thus *the action yields its predicted results*, and the theories were “self-sealing” (Argyris & Schön, 1992, p. 26).

### **Theories-of-action: Mood**

When talking about the mood-lifting effects of massages, participants referred to feeling rejuvenated, experiencing relief, and having reduced stress levels. To a lesser extent, they commented on issues related to their morale. The dominant governing variables appeared to be rejuvenation and relief (both physical and psychological). Some apparent underlying issues causing people to feel the need for massages included addressing physical and psychological symptoms arising from their hectic lifestyles and busy work schedules, or as one participant described it “my mad life”. In these situations, the measure of ‘busy’ is subjective with expected differences between participants’ perceptions of what busy means for them. Nevertheless, most participants reported high-levels of social, family, and workplace demands in their lives. For participants, their apparent governing variables when having massages included achieving feelings of rejuvenation and of relief (both physical and

psychological). Massage provided recipients with the opportunity to have some personal time (for example, taking time out, opportunities to meditate, reflect, or relax).

According to Argyris and Schön (1992), “the most important kind of consistency lies not between propositions in the theory. . . but among the governing variables of the theory that are related to assumptions about self, others, and the behavioral setting” (pp. 20-21). In the case of the participants, the assumptions about self possibly included, (a) I am busy, (b) I need some space to regroup, (c) I will feel better after I have a massage, and (d) I will perform better in my job if my mind is clearer. The assumptions about ‘others’ possibly included a notion that the massage therapist will help me to feel better, and the assumptions about the ‘behavioural setting’ possibly included the thought that my employer supports me by providing a massage program at work.

Massage recipients demonstrated strong internal consistency with “an absence of self-contradiction” (Argyris & Schön, 1992, p. 20). Their actions, that is, having massages at work, indicated that they held personal theories about the benefits of massage. Accordingly, their actions were congruent with their theories-in-use.

The effectiveness of massage is highly subjective because the only person who would know if the massage achieved the governing variables is the recipient. Participants reported that their massages made them “feel better”, “feel good”, “feel refreshed”, and “feel rejuvenated”. These self-reported outcomes suggested that the actions (i.e. getting massages) met the governing variables of the participants (i.e. feeling rejuvenated and relieved). Furthermore, employees reported reductions in feelings of stress and an increased ability to focus, allowing them to better concentrate on their work.

Established psychological questionnaires could have been used to test the effectiveness of the massages and to assess whether the massages provided participants with the mood-lifting effects they sought. However, the nature of these massages was personal and not necessarily requiring such formal assessment. People would be well aware of how they felt after their massages, and recipients could simply stop getting massages when the program ceased to meet the governing variables, try another therapist, or try another therapy. The recipients were therefore the best judges of the effectiveness of their massages, and seemingly, the

participants interviewed in this study were satisfied that the massages were effective and that they continued to achieve the governing variables.

### **Theories-of-action: Perceptions of Workplace and Employer**

In many interviews, participants expressed views that the availability of the massage program influenced their perceptions of the workplace and their employers. In one case, a participant believed that her employer had an obligation to support people striving to maintain their health. In her view, the program was an implied part of the overall occupational health and safety laws binding employers to their obligations, but this was not a generally held opinion. Most people seemed to feel that access to the program was a bonus, particularly those who worked keenly at maintaining their health and fitness. According to Argyris and Schön (1992), “each person lives in a behavioral world of his own - a world made up of his own behavior in interaction with the behavior of others” (p. 17).

Considering Argyris and Schön’s statement above, the participants who engaged in the program seemed to demonstrate that their behaviours were that of people actively engaged in looking after their physical and psychological wellbeing. Most used the program to assist them towards reaching their health goals. Many participants stated that they held their employers in high regard, partly because the program was available to them within their organisations.

The behaviour of the employers was to make the programs available to the staff. In Study 1, managers explained that by providing massages to staff, the companies or organisations benefited in a number of ways. The interactions and behaviours between the employees and the employers were necessarily interdependent for the program to work. For massage programs to succeed, the employer needed to provide the program and encourage its use by staff.

Employees had to respond to the availability of the program by attending the sessions, and generally expressed their appreciation that their organisations provided massage programs for them. Similarly, perhaps, the managers should have held those using the program in high regard. The behaviours of each of the parties, their interactions with one another and with the program, were important factors for the program to work. Possibly, the isolated opinion held



by the participant who felt that the organisation should provide such programs, was insightful because of the interdependency required for such programs to work. Her view was not that she should be grateful to her employer. Instead, maybe she perceived that each person had a role to play within organisations to achieve workplace health and safety goals. Occupational health and safety laws place joint responsibility on all parties in the workplace to maximise health and safety within their organisations.

In a different scenario, a recruiter (a head-hunter) had approached a participant with an offer of employment and a higher salary with another company. When describing her experience, her espoused theories included the importance of massages and workplace flexibility as part of her terms of employment. She pointedly stated that those things “meant a lot” to her and (despite the prospect of a higher income) the competing organisation did not offer her those added benefits. The behaviour of her employer strongly influenced her actions. In addition to her basic salary, the current employer provided the workplace flexibility and massages during work time that she sought, and which were important to her. For example, she stated, “I’m not sure I could put a dollar figure on that”. Accordingly, she reached a decision to reject the offer of employment with the other organisation, regardless of the temptation of a higher salary.

Her espoused theories were that employee benefits were important when choosing an employer. When faced with the opportunity of a higher salary without the added benefits, she chose to remain with her current employer. Her decision demonstrated that her behaviour was congruent with her espoused theory-of-action (Argyris and Schön, 1992). Important governing variables for this employee included salary with added workplace benefits. Her decision not to change jobs suggested that she was achieving her governing variables at that time. If the behaviours of her employer changed (for example, the implementation of new management team with different behaviours) resulting in policy changes where she did not meet her governing variables, then her view of the organisation might change. In such circumstances, she would possibly consider a similar employment offer differently, if that would assist her in meeting her governing variables.

The general view of interviewees appeared to be similar to those held by the participant who declined the offer a higher paying job. People generally seemed to assert that money was not

the only consideration for people when choosing employment. Those added employee benefits made the organisation seem like a more attractive place to work.

The participants in this study used and enjoyed massage. Only one person expressed a viewpoint that the massage program did not positively influence her opinion about her employer. She seemed to have an expectation that employers were obliged to support healthy workplace activities. The widely held view of participants in Study 2 was that the availability of the program was a bonus that contributed towards them feeling positive about their employers. Although, in general, employees had a high opinion of their employers, they did not seem to consider the possibility of the mutual benefits the program offered. Employees described a number of benefits they felt they gained from workplace massage. The managers in Study 1 commented that healthy workers were likely to be more productive (i.e., benefit to the organisation). This mutual benefit seemed to go unacknowledged by most participants. Instead, employees seemed grateful to their employers for the program and it positively affected their opinions about their organisations.

### **Theories-of-action: Expectations**

Without exception, all participants in this study described the benefits of massage as relatively short lasting. For people who used massage for its relaxing effects, there seemed little incongruence between their espoused theories and their theories-of-action. For those people, they sought massage as an indulgence, to feel rejuvenated, or for some time out. This theory was both internally consistent and logically consistent because there was no self-contradiction. People sought a short-term effect from massages and, therefore, they met these governing variables of indulgence, rejuvenation, and time out.

While having a massage, recipients could leave phones and other distractions out of the treatment room and have time with minimal interruptions. They could predict how long the massage session would last, that is, they paid for a specified time and, in principle, would receive that time. They could also negotiate with the therapist for the type of massage they wanted. If, however, the massage therapist did not adhere to the schedule, or did not provide the type of massage the recipient desired, then the session could become incompatible with meeting the governing variables. In such circumstances, the recipient would be likely to

review their use of the program because of the failure of it to achieve the desired constancies (Argyris and Schön, 1992).

As Argyris and Schön (1992) explained, “theories of action are testable if one can specify the situation, the desired result, and the action through which the result is to be achieved” (p. 25). Massage recipients would readily know the effectiveness of the massage because they could test (subjectively) whether they felt relaxed, indulged, or that they had experienced time out after the massage. They had expectations that the effect would not last long, and they could easily test that because they would *feel* when the sensations ended. If, however, the effect did not last the expected period, then this may have caused recipients to review their use of the program.

The same principles could apply to the other mood-lifting effects that recipients described during the interviews. The theory-of-action was that massage positively affected their mood and this theory was testable in a similar way to the governing variables of indulgence, time out, and rejuvenation.

### **Theories-of-action: Musculoskeletal Benefits**

Recipients reported that they sought massage to treat aches and pains associated with musculoskeletal complaints. They often described the massage experience itself as painful, and some expressed that massage needed to be deep to be effective. People appeared to use the terms deep and painful interchangeably. They also described how deep massage was relaxing. The need for the massage itself to be painful to address an already painful condition seems to be internally inconsistent; inflicting pain to reduce pain. Experiencing pain to induce relaxation also appeared to be internally inconsistent.

Despite the apparent internal inconsistency, perhaps there is a logical explanation. The governing variables for the massages in these situations were to address musculoskeletal discomforts (i.e., reducing aches and pains). To touch an already sore area of the body may have caused immediate discomfort, but the physiological response to such touch may have induced endorphins to be released into the blood stream. Possibly the pain was caused by muscle spasms, which were painful to touch, but were relieved by the stimulation of deep massage. Many recipients seemed to accept, enjoy, or even want pain experienced during

messages, and some even provided varying descriptions of this experience. There was, in some cases, an apparent theory-of-action that massages had to be painful to be effective, a philosophy of ‘no pain, no gain’.

According to Argyris and Schön (1992), “each of these variables has a range that is acceptable; within that range, there are levels of preference” (p. 21). As long as the pain did not exceed the limits that people were prepared (or able) to cope with, then they would be likely to continue receiving painful or deep massages. A dilemma of inconsistency would arise if the painful massages ceased to meet the governing variables (i.e., the massages caused further pain without positively affecting the initial symptoms). Then the massages would be no longer effective. The test of the painful massages was the effect it had on the symptoms it was intended to address. The recipient would have a dilemma once the painful massages reached the point at which they fell outside the acceptable ranges (Argyris & Schön, 1992). For the interviewees of this study, painful massages apparently remained within acceptable limits and achieved the governing variables.

### **Theories-of-action: Convenience**

The availability of the massage program in the workplace allowed people to address any musculoskeletal issues promptly. Just as the managers in Study 1 had predicted, the convenience of workplace massage meant that people could attend their sessions and deal with any issues with minimal disruption to themselves or their work.

Convenience was both internally consistent and logically consistent. The massages were available to staff locally, so they accessed them as necessary. Some people saw the therapists for specific injuries, others had massages for on-going chronic problems (such as backaches), and many used the program for the mood-lifting effects they experienced. As long as the therapist was able to provide the level of service that recipients sought, then it was likely that employees would use the program to suit their needs.

In Study 1, one of the managers described that the popularity of the program made access to it difficult for some people. She explained that employees booked the therapist well in advance, which appeared to lead to some inequities for some employees when they were trying to access the program. None of the interviewees for Study 2 expressed this type of

frustration about the program, but it was a potential problem in some organisations. Instead, participants generally held the view that convenience of the program was one of its appeals. Nevertheless, the potential for access difficulties could become a problem to some employees, just as it had in other organisations.

The governing variables for people regarding convenience were being able to access the program and receive massages to address any health issues. The measures of effectiveness included easy access, the availability and competence of the therapist, and minimal disruption to employees. The program would have reduced effectiveness for those people who were unable access it easily, or if the therapist was unable to provide them with the services they sought. If the program ceased to be convenient to employees, they would be likely to review their use of it because many people cited convenience as an important consideration in using the program.

### **Theories-of-action: Disadvantages**

The disadvantages that people cited about workplace massage were minimal. Participants, however, did describe some disadvantages including the location, the ambience, and privacy. These governing variables apparently fell within the acceptable ranges for participants because if they did not, people would probably stop using the program (Argyris & Schön, 1992).

People appeared to balance the advantages of the program with the disadvantages and in doing so the advantages outweighed any potential incongruence. Among the theories participants gave for using the program was its convenience, and the convenience was in part due to its location within the workplace. A dilemma of incongruity could arise if the location of the program made recipients so uncomfortable about having massages at work that it outweighed the benefit of its convenience. Similarly, the ambience of the program was limited by its location. Office space could be manipulated to meet the requirements of hosting a massage program within limitations, and people were apparently satisfied to accept those limitations. The workspace seemed to be private enough for people to be willing to take their clothes off at work and receive massages.

The tests for using the program were largely subjective, such as whether recipients were comfortable having massages during work time, in office space with the associated limitations that the situation presented. Seemingly, for the participants interviewed, the program was effective and achieved the governing variables despite the potential disadvantages.

### **Theories-of-action: Management Influences**

In both Study 1 and Study 2, people expressed the view that employees had the power to influence the massage program. When talking about staff in the organisations, one manager in Study 1 stated that people “would kill you if you dared to take the massage away”. Another employee expressed a similar sentiment when she warned of a manager, who was contemplating getting rid of the massage program to make more office space, “*do that at your peril.*” Both of these interviewees were speaking in exaggerated tones, but the message seemed to be that employees had the power to influence management.

Those comments seemed in stark contrast to another person’s view when she described her perceptions of the managerial influence on the program. She stated, “Our country head [manager] has massages and people know that he goes off for his massage, so I do think that’s really important in helping people feel that it’s allowable”. That statement suggested that unless the management approved of people having massages, then employees were ill-at-ease about getting them. Another person echoed this sentiment when he stated:

*I don’t believe my manager would allow me to use it during the day.*

Apparently, the managers of the organisation held significant power of the success of the program. Despite the mocked exaggeration about staff killing the managers and the proposed peril that managers might face, there seemed an implicit view that ultimately managers held the power to positively or to negatively influence the programs. Managers’ engagement with the program sent out a strong message to staff that it was sanctioned. The theories-of-actions of the managers seemed to be the key to the survival of the programs. If the program met the governing variables of the managers, then the program continued. Apparently, however, managers were cognisant of the potentially negative effects of altering employees’ conditions and benefits.

When the program stopped meeting the governing variables of the managers, then it appeared that the program was at risk of cancellation. In one manager's case, a governing variable was office space. Perhaps the manager would cancel the program if the organisation ran out of space for the workers. This proposition does not seem unreasonable; after all, for a business to operate effectively there needs to be enough space available to house staff and equipment. Managers in Study 1 also expressed the view that patronage of the program was a governing variable. As long as employees showed a high level of engagement with the program, then managers were unlikely to cancel it.

However, whilst employees appeared to have some influence over the program and although the managers seemed aware of the employees' desire to have the program in place, there were numerous business considerations underpinning the continued operation of the program within the organisation. Managers still held a strong influence over the success or failure of the program.

## **Study 2 General Discussion**

During the interviews, in view of the stark gender-influenced differences between the male and female managers in Study 1, there was an expectation that gender would play a significant role in the responses of participants in Study 2. There were, however, few differences between males and females.

Overwhelmingly, the predominant reason cited by participants for engaging in the massage program was for relaxation and they were explicit about the importance of that, and how being relaxed positively affected their productivity. Twelve of the 17 people interviewed spoke directly about using massage to relax, yet little literature exists about the effect of massage on healthy people. Smith, O'Driscoll and Ernst (2003) identified that most of the literature on massage and relaxation focuses on three main areas; (a) oncology, (b) medical and intensive care, and (c) mental health. The focus of these areas is on people with co-existing medical conditions. Furthermore, their responses suggest that mechanisms to support people's relaxation in the workplace may be significantly important for organisations to meet productivity targets. It makes sense that tense and stressed employees are likely to be less productive.

Whereas many massage studies focus on the physiological outcomes of massage, none of the people interviewed in this study sought to reduce their heart rate or blood pressure through massage. There was never any discussion about physiological outcomes from any participant in this study, but they did speak of the importance of having that time out to clear their minds with the purpose of focussing on their work.

There are numerous massage studies in which researchers have investigated and reported on the physiological and psychological effects of massage (Moyer et al., 2004). There are, undoubtedly, numerous strong rationales for this approach. Arguably, however, the part of the picture that has been missing is what participants are seeking to gain from their massages. Previous researchers have (perhaps without any prior consultation with massage recipients), determined the variables to be measured. Consulting with massage recipients would possibly provide researchers with other relevant variables to measure.

People described massages as indulgent. During their massages, people felt pampered, and when they explored their reasons for having massages, they emphasised the importance of emotional and physical wellbeing. The primary response of the participants from this study was psychological in nature, such as seeking a massage to affect mood (i.e., experiencing a sense of relief, rejuvenation). The secondary response of participants was the physical effect of massage, such as reducing musculoskeletal pain and tension. These results indicate that although people use massage for the musculoskeletal benefits, the psychological benefits they achieved were integral to their decision for having massages. People also expressed that when they were experiencing musculoskeletal pain and discomfort that it also affected them psychologically, which consequently affected their workplace performance. The physical and the psychological seemed inextricably linked. This study focuses on participants explaining the reasons that they seek to receive massage in the workplace. As one participant explained:

*Well, if my back's feeling better, I'm just thinking more clearly because I'm not concerned about the damage I could be doing to my back, so I just feel better mentally.*

One of the issues that emerged from this study was the way in which people legitimise or justify the reasons for getting a massage. Although people described massages as indulgent, when they explored their reasoning further, they expressed numerous perceptions beyond



indulgence. Those reasons included seeking massage for its mood-lifting effect and relief from aches and pains, rather than just for the simple pleasure of it. People explained that their massages could be uncomfortable, even painful, but this did not act as a deterrent to engaging with the massage program.

Participants enjoyed having the convenience of being able to access massages at work. This situation poses a positive, but perhaps, also negative for massage recipients. Through their actions and willingness to use the massage program, massage recipients placed considerable faith in the quality and experience of their therapist. For uncomplicated musculoskeletal disorders, massage therapists are unlikely to cause further injuries. In many instances, massage therapy can alleviate or assist in reducing pain and improving the symptoms of mild musculoskeletal complaints. As reported, using the massage program was useful for participants to address twinges, aches, and pains.

On the other hand, a number of serious conditions can manifest as musculoskeletal discomfort or pain. According to Yanik, Tur and Kutlay (2005), “many disorders including congenital, degenerative, inflammatory, and neoplastic lesions are associated with low back pain” (p. 384). A massage recipient in the corporate setting might present to their therapist with lower back pain, (or *twinges*). Such twinges could be (albeit unlikely) symptomatic of serious or life-threatening diseases such as malignancy, multiple myeloma, osteoid osteoma (Brukner & Khan, 2001), or referred pain from other organ systems (Car, Sheikh, McPherson, & Waller, 2003). Thoracic back pain could be symptomatic of a breast carcinoma, and breast carcinoma may also present as frozen shoulder (Brukner & Khan, 2001). Although only a small likelihood, a massage recipient could present to their corporate massage therapist with serious health issues, therefore, therapists and massage clients should not dismiss or ignore the range of disease possibilities.

### **Methodological Issues**

The participants recruited for this study were people who chose to use workplace massage. To ask people who actively use and enjoy a massage program what the disadvantages of it are, would be unlikely to produce many negative responses. The underlying assumption was that if participants were using the program, then they liked or derived some benefit from the program. Accordingly, the recipients did not identify too many disadvantages with the

program. People who discontinued their use of the program would be useful to interview to gain a full understanding of the disadvantages of the program, such as whether it disrupts the workplace (as Odette in Study 1 discussed), or how much additional work burden the non-massage recipients experienced.

### **Answers to the General Research Questions**

In response to the research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, the advantages of workplace massage included that it was convenient; people could access the program without too much disruption to their workday. Participants perceived that they gained psychological benefits by using the program, such as relaxation, that it provided an opportunity for time out, and people felt rejuvenated after their massage. There were physical benefits gained by using massage, such as increased mobility and reduced pain. Participants reported few disadvantages about the program.

Participants believed that massages positively affected their productivity or work performance in two ways: (a) by having massages, they experienced mood-lifting effects, and (b) massage relieved musculoskeletal discomfort. By attending to their physical and psychological needs, participants reported that the effects included an increased ability to concentrate and focus at work. Participants did not cite instances where massage negatively affected their productivity or work performance.

### **Conclusion**

The uptake of workplace massage seemed dominated by the organisational culture. In some organisations where participants were interviewed, large thriving massage programs existed, yet in others the massage program appeared to limp along. The success of the program seemed largely influenced by the management of the organisation. In organisations where the management embraced the program, participants reported that the program was highly successful.

The responses of participants indicated that the provision of a massage program had a two-fold advantage, in that it gave people the opportunity to have time out and to regroup. Once they returned from their massages, participants reported that they had the ability to better focus on the job. The benefits of allowing employees to have time for introspection were self-

reported clarity and a high regard for the employer, perhaps with increased loyalty to the employer. This study identified few significant disadvantages of workplace massage.

