

Impact of Employee Wellness on Performance – A Critical Review of Indian Industry Scenario

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the impact of employee wellness on performance by reviewing different research and global workforce surveys. Most of the companies in India have one or another kind of workplace wellness initiatives. However, they include off-the-shelf program adoptions without clear understanding the culture, dynamics and mindset of Indian workforce. Lukewarm participation of employees in the initiatives has been one of the major concerns for organizations. Technology progressions in machines and computers have outperformed humans in calculation and other algorithmic jobs. Employees are expected to be more creative, innovative and collaborative and thus complement the skills required to succeed in professional career.

Key Words: Employee wellness, workplace, productivity, performance, global workforce, Indian economy, career, culture, Technology, advancement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Workplace and nature of work are changing at an extraordinary speed and in a paradoxical way. These changes are in terms of cultural, demographic, socioeconomic, technological, climatic and geopolitical. Every human being struggles to survive, thrive and excel in this constantly changing world due to the evolving complexity. A nominal percentage of population have been pulled into formal economy, enhancing their quality of life from poverty due to the rapid economic growth as an effect of globalization. Also, this has created a new of generation of middle class workforce and mega cities in the world.

As per International Labor Organization (ILO), the current global population of 7.6 billion include 3 billion are employed and 250 million are unemployed. An average adult spends at least 90,000 hours working in their lifetime. With increased work load the rise of chronic diseases amongst working professionals has gone unchecked. Recent research suggests that the overall health of global workforce has decayed due to increased stress, financial uncertainty, poor health, including safety issues at workplace.

II EVOLUTION OF EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

As per defined by WHO: the seven dimensions of wellness, it is defined as a dynamic process of learning new life skills and becoming aware of and making conscious choices toward a more balanced and healthy lifestyle across seven dimensions (Social, Physical, Emotional, Career, Intellectual, Environmental, Spiritual). Workplace wellness or Employee wellness is not a new phenomenon. This concept gained momentum in the United States since employers are responsible to bear the health costs of their employees. During the Industrial revolution, various labor movements were responsible for protecting the health and safety of workers in grim working conditions. In the 19th century, US and UK nations passed their first Occupational Safety and Health legislations encompassing workers from railroad, mines and mills/ factories. In 1940, the first Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) came into force with the main intention to combat alcoholism. Due to industrialization and globalizations, many companies like Johnson & Johnson, Caterpillar, Dupont, Xerox, Boeing, Kodak, etc., the horizon of wellness encompassed family issues, mental health, addiction as well.

In India, the concept of wellness is ancient and has very rich history. India has always been known for its various traditional forms of healing and preventive healthcare approach like yoga and Ayurveda. Other Asian countries like China has prehistoric disease management approach like Qigong. Unani, the Persian method of traditional and natural method for leading healthy life has been around for many centuries (Stroheckner, 2010). India has become one of the leading economies in the global scenario. Thanks to the globalization and advancement of technology, India has been identified as major contributor to the development of IT Industry in the recent past. Corporate wellness began in the

western countries, but has slowly made great headway in India as well due to the soaring pressures at workplace and outstanding performance expected from each individual on daily basis. Today, most of the multinational companies both large and mid-sized have one or another type of wellness programs in place to promote health and wellbeing amongst its employees.

III IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

Human civilization has evolved through various stages of hunting to agrarian and reached the stage of current society resulting from industrialization and globalization. With advent of information age, our workplace has transformed in terms of digitization, huge networks, information flows. Democratization of knowledge has made the working class more aware and informed about worldly problems. The progressions of scientific and technologies have not been able to solve these problems and create an order to reach a balance and wellness for a regenerative and sustainable existence.

Healthcare cause around the world as escalated rapidly due to the rising rates of chronic diseases in employees. Nearly three – quarters of all deaths occur in developing and underdeveloped countries due to chronic diseases. According to the estimates of World Economic Forum and Harvard school of public health a projected cumulative \$47 trillion will be lost in the global economic output between 2011-2030. Even though globalization brings rapid economic growth and urbanization, it also leads to loss of traditional safety nets unsafe work places, loneliness and alienation of employees working in global organizations. Technology acts as a catalyst for innovation and the pace of change which results in increased stress in a 24/7 work culture. The positive trends of economic growth include rising education levels, affluence, increased numbers of women in the work place results in easy access to information and growing workforce empowerment. There is a need to address work – family balance, safety at work place / travel, maternity health etc., According to the survey by Willis Towers Watson, 83% of Indian workforce rank the main objective of wellness is to reduce stress. However, 79% of Indian employees believe wellness leads to improved health care/ risk awareness, develop healthy culture and boost program engagement. Currently 34% of the companies do not have a health and productivity strategy while 26% of the organizations have customized the strategy of differentiated health and productivity. Globally most of the organizations strive to improve their productivity being the main objective of workplace wellness.

Improved wellness at the workplace enhances cognitive abilities and processes of the employees resulting in them being creative and effective at problem solving. Another important result of effective workplace wellness is directly affecting the attitudes of the employees at work. They tend to become more co-operative and collaborative to achieve the common goals. Better health practices lead to improved immunity, speedy recovery from wellness and thus sustaining greater levels of energy and potential.

