A Critical Review of Employee Health, Wellbeing Programs, and Organizational Success: Navigating Post-COVID-19 Sustainable Development

Shikha Vyas-Doorgapersad

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Abstract
This article provides comprehensive coverage of the concept of employee health, examining its connection to employees' overall performance and the ideal workplace culture and environment necessary for achieving success. This passage provides a concise overview of the difficulties encountered by employees in achieving a harmonious equilibrium between their professional and personal lives, as well as the subsequent impact on their general well-being. The primary inquiry of utmost significance is to the requisite organizational measures that must be undertaken to foster employee welfare within the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and in the aftermath, with the ultimate aim of achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Three. This study employs a qualitative approach by doing a desktop analysis of material through a comprehensive examination of existing literature. The data is subjected to conceptual analysis. The study examines the utilization of employee wellness programs (EWPs) as organizational frameworks to ensure employee satisfaction and productivity. These programs are grounded in the notion that employee health is interconnected with employee performance and external factors. Furthermore, this study provides recommendations that can be used to enhance the effectiveness of Employee Wellness Programs (EWPs) in order to achieve the objectives outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) and enhance employee performance.

Introduction

According to Ban and Tomescu (2008: 239) and Vyas-Doorgapersad and Surujlal (2014: 268), the term "wellness" is commonly employed to denote a state of optimal equilibrium among the mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of an individual, leading to a comprehensive sense of well-being. The maintenance and promotion of a healthy lifestyle is of paramount importance on a worldwide level. The prioritization of accessible and affordable healthcare is widely recognized among persons in contemporary culture. According to Cotofan, De Neve, Golin, Kaats, and Ward (2021: 155), it is crucial for employers to recognize the significance of health in their relationships with employees, since it has a substantial impact on productivity. According to Gijana (2011) and Vyas-Doorgapersad & Surujlal (2014: 268), wellness programs encompass a wide spectrum of offerings, varying in both simplicity and cost. These programs can range from basic and cost-effective initiatives, such as providing information on weight-loss programs and stop-smoking clinics, to more intricate and expensive endeavors, such as providing access to professional health exams and workout facilities. In recent years, there has been a notable implementation and reform of health promotion activities and programs. Presently, there is a growing focus on assessing the impact of these changes on the workplace, examining if they have led to improvements or modifications. According to Makhanya (2021: 14–10), it is imperative for any organization to possess a comprehensive comprehension and implementation of an effective work-life balance in order to attain optimal performance and foster contentment among both employees and employers. Furthermore, Vyas-Doorgapersad and Surujlal (2014: 268) suggest that firms have the
potential to enhance employee wellbeing by including employee wellness initiatives into their overarching strategic framework and organizational culture.

According to Makhanya (2021: 32), the concept of employee wellbeing pertains to the extent to which individuals are able to effectively function within their existing work setting, encompassing factors such as their interactions with colleagues, utilization of technology, levels of stress experienced, expectations placed upon them, and the nature of their assigned responsibilities. The concept of workplace wellness encompasses more than just physical well-being. For example, the disregard for social connection, mindfulness, sleep, or diet can potentially lead to enduring consequences and ultimately lead to below-average performance. Employee wellness is a concept that places emphasis on the well-being of individual employees and encompasses workplace programs aimed at encouraging staff members to adopt healthier lifestyles. Employee wellness programs (EWPs) have been implemented in numerous firms globally due to the various benefits they offer, such as increased employee happiness, improved health, reduced stress levels, and enhanced motivation (Noelcke, 2015; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Surujlal, 2015: 6685). The primary objective of Employee Wellness Programs (EWPs) is to maintain the well-being of employees, enabling them to consistently fulfill their job responsibilities. Additionally, in exceptional circumstances, these programs may also assist in enhancing employees’ overall health. Wellness initiatives exhibit variations between organizations, contingent upon their respective ideologies (Edries, 2009). Given the significance of employee wellbeing, numerous endeavors have been undertaken to tackle this issue. These efforts encompass the establishment of comprehensive legislative frameworks, the formation of labor unions, the implementation of policies, and the introduction of wellness programs with the objective of achieving sustainable enhancements.

