

Prosocial Employee Well-being

Work is a social institution, workplaces are social units and humans are social beings, and therefore any effort towards increasing the well-being of an individual needs to incorporate a prosocial aspect into its design. Addressing this gap could probably go a long way in reducing stress related statistics within Indian organisations.

BY DR. M.V. ANURADHA

Health is not just the absence of disease, it is being emotionally, spiritually and physically sound" blared the radio through the speakers in my car. Every morning, while traveling to work, I hear this quote by a spiritual guru. And, it points out accurately that health is a wholistic concept, and overarches every aspect of our existence.

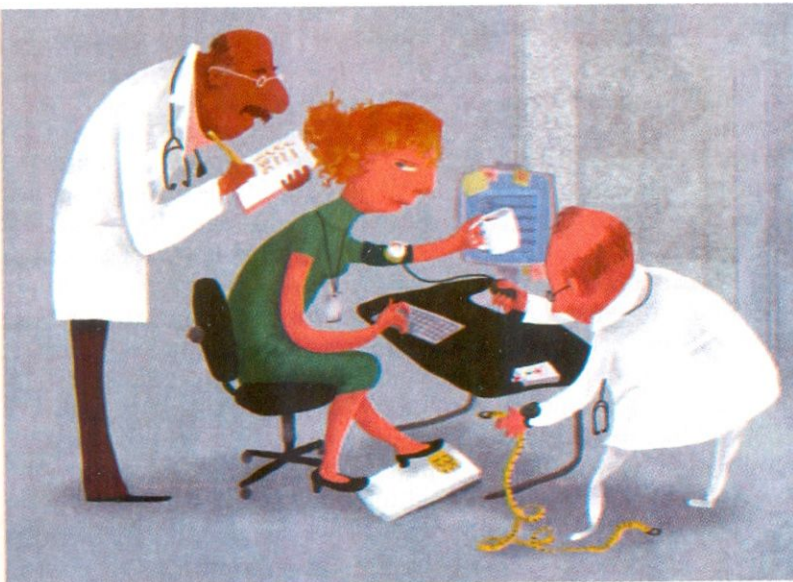
The wholistic nature of well-being

Thus the term well-being seems more appropriate while talking about the complete

health of an individual. More importantly, it appears that most organisations seem to have understood this fact. That is why if we review organisational practices concentrated towards employee well-being, we can see that the practices range from catering to-

- i). Physical and mental health of the individual, to
- ii). Taking care of their financial health through various financial aid policies, and also
- iii). Providing a facilitative environment for the personal and professional growth of an individual through integrating the well-being mind set into the Human Resource practices of the organisation.

Such three pronged approach, if it can be so termed, not only helps the organisation save costs incurred from medical insurance claims, absenteeism etc., it in turn increases profits derived through high employee productivity. Organisations are investing in the physical health of their employees by providing free health check-ups, medical benefits for the family members, gymnasium facilities at workplaces, ergonomically designed furniture etc. For example, Accenture and Wipro provide benefits such as counselling for employees on diet and provide special discounts at certain hospitals for medical check-ups. * Some organisations have also recognised the need to ensure the financial health of employees for their overall well-being. American Express provides financial counselling for employees, and helps them get advice on long term savings. A less popular practice (since it is being used



by only 2% of the organisations) also involves employers providing monetary assistance to employees when required. Other organisations have gone beyond the physical and financial health and have included wellness into their Human Resource practices. For example, Godrej Consumer Products Ltd. and SAP have designed multiple part time work options for women returning from maternity leave. Google spends a lot on designing its workplaces, provides free food and flexibility at work, with the underlying philosophy being, people should want to come to work and enjoy being here in order to be productive. The newest practice in this arena is the use of analytics for devising personalised wellness packages for each employee. Gamification, through the use of fitness monitoring devices like fitbits, is utilised to make employees compete with each other on fitness metrics. #

Employee well-being is work in progress

After such overview on the practices related to well-being within Indian organisations, it seems that there is very little that can be said about a concept that has not already been spoken about and implemented at least by some organisations. Unfortunately, despite the number and range of these practices, a report in the media suggested that 46% of employees in Indian organisations experience stress.⁵

This data is insightful since it tells us that employee well-being practices need to be looked at as a work in progress and should be ever evolving. This is because the nature of work, social structures and social values are also in a state of continuous flux. The well-being of an individual is closely related to these social changes. Another issue hindering the effectiveness of well-being practices is the fact that well-being is subjectively constructed by an individual, meaning that the same situation could be perceived differently by two different individuals, affecting their experienced well-being. In academic literature, this has been termed "subjective well-being" referring to a person's self-described happiness.

