Work & Health, Health & Work
and the policies that connect them

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Roundtable on Population Health Improvement

Exploring Labor Policy and Population Health: A Workshop Series

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Building Blocks

- Work matters for individual and population health and wellbeing

- Health matters for obtaining, performing, and continuing work

- Injuries and diseases from work are costly and can be prevented

- Public and organizational policies are necessary (but not necessarily sufficient

- Employers and workers make choices within constraints

- Risk and benefits of work are not evenly spread throughout the working population.

The Good

Income

Access to health & other insurance

Social supports

Purpose & meaning

Growth & Opportunity

The Bad

Traditional hazards: forgotten but not gone

- Physical, chemical, radiation, infectious
- Contributions to common diseases

"Modern Hazards"

- Psychological
  - Violence, bullying
  - Burnout, depression
  - Sleep disruption
- Heat
- Insecurity/precarity
- Commuting

The Ugly: Prevention failures have consequences

- Lost income
- Lost productivity
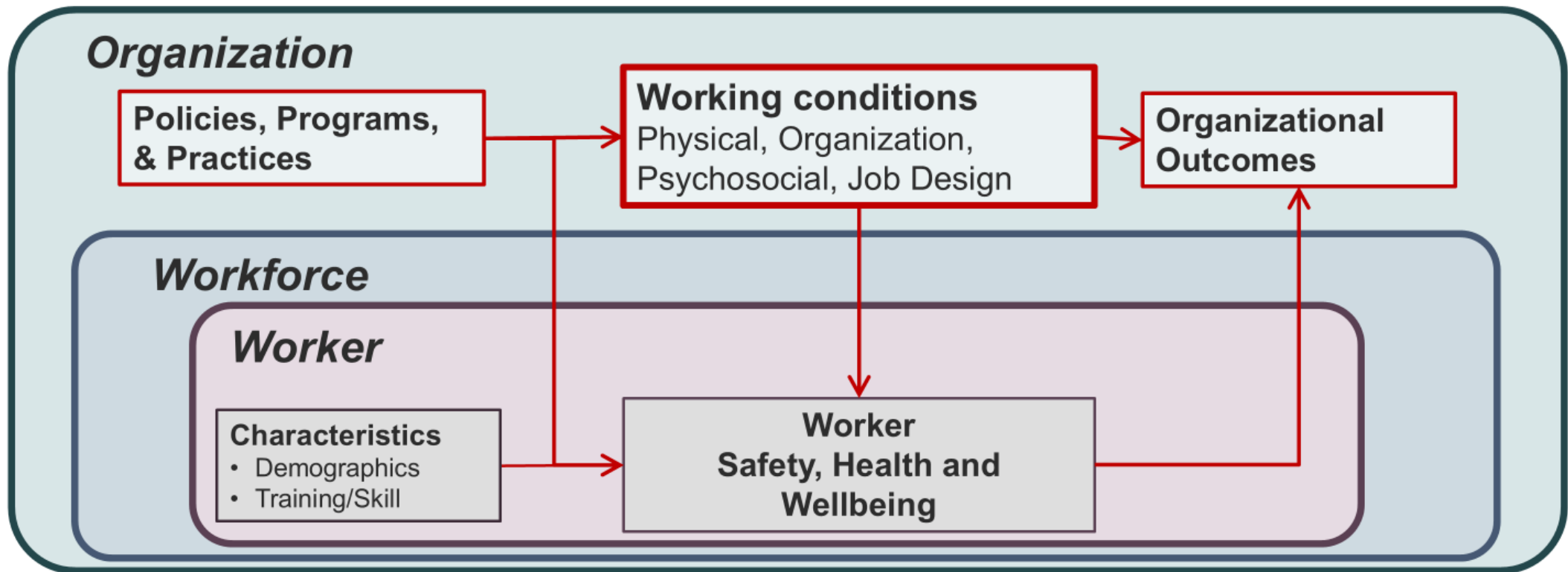- Increased turnover
- Reduced employment options
- Health care costs
- Opioid use
- Suicide risk

Public policies

Foundational US public policy: Occupational Safety and Health Act

- "To assure so far as possible every working man and woman in the Nation safe and healthful working conditions…"