Chapter 6 explores the perceptions of workplace massage from the perspectives of the massage therapists. As with Chapters 4 and 5, the theories of Argyris and Schön (1992) are used to interpret and understand the data.

## **Chapter 6: Massage Therapists' Perceptions of Workplace Massage**

### **Introduction**

An internet search for the term *workplace* or *corporate* massage will return thousands of hits, many of them advertisements listed by therapists, extolling the benefits of workplace massage. Among their numerous claims, these websites purport that massage will engage, motivate and reward staff, and provide stress relief and improve productivity. These claims, however, seem rarely supported by current scholarly evidence (Seatedmassage, 2011; SpecHealth, 2012; Troncao, 2010). Effective advertising is not necessarily based in scientific evidence and nor are those carrying the advertising compelled to verify the claims of their clients. Thus, in the absence of sound evidence, the value of the claims made in favour of the benefits of corporate massage are, perhaps, somewhat questionable. Furthermore, whether therapists actually believed the claims made about corporate massage remains unknown.

This chapter systematically explores the experiences and perceptions of massage therapists who provide workplace massage. Because of the wide use of the phrases *workplace massage*, *corporate massage*, and *seated massage*, these terms are used interchangeably throughout this chapter, with the intention that each refers generally to massages provided in the workplace. During their interviews, the therapists also used these terms interchangeably, indicating that this apparent lack of specificity does not cause a confusion of meaning within the profession.

### **Background and aims of Study 3**

Although workplace massage studies exist about the psychological (Katz et al., 1999), physiological (Cady & Jones, 1997), or psychophysiological (Back, Tam, Lee, & Haraldsson, 2009) outcomes for massage recipients, to date there appears to be few, if any, studies reporting the perceptions and experiences of corporate massage from the viewpoint of therapists. With so few studies available on the subject of workplace massage, there are insufficient findings to determine the unequivocal effectiveness (or benefits) of workplace massage for either recipients or organisations.

As a contribution to redressing this paucity of information, Study 3 explored the perceptions of workplace massage from the understanding of the therapists who provide such services. The therapists' related their diverse experiences from personal encounters during workplace

massage sessions and proffered observations about how they perceived that the workers and the organisations reacted to the initiative. The therapists' interviews, together with the data from the managers in Study 1 and the massage recipients in Study 2, provided a multi-dimensional picture of the acceptance of, and reflections on, corporate massage programs. As Wolcott (2001) stated, "our opportunity is also our challenge: to portray real people doing and saying real things, as seen through the eyes of another observer intent not only on helping us to see but helping us to understand" (p. 111). Thus, the importance of Study 3 to this investigation, when considered in light of the findings from Studies 1 and 2, has allowed the experiences of another group of intimately involved individuals, to be a third and independent standpoint from which to compare and contrast perceptions about corporate massage programs.

### **Research Questions for Study 3**

As described in earlier chapters, the central research question for the overall study was "What are the advantages and disadvantages of massage programs conducted in the workplace?" To enable a systematic data collection and analysis approach in Study 3, however, a series of sub-questions central to this study were posed. These questions were developed with the intention of exploring the perceptions of the massage therapists who provide the services to the staff and the organisation. The guiding questions were:

1. What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of workplace massage for employees?
2. What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of workplace massage for the organisation more widely?
3. What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of workplace massage for the massage therapists?
4. How do the results of Study 3 fit (or not fit) within the framework of the theories-of-action proposed by Argyris and Schön (1992)?

### **Methodology**

The participants for this study included eight massage therapists who provided massages in the corporate sector. Of those participants, five female and three male therapists who were interviewed, provided workplace massage as part of their wider massage businesses. The

participants were only connected to the organisations through the massage services they provided, and all of them provided massage services outside of the corporate sector in addition to their corporate work.

Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured approach, which was adopted to guide the responses. The semi-structured interview guide allowed participants the freedom to raise and discuss any issues that were important to them about the topic whilst allowing some level of structured control to be used (Kayrooz & Trevitt, 2005). The interview structure used in this study provided the framework to gain a systematic and therefore richer understanding of the participants' responses to the research questions. At the request of participants, each was interviewed at his or her private massage practice premises and all interviews were digitally recorded. No interview commenced until a full ethics application was approved by the Victoria University Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development Ethics Committee. Copies of all material provided to Study 3 participants and the interview guide used to interview therapists are appended (See Appendices C, D, E, F, I).

### **Background to analysis and findings**

In Study 3, after performing a thematic analysis on the interview data, Argyris and Schön's (1992) theories-of-action were used to understand participants' stories. A picture emerged from the analysis of the participants' interviews about: (a) the therapists' perceptions of the psychological and physical benefits that employees gained by having massages at work; (b) the benefits that the organisations appear to have gained through the provision of such programs, and; (c) the therapists' perceptions of their contributions to the health and wellbeing of the massage recipients.

Four general dimensions emerged after the analysis, within which there were ten higher order themes and 22 first order themes. The four general dimensions were: (a) psychological factors, (b) physical factors, (c) situational factors, and (d) disadvantages (Table 6.1). As with Study 2, there were few differences between the themes and ideas expressed by males and females. Accordingly, the findings and discussions given here are based on the themes that arose from Study 3, which is representative of the wider group of participants as a whole, rather than as aggregate stories or gender-specific tales (as were used to present the data in Study 1).

Table 6.1: Workplace Massage Themes from Massage Therapists' Perspectives

First Order Themes	Higher Order Themes	General Dimensions
Improves workplace morale	Mood	Psychological
Workplace massage is relaxing for recipients		
Therapists’ desire to make clients feel good	Compassion	
Therapists’ willingness to listen to people		
Therapists’ aim to educate massage recipients	Education	
Therapists feel they need to educate employers about workplace massage		
Corporate sector takes advantage of therapists’ goodwill	Attitude	
Professional prejudices		
Status of being a remedial therapist		
Perception that female therapists are preferred to male therapists in the corporate sector	Sexism	
Physical demands of massage for therapists	Musculoskeletal	Physical
Massages relieves pain		
Neck and shoulder massages in high demand		
Tactile nature of musculoskeletal assessments		
Massage improves productivity	Business outcomes	Situational
Transient nature of the work of corporate massage		
Client attrition		
Therapists’ commitment to private practice		
Corporate massage pays well		
Convenience of getting a massage at work	Convenience	
Logistical difficulties of conducting workplace massage	Logistics	Disadvantages
Disadvantages of workplace massage	Disadvantages	

### General Dimension 1: Psychological

General Dimension 1 contained five higher order themes. The psychological factors described by massage therapists reflected their observations of people within the

organisation, and their personal experiences when providing workplace massage. They did not limit their stories to observations about their clients, and shared stories about their wider experiences working as corporate masseurs.

Massage therapists focused heavily on the psychological aspects of corporate massage, which, for a manual therapy, was perhaps surprising. Therapists described how massage had mood-lifting effects on their clients, and they shared their thoughts about their desires to help make their clients feel psychologically (as well as physically) good through massage.

Therapists perceived that they had a role in educating their clients. They used their time with clients to inform them about the importance of their behaviours, particularly when they thought they could positively influence people's approach to their health issues. Therapists also explained how they tried to educate employers about what corporate massage could offer employees as well as informing them about the potential benefits for the organisation (including the limitations of workplace massage). This higher order theme of *education* is included in General Dimension 1 because therapists reported that whilst they initially perceived their role as being to help their clients with matters that might contribute towards improving their physical wellbeing, the longer-term process of changing habits is a cognitive process and requires an educative approach.

Therapists inferred that being a remedial massage therapist was important, and this seemed to provide them with a sense of status within their profession. However, they also described the psychological effects that the attitudes and perceived prejudices that they experienced from other healthcare professionals had upon them. These negative perceptions of professional acceptance within the healthcare industry may have influenced therapists' confidence about the acceptance of corporate massage within organisations generally. Furthermore, there appeared to be tensions within the massage profession itself, such as preconceptions between therapists about the status and value of remedially versus non-remedially qualified therapists.

## **General Dimension 2: Physical**

General Dimension 2 comprised one higher order theme, namely musculoskeletal issues. All of the interviewed masseurs perceived that massage was effective in reducing various musculoskeletal pains presented by their clients, noting that there was high demand for neck



and shoulder massages within in the corporate sector. Therapists also provided their views about the causes of common musculoskeletal issues of their clients, suggesting why neck and shoulder issues were so prevalent.

Therapists talked about the tactile nature of physical therapies and revealed that providing massages to recipients to relieve musculoskeletal problems actually placed significant physical demands on their own bodies. They openly shared the measures they took to look after their own health in order to remain fit for their work. This somewhat unexpected focus of the therapists on discussing their commitment to helping people improve their health and wellbeing whilst placing their own health at risk, introduced another concept (and potential dilemma) in this area. Here was a significant underlying inconsistency associated with workplace massage in that while allied health workers were attempting to promote the benefits of massage to contribute to a healthy workplace, yet they themselves often experienced injury resulting from their profession.

### **General Dimension 3: Situational**

Two competing aspects to this dimension emerged; that of the private practices of the therapists and that of the organisations to which they provided massage. Massage therapists discussed the parallel considerations related to business outcomes of introducing corporate massage services as part of their own business and for the organisations where they provided the programs. Therapists suggested that workplace massage provided a relatively lucrative source of income, and for many, this provided a temporary but regular cash flow, thus allowing them to supplement their incomes from private practices. All interviewees, however, considered their private practice to be their primary focus.

The complexity of this situational dimension became clearer when therapists expressed how organisational policies continually affected corporate massage businesses and thereby destabilised predictability of their contracts with organisations. Corporate massage could be on-going long-term contracts or single day events. This situation created a dilemma for them as they attempted to balance their private practices with providing contracted corporate massages sessions. For example, therapists explained that organisations could require them to attend corporate events at short-notice, which meant that they might have to disrupt their private clients' appointments. The paradox of this situation seemed to be that their private

business was therapists' stated priority, yet often they were prepared to forsake their private clients for the short-term cash benefit of providing corporate massage (potentially risking their private client base).

For the organisations, therapists held definite views that massages assisted in improving productivity outcomes for businesses because of the health benefits gained by the employees receiving massages (such as reduced pain and increased mobility); however, some criticised the ineffectiveness of providing quick 15-minute massages for employees' health outcomes. They perceived that this may result in productivity gains for the organisation and improved morale, but argued that there were few long-term health gains from such activities. When asked why they thought employees used corporate massage programs, therapists were clear in their opinion that people largely used corporate massages because it was convenient and easy to access.

#### **General Dimension 4: Disadvantages**

General Dimension 4 comprised two higher order themes, namely logistics and disadvantages. Although therapists cited few disadvantages for their clients or for the organisation, they did perceive that there were a number of disadvantages to them personally and for their massage businesses. They explained that they faced a number of logistical difficulties in providing the services to their clients. For example getting to and from the offices posed problems for them at times, and these particularly included issues related to parking. Carting the massage equipment around and setting up the rooms was not always easy and once at the various sites, the rooms were not always ideal. Despite these business challenges, the fact that the therapists continued to provide corporate massage services perhaps suggested that the financial gains outweighed the disadvantages. In light of this, the many potential benefits that corporate massage activities afforded therapists perhaps moderated the altruism they expressed as healthcare providers. Such opportunities may have included using the situation to advertise their businesses and the financial benefits gained by providing the service.

#### **Presentation style of the findings**

The following sections present the general dimension followed by a discussion of the respective higher order themes. Each of the higher order themes is explored using direct

quotes from participants with relevant explanations and contextual location of the quotations. An analysis of each higher order theme follows these sections using the theories of Argyris and Schön (1974, 1992, 1996) as the framework for understanding the data and findings. Following this analysis section is a general discussion and the conclusion to this chapter.

### **Psychological Factors**

The therapists described the psychological factors that affected the employees and themselves in the workplace setting. The following sections explore the various psychological themes that emerged from the interviews including mood, compassion and attitude, and the effect that these issues has upon them, their clients, and the organisations. Therapists saw these issues as impinging upon the overall outcomes of the massage program because of the multiple ways in which psychological factors affected the individuals and how that interaction translated into beneficial outcomes for both the employee and the organisation. Interestingly, the physiological responses of clients also affected how massage therapists felt about themselves.

### ***Mood***

This higher order theme was the primary focus of the massage therapists and they concentrated their interests in this area during interviews. Overall, they suggested that massage positively affected the mood of individuals receiving the massages and believed that these outcomes translated into favourable business outcomes for the organisation. Mood appeared in multiple guises, such as employees feeling a sense of relaxation, enjoyment, happiness, and relief. Apparently, employers used the massage program to influence the mood of employees during times of organisational change and industrial unrest.

Of the eight massage therapists, seven perceived that corporate massage improved workplace morale and mood, and they were able to articulate further some differences in how this manifested or arose. Therapists attributed their perceptions to the way in which people responded to them when they were in the workplace, the feedback they obtained from massage recipients, and their general observations.

Massage programs were seen to generally contribute to the air of happiness in the workplace. One therapist explained how a client had observed the effects of the massage program to be

very positive, reporting that “somebody actually said to me the other day, massage just makes us all a little bit nicer, it’s a bit like Christmas.”

The comparison to Christmas perhaps suggested that recipients viewed massage as a special event, something that employees looked forward to, and which improved their mood. This comparison might also have raised the mood of the therapists, knowing that they were providing a service that made people “a little bit nicer”. Another therapist provided massages to people who worked in a factory. He explained that workplace massage sessions provided a focal point, and opportunities for office discussions between employees. People who would not usually see each other in the workplace crossed paths when going to and from their massages. He explained:

*I think it also creates a bit more, how would you say, inter-personal relations. Because of the way the factory is set out, everyone’s allocated to a particular area. So, I guess one of the things from my point of view is that if I am massaging someone from the front of the business, in quality control, for example, and then the next person that I massage is from the back of the factory where the machines are, they might not see each other very often – just by virtue of the fact that they’re not in the same area. So, I often find that people will come back and say, “Yeah, I haven’t seen you all day. What have you been up to?” They have a bit of a chat and I think it sort of creates a bit more workplace socialism.*

Attending the massage session apparently broke the normal routine of employees. Staff who would not normally interact in the workplace had the chance for conversations because the massage area was centrally located. Another therapist described a workplace where there had been recent retrenchments. He explained that people in that organisation were experiencing low morale and high stress levels. He perceived that the massage sessions allowed recipients to reduce their stress levels and improve their happiness. He stated:

*I would say on morale that it does actually assist morale, or help morale. I suppose I’m basing that on, well one of the places that we go to and what they’ve been through. Generally when there’s low morale, there’s high stress, and one of the places had recently been through retrenchments for example. So, the morale there was fairly low, people were unsure about their jobs, stress levels were fairly high. So, in that case I think it helped to reduce stress levels, which in turn does impact and bring up morale with it because people, if you’re less stressed then you’re generally happier.*

Employers may have intrinsically understood the mood-altering effect of massage and used this to their advantage. The contribution of workplace massage was seen by therapists as promoting and maintaining a mood of happiness within the staff, but also reported instances

of more subtle uses of their programs when the industrial mood of the workplace was deteriorating. Indeed, some therapists reported that employers used the massage services to appease restless staff during industrial action, or where there were perceived inequities between worksites. For example, in one organisation, the office workers had corporate massage available to them, but the out-posted workers did not. The management of the organisation sent the therapist to massage those workers to balance out the inequities between employees and improve morale. In this circumstance, the massage therapist seemed to view the actions of the management as a form of appeasement to the staff, and explained:

*There was one of the community centres where there was a big industrial issue about two months ago and people were crying and people were upset and stressed and they needed some sort of Band-Aid treatment so they sent me out there and the people didn't pay, the council paid for the massages all day.*

The massage therapist explained that the organisation provided workplace massages to employees on two occasions during industrial action. He described that people were positive about the massages, but that he purposely chose not to raise the industrial action as a topic of conversation. He perceived that the massages improved the morale in the workplace and made people feel happier. He stated:

*It's happened twice to me and once again it was an industrial issue, I think, and they loved it. We didn't talk about it, I didn't say I'm here to calm your stress because of the industrial programs and they didn't question why I was going, and they probably knew why I was going, but we didn't talk about it we just treated the massage.*

In another instance, the massage therapist explained how a group of employees at one location received no programs or health benefits. The employees expressed dissatisfaction about the inequity of not receiving any services at their workplace, when other workers did.

He described his experiences:

*At another location where there were a group of people who don't get any services or health programs made available, they started whinging and all sorts of things, so they just sent me out with my table, like a bushfire and sending me out.*

In their descriptions of the massage program, there was a feeling that there was an apparent attempt by employers to use the activity to influence or manipulate the organisational mood. Not only did massage make people feel better, but therapists agreed that in their broad experiences workplace massages relaxed recipients. They observed that although there was a

suggestion in some of the literature that massage contributed to increased alertness in recipients (Field et al., 1999), and invigorated people, in their general experience people, on the contrary, relaxed during massages. Furthermore, therapists seemed to express pleasure in contributing to peoples' relaxation through massage. One therapist shared "I think for the client, apparently massage is supposed to invigorate you but I tend to have a tendency to make people relax and occasionally nod off."

This therapist also expressed a dilemma between what she believed managers wanted to hear about corporate massages and her actual experiences in providing massages. She described how people relaxed during workplace massages, and although she knew a technique that would invigorate people, she chose not to use that method on her clients. Her perception was that employees did not want invigorating massages; they wanted to relax during their sessions. She promoted workplace massage as invigorating to managers, but actually used relaxation techniques on her clients. She explained:

*We try and promote that it's going to be an invigorating massage, and even though I end it with a deportment technique, I think perhaps 15 minutes is long enough for a person, and the chair is actually very relaxing as well, it's very supportive and that surprises people. I think initially that you know, [people are surprised] how supported they feel, so it allows their muscles to relax as well, which is half the work. Yeah, so we try to actually promote it to sort of management, I guess, as it's going to be invigorating. But, I think people tend to be relaxed generally under most sort of corporate massage styles. I did read somewhere, that some research was done on sort of short-term massage and they found that anything that's sort of moderate to deep tissue work, promotes relaxation. The only one that actually promoted invigoration was that sort of almost like a shiatsu type, which I actually did learn. But, what I actually found was I feel the people didn't enjoy the actual experience of the massage as much as the more relaxing stuff.*

This observation mirrored the experiences described by massage recipients in Study 2, who explained that massage was an indulgence, which left them feeling relaxed. As one therapist confirmed, from her observations, "They [massage recipients] can relax, they actually feel better about themselves".

Massage therapists seemed to place importance on their clients' relaxation and the mood-lifting effects of massages. They appeared to respect their clients' sessions as time out and an opportunity to unwind. Another therapist also described how her clients often drifted off to sleep, or became so relaxed that they were on the verge of sleep. She sounded as though she

did not want to intrude in people's relaxation time. Her understanding of her clients' massage time closely mirrored how the recipients themselves had described their massage experiences. She continued:

*They have just basically gone to sleep and I could tell that they were virtually on the verge of falling asleep, so therefore I didn't want to interrupt their peace...they're drifting off and just enjoying the moment.*

Massage therapists seemed to be acutely aware of the importance of their clients' relaxation. They appeared to want to contribute positively to their clients' massage experience, and enhance their relaxation. They respected their clients' time out, and seemed to value the importance of the massage session to each person. A further therapist described:

*I think it's more that they just appreciate the time out. At the same time, they're getting a bit of reward for the hard work they do and some hands-on treatment. It makes them feel a bit more relaxed. Probably, of the six or eight massages that I can try to do while I'm there, I've generally got three or four that say, "Oh, I think I was asleep then".*

Interestingly, the influence of massage programs appeared to affect both the recipients and the therapists. Not only did the individuals receiving massage appear to experience improved mood, but the therapists themselves seemed to gain an indirect benefit. They felt valued by people's responses towards them, and enjoyed the sense that they made people feel psychologically better. The way that therapists spoke about their clients suggested that they were a professional cohort who had a high level of compassion for their clients.

### ***Compassion***

Therapists reported that they enjoyed interacting with their clients, meeting new people, and felt a strong desire to make their clients feel good, both physically and emotionally. The interviewees' responses were not surprising as the massage industry is a *healthcare* industry.

As indicated previously, contributing towards making people feel good, both physically and emotionally, appeared to provide positive effects on both therapists and their clients.

Interviewees seemed to receive pleasure by making their clients feel good. Therapists indicated that their reward for making others feel good was that, in return, their clients made them feel needed, wanted, and appreciated, and the recognition of this synergistic relationship

may be one of the underlying reasons why, even in the absence of increased productivity measures, there is commonly a very positive acceptance of workplace massage programs.

