WORK AND THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS IN BRITAIN
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Carl Walker and Ben Fincham
Dedication

To Bree and our children Nancy and Joshua (Ben)

To Ruth and Anna (Carl)
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Chapter 1
Introduction: Mental Health, Emotional Well-Being and 21st Century Work

It is very often the case that those who talk of the importance of the ‘human factor’ in one breath tell us that ‘the main problem is attitudes’ in the next. On the view taken here attitudes are no more suspended in mid-air than is technology . . . and ‘attitudes’ nearly always take us back to management. (Nichols, 1997: p. 117)

There is a long standing interest in the relationship between mental health and work. However in recent years a consensus has developed both in academia and policy formulation that the number of people who are out of work as a result of mental ill-health constitutes a ‘crisis’ of public health care. Approximately one million recipients of incapacity benefit result from poor mental health and this represents 40% of the total people on incapacity benefit. Moreover this figure has increased from 26% in 1996 and will continue to be supplemented by an estimated 200,000 people with mental health conditions moving on to incapacity benefit each year (Black, 2008). The number of people currently on incapacity benefit has been constituted by Dame Carol Black as a serious failure of both employment support for the workless and of healthcare in the UK (Black, 2008). This has led to prominent calls for a desperate need for growth in publicly-funded mental health services in the UK (Layard, 2005). Indeed the sheer volume and variety of UK government policy documents in recent years that have been formulated to address the problems of those out of work with mental ill-health stands as testament to the postulated severity of this problem.