

Promoting Well-Being Of Workforce During Covid-19

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Over the past decade VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) has been the most popular acronym across organizations in context of challenging times. The present Covid-19 situation, has surpassed all anxieties related to VUCA. The world has been put in a state of delirium. Organizations are striving for survival. A staggering number of layoffs and furloughs across sectors are rendering employees incapacitated and helpless. In such vulnerable times, organizations need to adapt and adopt extraordinary measures, maintain business operations from a remote location or working from home. For businesses to continue and to safeguard employees at the same time, companies resorted to this state of new normal. In a prolepsis, the new normal is here to stay. Employers around the world are increasingly worrying about well-being issues due to the apocalyptic spread of Covid-19. The crisis has the potential to generate lethal physical health consequences for the employees. Simultaneously one cannot overlook the mental health implications like fear of losing jobs, uncertainty and stress. These are equally devastating effects of the pandemic. Leaders across sectors are concerned about improving the well-being stamina while navigating their teams through this prodigious global challenge.

Well-being has been defined as “peoples’ feelings about themselves in relation to their work” (Warr, 1999, p. 393). Irrespective of a crisis situation, research propounds an overarching acceptance to a compelling argument for organizations to ensure and enhance the well-being of their employees (Krekel et al., 2019). As compared to monetary benefits, characteristics of the job, work-life balance and reduced stress are important determinants of employee well-being (Krekel et al., 2018). Flexible work practices like working from home generate positive emotions and reported increased employee well-being (Bloom et al., 2015; Moen et al., 2011; Moen et al., 2016). “Happy employees produce happy customers” is a popular adage. If organizations maintain well-being of their employees, they would be more productive (Taris and Schreurs, 2009).

Well-being has been enumerated across different disciplines in terms of definitions, conceptualizations and measurements. Following three categories have been identified: (a) *psychological well-being* – this examines satisfaction levels of employees with workplace practices; feelings and attitudes about work context (Diener, 2000) (b) *physical well-being* – health outcomes of employees such as accidents and stress; (c) *social well-being* – employees’ perception of equity, quality and quantity of workplace networks (Grant et al., 2007).

THE CHALLENGE – MAINTAINING WELL-BEING DURING CRISIS

“In the toughest times, the human spirit dictates the leaders will emerge, often from the most unexpected places”

Though every sector has a different response to the current crisis. A common factor remains, an infinitely stressful life for everyone. Furloughs have become the ordinary parlance during Covid-19. Humanitarian measures have taken a back seat for many companies. Organizations are prioritizing between physical protection, maintaining staff exhaustion and additionally managing the pressure of performance during this crisis. There is a plethora of feelings that people are undergoing. There

might be guilt of not being able to take care of their own family while working, people might be self-isolating from their loved ones to avoid transmission. Employees must also be juggling between work commitments, increased home-schooling and childcare responsibilities, absence of friends and social outings, and caring an extra mile for the older, immunocompromised members around them.

THE WAY FORWARD

Senior Manager Paul Davis' Interview:

“During this most stressful time that I have ever experienced in the 15 years tenure of my job at *Fidelity Investments Limited, India (FIL)*. The way my organization has steered operations during the Covid-19 crisis is beyond expectations”. Everyday we come across people who tell us about difficulties of being able to manage their finances as they have been fired, forced to resign as the company was unable to pay them. It has even become difficult for top managers to survive their jobs. Both personal and professional worlds have been upended several times. Contrary to all these, *FIL* is committed to safeguard the health and well-being of their employees. They are actively monitoring the Covid-19 situation, continuously making efforts to ensure the permeability of learning and commitment at all levels of the organization. It is striving to maintain not only the basics but to extend extra support for all the employees to set up a work from home space, render allowances for gadgets, pay internet and phone bills. Beyond physical protection of continuing to work from home, employees have adequate guidance and support for mental health too. Employees are encouraged to regularly stay connected through virtual video meetings. People leaders make themselves available to talk with employees about any overwhelming or anxious feelings, fears and reassure them about personal as well as work issues. The team leaders maintain a routine check not only about work but also enquire about our general well-being. They express concern about “How we are managing? Is there any support that is needed at the moment?”

In addition to this, Abby Johnson, Chairman and CEO at Fidelity Investments extends a great gesture through her article “When others step back, Fidelity steps up” published with LinkedIn (April, 2020) She encourages and engages her associates as well as instills faith in investors and customers. Hearing from the Chairman soars up confidence to resolve circumstances during difficult times like the ongoing pandemic and it definitely surges determination and motivation.