One therapist described her transition from working in the corporate sector to becoming a massage therapist providing workplace massages. She seemed to have felt undervalued working in finance, and her transition to massage was uplifting. People appreciated the way she made them feel, and expressed their appreciation openly. She described her experiences:

*I came from a corporate background and I really like going in there and making people happy and getting lots of compliments. Whereas, opposed to when I was in finance, you'd get the once a month thank you because that was bosses had to do to keep their staff happy, you know. So, that compares with sort of getting 10 or 15 or whatever people a day telling you you're wonderful.*

Another also shared how she derived pleasure from giving each individual his or her first massage. She enthused:

*I enjoy meeting the new people. A lot of them hadn't had massages before, so I loved being the first person to actually give them their massage, you know, just to gauge their response, I get a lot of satisfaction from that.*

Therapists seemed to be compassionate and placed significance on making their clients feel good. This desire extended beyond the physical aspects of massages (the hands-on part). They made efforts to ensure that none of their clients missed a massage, even if the client was late, or missed an appointment. They sought to please people. One therapist explained that even though her corporate massage day was busy, and her schedule full, she still attempted to accommodate as many clients as possible. She described her day:

*It's a day I have to keep on my feet. So, 28 people from 9 o'clock until 4.30. I need to be very flexible, because if there is no appointment available, you miss them and I have to maintain their relationship, which is very important to me. Just because they are not there on the list doesn't mean that I discard them, and they feel good when I come back and say, "You weren't here this morning. What time would you like to see me today?" So, it makes them feel good that I haven't forgotten them.*

Even though therapists conducted the massages in office settings, they attempted to foster a more pleasant ambience in the room with added touches such as candles, music, or aromas. They seemed to place great importance on enhancing the massage experience for clients



within the limitations of the setting. The actual massage appeared to be one part of the overall experience to make people feel good. Another therapist described her contributions to enhance the massage session for her clients:

*I make a point of having a really nice smelling candle. I use really nice oils. People walk past the massage room and they associate the aroma with feeling good and the relaxation. There's a whole lot of other things, it's never just the massage.*

Even with the best of intentions, however, achieving the atmosphere that therapists sought to provide their clients could be challenging. Nevertheless, therapists seemed to tackle the issues of office climate controls, burning restrictions, and general corporate setting, to provide the best experience they could for their clients. Another therapist explained how she adapted to the environment to enhance the massage experience for the massage recipients:

*Making the environment truly relaxing is quite difficult, when you can't control temperatures and you're not allowed to have things burning, but we'll try and do the best that we can in terms of still getting some smells in there and using some crystals just to change the energy of the place. And so, they go somewhere where they walk in and they feel like they've really escaped their office or their desk.*

Despite the difficulty of creating a relaxing environment for massage recipients, the therapists still attempted to do the best that they could in the conditions. Massage therapists placed emphasis on creating relaxing and calming ambiances to complement the massage experiences for their clients. Most tellingly, perhaps, it appeared that the therapists seemed to want to do more for their clients than just provide a physical therapy.

Part of the job of massaging people often involved listening to people. Therapists reported that they heard all sorts of issues from their clients ranging from casual conversations to the intensely personal. Most therapists considered that listening to their clients was part of the role of massage therapists. None of the participants expressed distress about listening to people; rather, they viewed their role as that of neutral sounding board. There seemed to be a consensus among the therapists that they were not advisors or counsellors, only listeners. A therapist talked about this listening role, and stated:

*It is a very confidential environment, a very private environment and as with any one on one situation, there are a number of things, which I don't tell outside but they sometimes see it as an opportunity to talk to someone neutral.*

Their compassion was evident; therapists took their listening and caring roles seriously. One therapist compared her role to that of a cleric or a doctor in a bygone era. Possibly this analogy suggested that she viewed her role as more than that of physical therapist, and felt that she was a holistic carer for the psychological and physical welfare of her clients. She talked about the two sides of the door to the massage room and implied that people showed their stoic public face to the world, but when they entered the massage room, they showed their vulnerabilities. She shared:

*Sometimes I think massage therapists, especially really experienced massage therapists, are more like the priests and doctors of days gone by. As I said, I've had people that have come in and they're on that side of the door and they've just made a major decision, and then they walk on this side and they're a broken person. Then they have their massage and they walk back out and they're straight back into being strong. It actually allows people to let go, and sometimes people don't have time to come to a clinic because they have all, or if they have, work is different and your family takes up a lot of time.*

Another therapist provided his views on why he perceived that his role involved listening, as well as providing massage. He thought that he provided a safe environment for his clients to talk about issues. He had wondered whether people spoke to him because they had nobody else to discuss their concerns with, such as family members. He confided:

*I think it also gives the client the forum to discuss things that perhaps maybe they can't discuss with other people because there's no real personal connection in family or relatives often, you know. There are some things that are general that they just talk about, and there are some things that are something that I thought, 'I wonder if you have spoken to your family, or your wife or your brother or whatever it is they are talking about?' So, I guess it is an avenue that they can go down also; no pressure.*

Therapists described hearing all sorts of concerns from their clients from work related issues to personal issues. She described some of the things she was likely to hear during a session, and recalled:

*Others will tell you the whole story, it just depends on the person. Yeah, but some of them will tell you work's crap, and this happened and that happened, or this person did that or they want to leave or, you hear it all, or well, my personal life is stressful. And that's another aspect of it, so you get that.*

Again, this somewhat unexpected role of the massage therapist could go some way to explaining the continual general positive feedback regarding these sessions. People involved in the massage therapy sessions emerge with a positive disposition, but for reasons of unspoken confidentiality do not say it was directly because of a conversation or sharing of relatively private issues.

Finally, although massage therapists did not view their roles as counsellors for the psychological issues, they did see themselves as educators, which, in light of the above comments, is a more 'public' position. Therapists reported that they regularly provided education to their clients and to employers. They tried to positively influence their clients' behaviours and provide educational guidance so that people could experience optimum health. Therapists aimed to heighten their clients' awareness about how they could improve aspects of their musculoskeletal symptoms. For the employers, therapists provided advice on how to maximise the value of massage in the workplace for their employees.

### ***Education***

Education that therapists provided to massage clients ranged from simply giving general advice through to handing them specific written material. For example, corporate therapists advised on matters such as stretches, recommendations to address ergonomics at their workstations, postural advice, and gave suggestions to visit other healthcare professionals. In addition, there were various educational hand-outs made available on a range of relevant workplace topics. From their statements, therapists seemed to view the educational aspect of their work as fundamental to positive outcomes. Therapists expressed pleasure at the opportunity to help people through education. One therapist described feeling good about educating people, by stating, "You definitely educate people, which is another thing that makes you feel good about doing corporate massage".

Another therapist explained that education was about helping people to help themselves. By providing their clients with such guidance, they perceived that people could be self-empowered to gain optimum physical health. She shared:

*I mean we also tend to talk to them about exercises and stretches that they might be able to do. So, they're also getting information as to how they can take charge of it and change things around for themselves.*

Therapists commonly described similar situations about providing advice to their clients. People would come to them and explain their physical symptoms and, in turn, the therapist would consider the options available. For example, the following therapist explained:

*I do get a few people come in and going, “My arm’s sore and there’s something wrong with my wrist”. We’ve probably worked closely there, because if I think it’s something to do with how their desk is set up, then I will say to them, “I’ll get the OHS person to come and check your desk and make sure it’s all ergonomically correct”. And I might say, if they feel like they have, they don’t know whether it’s bone or whatever I’ll say, “Go and see an osteo, or you know, something, if you need to see a GP. You need to see a GP or you need to see somebody else”. So, [we are] giving them advice so that they can maintain their health.*

Therapists drew from their own knowledge to share healthcare options with their clients. Although therapists saw their primary role as masseurs, they seemed to consider that their role extended beyond just providing massages. They considered the effect that the environment, posture, and stressors could be affecting their clients’ health. One therapist described the postural advice she provided her clients when she stated:

*I also promote a lot of education on posture and how they can reduce the stress levels at work and like with my massage, we always tell them, where they’re tight and how they can prevent that from recurring.*

Massage did not just want to mask problems and issues by providing a massage and giving people temporary relief. They appeared to want to address the root-cause of people’s problems rather than just treating the symptoms. She continued:

*I basically educate in managing your problem. So, while I’m massaging you, I would be talking about a problem and how best to get, to actually manage that problem. That’s basically what I do.*

Therapists did not limit their educating role to their massage clients. They seemed to feel that employers needed education about the benefits and limitations of corporate massage, and commented that oftentimes employers did not understand what workplace massages entailed. Indeed, while undertaking the negotiation process to implement workplace massages, therapists reported that they needed to explain the nuances of corporate massage to prospective employers so that they fully understood what to expect from any program.

This incipient tension between the notions that massage is a purely physical activity with the more holistic view that has emerged from the therapists' perceptions, is an interesting observation. In this respect, therapists stated that many employers wanted to implement programs with the least disruption to employees and production. Furthermore, therapists seemed to perceive that in some cases the massage program was little more than an employer's token gesture to staff. For example, one therapist seemed annoyed when she was asked to massage staff working in a call centre, but the employer did not allow call-takers to leave their phones or desks during the massages. She described the situation:

*From my personal experience, I've had people that have come out and said, "This is what we want, blah, blah, blah". When I've turned around and said, "well it's actually not conducive for actual relaxation, in terms of the person having the massage, to not actually leave your workstation, to actually still have the headphones on", which sometimes happens in the big call centres. They'll still have their headphones on, and they're still answering calls, so they're listening, and to take up the slack if someone else is...and you're doing the work. How can that be relaxing? And, if someone, if you're really tight, and always is, and to have someone spend 10 minutes on you once a fortnight in that 10 minutes, and you're actually not removed from your position, to me it's a bit like, hen chickens. You're feeding the chickens but they're still in the hen. You're massaging the people but they haven't left the work space. They haven't actually had a real time out. If that employer is really dedicated, then give that person 20 minutes or 1/2 an hour somewhere else.*

She continued describing a different workplace, and expressed further frustrations, which understandably arose from the stance of a therapist taking a broader view of wellness. While the therapist was trying to maximise the benefit of the massages for the recipients, the employers, being focussed upon the physical interaction, did not seem to accept the advice of the therapists. She continued:

*She [employer] didn't listen to me either. Like, I told her, when she actually had a room and they could come off their phones and they could come down and have at least 20 minutes, then I could do it. And, she still hasn't done that and they have seated massage. In fact, they don't even have seated massage. The masseur goes around, the person sits on the chair, and the masseur goes around so that the person who's actually getting the massage, not only do they not leave their workspace, they're still in their chair, they haven't got something to lean onto.*

The massage therapists seemed to express greater empathy for the massage clients than for the business requirements of the organisation. Her attitude did not appear to be anything malicious against the employers. Instead, this therapist's response seemed to demonstrate her

level of compassion and commitment towards her massage clients, and her desire to maximise the benefits of the massages in terms of a whole-of-being experience.

### ***Attitude***

Therapists discussed (a) the attitudes of the people working within the corporate sector towards them and their profession, (b) prejudices they experienced from people within their own industry, and (c) the attitudes of other healthcare workers towards massage therapists. Being a remedial therapist seemed important to therapists (even to those who were not remedially qualified) and this status affected their attitudes about themselves and to others in the industry. Therapists seemed to have a high regard for the remedial status, which involved further education and training, and those who were remedially qualified often pointed this notion out during interviews. One therapist explained that he was remedially qualified, not *just* a massage therapist. He possibly sounded slightly elitist about his remedial status when he stated:

*Mostly attending to the injuries to the staff. So, it's massage but it's mostly remedial work because they come in and complain about various problems that they have. So because I'm a remedial masseur, massage therapist, I'm not just a massage therapist.*

In Study 2, most of the participants interviewed had explained the importance of relaxation during their massage. The therapists, however, painted a slightly different view, and seemed to place emphasis on the importance of remedial massage, which was interesting since remedial status seemed to be more important to the therapists than it did to the recipients. One therapist stated, “I’m remedially qualified, so I would say 80% of the work that I do in the workplace is more remedial than it is relaxation”, but although massage recipients valued *deep* massage, they did not ever specifically talk about remedial massage.

Clearly, having remedial status seemed to be important within the industry. Perhaps, being able to claim that status gave therapists a boost to their self-confidence. In Study 2, massage recipients did not refer to therapists’ remedial qualifications, so apparently this was not significant to them. Remedial massage therapy seemed to more important to the therapists than it was to the recipients. Another interviewee made a point of stating that she was studying to become remedially qualified and reported, “I’m actually studying, doing my remedial diploma at the moment”.

The attitudes of the employers also affected the therapists. In various capacities, therapists reported that they felt that employers took advantage of them and of their goodwill. Not only did employers seem to procrastinate and mislead therapists when negotiating to implement programs, but also, once those programs were in place, employers routinely inconvenienced therapists. The employers' attitude towards therapists seemed to make them feel as though they were little more than workplace commodities. One therapist explained how she was providing demonstration massages to potential organisations to promote her business, and reported:

*I was offering to go out, meet people, and massage them for free to show them what the massage was like. What I found in that instance was, that, I'd go out and take the chair and if the person was really interested in having the massage, usually nothing would come of it.*

She continued:

*There was another instance where they invited me to come and meet with them. At one of their meetings, it turned out that I was the subject of entertainment for a monthly catch-up type meeting. So, I was massaging and talking to a room full of 30 people at the same time.*

Another therapist reported how her efforts could be in vain. She seemed to feel disappointed and taken advantage of because it appeared that people got free massages, but she did not gain any longer term work from the demonstrations. She stated:

*I was offering to go out and meet people and massage them for free to show them, what the massage was like and what I found in that instance was, that, I'd go out and take the chair and if the person was really interested in having the massage, usually nothing would come of it.*

Employers seemed to pay little regard to the therapists in some instances. Therapists described how they were trying to run their businesses, and employ masseurs to accommodate corporate requirements. A therapist explained that getting subcontracting therapists to work was not easy, so that when organisations cancelled with short notice, it made it difficult to retain those subcontractors who were looking for stable sources of income. She described a scenario she faced:

*They say on the day, they'd say a couple of people are away, so we only need one therapist and you'd organised two. There wasn't much you could do about that and so that inconvenienced whoever you had on. So it was hard to retain the therapists because you didn't know when the work was going to come about and you had a lot of therapists on the books, but then if you didn't provide the work for them, they'd go and find other work. So it was really hard to manage, to manage the whole thing.*

In Study 2, participants described their experiences after having massages, and explained how they felt relaxed and rejuvenated after getting off the massage table. Massage therapists' observations seemed to mirror those descriptions. Therapists appeared to value table massages over seated massages, but organisations sought to maximise the number of people who received massages in organisations to minimise the financial outlay. One therapist felt that by implementing seated massages in the pursuit of efficiencies, companies compromised therapists' health. She stated:

*The most effective corporate massage that I've ever had is more where you can actually have a room on the premises rather than a seated massage. Most of the corporations these days try to get more value for money, as in they want the therapist to see maybe six in an hour. So, they prefer that people actually get the seated massage, and then the people actually don't leave their desks. But, for me, that's actually, that's not actually looking after the therapists. I would never send one of my staff members to do corporate massage in the seated massage. Seated massage is a blight on the massage society because it's very short lived, short term, its fine for a demonstration and things like that or for pregnant women but in terms of longevity in corporate.*

Massage therapists seemed to be affected psychologically by a number of issues that they faced as part of their work. They felt as though the corporate sector took advantage of them, that there were professional jealousies, and that other health care professionals did not necessarily make the therapists feel as though they were professional peers. Even new clients could treat therapists as though they were sub-standard healthcare workers. The attitudes of therapists towards one another sometimes seemed quite scathing, and they reported that other healthcare professionals could treat them as though they were bottom dwellers. She disclosed:

*I think people judge you before you actually get in there. If they don't know who I am, or I'm doing a one off thing, they don't know who I am so you invariably get, "Oh, what do you do for your real job", and you know, that sort of thing. So, ignorance of actually what you can do. And, I think ignorance of the skill level that you've actually got. That everybody looks at massage as a bad career choice. Like if you were any good, you wouldn't be in massage. You know that sort of, there's that quite distinct*



*thing that if you were any good, then you'd do massage for so many years and then you'd go and do physio or you'd go and do that type of thing.*

Her descriptions of people's attitudes seemed as though they were quite hurtful, and how they had made her feel cheap. She continued to describe the prejudices that she had faced. She reported:

*I've actually worked with people that have been just downright rude and cruel and in terms of you know massage therapists being the bottom of the barrel and they're a science degree something, blah, blah, blah or they're in a corporation so you're at the bottom of the you know, so you can be bought at any cost. Oh, just the way they actually speak to you, just in their tone of voice. Someone can always make you feel like a prostitute.*

The descriptions she provided, such as *prostitute* suggested she had faced some situations that had left her feeling worthless. She felt that she was a professional healthcare worker with a great deal of experience in the industry and the capacity to provide good healthcare to her clients. She seemed to enjoy the work of her chosen profession, but was hurt and disturbed by some of the negative attitudes of the people with whom she dealt.

There is once again an undercurrent of tension here in that the masseurs saw themselves and their profession having a more central role in workers' health, while some workers and employers took them to be more peripheral to 'real' workplace issues. Given the previous revelations that other workers and masseurs were engaged in more holistic health activities, this tension is understandable, and could explain why uptake of workplace massage is more problematic than expected.

### ***Sexism***

Although this higher order theme was not dominant, occasionally it appeared dispersed throughout the interviews. There seemed a perception among the female therapists that people preferred them to male therapists. Females did not provide any strong indication why they held this belief and the males interviewed made no suggestion that their gender had hindered their career. For example one therapist stated, "Being female has always helped me, not hindered me". Another observed, "A lot of people didn't want the male therapists". Another commented, "I think people, in my experience, prefer a female to do it".

A male therapist shared his experiences about how his gender affected his professional role and reported:

*I was at an office about 12 months ago and I saw on this particular day that there was a new name on the list. It was obviously a foreign name and I thought this will be interesting. So, the lady turned up and she had burkha on, she had a gown on, and she looked at me really strange. She said, "Oh, I thought you were going to be a woman." I said, "Look come in and lets have a talk. Where are you from?" She told me where she was from and that she was on contract on a temporary basis. I said, "You have obviously got some issues. Number one with any clothing removal", this was a table massage, it wasn't a seated massage, "and b, with another male in close contact with you." She said, "Yes." I said, "Look you don't have to remove any clothing, you don't have to take anything off at all, how about you just get up on the table and I will put a towel over your body and we will just work definitively with your body muscles and we will stop half way down your back?"*

*She was happy with that, so we worked through the towel, through the burkha, through the gowns and things she had on. She actually loved it. I took control with that situation and perhaps rather than her being embarrassed about it in what she can do and what she can't do. Now she was only there on a short-term contract, but she did come back two more times and we went through the same process. Now whether or not she was able to tell anyone at home what she did [I am not sure], but she was willing to come back and see me because of my approach to her.*

Despite the reported success of this massage, the male therapists faced a number of issues with his gender. The client would have willingly had a massage, without question or negotiation, had the therapist been female. Furthermore, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that other potential clients may not have attended the program solely on the gender of the therapist. Although not specifically asked about the importance of the gender of their therapists, participants in Study 2 did not raise it as an issue, problem, or a disadvantage.

### **Physical Factors**

The nature of massage treatments required that therapists manually provide physical manipulation to their clients, and therapists commonly reported multiple health benefits for massage recipients. The therapists' perceptions about the physical benefits for clients aligned with the themes that had emerged in Study 2.

## ***Musculoskeletal***

Therapists' focus was predominantly on the musculoskeletal benefits of massage to their clients. The perceived benefits of massage included pain reduction, and improvements to necks and shoulders brought about from having had massages.

