Research Article

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AT WORK PLACE – SUPPORTIVE INTERVENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Over the last few years' major changes have taken place in the workplace. These changes have radically transformed the very nature of work, the work environment and expectations from both employer and employee. The workplace transitions have to be taken into account so as to realize the kind of impact this could have on employee well being. The focus would be on issues that are current concerns for organizations and employees. Stress is a normal part of everyday life that none can avoid. Failure, setbacks, and disappointment are all part and parcel of life. These everyday situations have the potential to be very stressful. Elimination of stress may not be possible, but how it is perceived, and the response, can go a long way in reducing the negative impact. This impacts the personal front, which has a ripple effect on the individuals work life balance, relationships, self- confidence are some of the many areas. Specific to some industries the environments do not help with a balanced life style but also have environments of high stress and pressure, of having targets to be met and deadlines to be reached. Supportive interventions help individuals at being more productive and happier, and organisations also gain to having better environment, which lead to bigger profits. These interventions benefit both employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. The Life Coach / Mentor intervention, is a double-edged sword which completely empowers employees to be more holistic and enthusiastic. The importance of looking within oneself and checking for correction rather than always wanting change from the outside can also be achieved. Healthy competition, teamwork, leadership and persuasive communication, procrastination, blame game can be addressed comfortably. This paper will focus on the important interventions for the psychological well being of the workforce. The author will be dealing with general concepts, philosophies, theories and models, principle and experience sharing.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of well- being originates from Positive Psychology. The shift from negative to positive psychology is a welcome change in the discipline. The focus of positive psychology is to study the improvement in the lives of individuals. The term psychological well-being connotes a wide range of meanings, usually associated with wellness. Most studies in the past defined "Well ness" as not being sick, as an absence of anxiety, depression or other forms of mental problems. The psychological well-being includes meaning in life, absence of somatic symptom, self- esteem, positive affect, daily activities, satisfaction, absence of suicidal ideas, personal control, social support, absence of tension, and general efficiency (Bhogle and Prakash, 1995). The new conception emphasizes positive characteristics of growth and development. There are six distinct components of psychological well- being. These are:

- **Self-acceptance:-** Having positive attitude towards one self and one's past life.
- **Purpose in life:-** Having goals and objectives that give life meaning.
- **Personal growth:-** Having a sense of continued development and self-realization.
- **Positive relations with others:-** Possessing, caring and trusting ties with others.
- **Environmental mastery:-** Being able to manage complex demands of daily life.
- **Autonomy:-** Being able to follow one's convictions.

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These factors affect the individual in different ways. They have an effect on a healthy personality. In other words well-being refers to uniting self with self by negating the ego. This in turn indicates that well-being is a combination of survival, well-being, freedom and identity.

New Model of Well Being

A good life involves engagement, satisfaction, and purpose. According to this model, concept of well-being refers to health, vitality, creativity, fulfilment and resilience. It refers to thriving and flourishing that involves mind, body, society and environment in general. Well-being refers to a harmonious interplay of cognitive and affective process rather than subjugating to them.

How do we attain well-being?

The individual's relationship with reality determines the well-being. This generates three types of reactions

- Reality Evasion
- Quick Fixers
- Reality Investment

Background Research in the field of well-being

Research in the field of well-being reveals that demographic variables fail to account for substantial amounts of variance in well -being. As a result of the lack of predictive power of external factors, researchers have turned to internal influences on well- being. Research shows that the key indicators of well-being include positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction. As Cloninger (2006) rightly remarks that "psychiatry" has hailed to improve that average levels of happiness and well-being in the general population, despite vast expenditures on psychotropic drugs and psychotherapy manuals", He further emphasizes on the great need of focus-shift from stigmatizing aspects of mental disorders to applying the methods of enhancing positive emotions, character development, life satisfaction, and spirituality. Culture (Diener and Lucas, 2000), circumstances, religion (Gallup, 1984), and social support (Perlman and Rook, 1987) have also been consistently proved to be significantly correlated with well-being. Researches on stress and job satisfaction show that the individuals who suffer from high stress levels (Freudenberger, 1974; Pines *and* Maslach, 1978) have low job satisfaction (Maslach, 1978; Newcomb and Clark, 1985). Cooper and Marshall (1980) found that administrators also experience high stress and low job satisfaction. Administrators reported that "70% of their total life stress resulted from their jobs". The linkage between stress, job satisfaction, and the work environment is critical to the study of stress states. Individual's response to stressful situations can vary greatly and it has been shown that certain people are more likely to experience high levels of stress in their jobs than others (Fontana *and* Abouserie 1993).

