

Post Pandemic Mental Wellbeing Practices in Indian Corporates and Role of HR

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is about to study mental wellbeing practices in Indian corporate during post pandemic. The paper also tells about roles of HR leaders and actions taken by them to perform mental well-being practices for employees. Corporates are creating such type of work culture so that employees can balance their work and personal life which would increase their productivity.

Keywords : Pandemic, Mental well being, Global Talent Trends

Introduction

A pandemic is a disease outbreak that spreads across countries or continents. The world Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic when it became clear that the illness was severe and that was spreading quickly over a wide area.

The recent raging pandemic has disrupted the world economy in a humongous way causing socio-psychological stressors affecting the mental wellbeing of the employees. (International Journal of Global Business & competitiveness, 1-17, 2022)

The pandemic exposed & worsened the health and wealth gaps for different populations, underscoring that accessibility and affordability of care is not enough. Thus, the onus is on employers to address the unmet needs of employees and ensure they are emotionally, physically, socially & financially healthy. They actively support the well-being outcomes of their entire workforce by encouraging healthy, rewarding & sustainable work behavior and offering personalized support during moments that matters. (Global Talent Trends 2022 : Rise of relatable organization)

According to Global Talent Trends 2022:

	2019	2022
• Employee who feel energized at work	74%	63%
• Employees who feel at risk of burnout	63%	81%
• 97% of companies have plans to promote long-term employee health & well-being		
• 36% are introducing a mental or emotional well-being strategy		

So, questions we must ask:

- How & what role HR can play to ease out the disruptive work places?
- How will all of this change influence the future of enterprise & workforce?
- How can HR take the lead in helping their enterprises accelerate sustained performances?

Review of Literature

According to Pathways, by Patti van Eys, “as a result of job-related stress, physical & emotional exhaustion, helplessness, demoralization etc, 9 out of 10 employees say that burnout is an issue in their lives. In addition, HR leaders are under pressure to attract new talent as resignation rates soar. These challenges are not only leading to burnout but also compassion fatigue.”

According to Gallagher Better works Insights 2022, U.S. Edition, “understanding workforce engagement motivators is one of the first step towards developing an equitable wellbeing strategy & providing programs that serve diverse needs and lifestyles. The more closely they align with employee health risks and well-being goals, the better they support physical & emotional health.”

Research Gap

Though there is sudden rise on mental well-being awareness, however there is dearth of evident work by corporate HR in Indian scenario.

Objectives

The main objectives to do this research are-

1. To study different strategies to support mental well-being of all team members of organization.
2. To study the role of HR in Indian corporate during post pandemic scenario.
3. To study mental well-being practices after pandemic.

Research Methodology

The current study attempts to explain the concept of mental well-being and effect of pandemic on the mental well-being of the employees in Indian organizations. The nature of research is

completely qualitative. It is a conceptual research which is based on the review of previously done researches in this area. All the relevant data used in research paper has been collected from secondary sources e.g.- e-journals, newspapers, government publications & various e-resources.

Mental Well-being

According to Peterson, T. (2021, December 26), Mental well-being is how we respond to life's ups & downs. It includes how a person thinks, handles emotion (emotional wellness), & acts.

These traits which are all actually skills we can practice and develop – are all part of mental well-being:

- Self-acceptance
- Sense of self as part of something greater
- Sense of self as independent rather than dependent on others for identity or happiness
- Knowing & using our unique character strengths
- Accurate perception of reality
- Desire for continued growth
- Thriving in the face of adversity (emotional resilience)
- Knowing and remaining true to values
- Optimism
- Determination
- Action (in contrast to passive mindset)

Impact of Pandemic on the Mental Well-being of Employees in Corporates:

Burnout and compassion fatigue were not just problems for the employee, they affected a company's bottom line also. In addition, fatigue, anxiety, depression, & burnout all lead to decreased productivity, absenteeism, presenteeism, and high turnover rates.

According to International journal of global business & competitiveness, 1-17, 2022, “the fear of losing jobs due to economic shutdowns, or facing challenges of digitization of the work place, or fear of contaminating illness generated a feeling of despair & panic to more serious paranoia behavior amongst the employees.”