PRACTICES AT FIL THAT PROMOTE WELL-BEING OF EMPLOYEES AT FIL

Great bosses delegate but are there with support when needed

FIL believes in maintaining a tête-à-tête with every team member to understand their challenges. It is imperative for team managers to discuss problems with individual members and help them in coping with stress. Managers find creative alternatives to pivot through problems. Appropriate training is provided to understand team dynamics during tough times.

Making inductions a great acclimatization experience

The Covid-19 pandemic triggered mass lay-offs across organizations. Even the world's largest firms have announced measures like lay-offs, pay reductions, furloughs and reduced work weeks. Newspapers, social media are all flooded with information on lay-offs and firing. Whereas, *FIL* prioritizes to attract the next generation of talented associates. To ensure safety, they are relying on virtual interviews. To accentuate a smooth induction process virtual induction is encouraged. For an enhanced acclimatization experience, the new joiners enjoy a virtual tour of the office.

COMMUNICATION

During the present crisis, good communication in the workplace is important more than ever. Clarity and clear communication keeps worries at bay: plans must be clarified, aligned and shared meticulously to remove ambiguities. This works as a double dose benefit: reinforcing a broader purpose as well as shaping clear thought for action. Recognitions must be ‘shouted out’ for employees who diligently live values during the testing times.

EXPRESS THE POWER OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Leaders can neither be billboard of feelings nor can be stoic, and not express anything. FIL believes in creating a culture of transparency, respect and honesty. Managers exhibit agility, rigour and competence to steer their teams through adversities. They create an apt balance between choosing to act with the mind as well as heart and model greater emotional intelligence during tough times. The Emotion theory postulates that performance is directly driven by managing the employees' emotional states (Staw et al., 1994).

MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Positive affect or mood leads to a heightened motivation (Isen and Baron, 1991). FIL strongly believes in practicing this. To motivate employees while working from their remote location, teams have a monthly theme like wearing a creative eyewear, head gear and have colour themes. To keep employees engaged, the workplace fun has been replaced with virtual games like Invisible Enigma, zoom housie, FIL band performances, stand-up comedy by employees, quizzes.

WFH EUPHORIA. THEN REALITY.

Since work from home (WFH) is the new normal, FIL promoted and accelerated the process of overcoming this transition. It encouraged employees to create a small space in the corner of a room calling it workspace. Each employee was provided with seamless support and help that was needed to ensure a smooth remote working experience. To back it all, WFH allowances such as reimbursement for any gadgets, appliances were disbursed. Monthly utility reimbursement for internet and electricity bills have been an added advantage.

‘COVID-19 presents operational challenges, but it also represents a transformational opportunity’.

FOSTER RESILIENCE AND PERFORMANCE

A sudden transition of working from home might deteriorate performance. Employees need sufficient flexibility, infrastructure and support to pursue jobs and give their best during the ongoing crisis. Crafting new work patterns, and virtual teaming empowers employees. This is an extraordinary time when organizations can test, upskill and cross skill teams. FIL provides additional opportunities to enhance online learning, improve flexibility, increase organizational capability and resilience.

FUTURE PROOF THE WORKFORCE

No matter how disruptive the forces or stressful a situation, humans must always remain the core of an organization. FIL transcends such culture and takes pride in the environment it has created. Providing the care and concern that employees need during this phase, promotes sense of belongingness and engagement. Organizations have the opportunity to nurture their fledgling leaders into self-sustaining, empowered workforce who could take ownership and accountability. These employees would emerge through tough times as more resilient individuals than ever.

BEING EMPATHETIC

Leaders need to be aware that if they observe any significant changes in a team member's work style or personality, these may be possible signs of anxiety and struggle. Managers leverage and identify vulnerable hotspots. Such employees are dealt with concern and empathy and also helped to overcome the crisis situation.

EXCERPT FROM WEBSITE EXPRESSING WELL-BEING: AN FIL EMPLOYEE'S EXUBERANCE

"Ultimately, remember we're all in this together. I'm especially fortunate to work for an incredible team and company. One of the more senior leaders made it a point to acknowledge many of us are in the same boat, so if your children interrupts a video call, needs you this very second, it's okay! Everyone will understand and is here to support each other and our "new" co-workers".

COMMENT

This review is based on the analysis of company information available through social media, company website on latest updates about their practices during the Covid-19 pandemic. The authors investigated what practices characterize the mental well-being of employees during challenging times.

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