- "Each employer… shall furnish …employment and a place of employment which are **free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm** …"
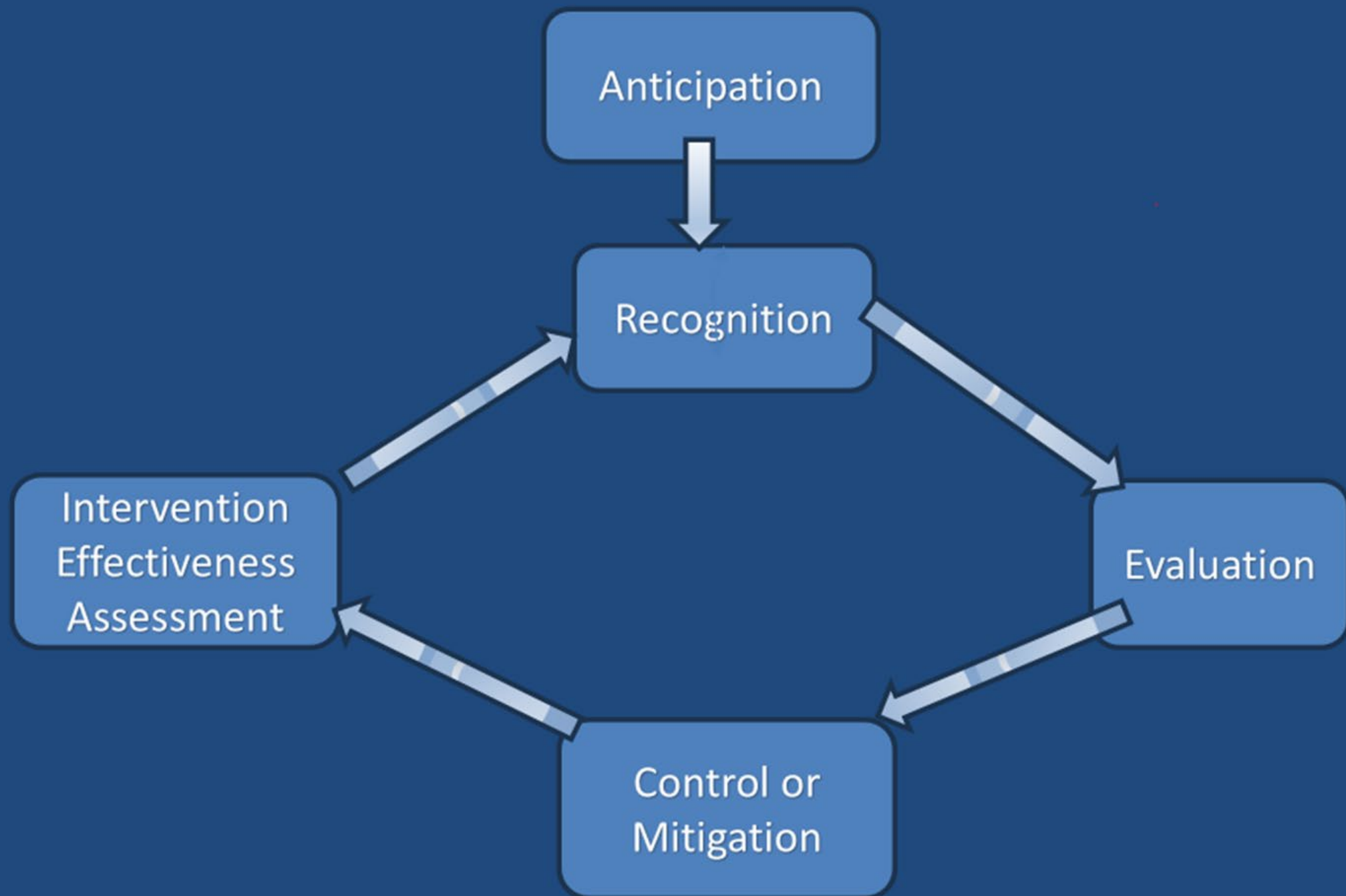
Work and the workforce change over a lifetime