Current corporate practices for mental well-being of employees:

Companies are starting to move away from work site oriented approach toward data-led ways of working, marrying digital with human delivery. Taking care of an increasingly diverse workforce requires understanding how the needs & circumstances of different populations have changed. 85% of HR leaders recognize the need for hyper-personalization to ensure benefits attract and retain talent.

According to Deloitte insights, 02 December 2021, “in the new hybrid environment, two ways to help ensure enough quality interaction to maintain company culture& establish strong connections-

1. Drive purposeful engagement
2. Create employee equivalence

Reliance Industries Limited

R-Swasthya is an initiative which provides for preventive, curative and promotive aspects of not only the physical but emotional, mental, spiritual and financial aspects of wellness. The wellness initiative of the organization is to target holistic wellbeing of the workforce. Some of them are-

- 24X7 mental health helpline

- Online cognitive behavioral therapy program
- 21 days of well-being initiative
- People’s manager guide: A 38 pager e-guide for people managers to guide their teams on mental well-being

- Webinar on lifestyle disorders, Diabetes control mission, BMI reduction program, covid precautions, immunity booster etc.
- Online yoga sessions, meditation sessions, pranayama videos, my voice group discussion and employee engagement, “Gratitude and Hope”, Reliance family day celebration by series of virtual sessions/webinars.

Tech Mahindra

They are creating a holistic approach to employee wellness. They are organizing webinar through which they find out how people leaders from across organizations are taking innovative& empathetic steps to create a safe, productive space for their employees.

IBM

IBM sees employee health as a path way to high performance. Some elements of IBM’s wellness programs include

- An EAP for all IBMers and their household members around the world at any time.
- Critical incident response tools for manager.
- “Ask Healthy and Safety”, a digital medical and safety tool where employees can ask questions and get answers quickly.
- Physical activity programs in movement, stretching, and ergonomics (including in remote work settings).
- Financial wellness with counseling, webinars and seminars on various topics.
- Vender partnerships offering support for specific underserved employee groups.

IBM’s wellness team gathers employee feedback via periodic surveys. The team also uses focus groups design thinking sessions, and an employee-engagement survey. Slack is used for

informal polls, gathering quick feedback on wellness program details and preferences. All of these tools drive modifications. (Kathie Harris Dec.23, 2021)

What did high-growth organization do differently in 2020-2021?

- 36% offered the options of a four-day workweek.
- 47% adjusted talent strategies to attract freelance & other non-traditional talent.
- 51% asked employees where they want to work & how they work best.
- 52% repurposed facilities for more digitally led hybrid working.
- 54% institutionalized flexibility into cultural norms.

Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, India Research Center

Some mental wellbeing practices recommended by Harvard T. H. CHAN (School of public Health):

An important pathway for mindful breathing is “decentering” learning where we learn to view negative thoughts in our mind without judging thus de-linking self with depressive emotions.

1. Try meditation

Mindful meditation involves being aware of your body, breathe, and thoughts, but letting go of any negative thoughts and emotions without judging yourself for having them. It can promote relaxation, decrease negative emotions, build skills to manage stress, and increase tolerance.

2. Limit news consumption to trusted sources

It is important to obtain accurate and timely

public health information regarding COVID-19 from such trusted sources as World Health Organization (WHO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Balance the time spent on news and social media with other activities such as reading, listening to music, talking to others or some other activity.

3. Mindful use of social media

Think twice before posting or sharing on social media. Ask yourself if the content is truthful, helpful, inspiring, necessary or kind?

Conclusion

Mental well-being plays a critical role in, among others, achieving workforce fulfillment, productivity and inclusion. Businesses, therefore, are fostering a work culture where employees do not just survive, but can thrive and flourish to their fullest. While there are many steps that organizations may take bring the best out of their employees and keep them motivated, especially during such challenging times, workplace mental health practices are integrated into all elements of an employer’s operating model: policies, practices, training, organizational culture or philosophy.

Top actions taken by HR leaders are:

- Offering flexible work/collaboration training
- Creating a safe environment to share concerns.
- Investing in enhanced collaboration technology

HR leaders are also re-considering their health insurance plans in order to ensure that such plans take care of mental illness of employees, just as much as their physical health. In the post pandemic world, the successful organizations and businesses will perhaps be those that maintain

such initiatives and look out proactively for ways to ensure that their employees receive the best support for their mental health and wellbeing.

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