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Dr. S Sundararajan
Teaching Assistant, Alagappa
Institute of Skill Development,
Alagappa University,
Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India

Dr. N Ramar
Teaching Assistant, Alagappa
Institute of Management,
Alagappa University,
Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India

Worker's wellness and efficiency during the pandemic in freight forwarding companies

Dr. S Sundararajan and Dr. N Ramar

Abstract
There is a strategic importance of having in place an effective people's approach. There is a myriad of contemporary thought that helps us to have this vital aspect of work place strategy right resulting in improving productivity, thereby reducing sickness, increased discretionary effort, trust and employee loyalty is most primary thing in Custom House Agents (CHAs) and freight forwarding companies. A few of the new ways of working and a number of considerations associated with people management responsibilities are quite challenging in freight forwarding Industry. The present paper, aims at identifying the strategies to deal with key challenges like ageing workforce, remote working and the mammoth impact that technology has in the workplace during the pandemic. Most importantly the wellbeing issues related to these aspects of work in the modern-day working environment are highlighted and the challenges faced by both employees and employers in coping with a fast-changing world of work are addressed. The key aspects of wellbeing strategy must focus on how to treat people with dignity and respect so that it fosters a growth mind set and help them to work on innovation and creativity that will provide huge productivity and assist them to work "beyond expectations". This paper brings out the well-considered and executed wellbeing strategies that will result in high productivity and make the organization a better place to be as it will focus on the ethics to be the purpose in working life among the employees of CHAs and freight forwarding companies.

Keywords: CHAs, well-being, productivity, performance, positive mindset, sporting analogies, COVID-19

Introduction

The novel corona virus disease declaration and following lockdown all over the world from March 2020, there was a rapid shift in the working conditions of millions of workers, who had to shift to work from home or home office model that was deemed advantageous to minimize the transmission of spread of infection. In a typical home environment, there is an emergence of new lifestyle among the working population resulting in extending working hours, stressful jobs, lack of exercise resulting in major ailments and has an impact on productivity and less focus at work. Stress at work is increasing year on year and long hours are becoming the norm particularly during the pandemic of CHAs and freight forwarding companies. This is not only having a detrimental effect on employee health, happiness and productivity, but also impacting the bottom line. Today the Human resource professionals are uniquely placed to manage this modern workplace crisis by implementing a well-being strategy. Well-being strategies will help to reduce employee anxiety, increase staff engagement and improve overall performance particularly during Covid-19. It is very essential in a fast-changing world of work and technological transformation to build a momentum around it. It is important to monitor, measure and evaluate its impact on productivity.

Research Objectives

- To critically examine the employee wellness programmes and productivity during the pandemic period.
- To bring out the importance of employee wellness programmes and strategies in the Indian context.

Corresponding Author:
Dr. S Sundararajan
Teaching Assistant, Alagappa
Institute of Skill Development,
Alagappa University,
Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India

Research Methodology

This study is qualitative and descriptive study which is aimed at understanding health and wellness initiatives taken by the organizations to help employees achieve healthy lifestyle and reduce health related risks. The findings from this study will help employers to streamline and structure health and wellness programmes in their organization for improved performance and productivity during COVID-19.

Review of literature

Galanti T, Guidetti G, Mazzei E, Zappalà S, Toscano F. (2021) [1]. Work from home during the COVID-19 outbreak: The impact on employees' remote work productivity, engagement, and stress. Journal of occupational and environmental medicine, 63(7), e426

According to the research, Galanti and co-authors have investigated that Work from Home (WFH) -related job demands and job resources are related to remote work productivity and work engagement as well as on stress. They found that the empirical results that were analyzed and discussed, except for the relationships between distracting working environment and the outcomes of productivity and stress, and the relationships between both autonomy and self-leadership and stress, mostly confirmed our assumptions. This study contributes to the literature concerning remote work and the well-being of remote workers that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is marked with relevant emotional and health implications. Furthermore, the implications of this study are of further importance as they provide information concerning the needs of workers who have had to adapt to enforce full-time WFH due to the pandemic, most of whom have no prior WFH experience. Further Managers, HR officers, and workers engaged in remote activities should consider family-work conflict, social isolation, and distracting work environments as potential obstacles and job autonomy and self-leadership as potential enablers of WFH engagement. In times of pandemic, such as the COVID-19, where containing the spread of the disease is crucial, WFH is a key opportunity and can give a competitive advantage to sustain and improve performance of organizations.