This article examines the significance of employee wellbeing within firms and the necessary tactics for preserving employee wellness amongst and following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was unanimously adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, offers a comprehensive framework that aims to promote peace and prosperity for both present and future generations, encompassing the well-being of individuals and the planet. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which represent a critical call for action from all nations, both developed and developing, through a global collaboration, occupy a central position in this matter (UN, 2023:1; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2020, as referenced in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022c:266; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023), the interconnectedness of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) stems from their shared objectives of attaining socioeconomic progress and environmental sustainability. The present analysis focuses exclusively on SDG 3, which pertains directly to the domains of wellbeing and well health. SDG target 3.9, as outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023:3), aims to significantly decrease the occurrence of fatalities and illnesses resulting from exposure to dangerous chemicals, as well as air, water, and soil pollution and contamination. By the year 2030, this target seeks to achieve a substantial reduction in such incidents. Correspondingly, indicator 3c, also identified by WHO (2023:3), focuses on the enhancement of health financing and workforce. This indicator emphasizes the importance of augmenting health financing and the recruitment, development, training, and retention of healthcare professionals. The implementation of SDG 3, which focuses on guaranteeing healthy lives and promoting well-being across all age groups (United Nations, 2023:1), is of utmost importance for organizations. Consequently, it can be regarded as a mandatory requirement in the workplace to safeguard many aspects of well-being, including physical, mental, psychological, occupational, and spiritual health.

Following the introductory section, the subsequent segment critically examines the theoretical and conceptual literature. The subsequent section elucidates the technique employed in this study, which is thereafter followed by a comprehensive analysis and discourse on the primary findings. The final section of the paper provides recommendations for enhancing the current situation and identifying additional areas that necessitate further investigation.

**Literature Review**

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

The section compiles information on Sustainable Development Goal Three and employee wellness; and Covid-19 and its effect on employee performance.

**Sustainable Development Goal Three and employee wellness**

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (2008, in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022a:627), sustainability is taking care of the economy, environment, and social development for the future, whereas development is an evolutionary process in which new plans are born to change structures, problems and adapt to change in social, economic, and environmental development. Both terms give rise to sustainable development (SD). According to Guegan, Suzan, Kati-Couliliby, Bonpamgue & Moatti (2018: 12), because of the concept of employee wellness, being sustainable in the workplace entails that an employer is to be concerned with an individual’s challenges that pertain to their health that will affect their performance at work, which would be sustainable long-term. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2017), sustainable development within the workplace means actively trying to improve an employee’s standpoint so that they may continue to perform at their optimal best into the future.
Sustainable development goals are 17 in total. The main goal of SDG Three is to ‘ensure healthy lives and promote well-being at all ages’, which is supported by nine targets that all fall into different categories, including lowering morbidity and mortality for vulnerable populations (mothers, newborns, the elderly, and children), lowering communicable and non-communicable diseases, lowering risk factors (tobacco, substance abuse, road traffic injuries, hazardous chemicals, and pollution), and implementing universal health coverage (WHO, 2017). Even though SDG Three does not expressly address employee health and wellbeing or any employee wellness initiatives, most organisations adhere to their health objectives.

Within SDG Three, there are main targets that will be looked at that are linked to employee wellness. Target (3.3) is about ending epidemics and fighting communicable diseases, these epidemics affect people in the workplace, for example, HIV/AIDS is one of the struggles that [many countries are] trying to overcome, these diseases impact employees' lives and performance (WHO, 2017). SDG Three guarantees safe working conditions and access to healthcare for employees, but it also encourages businesses to strengthen relationships with their workforces. Working from home and virtual teams, for example, as well as worker effects including social isolation, stress, and unemployment, were all significantly influenced by the Covid-19 epidemic (World Bank [WB], 2020:87). Also, there is a lot of anxiety among employees due to the health problem associated with Covid-19. WHO claims that the effects of the pandemic, including restrictions, social isolation, and self-isolation, have an influence on the health of employees in addition to the risk of contracting Covid-19 (2020:54). The SDG Three, on the other hand, faces the issue of health funding, both in terms of quantity and patterns (WB, 2020:91).