One of the benefits of massage that therapists reported was the potential for recipients to experience reduction in pain. Therapists perceived that for employees to have the opportunity to manage their musculoskeletal problems during work hours resulted in increased productivity in the workplace. In essence, less pain more outputs. Some believed that massage led to reduced compensation claims, but nobody verified this perception with any tangible data; their observations and comments were anecdotal. One therapist shared:

*Well, for instance, if you are working there as a typist or whatever and you are developing neck and shoulder problems that would stop you from coming to work, that would stop you, you know, that would lead to a claim. A bad shoulder could lead to a, could maybe, lead to a WorkCover claim. Now, the fact that I go there and if somebody complains and says, "I've had this shoulder for a couple of weeks now and its starting to bother me, and I've got to take time off work cause I can't come into work", and then I give them a treatment, and it comes good, then that problem's not there anymore.*

The therapists seemed to equate recipients' pain with reductions in productivity. They perceived that massage recipients could work for longer periods of time when they were not in pain. One person stated:

*You know, they can work for longer periods at a time I suppose, without, you know, the pain, which is comfort that some people feel.*

In Study 2, massage recipients focused on how massage relaxed them, and alluded to the ability to concentrate better after they had a massage. Therapists described similar observations about their client's massage experiences. Furthermore, therapists seemed to believe that massage contributed to improved posture, particularly for desk-bound workers. One participant drew a link between poor posture and headaches. He explained how massage had assisted one person manage her headaches. He stated:

*They sit down; they have their 15-minutes. A lot of them will stand up and they'll go, "I could go to bed now". But, as soon as they get back to their desk, they're so much more alert and so much more ready to tackle the day. The other aspect from that is*

*that in several of these organisations, because of their long hours, their staff tend to suffer a lot from headaches and that computer-based posture. So, obviously the massage helps in regard too. One girl recently sent an email to the person who coordinates it saying that, she's comes every week since I've been there; her normal headaches that are associated with her stressful job are pretty much non-existent anymore. That's basically because of the massage that that's been managed and kept under control.*

Therapists reported that they primarily provided corporate massage to office workers. By the nature of the work, these employees often undertook extensive hours of computer-based work. One therapist referred to “computer-based posture”. Therapists referred to such posture and explained that it resulted in sufferers experiencing sore neck, shoulders, and upper back, primarily caused by the way that they sat at their workstations and undertook their work. Most therapists interviewed explained that there was high demand for massage to alleviate the pain associated with this type of posture. Many therapists shared the common complaints their clients experienced, which were associated with computer-based, or desk-bound posture. One said:

*It's fairly common problem for what we treat, which are usually postural related or computer related so it's usually, neck, back, shoulders and arms.*

Another stated:

*A dominant problem is neck and shoulders. Neck and shoulders, migraine. Neck and shoulders, stress related problems.*

In order to treat those musculoskeletal issues, therapists used various methods to address complaints. Some used table massage, and others used seated massage, to try to improve people's posture-related complaints. One described her approach as “generally, I use a massage chair and I do ten to 15 minutes of neck, shoulders, and generally the back”.

Another explained that she used combinations of techniques for her clients. She stated that “back, neck and shoulder massages, either on the table or in the chair” were in high demand from corporate clients. One therapist clarified what she thought recipients were seeking from their massages, when she reported “it's always there, the headaches, the neck and shoulder. By shoulders, they don't actually mean shoulders, they mean upper traps [trapezius]”.

There was a widely held view among therapists that neck and shoulder problems were commonplace in the corporate sector. Clients expected therapists to focus the massage on those areas on their bodies. Such demand suggested that massage recipients derived some benefit from massages that concentrated on the upper torso. Through their discussions, therapists seemed to understand their clients' needs and responded by targeting those specific areas.

Therapists placed emphasis on the tactile nature of massage, and explained how they used touch and feel as much as visual and verbal enquiry to guide their assessments and examination processes. The language of therapists reinforced the physical aspect of massage. One person explained:

*Yeah well, the people will tell you. Somebody will say: "My neck's been killing me this last few days, and my back's been killing me". So, I will have a look around and, and I will see what my fingers are telling me. That's how I go, I go from my fingertips.*

He described how he used his fingers to assess how people's muscles felt. The way this therapist explained his understanding of his clients' conditions appeared to be a combination of intuitive assessment and palpation. He continued:

*It's a very tactile thing. Everything I do, is through my fingers, so that's basically how I assess and how I, you know, I mean I've got lots of knowledge and I can tell if, where something is wrong and what's happening. Yeah, but sometimes it is a genuine injury, as in a back injury or a neck injury, or in a shoulder injury but sometimes it's just plain stress that people have muscle contortions.*

Touch was critical to therapists' understanding of their clients. How massage recipients' muscles felt was integral to the therapist's physical assessment of them. None of the therapists discussed using formal musculoskeletal examinations on their clients, and as one therapist explained, "I measure stress by the muscle fibres, how they feel".

Corporate massage therapists had limited time to conduct each massage. They spoke of 15-minute chair massages, or half to one-hour table massages. Despite the existence of numerous clinical tests for the musculoskeletal system, massage therapists seemed to rely on their intuition and the *feel* of their clients' bodies to guide their treatment. This process may have been a consequence of the location and time limitations they faced conducting massages in

the corporate sector. None of the therapists who were interviewed specifically stated that they did not use clinical tests when examining their clients. They did not, however, discuss the tests that they may have used when treating clients.

### **Situational Factors**

The 'situational factors' dimension that therapists addressed included their own business experiences as well as those of their clients' massage experiences and organisational outcomes. General Dimension 3 comprised two relevant higher order themes, namely: (a) business outcomes and (b) convenience of workplace massage. Although the themes that emerged in General Dimension 3 were not as dominant or seemingly important to the therapists as for other Dimensions, they nevertheless made some perceptive comments

#### ***Business Outcomes***

Massage therapists appeared to want to believe that corporate massage contributed to increased productivity. They often used language such as *I think* and *hopefully*, which suggested that they were not certain about the actual productivity outcomes gained from corporate massage. One stated:

*I think with the massage it also covers the nervous system doesn't it? So it also, it would create more focus and attention in the brain. So, I think having said that, it's like a mini break they can recharge the batteries in that 15 minutes and then get a lot more done afterwards. So while yeah, so while it does use time, I think in the long-term get a lot more out them for the rest of the day.*

There was a great deal of supposition and uncertainty in the therapists' language. Whereas they might have alluded to specific research or observed differences in the workplace, the language used did not reflect anything other than anticipated outcomes. Another stated:

*Well, if the staff are comfortable while they're at work then obviously that's going to hopefully make them more productive in their job. So if they're pain free and I hope that to some extent I am achieving that for them or helping them and that rolls over into their job and working more efficiently and more effectively, because if you're sitting there in pain obviously you can't really concentrate on what you're doing.*

Although the statements made by therapists perhaps were based in common sense and their intuitive understanding, they did not refer to anything other than their thinking. Furthermore,

they may have been able to report the information their clients had shared with them anecdotally, but they did not. Repeatedly the language used by therapists was that of perception only, that is what they thought or anticipated. None seemed to have explored the outcomes sought by the employers from the massage services. There was no indication of a shared understanding of what the program was designed to achieve. The therapists were not part of the organisation's culture, and none had directly spoken of any specific direction given to them by the employers or about what they had expected the program to achieve. The best the therapist could do was to rely on their own perceptions of their role as service provider to the organisation. One therapist shared her thoughts:

*I think the better the person feels, the more they'll appreciate the company's giving them time and paying for them to have it and so that of course, is actually a bonus of productivity.*

What is of particular interest here is the generally tentative nature of the comments from therapists who might have been expected to be more positive about potential business outcomes related to their potential employers. The business outcomes that therapists often spoke about were their own business experiences whilst providing corporate massage, and they were not overtly claiming significant business outcomes for those organisations who implemented workplace massage programs.

The first order themes identified within business outcomes were: (a) transient nature of the work of corporate massage, (b) client attrition, (c) therapists' commitment to private practice, and (d) corporate massage activities attract good remuneration.

### ***The transient nature of the work of corporate massage***

Corporate massage work was quite volatile because it was difficult to secure on-going regular massage work within the corporate sector. This situation perhaps suggests that despite the benefits that managers claimed that massage programs delivered to their organisation, the programs did not receive appropriate level of support to ensure their success, thus sending a negative message to the workforce about its importance. Therapists reported that once they secured placements in organisations, competing interests in the workplace could distract the patrons of workplace massage, or people could simply lose interest in the massage program and cease making appointments. Furthermore, therapists seemed to perceive that after their appointment, managers treated them as little more than disposable commodities.

While times were good, organisations could afford the corporate masseurs; when things were not so good, therapists found that managers cut budgets by ending massage programs, perhaps ultimately perpetuating the view that workplace massage is, in fact, a *luxury* rather than a necessary function to support workers' health and improve productivity. Therapists seemed to feel that there was evidence of a perception of 'add-on' function rather than an essential worker program, which manifested in a feeling of corporate 'disloyalty' to the therapist. A therapist explained:

*I found there was no loyalty there when you did a lot of work for certain organisations. But then, when they were cutting costs, you know, that was it, they were looking for someone cheaper and there was no loyalty in it. So, I found it was extremely volatile and people would change the arrangements, last minute, which would affect my therapists that I had organised.*

In another case, the therapist explained that although he attended the organisation regularly, the uptake of the program was unpredictable. He worked in a company where he provided massages on a user-pays basis. This situation led to unreliability in the numbers of people who attended for massages. Despite the reports given by the users of massage programs regarding health benefits and productivity gains, the therapists' reported experiences suggested that recipients ultimately viewed massage as a non-essential service. He shared:

*I suppose it's just not regular. Well it is regular, I go there every week but the times that I work fluctuate enormously so I suppose that's because the clients are paying. So, but sometimes that works in my favour so, six of one, half a dozen of the other.*

The unpredictable nature of the recipients' attendance appeared to reflect badly on the acceptance of the program and seemed to drive therapists to seek some form of commitment from organisations. There seemed little point to make the effort to attend workplaces where the therapist was only likely to see a few clients. Therapists apparently sought to know how many people would be at the sessions so that it made their attendance worthwhile. One therapist described an interaction she had with somebody in the workplace when he recalled:

*I said if I'm going to come down here, I can't come down here for two people. I said if you are going to jump up and down and whinge about the fact that you don't get these programs, you've got to frequent them if I do come down here. You have to look at it from my point of view. I need that commitment from you so, I'm not going to take a full day off and come down here for two or three people.*



The importance of collaboration between service providers and managers to co-design the program seems critical to ensure that all parties understand the intended outcomes and thus meet the requirements of the organisation and its employees. Once implemented, an evaluation of the program would be necessary to understand the effect of the massage program, and this would reveal whether it met its aims and if there was a need to adjust the program.

### ***Client attrition***

Therapists expressed their views on why people leave the massage programs or cease attending them. Often they were not sure why people stopped using the program, but they did not seem overly concerned about client turnover. They appeared to view changing clientele as part of the business cycle. There did not seem to be a process for evaluating attendance for business purposes other than verbal feedback, and yet this seems to be a missed opportunity to work with managers to understand what the organisation and workforce required from the program. Therapists appeared to accept this aspect of their work without questioning it and without consideration for the benefits of co-designing the program with the management group for organisational gains. One therapist shared her thoughts:

*I didn't really hear anyone that said they didn't like it, but I know that just through natural attrition, that there are people and that massage just isn't their thing.*

The availability of the program affected people's attendance. Organisations provided programs on particular days. If people were not able to work within the schedule then that could affect their attendance. According to one therapist, people's non-attendance at the program was not necessarily reflective of their attitudes towards massage. In some cases, work commitments and competing priorities meant that people did not attend the program.

The manager and employee groups involved in the massage programs both reported the many benefits of massage, yet the inconsistent use of the program and the seemingly poor implementation of the programs contradicted its stated importance. Furthermore, the therapists' unquestioning acceptance of the attrition was another missed opportunity to work in partnership with management to improve the program's effectiveness. In view of the organisational gains that managers reported about the programs, they did not always seem to invest the requisite interest to ensure that they succeeded. He stated:

*Some of the attrition that I have found isn't purely the lack of desire to want a massage. It's timing as well. You know, people work on different days. They have different shifts. They also work on different machines. Often my most popular client might not want a massage on a particular day, because he just has to get something done for the boss, or the customer is waiting on a delivery and they just have to get all hands on deck to get it done and out the door. So, that is not a reflection of him not wanting a massage. It is just that he has got too much on his plate at that particular time. He just can't afford the time.*

Despite the therapists' ready acceptance (perhaps at the level of a pragmatic understanding) of client attrition, they seemed to have a high level of commitment and therefore priority for developing their private practices outside the corporate sector. Perhaps it was their view that securing corporate work was difficult, which drove them to develop their private work. This issue, however, raised a question about the joint level of commitment that managers and therapists made to corporate programs and may have even contributed to the ultimate demise of such programs. One person interviewed explained how she used the corporate exposure to market her private practice, and said:

*Advantages are definitely promoting your own business outside of that environment so you can just basically just meet a number of people in one day and if they enjoy it, they can get information on how they can contact you and see you outside of the office.*

Corporate work seemed to be a means to an end because when client attendance was good, the work paid well. The cost, however, was the physical demand on their bodies with the types of massage that the corporate sector lent itself too. Furthermore, there was the added burden of carting around heavy equipment to conduct massages in the workplace. All these issues perhaps suggest that corporate programs are not designed to succeed because the therapists enter the agreement with an expectation that it will only ever be a short-term arrangement. One person stated:

*I'm trying to build up my own business outside of that [corporate work]. I probably could [build up the corporate work], but this [private practice] is more important to me.*

When there was a conflict between their private work and the corporate work, therapists seemed to opt for placing their priorities into private work. Perhaps this resulted from the combination of the logistical difficulties of providing workplace massages, the physical

demands that therapists experience, the inconsistency of the work, and the potentially impersonal nature of the work. In light of these views, successful corporate programs may have been the exception rather than the norm. Some implied that corporate massage could be somewhat like a production line, one massage after another.

*I try not to do them [corporate jobs] because I'm too busy in private practice. They take up a lot of time and you tend to, like my tomorrow's one I'll start at 9.30 and I'll work all the way through to 4. So that's you know, boom, boom, boom, boom.*

One of the appeals of corporate massage was the remuneration therapists gained from it. Despite the reported challenges and the potential for injury, the financial side of workplace massage perhaps compensated for the disadvantages cited, but there seemed dubious commitment to the programs from therapists.

### ***Corporate massage activities attract good remuneration***

Regardless of their commitment to building private practices, therapists reported that the corporate work paid them well, and the financial gain from undertaking the corporate work provided a strong lure. The enticement of quick money may have driven therapists to undertake more work than they otherwise would have if the financial rewards were meagre. In some cases, therapists pondered the trade-off between the risks of physical injury versus the money. One person shared:

*The one off that I'm doing at the moment, it was purely because they threw an enormous amount of money at me. For me it was an economic decision. This one that I'm doing tomorrow is purely economic.*

One therapist had been in the massage industry for many years, and considered herself as a veteran of the industry. She acknowledged that the financial gain was potentially high. Her contempt for corporate work, however, was evident as she expressed exasperation about the physical cost to therapists who conducted workplace massages. As well as her own wellbeing, she seemed to fear the risk of injury that her colleagues and peers exposed themselves to when providing workplace massage. She stated:

*Corporate massage is great, get into it, you know, you can make really good money. We're cutting those people's wrists off. We may as well just cut 'em off and hang 'em up. Because, that's not something that they can sustain.*

Her view, and that of other therapists, seemed to be that corporate massage offered some financial incentives, but it was not viable as a long-term career. Perhaps that was why therapists invested time and energy into their private practices, but it raises doubt about the viability for long-term successful corporate programs, the value of such programs for individuals, and the real benefit to the organisation. The shared commitment between managers and therapists to create a successful program seemed to be a missing link.

### **Convenience**

Therapists perceived that the workplace massage programs were convenient for people to attend. They suggested that some people would be less likely to attend to their health if the convenience of workplace massage was not available. One therapist reported:

*When you spend that long, you kind of, you detach work, from the rest of your life, and your health. And you try to fit in your health you know, and when they fit it in you know, if they're working until 3 o'clock in the morning, I suppose they can see that they can do something for themselves during the day while they're at work and if they're stressed all the time, then they're going to be feeling, "Oh, I didn't realise I was that tight in the shoulders". Or, you know, they're like that when they sit down and then they sort of start to become like that, so they sort of didn't realise what they felt like.*

This sentiment echoed that expressed by the participants in Study 2. There seemed little doubt that the ease of receiving a massage at work contributed to people using the program. Therapists then recalled that when people received their massages recipients would become acutely aware of the muscle soreness and body aches they were experiencing. The massage seemed to provide people the time to focus on themselves. Had the massage not been convenient they may have chosen not to address their musculoskeletal issues with a resulting cumulative effect. In this regard, the organisation potentially benefited because people addressed their health concerns before they became major or debilitating problems. Another therapist shared:

*I think it's you know, a really positive thing for them because it's really convenient and if it's just there. It's accessible, but people don't have to change appointments because they can fit it into their work day. It's easy to set aside 15, 20 minutes, ½ an hour, or whatever and I think it does help them.*

Apparently, the convenience meant that people could access the program without unduly interrupting their working day. Participants raised this point in Study 2, indicating that both therapists and employees shared the perception of the convenience of the program.

### ***Disadvantages***

Therapists identified few disadvantages with workplace massage. The primary concern of the therapists was the logistics of the room. Therapists seemed focussed on ensuring that they provided the best service to their clients as the corporate environment allowed for under the circumstances.

### ***Logistics***

Therapists openly discussed aspects of difficulties they faced in conducting workplace massage. None of the therapists worked solely for one corporate organisation, and this presented them with various problems. Although therapists raised these issues, it was evident that this was not a dominant concern throughout the interviews.

Therapists reported facing many logistical difficulties in conducting workplace massages. The issues they raised included: getting to and from premises, parking (oftentimes organisations were located in the central business district), carting equipment to and from offices, and finding suitable rooms from which to work. One therapist stated:

*You know, and sometimes you can sort of give them your opinion but you've got to be very careful about that with corporate massage 'cause there's not enough time to give a proper assessment or to do a remedial treatment.*

This problem of being time poor was always a concern, because it had the potential to reflect negatively on the preparation and presentation of the sessions. One therapist reported, for example, that they were not being able to conduct a proper health assessment on the recipient and in doing so potentially placed the health of the employee at risk. In this respect, therapists ran the risk of injuring people during a massage because the employers provided insufficient time for the sessions. Paradoxically, although the employers did make continual reference to implementing the program in order to address occupational health and safety obligations, by not providing sufficient time to the therapists to do the necessary health checks, the resultant

haphazardly implemented program may have been counterproductive. Another therapist talked about getting to and from the organisation and stated:

*Disadvantages are the transport. Having to get your table around and parking and ...also waiting a period of time before you get your money.*

Many therapists seemed to experience pressure getting to and from the organisation that significantly ate into the available time for the sessions, and led to some expenditure of energy. In addition, employers often expected the therapists to do long hours providing massages in the organisation and, in doing so, this potentially meant that they were servicing their clients when tired. One therapist described the travelling process:

*You allow an hour for travel, you're there for most of the day and then you start at 9.30am and if you finish at 4pm. By the time you travel, that's a whole day. Well, it was too long a day for me. Often I do one off things. I do a lot of one off things. If someone will hire me for a day, or hire me to go in and massage their boss and that sort of thing, I do do that and that's quite easy. But, I'm just not into the whole carrying my massage table to...it's just from years of [massaging]; I just don't need to do it.*

The therapists also expressed a view that the set-up in the corporate sector provided less than ideal privacy arrangements for clients. One therapist stated “and one of the things for me was how can you really assess someone if someone's sitting there, you can't have a private one-on-one”.

Whilst the therapists did not speak of the disadvantages of the program in much detail, they did turn their minds to them. Some stated that others might perceive a potential negative as taking time out of the working day to have a massage. Another potential negative was that massage recipients might become too lightheaded to concentrate after their massage. As one therapist reflected:

*The only disadvantage that could come about from workplace massage is that the person has to take time out from their job. It's 25 minutes to have a massage. That's... apart from that, there's no disadvantage at all.*

Interestingly, while therapists seemed conscious of the potential stress that their clients might experience by having a massage when they should have been working, this issue was not raised by the massage recipients themselves. A therapist pondered:

*What they may perceive to be a negative is it takes 15 minutes out of their day, when they should be working. I would probably say that that 15 minutes possibly increases their productivity for the rest of the day, so they probably gain that 15 minutes and more back, in terms of work time later in the day but they possibly don't see that and measuring that is a very hard thing to do. Other disadvantages, obviously their staff member might be having a massage when something urgent comes through, but generally, they're only 15 minutes.*

Based on the perceptions and experiences of the therapists, there were several potential adverse consequences for the organisation of providing workplace massage. First, therapists cited an inability to undertake a thorough health assessment prior to conducting massages. In this instance, recipients may have been exposed to less than ideal healthcare treatments. Second, the long hours therapists worked potentially meant that they were fatigued when providing massages and therefore tired therapists could be ineffective and not provide an optimum service to their clients. Furthermore, perhaps the employers were placing the health and wellbeing of the therapists at risk and potentially exposing the organisation to liability claims for injury.

### **Theories of Action: Mood**

Therapists appeared to share the tacit understanding that massage improved the mood of their clients and supported this premise through their language and by citing concepts that they believed provided evidence to substantiate those views. As noted earlier, one therapist used the example of a client's comparison between massage and Christmas to demonstrate that massage, did in fact improve their clients. A number of assumptions were at play when the therapist used this example, including that Christmas is a happy event and that most other people (and the interviewer) considered it a time of year where most people enjoyed elevated moods<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the therapist's tacitly held theory that 'massage improved mood' was consistent with her espoused views.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on those assumptions, there was no internal inconsistency in this comparison for a person who identified Christmas as a mood-lifting event, but the use of this example may have been problematic had the therapist been of a different religious background or the interviewer of a non-Christian faith. Furthermore, there are many people within the community who (regardless of their faith) may not find Christmas a happy event.