Though organisations seem to recognise this and are trying to develop personalized wellness programmes for each individual, it might be easier said than done. This is because most of these practices are not based upon a deep understanding of how subjective well-being develops and how it is experienced. For example, academic research has ascertained that subjective well-being could either be Hedonic or Eudemonic. Hedonic well-being is associated with pleasure. Whenever an individual engages in activities that are pleasurable it leads

to his or her well-being. All practices focused on mandatory holidays, employee benefits like cash rewards, and family holiday's etc. fall in this category. Eudemonic well-being on the other hand, comes with being able to actualize ones' potential through work. Interestingly enough, such kind of well-being might not always involve pleasure. For example, a passionate entrepreneur facing a number of obstacles to set up her business, might not be experiencing pleasure, but might still score high on well-being since she is driven by her passion. When organisations provide career counselling to employees, listen to their career objectives, and use person-job fit metrics for recruitment, training and career advancement, they are allowing for an experience of eudemonic well-being. Eudemonic well-being has been found to be a stronger source of well-being. Every individual's needs on these dimensions are different and continuously changing. Any well-being practice should involve a good understanding of these dynamics. There is no formula for devising a perfect balance of these two aspects of well-being, rendering it as a big challenge for the effectiveness of well-being practices.

Prosocial Well-being: the way forward

Experts believe that "meaning" in work is an essential component for the experience of



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well-being within an organisation. Work can be made meaningful through various ways. I have identified three overarching aspects that contribute to meaningful work:

- Content of work: Does the individual like what he/she does at work? Does an individual feel that he/she is making a

structures, uprooting of job seekers from their hometowns, and the competitive nature of a globalized economy have greatly contributed to this feeling of alienation.

Recent research on prosocial work designs has prompted attention towards this much neglected aspect of well-being. It was found that when jobs allowed for making a positive difference to others, and when these employees were allowed direct contact with their beneficiaries, it led to lower levels of burnout in these individuals. Another research found that when employees participated in a 'help your co-worker' programme, (wherein all employees contribute financially towards a fund for another co-worker who is facing a personal crisis) they displayed greater commitment towards their organisation. Some organisations have started to realise the importance of this prosocial aspect of well-being and have incorporated this into their employee policies. Accenture, for example, has the "hours of work" policy. Through this practice, employees can donate their unused leave to their colleague during times of personal crises. Also, new employees in this organisation are assigned "buddies," usually another co-worker who has been in the organisation for a longer time. The buddy programme has helped many new employees ease into the system and adjust to the new environment comfortably. %

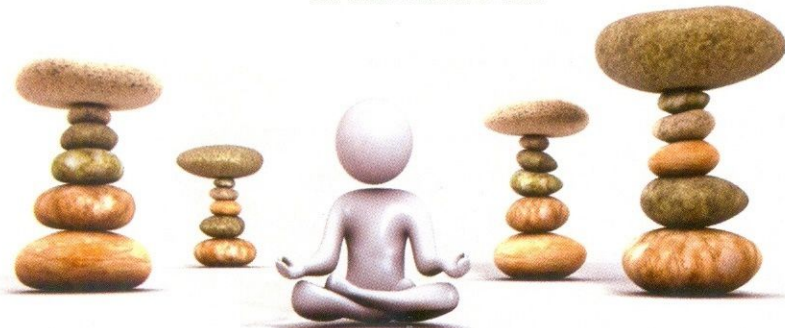
Though it is encouraging to read about these progressive organisational practices, it cannot be ignored that they are still at a nascent stage, and not very popular with all organisations. The need of the hour therefore seems to be to educate organisations on the prosocial aspects of well-being, and spark the conversation on how to incorporate this understanding into workplace practices. Work is a social institution, workplaces are social units and humans are social beings, and therefore any effort towards increasing the well-being of an individual needs to incorporate a prosocial aspect into its design. Addressing this gap could probably go a long way in reducing stress related statistics within Indian organisations. HC

“Building on relationships with co-workers is crucial for the well-being of an individual because more and more people are feeling alienated today than ever before. Fragmentation of traditional joint family structures, uprooting of job seekers from their hometowns, and the competitive nature of a globalized economy have greatly contributed to this feeling of alienation.”

difference to others through one's work?

- Relationships at work: Does an individual find support in one's co-workers?
- Balance between Work versus Non-work aspects of one's life: Is work contributing to the meaning one sees in one's life as a whole?

Out of these three aspects, the content of work and work/non-work balance has received a considerably fair amount of attention by researchers as well as Human Resource professionals. However, the relevance of relationships at work for an individual's well-



being has not received the prominence it deserves, and, this seems to be the missing link in wellness practices across organisations. Building on relationships with co-workers is crucial for the well-being of an individual because more and more people are feeling alienated today than ever before. Fragmentation of traditional joint family

- * - <https://doctors.practo.com/5-corporate-wellness-programs-in-india/>
- # - <http://www.rediff.com/money/report/pix-special-what-makes-these-10-companies-the-best-to-work-for-in-india/20150721.htm>
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