Researchers involved in an environmental situation that is perceived as presenting demand which threatens to exceed the person's capabilities and resources for meeting it, under conditions where he or she expects a substantial differential in the rewards and costs from meeting the demand versus not

meeting it (McGrath, 1976). From the documented evidence, it is clear that as far as work life is concerned extreme stress is so aversive to employees that they will try to avoid it by withdrawing psychologically, through disinterest or lack of involvement in the job etc. physically, frequent late coming, absenteeism, lethargy etc. or by leaving the job entirely (Beehr *and* Newman, 1978). It predisposes the individual to develop several psychosomatic illnesses; in contrast, the absence of extreme stress would result in more satisfied, happy, healthy and effective employees. However, the stress that one experiences in the job varies from mild to severe depending on one's physiological, psychological and social make up (French *and* Caplan, 1970).

Factors that impact well-being because of the presence of stress

Stress can be defined as physiological and psychological reaction to relatively excessive demands made on a person. The role of stressful life events in the etymology of various diseases has been a fruitful field of research for the last 25 years. It is increasingly recognised that stress is one of the components of any disease, not just those labelled psychosomatic (Pestonjee 1992). In fact researchers like Schmalo and Engel (1967), Homes and Rahe (1967, Grant *et al.*, (1974) have established this point beyond doubt that there exists positive correlation between stressful life events and subsequent illness. Job stress is usually conceptualized as a condition wherein job related factors interact with the individual to change his/her psychological or physiological condition such that the person is forced to deviate from normal functioning (Beehr *and* Newman, 1978).

In contrast to the occupational stress literature, which focuses on ongoing or chronic sources, stress research in clinical psychology and in health sciences focuses on the social readjustments that specific stressful life events often precipitate. This approach defines stresses as an unsolved environmental demands requiring adaptive social readjustment (Dohrenwend *and* Dohrenwend, 1974; Gunderson *and* Rahe, 1974; Homes *and* Rahe, 1967; Rabkin *and* Streuning, 1976). By focussing only on job stress or personal life stress, past research has ignored their combined effects, resulting in segmented rather than a holistic perspective. Bhagat (1980, 1983) has argued in favour of research that would incorporate the influence of both work and personal life stress on the employee. Social support has been defined as the availability of people whom the individual trusts, on whom he can rely, and who make him feel cared for and valued as a person (McDowell *and* Newell 1996). The amount of social support is a reflection of how stable a person's life is and also how approachable and forthcoming people within the social environment are likely to be (Pierce *et al.*, 1991). The benefits of this stable viewpoint to the individual are believed to be rooted in Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) theory of attachment in early childhood. The accumulation of these early experiences of social interactions; these models form the basis of later adult relationships (Dolbier *and* Stienhardt 2000).

Impact due to occupational stress

Occupational stress is gaining importance due to continuing structural changes in the workplace, with both increasing

demands and job insecurity imposed on employees. The deleterious effects of stress on human performance are well documented and have been focus of research in the social and behavioural studies for a number of years. Most models of occupational stress propose that stressors in the work environment lead to negative psychological, physical and behavioural changes in employees (Beehr,1995;Jex *and* Beehr,1991; Kahn *and* Byrosiere, 1992). The implications of work-related stress include the effects on worker satisfaction and productivity their mental and physical health, absenteeism and its economic cost etc. along with work related effects. A range of adverse health outcomes have been identified, and what comes through is that psychological problems are significant because they occur frequently, are often unrecognized and they can be accompanied by significant morbidity. There are important implications to be noted for the lifestyle and health of employees. While depression is the most likely adverse psychological outcome, the range of other possible psychological problems include burnout, alcohol abuse, unexplained physical symptoms, absenteeism, chronic fatigue and accidents, sick building syndrome and repetitive strain injury. The influence of psychosocial factors at work on health has been studied extensively over the last two decades (Singh, Srivastava *and* Mandal, 1999; Karasek *and* Theorell, 1990; Seigrist, 1996; Marmot *et al*., 1999; Cooper 1998). Most studies have focused on the relation with cardiovascular disease (Siegrist *et al*., 1990; Karasek *et al*., 1988; Johnson *et al*., 1996; Bosma *et al*., 1998) but several other health outcomes have also been examined, including self – rated health, sickness absence, neck and low back pain, psychiatric disorder and depression (North *et al*., 1996; Tsunami *et al*., 2001; Pikhart *et al*., 2001). Depression is related to several cardiovascular risk factors and possible to the risk of cardiovascular disease (Dinan, 1999; Rozanski, Blumenthal, *and* Kaplan, 1999), and may potentially be one of the mechanisms linking psychosocial factors at work with chronic diseases.