EWP are what fuel long-term performance, as emphasized by Mungania, Waiganjo and Kihoro (2016:2). The workplace wellness process, which is aimed at enhancing the emotional, spiritual, psychological, and physical well-being of employees in an organization, uses the EWP concept frequently in the human resources (HR) discipline. Therefore, because it increases productivity and benefits the bottom line, employee wellbeing has elevated to the top of the priority list for modern businesses (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Surujal, 2015:2). Raising awareness of wellness-related issues, assisting with individual change and health management, and fostering a supportive and healthy workplace are the main objectives of putting a wellness program into place in an organization, as further highlighted by Anonymous (2007, cited in Sieberhagen, Pienaar & Els, 2011). The wellness programmes also aim to impact personnel management practices and increase organizational performance, profitability, and productivity (Matlhape, 2003;2; Nyati, 2013:3). Wellness treatments also affect the performance scorecard and profitability, claim Zheng, Molineux, Mirshekary, and Scarparo (2015:5). As a result, employee wellbeing is being promoted and given top priority by local and public and private organizations. These attributes are supported by Makhanya (2021:70) adding that wellness programs benefit workers and their productivity levels by fostering a positive work environment, fostering coworker harmony, and grounding workers. Participants in the study led by Makhanya (2021:82) explicitly stated that EWPs give them coping mechanisms for handling difficult emotions, challenges in their personal lives, and problems at work. According to Buruck, Dörfel, Kugler, and Brom (2016; Makhanya, 2021:82), it is crucial to control negative emotional reactions at work. Participants gave instances of how EWP helped them, including by taking the necessary actions to resolve personal issues and making COVID-19 adjustments.

According to Hoque & Dawad (2016:13), both domestically and globally, employee health is a top priority due to the hostile and competitive economic environment. This situation demands survival hence more attention to employee wellness is required. However, there is a lack of data linking employee wellness programs to the advantages they are expected to have for businesses, according to Mattke (2012:4). This statement is supported by Dawad (2014:3) emphasising that EWPs have the potential to help workers solve or treat their problems, making them well again and able to be incorporated into a productive workforce when properly implemented and used. There are numerous businesses that provide EWPs, but few of them conduct formal evaluation research on their programs. There hasn't been much research on EWPs, according to the literature review done for this study. This is especially relevant to research on the knowledge of EWP functions, the credibility of EWP practitioners, their adherence to ethical standards, and concerns about the accessibility of EWPs in organizations (Dawad, 2014:3). It is significant to consider that EWPs must therefore be modified to address new and/or altered situations because covid-19 affects employees in both the public and private sectors and presents a problem.