Extreme global competition has shortened the company lifecycles as has employees' tenure with specific employers. Hence, employees work under strenuous and unsecured work environment subsequently making them more discontented and disengaged. This represents enormous hidden costs for the organizations by affecting productivity, turnover, absenteeism, presenteeism and much more. A global study conducted by Deloitte rated culture and engagement as the most challenging factor for businesses. Young generations of professionals view themselves as "Free Agents". They not only expect to have multiple employers, but also different carriers in their lifetime. Many employers have expressed their inability to retain top talent among the Millennial Generations. The advent of technology has allowed work to intrude into the personal lives of the employees and thus blurring the boundary between work and life. Collaboration among global teams working in different time zones demands active participation instantaneously during any time of the day. Hence elevating their stress levels as the expectation of different stake holders for an immediate action always.

Computers and machines are replacing and outperforming skilled workforce. Hence, employees need to compliment the computers and machines to excel in their professional carrier. They are expected to be more creative, intuitive, innovative and adaptable to any situation through intrinsic motivations. Therefore, organizations need to create a work environment and culture that aligns with the personal values, motivations and wellness. In the future, employers need to create high levels of motivation, energy and creativity amongst the employees since it requires them to have constant learning ability.

IV BARRIERS TO WORKPLACE WELLNESS TO ACHIEVE HIGHER PERFORMANCE AT WORKPLACE

Productivity is measured as output per worker varies across different industries and organizations. Most employers who do not value the human capital as the most important resource for their success will not sustain the business in the future economy. In India, most of the wellness approaches have been a replication of the strategy being followed at their US headquarters. This approach has led to flawed design and implementation of wellness initiatives with poor understanding of Indian culture and people mindset. The dynamics and relationships of an Indian workforce is

completely different and unique from that of other countries. Most of the programs that are implemented are reactive in nature rather than preventing health and wellness issues proactively. Lack of enthusiasm by employees in the participation of workplace wellness programs has been one of the main hindrances in effective performance. As per the study conducted by Staw et.al (1994) found that employees with positive job - related affect were more likely to get better supervisory evaluations and leading to higher earnings.

One of the major concerns has been the lack of proof that wellness contribute to company performance and are also cost effective. Every company needs to question whether ROI is the appropriate measure for the effectiveness of wellness programs since the results of these programs are often intangible and given the inherent limitations of employee wellness measurement. Various qualitative outcomes that leads to improved employee attitude, morale, engagement, job satisfaction can lead to reduced presenteeism and stress at the workplace. Wellness and performance at work are interdependent factors. The cost of employee disengagement, stress and burnout lead to workforce and wellness. An estimate has been made that unwellness of the workforce costs the global economy 10-15% of annual economic output. A two – way relationship has been identified between wellness and workplace performance. An unmotivated, unwell, disengaged employee is result of unsafe, unhealthy, hostile and stressful workplace environment. However healthy habits, joy and fulfillment amongst employees can be achieved through motivating, energetic and healthy workplace. Work can provide a sense of purpose or accomplishment to the employees by which the, make a positive impact in the organization leading to emotional and mental wellness along with physical health.

V. A PARADIGM SHIFT IN WORKPLACE WELLNESS

The world is transitioning from knowledge economy to wisdom or human economy. Here work will be completely different due to the ever-advancing technology. Employees are expected to have broad abilities, self-direction, creativity and collaborative skills that can only be achieved at an elevated state of wellness. Companies will attempt to reverse the current trend of un-wellness workforce and Governments are expected to be partnering with them as well. Proactively, organizations will strive to prioritize safety, reduce occupational hazards while infusing wellness into the physical health. New workspace designs like treadmill desks, on-site fitness facilities, attractive staircases, and cafeteria offering nutritional food options, gym memberships, yoga classes etc.

Workplace wellness will become a shared responsibility instead of employers fixing their employees' health problems. Every person in the business lifecycle will share and perform a responsible role to accomplish common goals. Compartmentalized Wellness programs will become a thing of the past. Both employers and employees are aware that such programs do not have significant effect on job performance. Instead wellness will be treated at a holistic level while encompassing different dimensions of wellness – physical, personal and social. Companies need to recognize diverse needs of employees and recognize workplace stress as the top deterrent of wellness. Some organizations will need to abandon the traditional, hierarchical management structure and thus empower the employees to elect their leaders, define their roles etc. Agile work principles and methodology has been the recent buzz word across organizations.

Gallup has identified having “a best friend at work” as one of the key traits for productive work groups and high employee retention. Healthy relationships lead to emotional and mental wellbeing of employees while increasing communication, collaboration and honest feedback. Leaders are expected to demonstrate that human capital is the most important asset and encourage shape social interactions at work. Employees will become more committed and effective and will show more citizenship behavior. The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) promotes ethical business behavior, fair labor practices, environmental sustainability and social impact in the community.

CONCLUSION

Employee wellness has direct impact on the future of the organizations and economy. Employees need to become productive, happy and fulfilled individuals for the success of any organization. Recently, there has been a rapid growth in “wellness programs in India”. However, the field of wellness at work is still at its nascent stages. Current wellness programs only address a sliver of the global workforce. There is a need for changing the image of wellness from being a vicious cycle to a virtuous one. There is an enormous amount of research that shows the positive impact of employee engagement on companies' bottom lines. As many corporations must include wellness into their core culture and as work evolves in the next era of Wisdom economy. In the near future, people will not only work for financial compensation but also to seek and enhance their own wellness. In turn, improving the lives of peers, family and society.

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