Depression figures prominently among the hazards of unfavourable work environment. Depression in the workplace and full-blown syndromes, are important consequences for workers' quality of life, the costs and utilization of health care and workplace productivity. Various investigations have demonstrated relationships between work stress in particular heavy job demands and lack of autonomy. Longitudinal evidence is available linking job demands, lack of autonomy and other elements of work organisation with depression.Some studies investigated the association between psychosocial factors at work with depression but it appears that the rates of depression are higher in persons with job stress (Gershon, Lin, *and* Li, 2002; Wang *and* Patten, 2001; Tyssen *et al*., 2000; Stansfield, Head, *and* Mrmot, 1998; Kawakami *et al*., 1997; Boey *et al*., 1997). Overall, investigations of work stress and depression constitute a body of analytic epidemiology that supports the development of preventive interventions in the workplace.

SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A POSITIVE IMPACT

The major functions of social support include health sustaining function, stress preventing function and buffering function. The health sustaining function of social support indicates that it satisfies the individual's need for affection and enhances self-esteem and self-efficacy. The stress preventing functions of social support indicates that it reduces environmental demand or pressure that generates stress. Finally, the buffering function of social support indicates that it attenuates the relationship between stress and well-being by enhancing the recipients' cognitive and behavioural coping strategies (Parsuraman *et al*., 1992). Thus instead of having direct effects on stress or health, social support modifies the relationship between stress and health and protects the individual from negative consequences of stress (Williams *and* House, 1985; Greenhaus *and* Parsuraman, 1986; Wiley, 1987).

Measurement of social support as focussed on the structures and the functions of interpersonal relationships, (Cohen and Willis 1985: Pugliese 1998: Dolbier *and* Steinhardt 2000). Structure refers to the existence and quantity of social relationships like the presence of family, friends, marital status and group membership. Also to be noted is the inter connectedness of these networks. (McDowell *and* Newell 1996: Dolbier *and* Steinhardt 2000).
Functional support refers to perceptions of the availability of support and the extent to which interpersonal relationships serve particular functions (Sherbourne *and* Stewart 1991). The major functions are emotional, instrumental, appraisal and informational support and social companionship (Cohen *and* Wills 1985). Emotional support involves caring, love and empathy. Instrumental support refers to practical help or assistance. Appraisal support involves information relevant to self-evaluation. Informational support is related to the provision of advise or feedback that can provide a solution to problems. Social companionship involves spending time with others (Cohen and Wills 1985).

There is plenty of literature spanning the last 30 years or more investigating the relationship between social support and health (Berkman 1984; Cassel1976, Cohen and Syme, 1985; House *et al*., 1988). Numerous studies have shown, in general, that people who have better social support tend to have more protective factor in the likelihood than individual will become ill, die, or suffer a functional limitation (Berkman and Syme 1979; Orth-Gomer and Johnson 1987; Krantz and Orth, 2000). Second, people with chronic illness including HIV, diabetes, arthritis, mental illness, etc, tend to cope better, comply with treatment regimens and enjoy better outcomes if they have better social support. Third, people with higher levels of social support tend to be protected from psychological distress, psychiatric disorders, and the poor general health (Veiel and Baumann, 1922; Melchior *et al* ., 2003). Finally, people who have suffered a major illness e.g., cancer, heart disease and stroke tend to have better outcomes and even longer survival after treatment if they have better social support (Vogt, *et al*. 1992; Berkman, 1995).

Challenges Faced To Attain Well-Being

- Imbalance of work and leisure.
- Life style related problems.
  * The very approach of measuring development in terms of consumption.
- Competition, promoting individualism, and egoism.
- Technology generated problems
- Modern medicine and health related interventions and
- Lack of health related support system

Concerns that come from heirarchy

- Managerial staff cite career growth and leadership as the factors that most influence attrition and retention, together with "opportunities for management" "ability of top management" "use of skills and abilities" and work/family balance
- Professional employees cite concerns about supervisory coaching, company direction and interesting work
- Clerical employees voice concerns such as type of work, use of skills and abilities and opportunities to learn
- Hourly employees assess whether they are treated with respect, whether they have competent managers and if their work is interesting

Supportive interventions

Grant (2001) attempted to make distinction between what he called personal or life-coaching and in the workplace. Personal or life-coaching is a solution-focused, results – oriented systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of the coachs life experience and performance in various domains as determined by the coach, and fosters self-directed learning and personal growth of the coach. Workplace coaching is a solution-focussed, result-oriented systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of work performance and the self-directed learning and personal growth of the coach.

Intervention by method of coaching and mentoring

Grant (2001) attempted to make distinction between what he called personal or life-coaching and coaching in the workplace. Personal or life-coaching is a solution-focused, results–oriented systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of the coachee's life experience and performance in various domains as determined by the coachee, and fosters self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee. Workplace coaching is a solution-focussed, result-oriented systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of work performance and the self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee.

The common contexts in which life-coaches operate typically include:

- Confidence and self-esteem
- Career transitions;
- Relationships;
- Dreams and aspirations;
- Getting your life in order;
- Health and physical wellbeing.