Russo D, Hanel PH, Altnickel S, & Van Berkel N (2021) [2]. Predictors of well-being and productivity among software professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic– a longitudinal study. Empirical Software Engineering, 26(4), 1-63

According to Russo and other authors, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted software engineers in several ways. Abruptly, lockdown and quarantine measures changed the way of working and relating to other people. Software engineers, in line with most knowledge workers, started to work from home with unprecedented challenges. Most notably, the research shows that high-stress levels, the absence of daily routines, and social contacts are some of the variables most related to well-being. Similarly, low productivity is related to boredom and distractions at home. This paper confirms that, on average, software engineers' well-being increased during the pandemic. Also, there is a correlation between well-being and productivity. Software organizations might start to experimentally ascertain whether adopting these recommendations will increase professionals' productivity and well-being. Further, the research findings indicate that granting a higher degree of autonomy to employees might be beneficial, on average. However, while extended autonomy might be perceived positively experienced by those with a high need for autonomy, it might be perceived as stressful for those who prefer structure. It is unlikely that any intervention will have the same effect on all people (since there is a substantial variation for most variables); it is essential to have individual differences in mind when exploring any interventions' effects. Thus, adopting incremental intervention, based on the findings, where organizations can get feedback from their employees is recommended.

Howe DC, Chauhan RS, Soderberg AT, & Buckley MR (2020) [3]. Paradigm shifts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizational dynamics

The authors during COVID-19 pandemic have created multiple paradigm shifts the likes of which organizations have never before seen. Even the most prepared organizations scrambled to react to the rapid changes brought on by the pandemic. Whereas most organizations would agree that job security, financial consequences, remote work, worker well-being, and career attitudes have all shifted, organizations ability to understand and respond to those shifts in both the short- and long-term has become another story altogether. However, by becoming more aware of these paradigm shifts in the key areas discussed above, practitioners can better position themselves to explore the myriad of organizational changes resulting from the pandemic. Furthermore, awareness of these paradigm shifts enables individuals and organizations to proactively adapt to a rapidly changing business environment. It is likely that the effects of this pandemic will need to be explored for years to come in order to truly understand the depth and magnitude of effect. By being armed with the knowledge of these paradigm shifts, their implications, and the issues for consideration, organizations and their leaders can take the actions that should lead to long-term organizational success.

Singh MK, Kumar V, & Ahmad T (2020) [4]. Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on working culture: an exploratory research among information technology (IT) professionals in Bengaluru, Karnataka (India). Journal of Xi'an University of Architecture & Technology with ISSN, 1006-7930

In the authors view to the present situation created by COVID-19 has shaken up the socio-cultural framework of the society and work culture. The health and safety measures have overshadowed the norms of any local culture also. A new global culture has emerged with primary focus on safeguarding from highly infectious Corona virus. Facemask, hand gloves, sanitizers and physical distancing became an integral part of life. The current situation has given thrust to the virtual world and there are various steps taken by the governments to increase contactless experience. Similar to every coin that has two sides, the present situation also poses opportunities and challenges. The increased remote working will enable organisations and hire the best talent from anywhere without spending on office space and administration cost. Employees will be empowered to work remotely based on their convenient flexible working hours. However, the flip side is long-term remote working may also increase physiological stress, diluted work life boundaries, communication gap among team members, lack of interpersonal relationship, concern over job security and diminishing organisational culture.

Camilleri MA (2021) [5]. The Employees' State of Mind during COVID-19: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective. Sustainability, 13(7), 3634

In this paper the author opines that the unprecedented outbreak of the Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic had a devastating effect on the global economy. Many businesses experienced a significant decline in their business activities. As a result, their employees were concerned on their job security and long-term employment prospects. This research explores the service employees' motivations in their workplace environment and sheds light on their perceptions about their employers' corporate social responsibility (CSR). The methodology integrated key measures from the self-determination theory (SDT), CSR, job security and organizational performance. A structural equations modelling (SEM-PLS3) approach was used to analyze the proposed research model. The findings confirmed that the employees' intrinsic motivations were significantly predicting their organizational performance. Their identified motivations, job security as well as their employers' social responsibility were significant antecedents of their intrinsic motivations. Moreover, there were significant indirect effects that predicted the employees' productivity in their workplace during COVID-19.

Well-being or Employee wellness

Well-being is a State of mind or state of being, that include feeling safe, comfortable, secure, happy, fortunate and of course healthy. Happiness is about walking around all day with the smile on the face and a feeling of non-grumpiness. Well-being can have huge impact on productivity and performance of employees. The skills of a manager is to be positively charged so that a conducive work environment is created for the workforce, who would feel trusted, engaged and motivated to work hard who is away from the workplace in times of pandemic. In return the employees will gain enormous amount of satisfaction and feel proud about their organization and converse positively about their work. Therefore, well-being can result in huge returns financially.