Photo by Teemu Laukkarinen on Unsplash

Beyond compliance:
Supporting worker health and wellbing

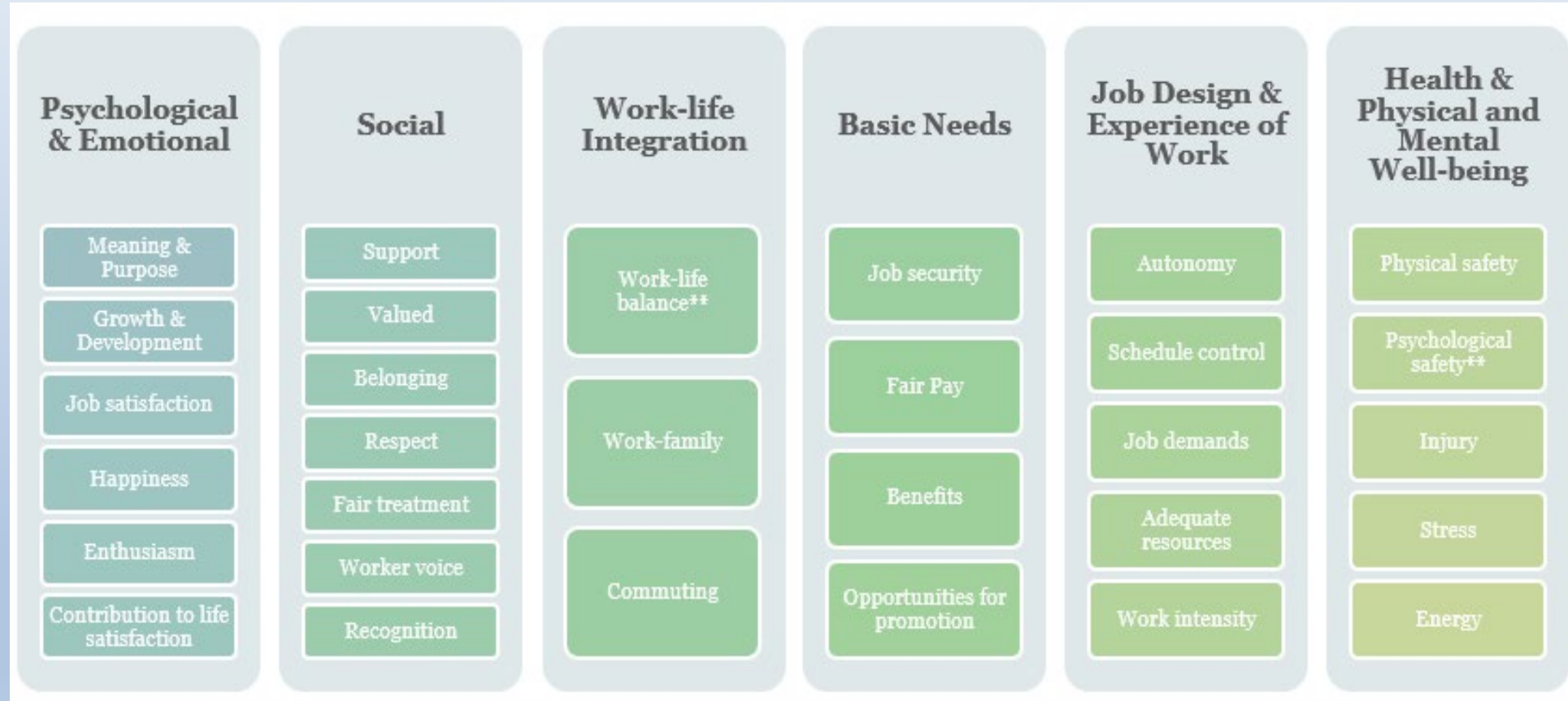| Psychological & Emotional	Social	Work-life Integration	Basic Needs	Job Design & Experience of Work	Health & Physical and Mental Well-being
Meaning & Purpose	Support	Work-life balance**	Job security	Autonomy	Physical safety
Growth & Development	Valued	Work-family	Fair Pay	Schedule control	Psychological safety**
Job satisfaction	Belonging	Commuting	Benefits	Job demands	Injury
Happiness	Respect		Opportunities for promotion	Adequate resources	Stress
Enthusiasm	Fair treatment			Work intensity	Energy
Contribution to life satisfaction	Worker voice				
	Recognition				

Why thriving workers? The basics.

- Higher overall life satisfaction, better mental health, flourishing, and lower burnout

- Lower turnover intent, lower actual turnover, and lower injury rates

- Higher productivity and customer satisfaction

- More willingness to identify, report, and act on problems

- Interventions focused on improving working conditions result in higher levels of thriving

Data matters

- Setting priorities for scarce resource
- Evaluation of current prevention strategies
- Identification of new problems or emergence of old problems in new populations
- Understanding distributions of costs and benefits
- Developing public support for policy change

Final thoughts

- The current and future health of people who work are profoundly influenced by their work exposures and overall work environment.

- Systems interventions are most effective.

- Fear stifles success.

- Thriving workers in successful workplaces is a reasonable policy goal.

- Good data helps focus interventions and assess their value.

Don't forget

Risk is not evenly spread throughout the working population.

Some workers are more likely to be injured or sickened on the job than others. Others are more likely to thrive.

A range of worker protection policies are needed to help mitigate risk and support the benefits of work.