**Covid-19 and its effect on employee performance**

The Covid-19 epidemic has caused significant adjustments to the way service businesses run, changing employees' daily schedules and activities. New technologies that may permit such adjustments, new digitally adopted processes were aimed at lessening the effects of Covid-19, according to Hagos (2021). It was also stressed by Hagos (2021:1) stating that the ability of workplaces to impact employee wellbeing and have a significant impact on people's quality of life. Employees who previously spent all or most of their time working inside the physical boundaries of their organization now have to adapt to remote work environments, which presents a challenge for human resource management (HRM). Additionally, as workers attempt to acclimate to their drastically altered work environments, the COVID-19 pandemic is having significant socio-psychological, physical, and technical implications for them. Employee wellbeing is being negatively impacted by the altered working conditions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hagos, 2021:1). Few studies have been found in the literature to examine how the effects of the pandemic affect employees' general performance and well-being, which is understandable given the novelty of studies that have addressed the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in an organizational context (Popa, Stefan, Olariu, Popa & Popa, 2022:1). For instance, Kawugana and Rabiu's study (2021, in Popa et al., 2022:2) sought to ascertain how and to what degree the pandemic had impacted employees' performance. The findings showed that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on employees' well-being and performance. The effects of the
pandemic on the performance of private companies in 37 countries were examined in Popa et al. (2022:2). The findings demonstrated that the COVID-19 pandemic had a detrimental effect on company performance in nearly every country examined, but a stronger impact was seen among businesses in developing nations. Financial performance was most significantly impacted (Popa et al., 2022:2). However, the effect was also noticeable at the individual level whereby varied forms of stress (financial, emotional, mental health, psychological, relationship, to state a few) were embraced by employees at personal level. It was added by Makhanya (2021:70-72) that high levels of stress are one of the most well-known variables that impede employee wellbeing, and this has numerous detrimental effects at work. Many employees' psychological, behavioral, and physiological states are known to be significantly impacted by stress. Stress depletes motivation and morale, which lowers performance levels. The detrimental impact of stress is that these workers occasionally suffer from poor health conditions, which might make it worse for them to feel overburdened with work as their focus wanes and their level of concentration declines, as warned by Oehler (2020). Another dire serious impact of stress is cognitive damage to an individual’s thought process which would later result in short-term memory loss or distracted attention to the work at hand (Saleem, Malik & Quresh, 2021: 32). The forms of stress are a result of the impact of Covid-19 because of the work environment that employees were placed under leading to low commitment and less job satisfaction that would eventually tamper with their level of productivity (Oehler, 2020). Botha and Coetsee (2022:1) added a new form of stress in which employees were required to work from home, but they were still largely engaged at work thanks to organizational and leadership support, the flexibility provided by the work-from-home model, and organizational concern for the health and wellbeing of their workers. However, the workers faced difficulties that were typical of those who worked from home during the Covid-19 pandemic, including increased workloads and working hours, loneliness brought on by isolation, and inadequate office infrastructure. The uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the work systems that are currently changing to try to fit with the constantly shifting status quo may be a disruption in how processes around tasks were done in a certain company, which may result in work overload, role ambiguity—where people are unsure of undertaking certain tasks—which may cause more stress and decreased performance, according to Saleem et al. (2021) citing Sullivan (2012: 32-35). It was further added by Nguse & Wassenaar (2021: 304), that there was a lot of pressure on employees who worked in the Department of Health [in every country] because they were mostly responsible for everyone who got infected with the virus, which means longer work hours, heavy workload, and more stress without rest as there was a shortage of medical doctors in South Africa and globally. This had an impact on their performance overall. It is important to note as highlighted by Saleem et al. (2021:10) that employees may choose to adopt procedures that protect them from COVID-19. Using information technology, the internet, and other communication technologies, they can adopt new methods of working thanks to their flexibility. Due to their adaptability, they can successfully complete their office tasks without feeling stressed out from COVID-19. Those with high levels of adaptability recognize the demands of the workplace quickly and can react without jeopardizing their daily tasks. (Shoss, Witt & Vera, 2012; Saleem et al., 2021:10) as the ability of a person to handle stress at work has a big impact on their performance (Yunita & Saputra, 2019; Saleem et al., 2021:10).

Research and Methodology

Because it ‘seeks to develop an in-depth understanding [and] views social phenomena holistically’, the article's use of the qualitative research approach is significant (in Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020a:33, cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2021:1). The desktop analysis of information is obtained from literature review. Fink (2014:3, in Mutandwa, 2023:39) states that an explicit, reproducible, and systematic method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the body of recorded and completed work that academics, researchers, and practitioners have produced is called a literature review. Due to the diversity of the secondary sources, relevant information was chosen for analysis and argument construction using a purposive sampling strategy. The argument made by Flick (2018; also adapted by Poshai & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023) that purposive sampling should be used to select only relevant secondary sources from document reviews and desktop research that deliberately choose only those documents that focus on the subject under discussion. Each document was chosen using a pre-content check criterion, and each one was checked to see whether it addressed the EWP issue in order to see if any of them was qualified for research when determining the sources of data for this paper. This condition was crucial to keep other materials. This criterion was significant to eliminate other documents and concentrate only on those that specifically addressed EWP without any biases, as suggested by Poshai & Vyas-Doorgapersad (2023). The information is analyzed through conceptual analysis that “is a system of concepts, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations, including theories that guide research and an alternative understanding of the social reality/phenomena being examined”, as explained by Maxwell (2005, cited in Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020b, 236; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Shava, 2022: 40). It should be noted that conceptual analysis is also important in qualitative studies that involve various concepts of interest, and/or where there is a need to understand how these relate to or have changed over time (Pirttimäki 2007:11, cited in Soga, 2022:51). The analysis in this study focused on the concepts and arguments relating to the difficulties caused by Covid 19 that have an impact on employee performance, as well as its link with SDG3. The applied “conceptual analysis started with the identification of the concepts of interest from the preliminary literature and document review. Further actions involved building a conceptual framework that captured the theorised relationships among elements of interest to the study. Data were collected to further advance how the empirical world understood the relationships identified from the conceptual framework” (Graan, Williams & and Koen, 2015:33, Soga, 2022:52). Moreover, it categorised the information, such as Covid-19 and its effect on employee performance; and Sustainable Development Goal Three and employee wellness.
Findings and Discussions

This section explores discussion regarding challenges to promote SDG Three and employee wellness during/post covid-19.