Another therapist used a phrase cited by one client that massage made people *a little bit nicer* as evidence that massage improved individuals' moods. This statement indicated that the tacitly held theory of the therapist was that *nice* people experienced better moods. Although this concept may have been congruent with the therapist's tacit theory (that *nice* people experience good moods), it was neither internally nor logically consistent as a person may have been experiencing a low or depressed mood yet still be perceived as *nice*.

Another therapist used an example based on the assumption that the personal interaction that arose resulting from people crossing paths on their way to and from their massage sessions led to improved mood. As with the earlier therapist who had cited the 'massage is like Christmas' analogy, there were a number of assumptions at play here. The first assumption was that there was no workplace conflict between the employees crossing paths on the way to their massage sessions; the second assumption was that people enjoy socialising in the workplace; the third assumption was that people had time to socialise in these circumstances; and finally, that people experienced improved mood from social exchanges. Analysing this from the viewpoint that these assumptions held true, then the tacitly held theories of the therapist were both internally and logically consistent, and congruent. Furthermore, in Study 2 there were a number of participants who had expressed their enjoyment at the opportunity for the social interactions with their colleagues (and with the therapist) arising from the massage program.

One company had been using the massage program during industrial unrest to lift morale and the mood of its employees and the therapist used the term *Band-Aid treatment* to describe the actions of management. In this instance, the therapist's internal theory seemed to hold that a massage program would be ineffective in improving employees' moods in the face of industrial turmoil. His theories appeared both internally and logically consistent because a short-term massage was unlikely to result in a longer-term mood-lifting outcome for recipients. Perhaps for the duration of the massage individuals may have experienced pleasure; however, the massage was not going to alter the industrial situation.

Notwithstanding the therapist's apparent view that the massages were unlikely to lift the moods of his clients, he continued to provide the massages. Although he did not seem to agree with the provision of the *Band-Aid* response, he did continue to provide massages at



this organisation. As such, his espoused theories were incongruent with his actions. Arguably, there would have been little value in providing staff with massages if there was negligible resulting gain for recipients (or the organisation). Financial reasons (i.e., earning an income) may have driven his decision to provide massages; nevertheless, he continued to provide massages despite his apparent dilemma. This therapist's actions were perhaps a form of "systematic self-deception" (Argyris and Schön, 1992, p. 33) because he spoke in the language of one theory (the massages were a *Band-Aid* solution, seemingly unlikely to improve people's moods) and he acted in the language of another (by continuing to provide massages). He seemed to maintain congruence between his espoused theories and his actions by justifying the organisation's actions (the council was paying for the massages) and espousing the notion that people enjoyed massages (*they loved it*) perhaps believing that massages might improve their moods, albeit fleetingly.

A number of therapists seemed to hold a theory that massage was relaxing, which in turn improved their clients' moods. For some, this presented a dilemma because although they perceived relaxation improved mood it also led to sleepiness. Therapists apparently held a tacit theory that employers implemented massage programs to invigorate their staff, yet massage often sent recipients to sleep. Therapists alluded to massage outcomes such as invigoration and increased alertness, but consciously chose massage techniques to relax their clients knowing that such methods would often result in people falling asleep. Two concurrent tacit theories were at play here; one, that employers wanted their staff invigorated by massage; and two, relaxed clients enjoyed improved mood, but became sleepy. The outcomes sought by employees and employers were inconsistent; recipients were unlikely to be both sleepy and invigorated simultaneously. Furthermore, therapists felt certain obligations to the employers (to whom they marketed massages as invigorating, knowing that if the program did not meet employers' expectations they have the capacity to cancel programs) and to their clients (who enjoyed the relaxing massages). Therapists opted for the relaxing style of massage and to reconcile their dilemma, they implied that such relaxation led to improved mood and workplace morale.

Therapists had strongly held views that massage improved mood, but in the workplace setting they encountered several dilemmas and appeared to have a higher loyalty to their clients than to the organisation. The dilemmas included the tensions they faced such as balancing the

managers' and organisational requirements for the program against their clients' expectations of the massages. Each stakeholder group apparently sought differing outcomes from the program. To find the balance, therapists marketed the massage program to managers in a manner that they thought would please them but provided massages to recipients that relaxed them and improved their mood. As Argyris and Schön (1984) explained, "the problems of real-world practice do not represent themselves as well-formed structures. Indeed, they tend not to present themselves as problems at all but as messy, indeterminate situations" (p. 4).

The *messy* situation for the therapists was meeting the expectations of what they perceived both the employers and the employees wanted to achieve from the massages. Despite promoting massage to the employers as invigorating, recipients became sleepy. Regardless of the sleepiness, people enjoyed improved mood and that outcome seemed enough justification for the therapists.

### **Theories of Action: Compassion**

Therapists seem to have tacitly held theories that a masseur should be compassionate. They indicated that through their language and actions that they perceived their role being more than that of simply providing a manual therapy, but that it should include kindness and consideration in order to provide a full health service. In light of the World Health Organization's definition that "health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (2011, n.p), the therapists' approach to treating their clients was both internally and logically consistent. To treat clients without compassion would be an incomplete service.

The terminology used by therapists demonstrated that their tacit theories were congruent with their espoused theories and their theories-in-action (Argyris & Schön, 1992). There were any number of examples of the effort and consideration where therapists demonstrated their compassion, such as how they set up their treatment rooms, and in how they dealt with their clients, apparently with the intention of delivering an optimum service. In many instances, their efforts might be considered to be beyond what was necessary in the circumstances. For example, even though they were working in a corporate setting, many therapists put significant effort into improving the ambience of their treatment rooms, such as the use of candles, fragrances and essential oils, and the use of crystals (considered by some to have

therapeutic benefits, such as changing the energy of a room). The forethought therapists gave to creating this environment, which they felt would positively affect their clients, provided further evidence that their theories-in-action were compatible with their espoused theories.

The first sign of therapists' implied theories was in how they set-up of the room by using candles and essential oils. They appeared to consider themselves as neutral listeners for massage clients, who they wanted to feel safe in the event that the client chose to share private thoughts. Therapists discussed how they provided a confidential environment, with one comparing herself to a doctor or a priest. In this instance, the governing variables seemed to be that the treatment room was confidential and safe, so people could feel comfortable to share their innermost thoughts.

Argyris and Schön (1992) stated that:

*Each person lives in a behavioral world of his own – a world made up of his own behavior in interaction with the behavior of others. Each person's behavioral world is therefore artificial not only in the sense that it consists of artifacts [sic] of human convention but in the sense that it is shaped and influenced by one's own action and by one's theories of the behavioral world as they influence action. The relationship between theory-in-use and action is special. Here, the action not only applies and tests the theory but also shapes the behavioral world the theory is about. We are familiar with this phenomenon in its pejorative connotations, as in the example of the teacher whose belief in the stupidity of his students results in the students' behaving stupidly. But the usual conclusions of such experiments is that one should avoid self-fulfilling prophecies – as if one could. Every theory-in-use is a self-fulfilling prophecy to some extent (pp. 17-18).*

Drawing from Argyris and Schön, perhaps the underlying theories of the therapists (that is, that they are compassionate healthcare workers who provide more than simply a manual therapy) becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The therapists provided the ambience and setting that favoured intimacy, one where clients could open up about their most private situations. The therapists appeared to invest significant energy into creating the setting for this situation. They could easily have provided an environment devoid of niceties. In this event, a more clinical setting may have discouraged clients from sharing their innermost thoughts with the therapists. Nevertheless, the tacit theory that the therapists seemed to hold was that they were, indeed, compassionate healthcare workers. Their primary function was to provide manual therapy services, but their theories-in-action demonstrated that they believed that their role

extended beyond merely the physical. The self-fulfilling prophecy was actualised because the therapists' belief that their role included listening resulted in them creating an environment where clients were comfortable talking.

### **Theories of Action: Education**

Participants seemed to hold implicit theories that part of their role went beyond that of physical therapist and was also that of a healthcare educator expressing this notion clearly through many of their conversations. A number of therapists described how they provided their clients with written educational health care material, advice on posture and ergonomics, and recommendations for stretching exercises that recipients could do between massage sessions. In doing so, their theories-in-use matched their espoused theories.

The concept of masseur as educator is internally consistent. Massage therapy is a healthcare option that is regarded as having several psychological and physical health benefits (Moyer et al., 2004). To advise clients to complement and build upon the benefits of massage by providing supporting educational material is both logically consistent and internally consistent. Massage therapists aimed to improve people's health outcomes through massage and, therefore, providing advice to maximise the health benefits was congruent with their theories, and therefore their actions matched their espoused theories.

However, the effectiveness of their role as educator was unclear. According to Argyris and Schön (1992), "a theory-in-use is effective when action according to the theory tends to achieve its governing variable" (p. 24). In this regard, their role as educator was to provide advice to their clients that might improve their health outcomes. None of the participants interviewed reported that they had tested the effectiveness of the education with their clients. The value of providing their clients with such education may have been ineffective, expensive, and time consuming. Providing verbal advice at the end of the massage may have seemed valuable, but if a client merely listened with interest but chose not use the information, it might bring into question the value of using that time to provide education to those individuals.

The therapists' theories would have been testable. If they provided education to their clients then the clients should logically gain some health benefit from the education. For example, if

a client was experiencing pain and reduced range of motion, then the therapist could have measured the range of motion and recorded the client's self-reported pain levels, and provided advice on how to improve or manage these issues. At the next massage, the therapist could re-test these variables by: (a) asking the client if he or she had adopted the recommendations; (b) measuring the range of motion to determine if there were any improvements; and (c) obtaining clients' self-reports on pain levels. In this regard, the therapist could test and determine the value of the educational strategies; however, they did not report that they did any testing. Although massage therapists enjoyed providing advice and education to their clients, the value of doing so was uncertain because the effectiveness of the education had not been tested. Nevertheless, massage therapists did not appear to question their theories or see any dilemmas between their theories and actions.

### **Theories of Action: Attitude**

Being a remedially qualified therapist was important to therapists. To achieve this professional status required therapists to undertake further education, and it was apparently highly regarded within the profession. According to Argyris and Schön (1992):

*The most important type of consistency lies not between propositions in the theory ("this man is generous," "This man is stingy") but among the governing variables of the theory that are related to assumptions about self, others, and the behavioral setting. For example, a theory of action might require two propositions- "Keep people calm" and "Encourage participative government; if participative government can only come about through heated action, the theory is internally inconsistent, although not logically inconsistent (pp. 20-21).*

The importance of the remedial qualification to therapists was unambiguous and affected their attitudes and assumptions about self, of others, and the behavioural setting. In this regard, the consistency of their personally held theories was complex and demonstrated a number of internal inconsistencies that were logically consistent. On face value, to enhance one's skills, knowledge and ability in a chosen profession through formal study is both internally consistent and logically consistent. However, a number of issues emerged during the interviews with massage therapists, employers, and employees that bring the importance of the remedial qualifications in the corporate sector into question.

First, massage therapists and employees alike stressed the importance of relaxation as one of the primary outcomes sought by recipients from workplace massage. A massage therapist is not required to hold a remedial qualification in order to provide relaxation massages, rather the therapist need only have a base qualification.

Second, massage recipients did not focus on the necessity for their therapist to be remedially qualified. In fact, few employees referred to remedial qualifications during the interviews in Study 2. Likewise, employers interviewed in Study 1 did not require therapists to hold this level of qualification, and in one instance, a manager interviewed in an organisation that had a large entrenched program in place specifically stated that the massages *were not* intended to be remedial.

Therapists appeared influenced about how they felt about themselves and of their professional peers concerning the remedial qualification. Because the qualification was so seemingly important, they made specific reference to it in many of the interviews. They stated that they massaged people who presented with injuries and conducted *remedial* massage, yet they made little if any reference to the associated tests and assessments required for conducting such massages (Brukner & Khan, 2001). A number of employees had expressed a preference for a deep massage, but few explicitly referred to remedial massage.

Considering the position posited by Argyris and Schön (1992) that theories are based on assumptions about self, others and the behavioural setting, therapists were greatly affected by a number of workplace issues. For example there are ‘self’ issues such as ‘to be a worthwhile therapists, I need to be remedially qualified’, issues related to ‘others’ such as ‘employees require remedial massage’ and the behavioural setting issues such as ‘massage therapists are employed to manage employees’ injuries in a workplace setting’. However, it appeared from their responses that their espoused theories were not congruent with their theories in action. An example of this is where many therapists discussed the measures they took to create a relaxing ambience in the room, such as the use of candles, aromatherapy oils, and music. They did not stress their attention to strategies, which are integral to remedial massages such as musculoskeletal assessments and testing, pre and post massage. According to Argyris and Schön (1992),

*lack of congruence between espoused theory and theory-in-use may precipitate search for a modification of either theory since we tend to value both espoused theory (image of self) and congruence (integration of doing and believing) (p. 23).*

Therapists clearly valued the remedial status and having this qualification provided them with a positive *image of self*. Although therapists provided little to suggest that they were undertaking remedial massages in the technical sense of the term, the *integration of doing and believing* may have in their references to injury management. The value of relaxation massages did not seem to provide therapists with a strong image of self despite the importance of relaxation massage recipients had expressed. The attitude of therapists towards being remedially qualified was that it was highly valued, but overall seemed of little importance to employers and employees.

Therapists' attitudes suggested that they had an inherent desire for acceptance by people, but most notably by other healthcare professionals; they seemed to perceive that other allied health professionals were condescending towards them. One therapist had suggested that people could be cruel and hurtful, and had even stated that people could make you feel like a prostitute, but gave no examples of such cruelty; whether the cruelty was actual or perceived remains unknown. However, in view of this, such perceptions may have subconsciously driven their assumptions about self and of others (Argyris & Schön, 1992). For example, if therapists had attained the remedial qualification, then they may have had an improved *image of self* and in turn may have believed that a remedial qualification improved their status with other healthcare professionals, but this assumption was untested. Nevertheless, such defensive thinking was probably counterintuitive; the fact that people enjoyed the massages and employees continued to run the programs should in itself have been the primary concern therapists. The professional insecurities placed too much emphasis on issues that were not relevant to the program.

### **Theories of Action: Sexism**

As described earlier in this chapter, sexism was not a dominant theme for therapists. Although female therapists saw their gender as an advantage, male therapists did not seem to think that being male placed them at any disadvantage to their female counterparts. The male therapists' theories-in-action matched their espoused theories by virtue of being actively engaged in the profession. Female therapists offered no real theories on their rationale that

being female served them better professionally, and none of the employees interviewed in Study 2 expressed any real preference for female over male therapists.

### **Theories of Action: Musculoskeletal**

The underlying tension that therapists perhaps did not acknowledge, was that by providing massages and supporting people with musculoskeletal complaints, they were placing their own health at risk. A number of therapists described how massage proved to be physically demanding on their bodies. Many had various exercise or health regimes that they used to ensure that they could withstand the physical demands on their bodies and increase the longevity of their careers. To adopt a healthy lifestyle as a massage therapist is logically and internally consistent. Their espoused theories were to undertake exercise and strengthening activities. Their theories in action matched their espoused theories as many therapists explained that as well as their health and wellbeing strategies, when faced with potential overuse injuries they modified their massage techniques. By doing so, they attempted to limit any aggravation to injuries, and therefore such modifications to massage style were congruent with their espoused theories.

This approach also made good sense from a business standpoint to ensure that injury did not shorten a therapist's career. As previously explained therapists saw their role as educators and taught their clients about the value of stretching and exercising. Therefore, by adopting healthy life choices, such as exercise and behavioural modifications in the face of potential injury, the therapists' actions (in some part) demonstrated that they practised what they taught their clients. Perhaps the overarching dilemma for therapists, however, may have been in espousing the value of protecting ones musculoskeletal system while knowingly placing their own at risk.

Argyris and Schön (1992) explained that "dilemmas of effectiveness arise when the governing variables, in a theory-in-use/ behavioral world interaction, become less and less achievable over time, finally reaching the point at which they fall outside the acceptable range" (p. 31). In the case of therapists, continuing to massage people and espousing the value of massage for the treatment of musculoskeletal complaints may be acceptable while injuries to self were manageable and not disabling. However, the congruence of espousing the value of massage while placing oneself at risk of physical injury is likely only to be



acceptable while any injuries are negligible or at least controlled. A dilemma for a therapist then becomes one where they advise people to cease activities that place them at risk of overuse injuries, but then go on to provide massages while exposing themselves to an overuse injury arising from their profession.

### **Theories of Action: Business Outcomes**

When discussing the business outcomes of corporate massage, therapists used language that was vague including terms such as *I think* and *hopefully*. They seemed uncertain what benefits the organisation gained from the workplace massage, so despite their tacit theories that massage made people feel good, their espoused theories regarding the organisation were ambiguous. As providers of corporate massage (and marketers of their business product) to have uncertain espoused theories was both internally inconsistent and not logically consistent. Massage therapists should logically have undertaken significant research to understand the benefits of massage and to apply that into a workplace context. As marketers of corporate massage, they should have been able to explain with confidence what research existed to support the value of workplace massage. Instead, therapists were unclear about the existing theories about any benefits employers and employees may have gained in the workplace.

The therapists' responses perhaps provided insight into the complexities and insecurities they expressed about the attitudes they had experienced within their industry and from other healthcare professionals. The uncertainty with which therapists talked about the business outcomes that an organisation should expect by implementing a workplace massage program perhaps exposed a bigger issue. Therapists had insufficient knowledge of their own industry and of massage, which manifested in vague responses about the benefits of massage within a business setting. If they had little confidence in their own knowledge then this may have fed their insecurities about what other professionals thought of them.

As Argyris and Schön (1992) stated “effective action requires the generation of knowledge that crosses the traditional disciplines of knowledge – with as much competence and rigor as each discipline usually demands” (p. 3). Arguably, the indefinite responses that therapists provided demonstrated limited competence and rigor in their professional field. Although therapists firmly believed in the value of massage, they had limited scholarly knowledge from which to draw. Their implicitly held and espoused theories were that massage made people

feel good, but they were unable to substantiate their views with strong arguments in the organisational context. They apparently based their positions largely on intuitive belief patterns.

Despite their limited views on the benefits that employers gained from workplace massage, this did not seem to create any dilemmas for therapists. Argyris and Schön (1992) explained, “dilemmas may be created suddenly, as conditions shift in the behavioral world, or they may emerge gradually through the cycles of interaction” (p. 32). Apparently, the conditions that therapists had experience did not warrant a rigorous understanding of the corporate benefits of workplace massage. They were providing massage programs, which suggested that the employers already knew what they wanted to achieve from the program and did not need any further explanation from therapists. If, however, the behavioural world changed and employers demanded such information from therapists, then the shift would create a dilemma and therapists would need to respond to the new behavioural world differently than they had to date.

Therapists focussed more on their own business outcomes than that of the organisations to which they provided the programs. They explained that the work was transient in nature and that they experienced shifts in demand due to corporate budgets and client availability. In some ways, therapists seemed to imply that organisations should demonstrate some loyalty to them. Whether this was a tacitly held theory or simply an expression of frustration is debatable. Regardless, a therapist was never likely to experience much level of loyalty out of an organisation other than meeting any contractual arrangements.

### **Theories of Action: Convenience**

Convenience arose as a minor theme in the therapists’ interviews, and they raised nothing controversial about this issue. Therapists held theories that workplace massage was convenient for employees, which was both logically and internally consistent. That therapists provided corporate massage was congruent with their tacitly held theories and that workplace massage was convenient resonated in the words and actions of the people who used the program.

### **Theories of Action: Disadvantages**

Therapists discussed a number of disadvantages with providing workplace massage programs. They espoused the difficulties of working from multiple sites and the problems associated with carting their equipment around and finding parking for their cars. Other logistical issues that therapists raised included the number of hours that they were often expected to work and that the set-up of the rooms often limited their ability to conduct proper health assessments. Despite these disadvantages, therapists continued to provide workplace massage. Any number of reasons may have underpinned their reasons for continuing to work under such conditions and no single theory seemed to underpin this decision. Many of the reasons that therapists had explained about providing workplace massage throughout their interviews included that it paid well, that they liked meeting new people and that they felt that they were positively contributing to the health outcomes of their clients. In light of these intertwined explanations for providing workplace massage, there is arguably no single theory that drove therapists to provide workplace massage. While the personal benefits outweighed the disadvantages, therapists were likely to continue providing the programs.

### **Study 3 Discussion**

Despite massage being a tactile therapy, the dominant issues in the discussions overwhelmingly fell into the psychological dimension. From the perspectives of the therapists, although the physical benefits of massage in the workplace, such as pain relief, and increased mobility and range of motion, the dominant aspect addressed by therapists was psychological. Consistent with this decentring of the effects of the massage from the purely physical, most therapists also saw themselves as educators as well as healthcare providers.