During the time of pandemic, employee's physiological well-being say, free from injury, physical ailments, mental ailments is very important. Particularly keeping oneself fit, active and free from size, weight, BMI, cholesterol levels and blood pressure will prevent them from being absent to work. Along with physiological well-being, psychological well-being namely stress, anxiety and depression which are work related also directly impact the performance.

Sociological well-being and financial well-being are two challenges that exist for all human being in the times of COVID-19. This remains a major source of concern. The threats that exist for all employees during pandemic of course are job losses, taking loans and struggling to pay off. Such stress can have a huge impact on all the spheres of well-being.

Remote working during COVID-19

Employees are not physically in an office or workplace. Sometimes they work from home and office. For some of them this is the perfect way to work: maximum flexibility, convenience, autonomy, trust and empowerment. For many in contrast it is feeling of isolation, loneliness and abandonment. Human beings are social creatures. Although working remotely enhanced the level of productivity and

performance it creates a feeling of demoralization. It is one of the greatest challenges for the mangers in relation to leading a virtual workforce. The managers need to become better skilled to fit themselves into this new role where the outcome and results are more focused than the employee. The managers need to adopt different approach in terms of communicating, assessing and measuring the performance of virtual employees. The employees are in isolation, so social element of well-being needs to be focused now to increase the loyalty and feelings of belonging among employees. To the extent the managers may look forward to bring in the office to home, recreating as far as possible, a virtual office environment that may help employees to mitigate the feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

Creating the right environment

A perfect environment in which employees can feel connected, identify themselves with the CHAs and freight forwarding companies or brand and feel energized in their commitment towards work during the absence of workplace is creating a right environment. The work environment may be a room in employee's own home. We could assume the hygiene factors that are met which are in the COVID protocols. Secondly to make sure, if the employees are working in poorly lit, small ill-equipped areas in their homes it may be challenging and needs immediate intervention as it will affect the well-being of the employees of CHAs and freight forwarding companies. Working environment should be the one that makes the employees positive, happy, inspired to work efficiently, smart to a large extent that will increase and enhance their ability cope with their work during these challenging times.

Promotion of well-being during remote working

The promotion of well-being had to be clearly planned as it is the vital component to make life better for the employees to lead a healthy and successful working life. Strategy setting is the key for well-being. Wellness must be viewed in a positive light. As an annual strategy, it is good practice to focus on wellness periodically in terms of best fit. Deciding the strategy and communicating it is equally important. When properly communicated, employees feel valued and cared for which is the order of the day. Hence, employees engage in their process with interest and feel part of it. The strategies laid out has to be accessible to the employees and make them feel that the organization do not function in isolation from the society around them. Performance and productivity are key results of effective wellness strategies. This helps to increase morale among the employees and keep them motivated as this is a key priority in times of uncertainties like this.

Well-being tool kits

There are excellent ways to land the strategy and provide clear guidance, advice and techniques to help employees with wellness. Toolkits should not be too generic but should draw on good practice and specify how they fit a particular organizational context they operate in and intend to suit the operating environment. It is important within the operating environment to consider the health and safety issues. It is wise to consider how legal requirements fit the well-being strategy. A positive move will bring about good employee engagement and is likely to return higher level of productivity, performance and deep sense of satisfaction

among employees.

Digital wellness – order of the day

Digital wellness or digital well-being is the technology's ideal state that works in harmony with user's physical and mental health. It is a key to employee engagement and productivity.

In office employees spend a lot of their time inside a building, where the physical environments influence their well-being and directly influence their work performance and productivity. In the workplace, it is often assumed that employees who are more satisfied with the physical environment are more likely to produce better work outcomes. Temperature, air quality, lighting and noise conditions in the office affect the work concentration and productivity. Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated that characteristics of the physical office environment can have a significant effect on behaviour, perceptions and productivity of employees. The study aims to characterize the working environment, stress levels, and psychological detachment of employees working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic among employees and investigate their relationship to productivity. Some methods of preventing stress levels and boosting confidence among employees are suggested.

Tips for physical and mental well-being

1. Circles of control: In life, some things are not in our control like the Covid19 while some things are in our control. It is with us that either we can focus on what is not in our control and feel negative and stressed or we can focus on what is in our control. When we focus on what we can control makes us feel empowered and reduces our stress.