The WHO (2020:12) reports that a new virus that poses a serious threat to human health started to spread over the world in 2019. Several of the Goals were impeded by the Covid-19 pandemic. The SDG Three, according to the WB (2020:23), involves the convergence of poverty, discrimination, health issues, and important demographics, with a focus on “leaving no one behind.” Moreover, the Sustainable Development Goals were created during the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro (United Nations [UN], 2017:59). By 2030, it was formed as a global call to action to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and guarantee peace and prosperity for everyone. The coronavirus pandemic has affected South Africa’s health situation, which has typically had an economic, social, and psychological impact. The SDGs are not just at danger due to the Covid-19 virus, but they have also gotten worse (WB, 2020:22).

Various countries experienced varied forms of challenges. The article tried to compile some of the challenges in a general context. In undeveloped and emerging nations, financial resources are scarce. Achieving SDG targets would be challenging because many countries are already in debt and their financial situation has gotten worse during COVID-19. The financial recovery seems to be still challenging in the post covid-19 context.

According to WHO (2020:5), as previously said, employees were more worried about their safety, the risk of contracting the virus, social exclusion, financial loss, and job instability during the Covid-19 pandemic, suggesting that they felt threatened by the effects of the pandemic. It should be emphasized that Covid-19 effects were the main contributor to employee stress and subpar work performance in this regard. In addition to changes in behavior and employee overall health, the repercussions of the pandemic, such as feelings of isolation and working from home, need workplace modifications. Assiri (2016:34) asserts that doing work-related tasks in a less-than-ideal setting can have a detrimental effect on employees' physical and mental health as well as their general level of productivity. It is important to note that during the Covid-19 epidemic, employee productivity and, indirectly, their total job performance were negatively impacted by the precautions used to stop the virus's spread, such as isolation and loneliness and working from home.

Covid-19 not only caused stress for workers and the general populace, but also stressed already weak budgets in financially troubled nations, as opined by Nguse and Wassenar (2021: 312). It was further stressed by Allinder (2019) that even though there are other illnesses, including non-communicable ones, Covid-19 has received more attention than other epidemics like malaria and TB.

During COVID-19, when employees were forced to begin working from home, the situation altered. Employees experienced feelings of isolation; they had to modify their schedules to make room for other family members in their homes, which resulted in underutilizing working hours; parental leave also had an impact on performance; and, to name a few, a lack of human interaction had a detrimental effect on their mental wellbeing. This was accompanied by feelings that may be viewed as difficulties, such as dread, uncertainty, poor focus, and the difficulty of balancing work and personal obligations, which led many individuals into a melancholy mood.

The impact of Covid-19 at the time meant that it would have a significant negative impact on many people's health. It was also discovered that it had a negative impact on older workers, which would reduce their productivity at work. Additionally, the cancellation of numerous company goals also demotivated many employees because many organizations were unsure of the limitations of Covid-19. Before the pandemic became a concern, SDG Three objectives were being worked on, but suddenly a lot of things had to be put on hold to find better ways to mitigate the virus and stop it from spreading widely throughout the nation. As a result, the aims' execution was delayed and impeded because most of the funding was given to covid-relief funds.

Based on the discussions, the article offers suggestions to consider. As a one-size-fits-all strategy won't work, EWPs must approach each employee individually. This motivates all employees and allows them to be upfront about their issues. The Employee Wellness Officer may develop a list of questions where varied aspects linking to employee wellbeing are covered. Reasons of stress, demotivation, absenteeism, lack of performance are some of the significant aspects that need to be included in the interview schedule. Organizations must change several components of their performance management (PM) in accordance with Covid-19. Online performance reviews were completed by the employees. The PM system may be expanded to include a distinct section on EWP. This might establish a correlation between employee wellbeing and performance management, connecting EW and PM. Since employees are still having trouble transitioning from their “work from home” schedules to “office bound” routines, this practice can be kept up after Covid.