Paradoxically, perhaps, whilst the therapists were giving of themselves, they were themselves equally needy. They wanted people to like them; they too wanted to feel good. In this regard, seemingly the mental construction of the therapist may have influenced the massage experience for the massage recipient. For example, if the therapist felt positively about their role, then recipients of the workplace massage may be more likely to have a positive massage experience. One therapist had confided:

*I came from a corporate background and I really like going in there and making people happy and getting lots of compliments. Whereas opposed to when I was in finance, you'd get the once a month thank you because that was bosses had to do to*

*keep their staff happy, you know. So that compares with sort of getting 10 or 15 or whatever people a day telling you you're wonderful.*

Therapists gave a strong impression that they were committed to making peoples' experiences special. They strove to make little but positive differences in clients' massage experiences and placed a high burden on themselves to make that happen. Therapists spoke not only of providing their clients with massages, but also of enhancing the massage experience with additional indulgences, such as candles. As one therapist explained:

*I make a point of having a really nice smelling candle I use really nice oils. People walk past the massage room and they associate the aroma with feeling good and the relaxation. There's a whole lot of other things, it's never just the massage.*

The language massage therapists used provided a strong sense that they saw themselves as healthcare's professional poor cousins. They often used words during interviews that suggested self-doubt and uncertainty. Particularly, female therapists' littered their conversations with words such as *I think*, *I suppose*, *hopefully*, *I hope*, and *I guess*. What created this seeming insecurity remains uncertain, and perhaps such turns of phrase stemmed from a lack of education or extensive knowledge about the physical therapies and the organisations for which they were providing the services. After all a person whose knowledge and understanding is sound would make statements that instilled confidence in his or her audience. As another stated about their massage services:

*I 'think' it would complement it [OHS policies]. Because occupational health and safety requires that they obviously are healthy. So I 'think' it would help to reduce like the stress levels and also the education on ergonomics, so I 'think' it would really compliment that in that the staff are going to reduce anything's that's contributing to sick days etc. and just education on how to look after themselves, I just 'think' it's quite complementary.*

In another interview, a different therapist made the following statement, which was again flooded with words of self-doubt. Here was a massage therapist talking about the effect that their work had on individuals. There was no indication throughout the statement that this therapist was at all confident. She shared:

*Well, I 'think' it does make well, 'hopefully', I like to 'think' I am making a difference to their body especially if they've got deep seated issues that are recurrent and it's you*

*know I can get into those effectively and treat those, therefore it doesn't build up as quickly I 'suppose'.*

The uncertainty expressed by therapists may have affected the quality of the service they provided their clients. Had therapists and managers worked more closely to establish a clear and shared understanding the underlying drivers for implementing the program then therapists may have experienced greater confidence in delivering the program. Therapists expressed a high level of concern and empathy for the needs of their massage recipients as clients, but seemed less cognisant of the role of managers as clients; after all, managers had significant influence over the fate of the program. Despite this, therapists seemed largely unaware of the role as managers as clients, instead viewing the people with whom they dealt with directly as clients (that is massage recipients).

### **Methodological Issues**

The participants recruited for this study were therapists who provided corporate massage. The situation that there was unequal numbers between male and female therapist may have influenced the findings from the study. A number of therapists approached during the recruiting process chose not to participate. Accordingly, it cannot be stated with certainty whether the individuals interviewed for this study represented massage therapists' views on workplace massage more widely.

### **Answers to the General Research Questions**

In response to the research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, the advantages of workplace massage from the perspective of the massage therapists were that massage improves mood in the workplace and provided a platform where people could receive information and education about their health issues in a convenient setting. Workplace massage is convenient and employees could access therapists to address their musculoskeletal issues without leaving work. Workplace massage also provided workers with a neutral sounding board to discuss issues of concern. Although therapists expressed personal disadvantages about workplace massage, the only disadvantage they identified for employees was that workers had to leave their workstations for a period during the day to get their massage, but they did not see this as a major problem.

Massage therapists believed that by providing workplace massage, managers positively affected morale and consequently increased the productivity of their workers. Therapists also suggested that employers could use corporate massage as an inexpensive reward for their workers.

An issue that therapists did not identify, but which has emerged from the data was that therapists (as it had been with managers) did not evaluate the program. Consequently, this situation seems both a disadvantage and a missed opportunity to collaborate and co-design the massage program to ensure that the program achieved its intended outcomes. Therapists provided massages, but expressed uncertainty about their role, the corporate culture, and, as such, demonstrated little insight into the corporate drivers for implementing the massage programs.

## **Conclusion**

The personal theories held by therapists appeared to align with their espoused theories and subsequent actions. Based on the espoused theories and actions of therapists and managers, there seemed to be disconnectedness between the understanding of the therapists about their role within the organisation, the objectives for the massage program and the corporate culture.

Each therapist viewed workplace massage as a beneficial healthcare option in the workplace, with the caveat that it was dependent upon employers implementing the programs properly. Massage programs were implemented without clearly defined objectives and without any form of evaluation that could determine the effectiveness of the program for massage recipients or the organisation. Therapists and managers did not work together to co-design or implement workplace massage programs; this appears to be a significant gap, which, if rectified, could provide an opportunity to improve corporate massage programs.

From the interviews undertaken in Study 3, therapists appeared to be a committed group of healthcare workers who expressed genuine concern for their massage clients' health and wellbeing. Despite the fact that programs were not evaluated formally, it appeared that workplace massage was considered a relatively cheap and convenient healthcare option, with

a strong perception that it positively affected people's health, corporate culture, and productivity in the workplace.

This study revealed some key issues for the therapists who work in the field of corporate massage. Therapists appeared to face a number of personal dilemmas when balancing their needs of their private clients against their corporate obligations, providing massages to clients at risk to their own health, and an underlying professional insecurity about the status of massage therapy as a healthcare option. Whereas managers and employees clearly valued corporate massage programs, perhaps these issues and tensions raised in Study 3 suggest that the therapists themselves hold a degree of ambivalence about the utility of workplace massage.

The following is the final chapter and provides a discussion of the outcomes and the three key findings arising from this study. The limitations of this study are described together with some recommendations for future studies that would address some of the limitations identified.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion - Outcomes of the Study and Further Discussion**

### **Review of Aims**

The impetus for this study came from a general observation that in the area of massage therapy in the workplace there were some apparently incompatible notions, which have led to public debate about the nature, appropriateness, and economic benefit of corporate massage. Although it is clear that there are few concerns about the benefits of massage *per se* for treating psychological, physical, physiological and psychosocial symptoms (Bost & Wallis, 2006; Lindgren et al., 2010; Listing et al., 2010; Moraska, Pollini, Boulanger, Brooks, & Teitlebaum, 2010; Šiško et al., 2011; Zeitlin et al., 2000), the on-going controversy about using massage in the corporate sector (Longmore, 2011; Masanauskas, 2011) is inevitably clouding our understanding of the wider potential benefits of corporate massage programs.

Indeed, the decision for some organisations to cease their workplace massage programs (Australia Senate Debates, 2005; Longmore, 2011) may be an outcome of public criticism, and without some serious evaluation of the economic, physical and psychological corporate benefits of these activities, it is apparent that the future of workplace massage programs may be uncertain. This investigation has therefore attempted to contribute some clarity to the debate so that institutions might be more confident in their decisions to either support or discontinue these activities.

As this was an exploratory study, this investigation sought broad personal opinions of the three groups most closely involved with massage programs in the corporate sector (the employees, managers, and massage therapists) in order to examine their perceptions of the lingering tensions noted above. By deliberately looking at all the parties involved in workplace massage programs, it has been assumed that the emergent triangulated outcomes of the views of the three independent groups would allow a more balanced and evidential understanding of the personal and institutional benefits, and the associated difficulties arising from the introduction of massage programs into some workplaces.

As an entry point to the investigation, it was evident from previous literature that a number of organisational reasons might have initially prompted managers to implement massage programs for their employees. These included, but were not limited to, health and safety legislation requiring employers to protect and support the wellbeing of staff (O'Neill, 2011;



Sherriff, 2011; Wheelwright, 2011), to improve productivity outcomes (Lloyd & Foster, 2006; Seymour & Dupré, 2008), to reduce compensation claims (Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Committee, 2009) and subsequent compensation pay-outs, to reduce employees' stress (Colligan & Higgins, 2005; Lavelle, 2005; Zolnierczyk-Zreda, 2002), or to positively influence the corporate culture (Attridge, 2009). These notions were retested during the project to establish whether there had been any significant shift or debate regarding these propositions, since it appears that little specific evaluation work on corporate massage programs have been carried out.

Although the preliminary literature search indicated that relevant findings published in the general massage literature regarding the positive physical benefits of massage appear largely applicable within the workplace context. The effect of massage programs on certain aspects of the organisation, however, such as morale and productivity, has not been widely explored.

Moreover, it is clear that any evaluative comments regarding massage programs generally in the literature have not been sufficient to counterbalance or abate the controversy about the value of using massage in the corporate sector. This investigation undertook to redress this issue, and this chapter provides a general discussion of the outcomes of the study and its contributions to the debate, noting the limitations of the work and making suggestions for future research in this area.

### **The notion of 'theory in practice'**

To add robustness to the work, a specific focus of the investigation was to use Argyris and Schön's (1992) theoretical formulation of 'theory in practice' to examine how the protagonists in this area revealed any links between their ideas and their actions; that is, how the stated 'held beliefs' of the managers, employees and therapists about the effects of corporate massage programs correlated with their comments regarding their observations and responses to the programs with which they were involved.

In essence, of interest here was whether workplace massage programs achieved the outcomes that each party considered appropriate and whether these perceptions of the effect of the program aligned or diverged between the groups. Furthermore, the intention was to see if

there was there any consensus between the parties regarding whether workplace massage actually benefited employees and the organisation.

Not unexpectedly, perhaps, during the conduct of the investigation particular themes that emerged from the studies that were not considered in the original thesis design. These emergent issues were a significant contribution to the general understanding of this complex area, and gave support to the original notion that the debate in the area was at times lacking in matters of insight. In this respect, the comparison between the three studies showed some unsuspected similarities and differences, which emerged when the data was analysed using the theoretical framework of Argyris and Schön's (1992) theory in practice. This outcome gave some added justification to the initial selection and use of this framework to underpin the investigation, and was an important mechanism by which the research was restrained from asking respondents to *question* their implicitly held theories, but rather for the researcher to *understand how* their tacitly held theories reflected and influenced their actions.

As a consequence of this approach to the data analysis, six relevant outcomes arose from this study, each comprising several aspects. Within the framework of Argyris and Schön's theories of action, the following sections will address these outcomes, which in summary were that:

1. The program was seen to have provided several evident but formally untested occupational health and safety benefits;
2. The program generally resulted in employees feeling refreshed, rejuvenated, and relaxed immediately after their massages;
3. The program positively contributed to the development of the corporate culture. These contributions included significant influences on:
  - a. Maximising productivity
  - b. Being an employer of choice
  - c. Attracting and retaining good staff
4. A disconnect, in terms of agreed aims and objectives of the program, existed between the massage therapists and the organisation;
5. Managers judged the success of the program through quantitative measures of its uptake rather than through qualitative formal evaluations;
6. Issues of gender influenced peoples' perceptions and actions regarding the appropriateness and outcomes of massage programs. These included:

- a. Managers' behaviours towards their staff and the outcomes they sought from the program
- b. How therapists approached both the massage sessions and their clients
- c. What employees valued and gained from massage sessions.

### **Outcomes of the research**

The following sections provide a discussion of the main outcomes arising from the research. These are based on the themes that emerged during the interviews and subsequent analysis and are discussed within the context of Argyris and Schön's theory in practice.

#### **The program provided formally untested occupational health and safety benefits**

Respondents generally agreed that the program provided several occupational health and safety benefits. As indicated at the outset of the investigation, occupational health and safety laws provided managers with an initial strong impetus for considering their options for supporting the wellbeing of staff in the workplace, and as a group they explained that they wanted their staff to be *well and enjoy good health*. They viewed the massage program as an opportunity to support employees' health and that massage contributed (both directly and indirectly) to a number of other beneficial outcomes for the organisation. Such outcomes included addressing their lawful obligations for occupational health and safety, injury prevention and management, reductions in unplanned leave (sick leave), and the ability for staff to be productive in the absence of injury. These factors formed the basis of managers' rationales for implementing or supporting massage programs. Argyris and Schön (1992) stated that:

*Instead of actions being related to ends on a one-to-one basis, any given action may affect many variables; all of them are ends in the sense that all behaviour is shaped so as to keep all variables within an acceptable range (p. 15).*

In this regard, the implementation of a massage program may be considered a single action; however, the managers explained that the program affected many variables. For example, they explained how providing workplace massage contributed towards meeting some of their occupational health and safety responsibilities because they also believed that the program resulted in reduced stress for employees, as well as providing an avenue for staff to manage musculoskeletal injuries. Furthermore, they believed that program potentially reduced injury compensation claims. Managers' espoused theories about occupational health and safety

(OHS) were explicit and unambiguous. Clearly, they believed that they had a responsibility (for the many reasons cited above) to meet their lawful obligations and provide healthy and safe workplaces. Thus, through the single action of implementing a massage program, managers were able to both meet their legal obligations and provide valuable contributions to employees' wellbeing.

Argyris and Schön (1992) also explained that:

*At any moment, one variable may be more interesting than others and move to the foreground of our attention, but the other variables affected by the action cannot be ignored; they may be considered constraints on our efforts to manipulate foreground variables. That is, whatever we do to manipulate foreground variables, we cannot allow one of the other variables out of its acceptable range (p. 15).*

The insights provided by the managers about their thinking and the drivers for implementing the program demonstrated the numerous and complex variables that inevitably influenced their actions and behaviours. Argyris and Schön further stated that “formulating and selecting actions is a design problem analogous to the problems of architectural and engineering design, which require achieving desired values of a range of related variables, not just one variable” (pp. 15 -16). In this regard, we can see that managers did indeed factor many variables into their thinking, decision-making processes and actions before deciding to support the program.

Although managers' actions demonstrated high levels of congruence between their espoused theories, their actions, and their implicitly held theories, of note is that they did not test the effectiveness of their theories (by gathering empirical data to confirm their beliefs). Instead, they implemented massage programs based only on their personal theories and anecdotal evidence and, therefore, could not have had a full understanding of the actual OHS benefits that their staff or the organisation gained from the provision of the program.

Employees, however, explicitly claimed that they gained many physical and psychological benefits from using the program. On this basis, the intuitive assumptions and theories of the managers seemed to hold true. Many employees described how they used the program as a preventative strategy to reduce musculoskeletal injuries, to manage existing injuries, and to moderate their stress levels (to improve their effectiveness in the workplace). Employees who opted to use the program espoused theories that massage was beneficial for managing various

physical or psychological symptoms, and were able to support these espoused theories through their actions by using the program. Based on Argyris and Schön's (1992) theories of action, the employees had apparently tested their theories and found them to be effective (i.e., *if I use massage to manage a symptom then it will improve*) and thus their actions were congruent and consistent with their personal beliefs.

As was the case with the managers, employees incorporated a number of variables into their thinking. Argyris and Schön (1992) recognised this style of action development when they noted:

*theories-in-use maintain a person's field of constancy. They specify the governing variables and their critical relationships to one another – for example, which variables have priority. They specify the acceptable ranges for these variables and the objective functions for new governing variables* (p. 16).

For employees, such variables included: (a) how they balanced their work commitments with taking time out for a massage; (b) the cost in time and dollar terms of the massage; (c) the degree of inconvenience of the timing of the massage session, and; (d) the more obvious variables such as their health outcomes. While all these variables fell within personally acceptable ranges, then employees were satisfied with using the program. However, if they had not, then they would have reconsidered these variables and the priority of the resultant actions. Perhaps, for example, if the cost of the massage went up then it may have become a more important variable, which would then have influenced the action of the recipient (that is, the expense of the massage would have fallen outside the range of cost the recipient considered acceptable).

Significantly, massage therapists made few explicit references to organisational occupational health and safety issues, which suggest there is a gap in the therapists' understanding of the importance of this issue to managers regarding health and safety responsibilities. Perhaps therapists held implicit theories about such matters, but they did not overtly espouse such ideas, nor did their actions suggest that they viewed the issue of occupational health and safety legislation with the same level of importance as the managers. Instead, therapists seemed primarily focussed on health outcomes at an individual level (which was a clear point of agreement with the employees) with few, if any, references about the broader organisational health and safety issues.

Overall, the importance for managers to meet their occupational health and safety responsibilities was paramount. However, general criticism about the use of workplace massage suggests that the public does not consider it a legitimate OHS intervention for injury prevention or management. Thus, this study has provided some evidence to support managers' perceptions that these massage programs do contribute materially to the OHS wellbeing of their employees.

A confounding issue here is that the massage therapists themselves had minimal focus on the link between their clients' health outcomes and the organisation's occupational health and safety requirements. Although a logical inference could be drawn that providing massages supports the concepts associated with occupational health and safety, the massage therapists achieved this by default rather than through any specific intention to design their program in consultation with the managers or the needs of the organisation. This mismatch of intentions may well be clouding the overall debate on workplace massage, and clearly should be resolved between therapists and management as soon as is practicable.

**The program resulted in employees feeling refreshed, rejuvenated, and relaxed immediately after their massages (the three 'R's of massage)**

Each study group agreed that massage had a relaxing and rejuvenating effect. Employees who used the program placed a high degree of importance on the need to achieve what shall be referred to as the three 'R's of massage; that is, refresh, relax, and rejuvenate. Managers also expressed that they wanted their staff to be refreshed and relaxed in the workplace so that they were productive and effective, and therapists seemed to feel successful if their clients achieved relaxation from their massages. There were, however, subtle gendered differences between the male and female employees and therapist groups in terms of their descriptions of massage and the underlying perceptions of what the program was intended to achieve.

Arguably, the three 'R's (in this instance considered as a single variable) represented one of the governing variables (Argyris and Schön, 1992) for each group, but the degree of importance and priority of that variable appears to have been different for each group. For example, managers spoke of OHS and productivity as important variables, and although they wanted their staff to be relaxed in the workplace this variable would, perhaps, not have been as critical as it was to the employee group (who held the importance of achieving relaxation

highly). As Argyris and Schön explained, governing variables have critical relationships with one another. For example, if the employees had become so relaxed after the massages that they became ineffective in the workplace, then perhaps the managers would have reviewed the importance of this variable within the context of the other outcomes they sought to achieve.

Although employees provided very clear messages that massage benefited them both psychologically (such as reduced stress and an improved ability to cope with work pressures) and physically (such as reduced pain and improved ranges of motion), the males tended to describe massage more as a means of keeping their bodies in tune, almost as though their bodies were machines. The females, however, described how massages supported them psychologically and emotionally by being better able to cope with their daily demands and how it made them *feel*.

Again, there is an implicit tension between the management and therapists in the overall aims and objectives of the program which may be contributing to the ambivalent views of the place of workplace massage. Resolution of the notions of the outcomes of massage in terms of the relaxation versus rejuvenation issue may help the overall acceptance of the contribution of massage to the corporate objectives.

### **The program positively influenced the corporate culture**

Another perceived advantage of the program shared by the respondents was that having it in place enhanced the corporate culture. A number of sub-areas arose under the aegis of 'corporate culture' and these are addressed below as sub-sections.

#### ***Maximising productivity***

Managers seemed to hold personal theories that organisations needed to be productive to remain competitive in the market and, therefore, a corporate culture that nurtured high performing, productive workers was likely to contribute to the overall success of an organisation. They actively espoused the importance of productivity, and their actions (by implementing or supporting massage programs) demonstrated that they believed massage might ultimately lead to productivity gains. The emphasis on productivity by employers clearly demonstrated that it was an important governing variable to them (Argyris & Schön,

1992). Had the massage program negatively affected productivity within the organisation, then managers would have to review its position within the complex web of co-existing variables influencing their actions.

By supporting workplace massage, the managers seemingly held personally theories that the program would contribute to a culture of employees who actively manage their health, thus lead to productivity improvements in the workplace. In this case, *if* the massage program creates a good corporate culture *then* people will be happy and productive in the workplace. The priority appeared to be that productivity was the governing variable and regardless of how good the corporate culture was, if there were no productivity gains (or worse still, reduced productivity) then the program would be reviewed. In this respect it is claimed that “all behaviour is shaped so as to keep all variables within an acceptable range” (Argyris & Schön, 1992, p. 15) and seemingly for managers no governing variable was held in isolation (whether consciously or otherwise) because “the other variables affected by the action [could not] be ignored” (Argyris & Schön, 1992, p. 15)

Managers reported that employees who managed their musculoskeletal complaints and reduced their stress levels through massage may be better positioned to achieve higher performance and improved productivity. None of the managers suggested that the program adversely affected productivity; however, *Odette* did state that she became annoyed because she was not always able to contact her staff when they were receiving massages.