2. Count your blessings: When we express gratitude for good things, it will help us feel positive and will reduce stress. A strong belief in oneself and one's abilities will help to achieve success, boosts confidence and improves one's performance.

3. Strengths: We can identify our strengths and abilities to boost our confidence which will reduce our strength and thereby help to increase our productivity.

4. Set Goals: We can create a 4D process for setting and achieving the set goals:
Firs let's Dream of a goal that is desirable and achievable.
Secondly, let's define the goal on a paper with 'Date' and 'detail'.
Thirdly divide it into sub goals.
Lastly, do daily actions to achieve the set goal.

5. Time Management

Make a-to-do List
Prioritize – Important things first
Self - Motivate
Finally – Eliminate distractions
Basically, at the start of each day, we shall write down all the things that we want to do during the day. Then Re-arrange the task according to priorities, so that the most important task gets completed on time and it will help us to keep track on the pending activities. We are at home, so self-motivation is an important technique that will help us to complete tasks as per schedule without any deviations.

Finally, we can eliminate distractions like spending time on mobile phones, whatsapp or chat that not only distracts us but also wastes our productive time resulting in lack of concentration and more of pending activities.

6. Positive thinking: Let's be more conscious of our talk throughout the day. Practice positive talk. Develop assertive skills and avoid negative conversations.

7. Breathing techniques: The method of calming the mind is deep breathing. This is a mind full practice to reduce stress, slow heartbeat and reduce blood pressure. Sit comfortably with your spine straight and practice deep breathing every day to keep yourself away from chest congestions the enemy of COVID-19

8. Meditation: Meditation is the way of stilling the body and mind, a vital technique to calm ourselves during our busy schedule. It's an important practice that helps us to keep us aware of the happenings. It is a way to support our mental health which is because of increased isolation and uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

9. Being Grateful: Gratitude is a way of acknowledging the goodness in one's life. People, who express their gratitude for others, feel more positive and are able to build strong relationships. They live healthier and are always ready to bounce back when difficulty and uncertainty hits.

10. Power of helping others: Helping others has a powerful impact on our well-being. When we help, we feel good and increase our social well-being. The act of giving back to the community particularly in these challenging and difficult times boosts our own happiness. Researches show helping others result in improved ability to manage stress and stave off disease as well as reduced rates of depression and increased sense of life satisfaction.

Conclusion

Resilience is the ability to cope with setbacks and find solution to problems. It is the ability to come out of adversities, learn from experiences and move on. Resilience gives strength and conviction to confront life challenges and adapt positively during difficult circumstances. Even before the pandemic, work environment had become one of the constant changes. People could no longer expect job stability; working time had become increasingly fluid and sophistication of technology meant business were no longer limited to specific geographical locations to manage their workforce.

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic, from the uncertainty and stress, has created to the realization of the world of work, will need to change the deal with economic uncertainties and modified ways of working. Promoting productivity and happiness at work means lower sickness, better retention and more satisfied workforce. Turning the workplace a sustainable positive culture means a fundamental change. The events of 2020 have proved that our capacity for change is bigger than what we thought. It starts reframing the use of technology as a means and not an end. The major goal of all the organizations is to design well-being into work for individual, teams and organization. The main goal of the study is to examine the ability of a job stress and work life balance to improve employee outcomes

during the pandemic. Employees spend more than 45 hours of work in a week at home. It is logical to establish digital wellness programs to render a peaceful environment for healthy workforce is pre-requisite for sustainable development and social well-being.

Promoting wellness among employees is a good idea. Giving employees the inspiration and the tools they need to make changes in their life style is a great idea. Creating healthy Workplaces include the efforts taken by the organization to reduce stress and improve the mental, physical and psychological health of employees through positive change initiatives now are really encouraging. From the positive perspective, there is a need to understand the characteristics of healthy thriving and flourishing people and organizations. Creating healthy workplace target in times of pandemic is appreciated by individuals and their attitude and behavior; others target workplace relationships and the organization. The results are reduced obesity, depression, elevated blood pressure, accidents and also staff turnover. This basically works on creating and expanding existing strengths by eliminating the weaknesses.

On the whole it is predicted that recognition of positive emotions as a powerful source of motivation and energy for change. This will generate hope and optimism, thereby enhancing the psychological resource and psychological capital of the organization. It also works actively to build relationships so that social capital is enhanced and adequate social support is sought for individuals which is the need of the hour. Finally, we can summarize as "Making best choices for the good of the whole" emerging from all directions to keep the well-being of the employees.

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