Encouraging international aid for financial hardships like the Covid-19 outbreak may make individuals more prone to feeling disappointed, discouraged and hence unproductive. However, there are political and financial challenges that may also be restricting developed countries to support underdeveloped and developing countries during/post covid-19. The existence of Covid-19 and the difficulties the world is facing as a common threat were voiced by Vyas-Doorgapersad (2021; also cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022b:5) in a study titled ‘Global governance reforms to achieve Sustainable Development Goal One (no poverty) in BRICS’. It is evident in the policies of dominant nations like the USA and Europe that this pandemic-driven situation has sparked disagreements. These nations are struggling internally to plan their health policies and manage the health sector effectively. Additionally, these
resourceful nations' economies are experiencing severe declines (see Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2021; and Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022b). Governments globally need to find internal measures to sustain the economy. However, the truth is that many businesses and firms have shut down, let people go, or reduced their pay, which has lowered employee morale and performance by making workers fearful of losing their positions and insecure about their finances and jobs.

The study found that the use of EWPs can be considered as a solution for promoting employee well-being. The key components of EWPs, such as mental health support, flexible work arrangements, and communication strategies need to be enhanced. It is therefore suggested that clinical psychologists, employee wellness consultants and health practitioners need to be invited to offer workshops to employees. This arrangement may assist employees to raise concerns regarding their overall well-being during/post covid context and gain awareness regarding sustaining their physical, mental, psychological, health and even spiritual wellness aspects. It is also important to note that a study conducted by Atiku, Jeremiah and Bouteng (2020) on flexible work arrangement (FWA) in selected African countries. The managerial ramifications of this study show that, given the changing nature of work and workforce demographics in modern workplaces, FWA may be incorporated into work-life balance strategies of many companies, especially considering the rising proportion of female employees in the post-COVID-19 era. In order to improve employee productivity and the satisfaction with their work-life balance, FWAs may therefore be adopted in Africa as a result of changing workforce demographics and lifestyles. In order to implement teleworking as an FWA effectively in the post-COVID-19 era, employers must support it and provide the necessary IT equipment (Atiku et. al., 2020:4).

Although the EWPs expect to have positive outcomes, these interventions are not free from criticisms or challenges. A report published in the Corporate Wellness Magazine (2023:1) highlights that it can be challenging to develop a wellness program that meets the varied needs and preferences of a workforce. Because each employee is different in terms of their level of fitness, their health issues, and their schedules, it is difficult to create a program that will work for everyone (Corporate Wellness Magazine, 2023:1). On the other hand, a study by Madison (2016) stresses that the risks associated with employers participating in such programs could be very high. Wellness program enthusiasm coexists with worries about employee health costs, the possibility of employment discrimination, and the potential for employers to invade employees' privacy in addition to enthusiasm for the potential financial and health benefits that these programs may bring about. Abbas (2023:2) stated that employee wellness programs are unethical and ineffective. They are frequently ineffective, poorly designed, and discriminatory, yet businesses frequently turn to them to lower health costs.

It is therefore suggested that organisations need to explore alternative means of sustaining and maintaining employee wellness. This includes introducing sports, yoga, meditation, open spaces for refreshments with access to sunlight, to state a few. A study was conducted by Vyas-Doorgapersad and Surujlal in 2014 in South African context exploring the significance of yoga in organisations to improve employee performance. The content is taken from published findings as follows (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Surujlal, 2014: 269): some South African businesses have recognized the importance of yoga. Corporate yoga was created as a result of businesses like First National Bank, Investec, Old Mutual, Regenesys, and Nando's incorporating yoga into their employee wellness programs. Innovative ideas for dealing with workplace stress are spawning new concepts and designations. In Cape Town, Martin Combrinck, also known as ‘The Corporate Yogi’, advises businesses on how to incorporate yoga into their corporate wellness programs. He currently serves as the Chief Happiness Officer (CHO) at Laughter for Africa, the CEO and Founder of Sanga Wellness, and an Educator at the Ananda Sanga Educational Institute. The idea is catching on at a larger scale, as evidenced by the early morning yoga and meditation bootcamp that was part of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association of South Africa's (EAPA-SA) 2012 National Conference (Somerset West, Cape Town). This shows that the importance of integrating these alternative healing modalities into Employee Wellness programs is recognized in order to improve mental status, focus, concentration, and clarity while also promoting better health. A better level of workplace productivity could be the result of this. This event was planned by a company called Enov8, which was created to organize conferences, seminars, and other events for a wide range of clients so that they could do so without stress. With this kind of support, clients can network instead of spending their time worrying about organizing problems, which can be stressful (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Surujlal, 2014: 269). This arrangement is very significant during/post covid-19 as employee had and still experiencing physical, health and mental issue cause by stress, job, and financial insecurities, loosing family members to covid, isolation, loneliness, etc. and therefore can be considered by other organisations, in other countries to yield the benefits of spiritual wellness and hence improved employee performance.