Notwithstanding this issue, she also held similar beliefs to the other managers in terms of the overall health and productivity benefits, and improved employee morale that the organisations gained through providing the program. Therefore, even though *Odette* was irritated by the inaccessibility of employees while they had massages, ‘accessibility’ as a governing variable must have fallen within acceptable ranges when considered against productivity gains (another variable).

Employees were very clear that the massage program assisted their productivity levels and that the time away from work enabled them to deal with issues related to their health and wellbeing. They were unanimous in their perception that massage reduced their stress levels and provided multiple psychological benefits (as described above as the three ‘R’s).



Furthermore, employees stated that being physically impaired (through injury) actually negatively affected their performance. Many employees used the program to actively manage physical injuries and they used the program in the workplace because they felt that being physically 'on top of their game' made them better performers at work. Overall having a massage was reported as aiding productivity, improving employee engagement, and positively contributing to the corporate culture.

All three participant-groups perceived that massage benefited the individuals who received massages (both physically and psychologically) and that the organisation profited more broadly. Each group cited improved productivity and improved corporate culture as the significant outcomes for the organisation. There were few notable differences between the perceptions between participant groups about how massage benefited individuals and the organisation. Based on the findings from these studies, workplace massage does lead to self-reported improved productivity and material benefits to the organisation and to individuals who use the program, and hence provides a powerful argument for the implementation of such programs in unequivocal economic terms.

### ***Being an employer of choice***

Managers reported that the program provided an avenue for them to market their organisation as an employer of choice and use the program as an avenue to attract and retain valuable staff. A number of managers suggested that they had followed the initiatives of another organisation when implementing the program. This action indicates that managers held personal theories that providing additional activities to support employees in the workplace made the organisation more marketable than their competitors (or at least made them *as* competitive). Apparently, managers' implicit theories included that if an organisation offered health programs (such as massage) it contributed towards that organisation being an employer of choice. Providing a massage program is congruent as it demonstrated that the managers' implicit theories matched their espoused theories and their actions (Argyris & Schön, 1992). Employers indirectly tested their theories with staff surveys to understand the mood of the organisation. Managers, without exception, considered that a massage program in isolation would not achieve this end and that it formed part of multiple strategies (to improve the corporate culture and a range of other governing variables).

Employees, managers and therapists alike each used anecdotes to describe the influence of massage on the corporate culture. There seems a generally held theory across all groups that a good corporate culture within an organisation is important. Examples of anecdotes by each group included managers using the program to highlight the organisation as an employer of choice, staff comparing the program to Christmas, employees stating that massage made everybody a bit *nicer*, and all groups talking about the improved mood in the office on the days the program was offered. The positive effect of massage on the corporate culture seemed to be an area on which each participant group unequivocally agreed. Argyris and Schön (1992) stated, “a theory-in-use is effective when action according to the theory tends to achieve it governing variables” (p. 24) and on this basis, according to the groups in this study, massage programs positively affect corporate culture. As such, this investigation has determined that massage programs again have a significant effect on the economic prospects of the corporation. A positive corporate culture is arguably an intangible but essential feature of a strong corporation, and all of the interviewed groups supported the facilitation of workplace massage programs.

### ***Attracting and retaining good staff***

Managers cited one of their rationales for providing corporate massage as a means of attracting and retaining younger staff. Although one employee categorically stated that the existence of a program formed part of her decision to remain with her current employer when approached by a ‘head-hunter’, this was not a common theme throughout the interviews. In this respect, it is relevant to note that this person was a highly experienced individual with a senior position within the company, which emphasises the importance to the organisation of this outcome. Although employees did not indicate that the existence of a massage program was part of their decision-making process to join the organisation, they did allude to the program as an employment benefit. Many described how they bragged to friends about their access to workplace massage indicating a level of pride in their organisation and employment conditions. Perhaps the existence of the program may have influenced their decision to remain with that employer, but there was insufficient evidence to draw such inferences. One of the observations arising from this research was that of the participants interviewed who were massage recipients, only one was in a young age bracket (still in her twenties). The group of people interviewed tended to be somewhat older (that is, people who were not new

to the workforce and who were not in their twenties), indicating that people who volunteered to participate in the research were not new to the workforce nor were they recent graduates.

Consequently, drawing from the findings of this study the espoused theory that “massage attracts and retains staff” is problematic. Managers had not tested their theories or actions as explained by Argyris and Schön (1992) that “actions are testable if one can specify the situation, the desired results, and the action through which the result is achieved” (p. 25). All that managers had done is espoused their theories and implemented the actions (*theory* - massage programs are useful for attracting and retaining staff; *action* – implement massage program) but had not had the opportunity or motivation to test it to determine the effectiveness of the program.

The popular media makes many claims in favour of workplace massage, including that it improves productivity, it is useful for attracting and retaining staff, and it improves morale. This aspect of the study again supports the notion that workplace massage does positively influence corporate culture, yet, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, the scholarly literature remains silent in this area. In addition, public perception of massage programs appears to be misinformed or ignorant of this contribution to corporate culture. The findings from this study might provide a useful counterbalance to the negative views expressed in the public domain.

### **A disconnect existed between the massage therapists and the organisation**

Massage therapists are client-focussed and have a genuine interest in positively contributing to the health and wellbeing of massage recipients and in the course of this investigation demonstrated that their implicitly-held and espoused theories are congruent with their actions (Argyris & Schön, 1992). Therapists invested significant energy into ensuring that their clients gained maximum value from their massages, not only by providing the physical therapy, but by also providing educational material, acting as a neutral sounding board to people, and adding personal touches to sessions such as candles and scents. Their personal commitment to their massage clients was obvious.

However, there appears to be a significant disconnect between corporate masseurs, managers and the organisation in the setting of the aims of the program. There was little evidence to

suggest from the studies that therapists connected with the managers as corporate clients (as distinct from massage clients) or that they actively engaged with them in designing the details of the massage program. In light of the on-going criticism of workplace massage and to ensure that the maximum benefit of the massage program is both understood and realised, both groups need to work together in harmony to support the organisation and its staff. Failure to work collaboratively means that the massage program is unlikely to fulfil its maximum potential for all parties, and that criticism will continue. Indeed, without a shared understanding of the outcomes expected from the program, its purpose will remain unclear and it will risk becoming irrelevant to the organisation.

Using Argyris and Schön's (1992) model could be a useful approach to understanding the implementation of programs where therapists might work with managers with an aim to fully understand: (a) the governing variables of the organisation; (b) the interactions and priorities of the variables; and, (c) the range of acceptability to all parties for those variables. Through this process, managers would need to clearly articulate (and fully understand) the desired results and the actions through which they would achieve those desired results. Therapists would then be able to question and understand the internal consistency, congruence, and potential effectiveness of the outcomes sought. For example, one therapist raised questions about the effectiveness of 15-minute massages where people were not permitted to leave their desks. By raising such questions with managers, therapists could get a better understanding of the intentions of the intervention, and consequently provide managers options for actions that would be more effective in achieving the desired results.

Managers had explained during this study that for them, important governing variables included corporate culture, occupational health and safety requirements, and health and compensation patterns. In a cooperatively designed program, massage therapists could use this information to design an intervention that targets risk areas for the organisation while also reporting on any health trends and injury patterns that they identify during the program. Furthermore, as managers and massage therapists alike did not evaluate the outcomes of the massage program, working in conjunction could provide a valuable partnership for evaluation, focussing on such issues as improvement to health and avoidance of injuries.

Argyris and Schön (1992) explained that actions are testable to determine their effectiveness, and the disconnectedness described here is an example where neither the managers nor the therapists had tested their (independent) theories to determine the effectiveness of the program. This situation would not become an issue if the program appeared to meet the independent governing variables of all parties. Massage therapists would be unlikely to test their theories while they had a strong client base and on-going work with the organisation, and managers would be unlikely to test their theories while the massage therapists continued to facilitate the program without complaints arising from employees. Yet this apparently harmonious situation is actually a missed opportunity for the organisation to maximise the effectiveness of the program, since it was based upon possibly incompatible theories.

The scholarly literature about workplace massage does not talk about the integration processes between therapists and the organisation to optimise the effect of massage programs. The workplace massage literature seems to focus largely on the physiological and psychological outcomes that massage offers, with few references to the implications for the wider organisation.

### **Managers measured the success of the program through its uptake rather than through a formal evaluation**

An expected productivity gain was a significant driver for managers in their justification to support massage programs in their workplace; as such, this focus on productivity prompted interview questions around how managers evaluated their programs to measure the effect on workplace outcomes. Surprisingly, with such a heavy emphasis placed on productivity as a marker of the value of a massage program, when asked if managers evaluated the massage program the answers were without exception, “no”. Instead, managers talked about the patronage of the program as a measure of its success and spoke anecdotally about their perceptions on how the program aided productivity. They did not have collated empirical data detailing health or organisational outcomes aligned to the program. However, although they were unable to quantify the effect of massage on productivity gains, managers did seem to consider the effect of the program from a more holistic perspective and were able to articulate their overall general observations. Arguably, the uptake of the program alone is not a measure of its success, particularly based on the outcomes managers sought. To implement a program (such as massage) because the popular literature advocates it, or because another organisation

has implemented a program (a number of managers implemented ‘copy-cat’ programs), is a simplistic and ineffective measure or rationale for implementing a massage program. Similarly, massage therapists did not evaluate their workplace massage programs. Attendance to appointments and verbal feedback were the only forms of evaluation that the therapists employed. This was the case even though it would seem clear that program evaluation would benefit the therapists in two ways. First, evaluating the experience from the recipients’ perspectives would provide therapists with a more client-centred framework upon which to modify and market their program. By responding more accurately to their clientele, they could engage in a process of continuous improvement that would be sensible business practice and build client commitment. Second, a well-structured evaluation would enable therapists to report to and work in partnership with the management of organisations to maximise the benefit of the program for all parties (i.e., management, massage recipients, massage therapists) in ways that were cast against agreed criteria.

Argyris and Schön (1992) stated, “we can learn to adopt new action strategies to achieve our governing variables; and we can learn to change our governing variables” (p. 18). Seemingly, therapists developed their governing variables in an intuitive and unstructured way, with little consultation with managers or with their massage clientele. By working in a more formal evaluation with their clients (both managers as corporate clients and employees as massage clients) therapists would have developed clear and easily articulated governing variables that met the needs of their clients and of their own businesses. With these variables in place, therapists would have been more readily able to test the effectiveness of their work, instead of experiencing the transience of clientele that they had described. Such transience may have been that the therapists were not meeting the governing variables of the clients and so the clients stopped using their services.

### **Issues of gender influenced people’s perceptions and actions regarding massage programs**

One strong theme that arose from these studies, which was not a part of the original question, was how *gender* affected the way participants told their stories and related their experiences. The investigations revealed that *gendered tensions* seemed to surface for each of the participant groups. In the following discussion, the way in which this issue rose for each group will be noted, and then similarities and differences in the groups highlighted. Whether

or not these perceptions were a part of the inherent theory-in-action of each group of participants will also be considered, and what this association means for the outcomes of the study will be discussed.

The gendered distinction between how males and females described the benefits of massage highlighted some differences in their tacitly held theories. Both men and women discussed the physical and psychological benefits they gained from massage. The men, however, placed considerable emphasis on the physical aspects, and therefore their personal theories seemed to be that massage was effective in addressing musculoskeletal symptoms and keeping their bodies feeling physically well. In contrast, the women considered the psychological gains they received from having a massage, such as how they *felt*. The therapists mirrored some of these gendered differences through their espoused theories and subsequent actions.

Again, although the differences between males and females were not mutually exclusive (that is, they all sought to achieve physical and psychological benefits from massages) there were some distinct differences expressed. For example, female therapists seemingly held theories that their clients' massage experiences could be enhanced through sensory processes such as smell and sight, leading to improved mood and therefore helping their clients achieve the three 'R's. For example, female therapists' described how they used candles or scents to improve the ambience of the massage room.

In contrast, the male therapists talked about the musculoskeletal aspects of the massages they provided, indicating personal theories that massage is a physical therapy, which ultimately helped their clients to achieve the three 'R's. Male therapists' actions and focus was about the manual aspect of the massages and, unlike their female counterparts, they tended not to use peripheral paraphernalia (such as candles) when massaging people.

These gendered perceptions and actions (as either massage client or therapist) emerged during this study and such findings were not articulated in the existing scholarly literature. The gendered understanding about what massage is, the benefits it should provide, and how these can be achieved are highly variable. There is therefore, no single agreed benefit of workplace massage program. Instead, there are a series of benefits, which are perceived

through gendered lenses, but which are important to recognise and emphasise. The following sections describe the experiences of each gender group more specifically.

### **Managers' behaviours towards their staff and the outcomes they sought from the program**

Female managers seemed to have a more nurturing approach to their management styles (and interview responses), seemingly more interested and focussed on people's feelings. Through their language and stories, female managers impressed their belief of the importance of harmony in the workplace and relevant to this perspective, Linstead et al., (2005) described the concept of relational vision. Apparently, female managers held personal theories about the value of inclusiveness in the workplace and their actions and words supported this notion. For example, females explicitly stated that they would not move to cancel the massage program reasoning that the workers liked it and that it had been shown to improve morale. Even Odette, who had actually considered cancelling the program, ended up choosing not to do so; her decision being influenced by this consensual view. Female managers also used language such as *we* statements rather than *I* statements, and such language was consistent with their theories.

In contrast, the male managers seemed to view massage as a means of increasing productivity and implied that massage contributed towards supporting staff to maintain good health (dealing with physical and psychological ills). Male managers seemed to hold implicit theories that people who were in poor health would not be productive; therefore the action of implementing the massage program in order to relieve musculoskeletal problems being supported their personally held theories.

This gender-influenced approach to theories of management, as manifested in the different theories-in-action, was a surprising outcome from these studies. The dominance of this theme demonstrated that gender affects managerial styles and how they viewed their employees.

### **How therapists approached the massage sessions and their clients**

There were similarities between managers and the massage therapists in the way they showed distinct gender-influenced responses to providing their clients' massages. Although massage is by implication a tactile and nurturing therapy, the actual responses of male and female therapists again demonstrated that females showed greater interest in the feelings of their



clients, whereas the males talked more about the physical outcomes of the therapeutic manipulations. Female therapists seemed to hold tacit theories that massage was a holistic therapy and these implications of these personal theories matched their actions, such as providing extra services to increase the mood lifting effect of massage (such as candles and scents).

Although the male therapists' responses were not completely devoid of concern for the emotions of their clients, they consistently seemed to be more interested in the physical aspects of the therapy than their female counterparts. Furthermore, they appeared to be less emotionally involved with their clients and this was again consistent with the emerging gendered notion of massage therapy. Their massage style was accordingly more physical, with references such as using elbows *to get into* the muscles, suggesting that their implicit theories held that massage was tactile and physical, more than a nurturing and gentle experience.

### **What employees valued and gained from massage**

The gendered-language used by the employees was similar to those expressed by the managers and the therapists. The females talked of their feelings and the effect of massage, whereas males talked about the physical gains they experienced from massage. Their personally held theories were easily testable in the massage environment. *If* a male had a massage *then* he would experience physical improvements; *if* a female had a massage *then* she would experience improved emotions and feel better able to cope. What this notion implies is that if the massage ceased to meet their (gendered) governing variables then the participants would need to review their engagement with the program. Had a female received a massage that did not meet her emotional needs then she may reconsider having massages. Likewise, if a male received a massage that did not meet his physical needs then he too might face a dilemma and choose to cease using the program. As stated earlier in this chapter, most massage recipients seemed to want to achieve both physical and psychological benefits from massage, but there were some distinct gendered differences.

The scholarly literature does not explore the effect of gender on perceptions of massage programs, so there were no prior indications of any of the participants' expectations of the massage or the approach of the massage therapists to providing massage. Male therapists

stated that they did not consider their gender as a disadvantage to them in their profession, but females did believe that their gender provided them with a professional advantage. A manager had reported that gender did play an important role for therapists, particularly for people wanting massages who came from culturally diverse backgrounds (massage recipients only wanting therapists of the same gender).

In general, the practice of massage has the potential to be quite intimate and therefore this gendered tension, whilst not widely discussed in the literature, is not a surprising finding. It is not unlikely that this is a key element in the difficulty that massage programs face in becoming an accepted part of corporate activities. As the foregoing discussion has indicated, such potential difficulties related to intimacy have not become apparent in the workplace during the course of this investigation. On the contrary, there appears to be a mature and pragmatic perception of massage sessions which is shared by managers, employees and therapist alike. Results such as these, if made more widely known, could therefore go some way toward informing public opinion and facilitating wider acceptance of massage therapy as a positive contribution to employee wellbeing.

### **An overview of the outcomes**

As discussed in the literature review, despite the relative lack of scholarly research into workplace massage, there is sufficient evidence about massage more generally to support the notion that massage (and by implication, workplace massage) provides many positive physical and psychological benefits. This investigation adds further evidence to the argument that workplace massage provides recipients with the benefits described above. What is unique about this study compared to previous studies undertaken in the field of workplace massage is that it explored effects beyond the obvious health outcomes usually investigated, such as the effects on corporate culture, morale, and productivity within the organisation.

By reference to Argyris and Schön's (1992) theory in practice, this study was able to explore the personal theories, espoused theories, and actions of three distinct but inter-related groups associated with workplace massage. By using Argyris and Schön's theories, the internal consistency, congruence, and effectiveness of those theories were explored to understand how their held theories influenced their actions and what governing variables affected their thinking. In general, the outcomes from this study found that people's personal theories about

workplace massage matched their espoused theories and subsequent actions. Argyris and Schön stated, “the governing variables of the theory . . . are related to assumptions about self, others and the behavioural setting” (pp. 20-21), and in this regard, each of the participant groups expressed particular views about workplace massage and described different governing variables when explaining their actions and the issues that influenced their thinking. Such thinking was often complex and as Argyris and Schön explained, “theories-in-use maintain a person’s field of constancy. They specify the governing variables and their critical relationships to one another – for example, which variables have priority” (p. 16). In this investigation, it transpired that each participant group had certain variables that appeared to govern their actions and behaviours.

Many areas of agreement emerged between the participant groups. One of the areas of wide agreement between the groups included the notion that massage supported the health and wellbeing of staff, which subsequently affected productivity. For example, managers explained that they implemented massage programs with the intention of supporting the health and wellbeing of staff, to improve the productivity of employees and to improve the overall culture of the organisation. In line with the intended outcome of the program, managers and therapists perceived that people did derive health benefits from massage; employees who used the program confirmed this view, stating that they used massage to support their health and wellbeing. Although the health benefits that individuals reported they had experienced may have varied (such as some used it for injury management and others for relaxation), they all agreed they experienced wellbeing and health benefits.

Although each group was in agreement about the productivity gains that the program provided, the evidence to support this view was generally anecdotal and poorly supported with evidence. Those individuals who used the program and felt that having workplace massage did improve their productivity, indicated that they experienced improved health, reduced pain, and improved mood and this in turn allowed them to achieve more while at work. Therapists also expressed the view that massage improved productivity but based this opinion on their intuitive views rather than any particular piece of evidence. Managers stated that the program had to offer productivity gains because if it did not, then it would not be worthwhile. Having said this, they did not provide any evidence to support the view that it actually did lead to productivity gains. As it was with the therapists, the managers’ views

were largely intuitive; that is, if people are fit and well and not in pain, then they should be more productive than if they were experiencing poor health. Though this position is logically sound, it was not a position supported with evidence.

Another area where each participant group were in agreement was that massage positively contributed to the corporate culture. They provided anecdotes, personal experiences and stories to support their opinions. The caveat that managers placed over this view was that massage in isolation was not likely to influence the corporate culture in any significant way and that it had to be implemented concurrently with other programs for any measureable effects.

As indicated earlier, the scholarly literature is silent with regard to the effects of massage on productivity gains and corporate culture. Nevertheless, all participant groups in this investigation held the view that massage improved the corporate culture and positively affected productivity. Therefore, although these outcomes do not appear in the literature, they do give credibility to the views expressed in the popular media regarding the benefits of corporate massage.

### **Limitations of the study**

This thesis specifically focussed on the advantages and disadvantages of workplace massage, and was designed to access the perceptions of participant groups comprising all the people involved in one way or another with massage programs (users, providers, implementers). The assumption was that each of the participant groups was likely to have had a vested interest in the success of the program and thus responded to the interview questions with a degree of interest, albeit self-interest about the massage program. For example, a manager who provides employees with a massage program is unlikely to do so if he or she believes that the program will negatively affect the organisation; to do so would be seemingly counterintuitive. In a similar way to the managers, it was assumed that employees who actually used the program were unlikely to describe many disadvantages of the program. To receive massages with an underlying belief that there was nothing to be gained from doing so would be something of a paradox.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the participants for this study were drawn from a non-probability sample of respondents sharing their personal experiences and perceptions about the effects of corporate massage. As such, this study provides insight into workplace massage that offers valuable findings, which are indicative but by no means conclusive.

