



Mental Health or Well-being in the workplace

Every year on October 10, World Mental Health Day is observed to raise awareness of and support for mental health issues.

Half of our waking hours are spent at work and unsurprisingly, our experience in the workplace is one of the most influential factors to our well-being. Despite the fact that the impact of work alone on personal identity, self-esteem and social recognition is hard to express in numbers, it is agreed that the workplace environment can have a significant effect on an individual's mental health and well-being.

Depression and anxiety are two of the commonest mental disorders that affect our ability to work. A recent study led by the WHO found that more than 300 million people around the world suffer from depression and another 260 million from anxiety, with many living with both conditions and that such disorders cost the global economy \$1 trillion in lost productivity each year. But mental health is more than anxieties and depression...

What is mental mental health?

Mental health or in a wider perspective, well-being, encompasses our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It is defined as a state in which every individual realizes her or his own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

There is increased awareness that, despite high engagement levels, negative symptoms of low well-being are on the rise in organizations and the costs of this, to our health, happiness and performance, are enormous.

Why is employee well-being so important? Individuals' experiences at work, be they emotional or social in nature, obviously affect them. Well-being can potentially affect both workers and organizations in different ways. Research has shown that employees with poor well-being may be less productive, make lower quality decisions, be more prone to be absent from work, and make consistently diminishing overall contributions to organizations.

| Possible risk factors to well-being in the workplace | |
|--|--|
| insufficient health and safety policies | monotonous and/or unpleasant tasks |
| poor leadership and communication | lack of respect and recognition at work |
| low participation in decision-making | inequity and favoritism in the workplace |
| limited control over one's work space | poor interpersonal bonds/team cohesion |
| lack of emotional support for employees | bullying (both physical and psychological) |
| long and/or inflexible working hours | harassment (both sexual and racial) |
| ambiguous roles, tasks and objectives | clashing of home and work demands |
| workload (both excessive and insufficient) | |

An integrated approach to mental wellbeing in the workplace

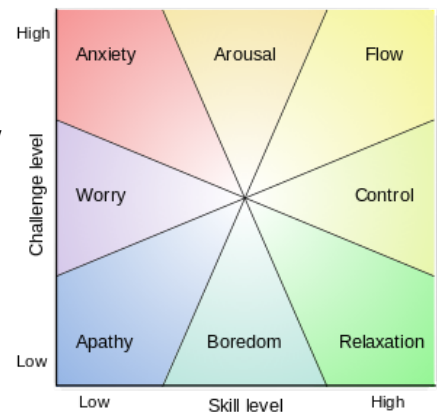
Most organizations have might have specific interventions in place that are aimed at improving mental health or well-being for their employees. But it can be a struggle to position well-being, how to fit it into the people strategy so it aligns in a meaningful way with leadership, performance, diversity & inclusion and employee engagement.

To look at mental well-being as a complete construct, an interesting framework was introduced by Martin Seligman in 2011. Martin Seligman is an American psychologist, educator, author and a strong promoter within the scientific community of his theories of positive psychology and of well-being. As a result of his extensive research into wellbeing and more specifically, flourishing and thriving, he introduced the PERMA model, which comprises of 5 pillars of well-being;

- **Positive emotions** - Good feelings motivate many human actions and most people believe these are nice to have. But science has shown that positive emotions are vital to function at our best and can counterweigh the negatives. According to the 'Broaden and Build' theory of Barbara Fredrickson they allow us to discard automatic responses and instead look for creative, flexible, and unpredictable new ways of thinking and acting. People who experience positive emotions are more innovative, are better at managing stress and are more productive. Positive emotions in organizations foster growth mindset, greater levels of trust and collaboration. Questions to ask yourself when you want to improve positive emotions in the workplace are; What is the 'mood' like in your organization? In which way(s) are you providing positive feedback? Do your employees feel good about themselves and each other Is there a sense of 'hope' or 'optimism' in your organization? What is your role to enhance this? Do your employees have 'fun'? Is there transparency in decision making?

| Top 3 emotions felt in the workplace | |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Positive | Negative |
| comfortable | frustrated |
| satisfied | stressed |
| enthusiastic | anxious |

- **Engagement** - True engagement refers to a state of 'flow', which is a mental state of working in which someone performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. Having your employees know and be able to work with their personal strengths energizes them, increases productivity and creativity and has them feel more fulfilled. Job crafting is a way in which employees can shape their tasks which fits their strengths the best. Personal coaching can assist in helping your employees find their personal strengths and discover ways in which they can better shape the way they organize their work in order to enhance their engagement, resilience and job satisfaction.



- **Relationships** - People have a strong inner need for connectedness, love, physical and emotional contact with others. Well-being is enhanced by building strong networks of relationships with all the other people in our lives, including colleagues at work. It is also from these groups that emotional support is received when things get rough. Good relationships give freedom - instead of spending time and energy overcoming the problems associated with negative relationships, employees can instead focus on opportunities. Relationships between subordinate and superior are very important as well. Mutual respect and open communication are the basis of trust and in the hope to develop our careers, guidance and support from superiors are essential. After all, if your boss doesn't trust you, it's unlikely that he or she will consider you when a new position opens up.

- **Meaning** - Why do people do the work they do? People find meaning when they see a clear connection between what they highly value and what they spend time doing every day. That connection is not always obvious, however. Leaders are in a great position to articulate the values a company is trying to enact and to shape the story of how today's work connects with those values. This means sharing stories of how the company is making a difference for good in the lives of real people, including customers, employees, and communities. So, three types of meaning are distinguished;



Ikigai - a Japanese term referring to the reason to jump out of bed each morning

Three types of meaning are distinguished;

- Job Oriented - where people feel their job is a means to an end
- Career Oriented - relates to feeling that progression is present
- Calling Oriented - where people feel that what they are doing is a meaningful part of their personal fulfillment.

People who experience Calling Oriented meaning feel more

satisfaction in both work and personal life and feel a greater sense of belonging. Meaning involves the use of strengths not for one's self, but to fulfill goals which are perceived to be important.

- **Accomplishment** - To achieve well-being, individuals must be able to look back on our lives with a sense of accomplishment: 'I did it, and I did it well'. **We all take pride in something we've done or accomplished. It is these accomplishments that strengthen our self-esteem and our confidence that we are worth something. When we achieve something, we feel good and want to do more and become more. So, do employees have the opportunity to be proud of what they are doing. Tell them about what they are doing well and why and celebrate success.

Some have even added the 'H' to create **PERMAH**, where the 'H' stands for Health, as food, exercise, sleep and safe working conditions play an important part as well in supporting good mental health.

The pillars of PERMA(H) do not stand isolated, but are very much connected and interventions designed for one pillar have effect on the other pillars as well, thus strengthening well-being and underpinning the framework notion.

So with October 10 around the corner, I leave you with a few questions to consider;

- * are all areas of PERMA(H) covered with interventions in your organization to support and enhance employee well-being?
- * how do you organize well-being in your organization; are they preventative and/or reactive, are they ad-hoc and/or strategic, are they generic and/or personalized?
- * which influence do your employees have on their own well-being?
- * do you know the level of well-being of your employees?

*This article was contributed by **Nicole Buitenhuis** of **Crossroads Coaching**, a private coaching practice in Budapest. Originally from the Netherlands, Nicole holds a Master's degree in Psychology and has extensive experience as a commercial manager in international companies, manager and coach of teams, expat partner and mom. Being a trained psychologist with a focus on life-span and positive psychology gives Nicole the knowledge and professional base for her work as a personal coach, counselor and psychological therapist.*

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If this topic interests you, here are some sources to read;

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