There are varied forms of external factors that can impact on organization/employee performance. Some of the factors identified are: stakeholder involvement, intellectual assets, HR management, individual factors, worker gender and age, organizational features, originality, and innovation, the organizational environment, research and development, a positive organizational environment, and organizational structure (refer to Hussain, Uddin, Farooq, Khan & Ahmed, 2023: 192-193). As each factor has an impact that requires comprehensive explanation and quantitative measurement to assess impact, it is not possible to cover the relationships in one study. All the stated factors may form part of future exploration.

Conclusions

The results indicate that the firm places significant emphasis on the health and wellness of its employees. The primary objective of the Employee Well-being Program (EWP) is to promote optimal levels of satisfaction and performance among all those involved. The well-being of employees has a significant impact on their performance, therefore emphasizing the importance of maintaining a
healthy workforce. An Employee Wellness Program (EWP) can assist an organization in effectively managing the impact of various changes experienced by their employees in both personal and professional domains.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the well-being of employees in South Africa. The available research indicates that there has been a detrimental impact on both the well-being and performance of employees. Consequently, there has been a decline in performance and a reduction in output. The ongoing global pandemic has witnessed a significant surge in mental health concerns, including but not limited to anxiety, burnout, and substance abuse. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in sudden changes in the structure of work, such as the implementation of remote work and the formation of virtual teams. Additionally, it has had a significant impact on employees, including the practice of social distance, increased anxiety levels, and a rise in unemployment rates. Furthermore, the implementation of SDG 3 was impacted by the increased levels of stress experienced by employees due to alterations in work structure and the work environment.

The correlation between enhancing employee welfare and improving employee performance is extensively acknowledged in academic literature. The achievement of a company is reliant on the effectiveness exhibited by its workforce. Amidst the lockdown imposed by the epidemic, organizations implemented various techniques and fostered cultural norms to promote remote work among their employees. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the significance of establishing appropriate working conditions, regulations, and protocols. The facilitation of organizations and employees in navigating the adversities posed by the pandemic has been enhanced, and certain measures implemented during this period can be perpetuated to promote employee well-being beyond the pandemic.

Contemporary corporations prioritize the psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being of their workforce. The notion of employee wellness has evolved into a comprehensive framework including several elements and a mindset, with businesses increasingly recognizing its significance. Consequently, legal frameworks have been established to safeguard the well-being of individuals during their work activities. Enhancing employee well-being and productivity can be achieved through the reduction of conflict, stress, and anxiety. In accordance with Maslow's hierarchy of requirements, it is conceivable to arrange social networks, meetings, and events, particularly within the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective is to ensure that employees do not experience feelings of isolation and loneliness, but instead foster a sense of connection. The employee wellness officer may consider implementing brief meetings to facilitate discussions among workers regarding their experiences with COVID-19. One effective approach to fostering a supportive work environment is the implementation of dialogue-based workshops, which offer employees the opportunity to openly and candidly express their experiences and perspectives. In contemporary culture, the third sustainable development goal, which pertains to promoting healthy lifestyles for individuals of all ages, is of utmost importance despite the challenges posed by the high costs and limited accessibility of healthcare in impoverished nations. This objective incorporates the aspect of employee welfare as it addresses both the physical and mental health of individuals. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of commitment from all people involved in order to achieve the desired goals.

The results of this study could potentially support the Human Resource Manager in effectively implementing Employee Wellness Programs (EWP) and health and wellness policies within the company. In addition, it may be necessary for the employee wellness officers to collaborate with the HR manager in order to develop effective strategies and programs for the Employee Wellness Program (EWP). These interventions may be incorporated into key performance areas (KPAs), and it is imperative for employees to participate in EWP seminars in order to comprehend the importance of EWP measures in relation to their overall well-being in the workplace. Future research could investigate the current state of Employee Wellness Programs (EWP) within certain public service departments in South Africa. Interviews can be utilized as a method of data collection. The objective of this study will be to investigate the effectiveness of Early Warning and Prevention (EWP) treatments within the context of a longitudinal comparative analysis.

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References


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