Massage therapists have a vested interest in promoting the value of workplace massage as a beneficial intervention because massage therapy is their business. They talked about the risks and disadvantages in running a workplace massage business (such as the physical strain and logistical challenges of practising in a corporate setting). Nevertheless, the disadvantages that they spoke of were personal experiences rather than the disadvantages to clients or organisations.

There is an inherent degree of positive bias associated with this work; all managers had agreed to support the programs, employees had opted voluntarily to receive the massage, and therapists were paid to provide the service. Furthermore, a constructivist approach is not well suited to measuring the efficacy or assessing the value of an intervention. The intention of this thesis was to gain an understanding of the effects (either advantages or disadvantages) of workplace massage from the perspectives of the individuals within each participant group. As previously acknowledged, this approach is open to personal biases and interpretation.

As indicated below, a more inclusive investigation might provide a number of different perspectives.

### **Future Research**

Based on the limitations of this study described above, there would be significant value in interviewing three other groups. The first group would be staff who have used the program and decided not to continue, to ascertain what they perceived to be the disadvantages of the program. The second group would be employees who do not use the program and who have no intention of using the program, to gain an understanding of how they perceive the program affects the workforce and the organisation. Also, it would be important to determine if any of the implicit tensions alluded to in earlier sections played some part in their decision not to participate in the program. The third group would be managers who work in organisations where programs are implemented, and whose staff use the program, but who have had nothing to do with the implementation or on-going support of the program (effectively where

the program is forced upon them). This group who have no vested interest in the success of the program would provide valuable insights into the advantages and disadvantages of the program.

Occupational health and safety concerns and reducing compensation claims were cited by a number of participants in this study as a beneficial outcome from workplace massage. No empirical data was provided during this study to indicate the effect that workplace massage has on compensation claims or work-related injury management. Future research could focus on using worker compensation data to establish what, if any, effect that workplace massage has on reducing compensation claims and injury management. The findings of this type of study would provide quantitative data to support the utility of workplace massage for managing insurance and compensation expenditure.

The outcomes that arose from this study that were not anticipated included the effects of gender and how each group used or identified with the massage program, the failure of employers and therapists to evaluate programs, and the disconnectedness that was apparent between therapists and the needs and culture of the organisation. These key findings are more fully discussed in the following section.

### **Key findings and Concluding Remarks**

Three key findings arose from this study relating to workplace massage programs, all of which were somewhat unexpected and certainly do not feature significantly in the scholarly literature. These findings, which are (a) gender influences, (b) failure to evaluate programs, and (c) disconnectedness between therapists and the organisation, provide a contribution to our understanding of this contested area and represent an addition to our existing knowledge on this subject.

#### **Finding One – Gender influences**

The influence of gender in the implementation and use of workplace massage programs was a significant issue that emerged as a dominant finding from this study. Argyris and Schön's (1992) theory in practice was used as the lens from which to analyse the data that emerged from this investigation; gender influences were not a consideration in the original construct of this investigation and as such this finding is both significant and unexpected. Individuals did

not cite gender as an espoused theory influencing their thinking or actions, and yet when they explained their actions it became apparent that there were clear and distinct differences in the approaches and implicit theories held between females and males in each group. Indeed, it seemed that the groups were unaware of how their gender influenced their thinking. Males seemed more focussed by physical aspects and in contrast females seemed focussed on emotional aspects. For example, male managers seemed to view massage as an opportunity to improve productivity whereas female managers perceived that massage would improve morale and make everybody *feel* better in the workplace. The overarching variable in both scenarios was maintaining the viability of the organisation, but each gender group approached this issue from different perspectives.

In the case of massage recipients, a number of men alluded to the physical aspects of massage, whereas females explained how the massage made them *feel*. Similarly, male therapists shared their views about the physical aspects of massage, whereas females invested energy in the ambience of the massage room. Therefore, with so many different expectations arising from this gender issue about what massage should deliver, it is not surprising that there exists a tension between the groups and perhaps provides a reason why programs are not subject to more evaluation.

### **Finding Two – Program evaluation**

Managers and therapists do not set up massage programs with intended goals. Therefore, in the absence of such outcomes the programs are not evaluated to determine their effectiveness, instead both groups accept that uptake of the program is a measure of its success. Perhaps, in view of Finding One, coming to an agreement on what the program should provide may be difficult because females are focussed on the esoteric, such as feelings and ambience, and males are focussed on the physical outcomes of massage.

The gender of the person implementing the program may well determine the specific outcomes the program should be evaluating. This could prove problematic if a male manager wants to implement a program but has a female therapist (or vice versa) where an agreed position is met about the goals of the program. All interviewees seemed quite clear about what they expected the program to deliver. Notwithstanding, of all the people interviewed nobody evaluated the program, so whether the program actually met the governing variables

or outcomes they believed it should was untested. Based on Argyris and Schön's (1992) theory in practice, not evaluating the program was internally inconsistent, not congruent with the desired outcomes, and the effectiveness of the program was unknown (other than anecdotal stories).

### **Finding Three - Disconnectedness**

Managers and therapists do not work together to establish effective massage programs that maximise the benefits to the organisation. Therapists remain 'outsiders' to the organisation and never become integrated into its culture to enable them to work effectively within it. For the program to be fully effective, managers and therapists need to have a shared understanding of the governing variables and the desired outcomes of the program and how to quantify them. By therapists fully understanding the governing variables that managers expect from the program, they could monitor the program to ensure that those variables remained within acceptable ranges and act accordingly.

### **Conclusion**

Despite numerous studies published in the scholarly literature, which provide strong evidence supporting the many physical and psychological benefits gained through massage therapy, there remains public tension and criticism about the value and utility of workplace massage. The association of massage with impropriety and self-indulgence seems in some way to contribute to this view. Additionally, the inability of managers and therapists to convincingly debate the significance workplace massage programs using evidence gained through systematic evaluation or empirical data has done little to dispel this public perception.

The original concept of this thesis aimed to explore the advantages and disadvantages of workplace massage; few disadvantages have been identified. The general findings provided further evidence to add to the existing literature that individuals who use massage gain (self-reported) physical and psychological health benefits; this was an unsurprising finding. In addition to the numerous personal benefits that massage recipients cited, the overall findings from this study supported the notion that workplace massage programs positively influence other indicators within the organisation, such as occupational health and safety, productivity, and corporate culture.



This study, however, revealed some unique findings not currently discussed in the scholarly literature on the subject and which add new thinking to the body of knowledge. People often hold personal entrenched theories, which influence their espoused theories and subsequent actions. This study has demonstrated that gender affected people's theories and actions regarding massage, such as the outcomes that managers and employees expect from the program and the way in which therapists provided their services. The effect of gender on the use or provision of massage is not discussed in the current literature. The theme of gender emerged markedly in this study, which indicates that there is a significant gap in the literature.

The implementation of workplace massage (particularly in the public sector) is a point of particular public concern. This study found that massage programs are implemented within workplaces with no specific objectives or subsequent evaluation. As such, the existing claims in the popular media about workplace massage are based on anecdotal reports, scant workplace massage studies, or inferences based on general massage studies not specifically designed around workplace massage programs or organisations. By designing and implementing massage programs around specific outcomes and evaluating them accordingly, they are likely to achieve optimum value for the organisation and its people.

Furthermore, well-designed programs that are evaluated against clearly articulated organisational indicators would place managers in a strong position to describe the benefits of the program and demonstrate their real organisational value. The current situation leaves managers with little convincing evidence to defend their decisions to support programs, particularly in the face of public scrutiny (and criticism). The findings from this study demonstrated massage program designs should be achieved through collaboration and co-design between therapists and managers to ensure that all parties understand and agree with the aims of the program. Currently there is a distinct disconnect between therapists and managers, which is neither noted nor published in the academic literature.

The importance of implementing multiple strategies and interventions to improve employees' productivity, reduce employees' stress and strain, and to ensure that organisations remain competitive (particularly when competing with other organisations in the employment market to secure the most valuable staff) cannot be overstated. Workplace massage is a relatively

inexpensive program for employers to implement, which this study has demonstrated can support health outcomes for employees and contribute to improving organisational outcomes. Despite the limitations described earlier, the results of this study provide evidence-based support for the implementation and on-going support for workplace massage programs.

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## Appendix A: Managers' Introduction Letter

(Manager's Name)  
(Organisation)  
(Address)

(Date)

### Workplace Massage: Is It Working?

Dear (Name),

We are conducting a study to explore the advantages and disadvantages workplace massage. To get a holistic understanding, we seek to interview managers responsible providing such programs and employees who receive massages at work. As a manager, we believe that your participation in our study can provide valuable information. We would also request that you allow us to invite eligible employees to participate in this study. Interviews should take approximately 60 minutes.

To be eligible to assist, your organisation must be providing workplace massages for your staff, or have previously offered this initiative, but since cancelled the program. It is not important whether the program is employer funded or simply a user-pays arrangement. For employees to be eligible they must have received at least one massage in their workplace in the 4 months preceding the commencement this study.

To participate in this study please read and complete the attached information sheets, which should take about 15 minutes of your time. You should have:

- An 'Information for participants' sheet,
- A 'Return sheet'
- A reply-paid envelope addressed to Victoria University in which to send completed information.

We hope that information gained from this study will inform policy makers about the about the potential value of spending corporate dollars on workplace massage and the utility of massage as a component of a larger OHS plan. The results from this study will also provide information for further research in the field of workplace massage.

We would be pleased to answer any further questions you may have about this research. We hope you will nominate to take part in this study and look forward to the opportunity to work with you and your organisation.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Mark Andersen  
Ph: (03) 9919 5413  
Email: mark.andersen@vu.edu.au

Deborah Lane, PhD Candidate  
Ph: 0419 585 175  
Email: deborah.lane1@research.vu.edu.au

Dr Melainie Cameron  
Ph: (03) 9919 1149  
Email: melainie.cameron@vu.edu.au



## Appendix B: Employees' Introduction Letter

### Workplace Massage: Is It Working?

We are conducting a study to explore the advantages and disadvantages workplace massage. To get a holistic understanding, we seek to interview employees who receive massages at work. If you are an employee who engages in workplace massage, we believe that your participation in our study will provide valuable information. To be eligible to participate in this study, you must have received at least one massage at work in the 4 months preceding the April 2006. Each interview should take approximately 30 minutes.

To register your interest in participating in this study please email contact details, including your:

- Work postal address
- Contact telephone number
- Preferred email address

Deborah Lane  
deborah.lane1@research.vu.edu.au

Once you have registered your interest in participating in this study, Deborah Lane will contact you to arrange a suitable time and place for your interview.

We hope that information gained from this study will inform policy makers about the about the potential value of spending corporate dollars on workplace massage and the utility of massage as a component of a larger OHS plan. The results from this study will also provide information for further research in the field of workplace massage.

We respect your privacy. All information received will be kept strictly confidential by the researchers and only used for this study. We hope you will nominate to take part in this study and look forward to the opportunity to work with you and your organisation.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Mark Andersen  
Ph: (03) 9919 5413  
Email: mark.andersen@vu.edu.au

Deborah Lane, PhD Candidate  
Ph: 0419 585 175  
Email: deborah.lane1@research.vu.edu.au

Dr Melainie Cameron  
Ph: (03) 9919 1149  
Email: melainie.cameron@vu.edu.au



## Appendix C: Massage Therapists' Introduction Letter

### Workplace Massage: Is It Working?

We are conducting a study to explore the advantages and disadvantages workplace massage. To get a holistic understanding, we seek to interview massage therapists who provide workplace massage. If you are an employee who engages in workplace massage, we believe that your participation in our study will provide valuable information. To be eligible to participate in this study, you must have received at least one massage at work in the 4 months preceding the April 2006. Each interview should take approximately 30 minutes.

To register your interest in participating in this study please email contact details, including your:

- Work postal address
- Contact telephone number
- Preferred email address

Deborah Lane  
deborah.lane1@research.vu.edu.au

Once you have registered your interest in participating in this study, Deborah Lane will contact you to arrange a suitable time and place for your interview.

We hope that information gained from this study will inform policy makers about the about the potential value of spending corporate dollars on workplace massage and the utility of massage as a component of a larger OHS plan. The results from this study will also provide information for further research in the field of workplace massage.

We respect your privacy. All information received will be kept strictly confidential by the researchers and only used for this study. We hope you will nominate to take part in this study and look forward to the opportunity to work with you and your organisation.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Mark Andersen  
Ph: (03) 9919 5413  
Email: mark.andersen@vu.edu.au

Deborah Lane, PhD Candidate  
Ph: 0419 585 175  
Email: deborah.lane1@research.vu.edu.au

Dr Melainie Cameron  
Ph: (03) 9919 1149  
Email: melainie.cameron@vu.edu.au



## Information Sheet for Participants

### Project Title

## Workplace Massage: Is It Working?

### Researchers

- Professor Mark Andersen
- Dr Melainie Cameron
- Deborah Lane, PhD Candidate, Victoria University

### Purpose of the study

This study, which is part of Deborah Lane's PhD thesis, aims to discover how workplace massage affects the organisation and its people. Managers who have had responsibility for implementing and cancelling massage programs will have an opportunity to explain the rationale behind the initiatives.

### Your involvement

We invite you to join our study and help provide us with a greater understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of workplace massage. Your participation will involve one interview, for approximately 30 minutes, conducted in a private area at your workplace. The interviewer will ask various questions about the workplace massage program, including your perception about the effect of workplace massage on employees receiving the massage and the organisation. Each interview is digitally recorded for research purposes only.

### Confidentiality

Your privacy is important. All information received will be kept strictly confidential by the researchers and only used for this study. All data collected will be securely stored at Victoria University, only accessible by the researchers for this study. The results of this study may be published in academic journals and reports. No information that identifies any individual or specific organisation will be published.

### Freedom of consent

As participation in this study is voluntary, you have the right not to take part. Your participation, or choice not to participate, will not influence the researchers or any other present or future association with Victoria University, nor will participation have any effect on your workplace position.



## Potential benefits

Your participation in this study will provide evidence about the value for individuals and organisations engaged in workplace massage. Information gained from this study will inform policy makers about the about the potential value of spending corporate dollars on workplace massage and the utility of massage as a component of a larger OHS plan. The results from this study will provide information for further research in the field of workplace massage.

## Further information

We would be pleased to discuss any aspect of this study, or answer any further questions you may have, at any time.

## Contact details

Professor Mark Andersen

Ph: (03) 9919 5413

Email: mark.andersen@vu.edu.au

Deborah Lane, PhD Candidate

Ph: 0419 585 175

Email: deborah.lane1@research.vu.edu.au

Dr Melainie Cameron

Ph: (03) 9919 1149

Email: melainie.cameron@vu.edu.au

## Counsellor details

For Melbourne: Dr. Harriet Speed, Ph: (03) 9919-5412

For Sydney and Canberra: Clark Perry, Ph: (02) 6242-6269

## Complaints

If you have any complaints, or queries not answered to your satisfaction, you may contact:

Jason King

Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University

Ph: (03) 9919 4673

Email: jason.king@vu.edu.au

## Acknowledgement

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. We look forward to the opportunity to work with you, should you agree to participate.



## Appendix E: Consent Form for Participants

# Consent Form for Participants Involved in Research

### Information for participants:

I agree that I have volunteered to be a part of a study entitled "Workplace Massage: Is It Working?". I understand that I will be interviewed about how workplace massage affects the organisation, its people, and me.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that if I become uncomfortable with any aspect of the interview, or experience any undue stress, I can ask for the interview to discontinue at any time. I also understand that upon my request, the interviewer will stop the interview without any hesitation or discrimination. I also understand that if I become distressed and wish to talk with a counsellor that one will be provided to me free of charge. Should I choose to terminate the interview, my non-participation will not influence the researchers or any other present or future association with Victoria University. I also understand that my participation or termination of participation will have no influence on my job status.

### CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I,

of

certify that I am at least 18 years old and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study "Workplace Massage: Is It Working?" being conducted at Victoria University by Associate Professor Mark Andersen, Dr Melainie Cameron and Deborah Lane

I certify that I have received a copy and read the contents of the "Information to Participants Sheet. I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures to be carried out in the research, as described in the "Information to Participants Sheet" have been fully explained to me by **Deborah Lane**, and that I freely consent to participating in these procedures.

### Procedures:

I understand that by participating I agree to be interviewed by the researcher Deborah Lane. I understand that the interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted in a private area at my workplace. I agree to participate in the interview, and I have given my permission to be audio taped during the interview.

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered, and I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way. I certify that I understand and agree the results of this study may be published in academic journals and reports. No information that identifies any individual or specific organisation will be published.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed: ..... }

Witness other than the researcher:

}

Date: .....

.....}

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Professor Mark Andersen Ph: (03) 99195413, Dr Melainie Cameron Ph: (03) 9919 1149 or Deborah Lane, PhD Candidate Ph: 0419 585 175. If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact Jason King, Secretary, University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428 MCMC, Melbourne, 8001, Ph: (03) 9919 4673.



## Appendix F: Confirmation Sheet

(Name)  
(Organisation)  
(Address)

(Date)

### Workplace Massage: Is It Working?

Dear (Name)

We are pleased to advise that you have been selected to participate in our study to explore the advantages and disadvantages of workplace massage. We value your opinions, and your views will greatly contribute a better understanding on the subject of this research.

Deborah Lane will contact you within the next 10 working days to organise a suitable time and venue to interview you. She will be able to answer any of your questions about any aspects of this study. We appreciate your assistance in participating in the study and look forward to your involvement.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Mark Andersen  
Ph: (03) 9919 5413  
Email: mark.andersen@vu.edu.au

Deborah Lane, PhD Candidate  
Ph: 0419 585 175  
Email: deborah.lane1@research.vu.edu.au

Dr Melainie Cameron  
Ph: (03) 9919 1149  
Email: melainie.cameron@vu.edu.au

## Appendix G: Managers' Interview Guide

1. Tell me about the circumstances that led to the implementation of workplace massage in your organisation.
2. What do you believe are the advantages and disadvantages of providing workplace massage for your employees?
3. What are your expectations from the massage program?
4. What effect has the massage program had on morale and stress levels in the workplace?
5. What do you aim to achieve in providing workplace massage?
6. What has been the response of your employees to this initiative?
7. What outcomes does your organisation experience from workplace massage?
8. What indicators do you use to gauge the quality of the program?
9. What do you believe are the most important indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of workplace massage in your organisation?
10. Has the implementation of workplace massage affected productivity and business outcomes in your organisation? If yes, in what ways?
11. How does the workplace massage program fit in with your occupational health and safety policy?
12. Has workplace massage had any effect on rates of absenteeism, workers' compensation claims and staff retention? If yes, in what ways?
13. What employee feedback do you receive about workplace massage?
14. What factors would influence you to cancel the program?
15. What do you see as the future for your current program?

## Appendix H: Employees' Interview Guide

1. Do you know the circumstances that led to the implementation of workplace massages in your organisation? If yes, what were these circumstances?
2. Why do you to participate in workplace massage?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of participating in workplace massage?
4. What are your expectations from the massage program?
5. Has the massage program had any effect on your morale and stress levels in the workplace? If yes, in what ways?
6. What do you believe your organisation gets out of providing workplace massage?
7. Does workplace massage affect your levels of productivity? If yes, how is your productivity affected?
8. What benefits do you believe you get from your massage?
9. How do you feel at the end of your massage?
10. Does massage affect your work performance? If yes, in what ways?
11. Would your work performance change if you stopped getting massages? If yes, in what ways?
12. Why do you believe your employer provides workplace massage?
13. Have you had any negative experiences with workplace massage? If yes, what were they?
14. What would influence you to stop getting massages?
15. Would you inform your massage therapist and employer if you were dissatisfied with your massage? If yes, how would you inform them?

## Appendix I: Massage Therapists' Interview Guide

1. Tell me about the negotiation process you employ with organisations to implement massage programs?
2. What organisational politics have you faced in implementing workplace massage programs?
3. Where are you currently providing workplace massage?
4. How frequently do you provide workplace massages to the various organisations?
5. Who funds the massages?
6. What do you believe are the advantages and disadvantages of providing workplace massage to employees?
7. What effect do you believe workplace massage has on morale and stress levels in the workplace?
8. Do you believe workplace massage has any effect?
9. What are the preferences for massage styles and frequencies?
10. What influences these preferences?
11. What feedback do you receive about workplace massage from employers and employees?
12. What alterations, if any, do you have for service delivery?
13. What outcomes do organisations experience from workplace massage?
14. How do you evaluate your programs?
15. How do you adapt to organisational requirements?
16. How does the workplace massage program fit in with the various occupational health and safety policies?
17. What negative experiences have you faced in providing workplace massage from employers and employees?
18. Why do you believe that some massage programs thrive while others wane?
19. What factors influence you to cancel programs?
20. Is there anything further you wish to tell me about workplace massage?