Existential Philosophy

One philosophy that we believe is particularly appropriate and relevant to coaching is existentialism. This is a fusion of philosophical and psychological thought mainly founded by Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55). Existentialism, broadly defined, is a set of philosophical systems concerned with free will, choice and personal responsibility; because we make choices based on our experiences, beliefs and biases, those choices are unique to us. The key concepts are that:

- Everyone has free will;
- Life is a series of choices that creates stress;
- Few decisions are without any negative consequences;
- Some things are irrational or absurd without explanation;
- If one makes a decision, one must follow through.

This leads us to the well-known phrase by Jean-Paul Sartre (1943): 'We do not choose to be free. We are condemned to freedom.' The existential view holds that people have no inherent characteristics and instead are endlessly remaking or discovering themselves in a movement towards self-realization – a progression of discovering who the real 'you' is. Anxiety comes from pretending to take responsibility for our choices, and taking our social attributes as positive because, existentialists believe, a crisis only occurs when you are equipped and ready to deal with it.

The main implications of existential philosophy for coaching are:

- The emphasis on 'being' rather than 'doing'.
- The recognition that we cannot always resolve conflict but must learn to accept and live with it.
- We should face uncertainty – acknowledge that change is constant – and strive to keep a balance.

Experience sharing as a life coach in an it company

When a company culture is based on respect, trust, care and accountability - few employees leave. Most employees leave their work for reasons other than money - and organizations can correct these reasons. Most leaving employees are seeking opportunities that allow them to use and develop their skills. Leaving employees want more *meaning* in their work. They often indicate that they want to use their qualities and skills in *challenging teamwork led by capable leaders*.

Having been associated with one such leading IT company as a Life Coach the following data helps to establish the inference on the need for Counselling in IT sector and the pleothara of needs which surfaced from interaction with the employees. This exercise was done on two levels one as in a floor walk and the other confidential one to one counselling.

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What typically happens during this exercise is the Counsellor/ Coach gives 20 minute presentations to employees at the work place on topics of well-being, motivation, procrastination, work life balance etc. which helps employees to give a thought to their personal life and psychological well-being. They are also made to realise the importance of sorting out issues and problems at an early stage so it does not fester and become into life threatening problems. Importance of communication and healthy relationships is also prodded. People in this industry

can get very easily sucked into depressive syndromes not even being aware of the same. The response from employees was unimaginable they would sit in the waiting hall in line, awaiting their turn to have a session. Advance booking of slots and complete honesty is what was experienced. People are desperately in need of ventilation and experience sharing, many times listening to young adults makes the journey easier. Huge number of young people migrate for engineering education from small towns and villages to the metro city and later take up jobs in IT sector they struggle with the transition and managing of finances. Freedom that comes with IT sector between the genders gives rise to lots of relationships which are not always manageable, issues on the grounds of caste and religion is high. Westernisation that comes in Indian scenario also creates issues for the young generation who want to ape the west in Indian situations.

Classificationofissuesdealtwith employees

The nature of issues can be classified under 12 distinct headings which enable to understand the context and to address the same effectively. These clients were met multiple times with an average gap of one week and many times they had to be supported by telephonic and mail communication. The highlight of the program was that at least half a dozen suicides could be prevented. Each of the above listed problem areas resulted in enormous stress to the Human Resources and a debilitative impact on them. As the organisation was proactive and employee centric this initiative yielded appropriate results. This turned out to be an important initiative employees had a yearning for this kind of initiative and was extremely productive. This initiative was a big success since it provided a platform for ventilation, as they did not have an alternate avenue to express themselves and take control of their situations.

A range of adverse health outcomes have been identified, and what comes through is that psychological problems are significant because they occur frequently, are often unrecognized and they can be accompanied by significant morbidity. There are important implications to be noted for the lifestyle and health of employees. While depression is the most likely adverse psychological outcome, the range of other possible psychological problems include burnout, alcohol abuse, unexplained physical symptoms, absenteeism, chronic fatigue and accidents, sick building syndrome and repetitive strain injury. In some cases they had to be referred to a Psychiatrist for medication. Sleep disorder problems and suicidal tendency.

To corroborate the findings we can link this information with the study from Walker Loyalty Reports, quoted by Terry Bacon in the book What People Want. The survey revealed:

- 92% wanted honesty and integrity from their manager.
- 89% wanted their manager to hold everyone accountable to the same standards.
- 87% wanted to trust--and be trusted by--their manager.
- 85% wanted to respect--and be respected by--their manager.
- 81% wanted to be able to count on their manager.
- 77% wanted to be a part of the team and to be asked for ideas and solutions.

- 76% wanted their manager to be genuine.
- 74% wanted their manager to appreciate them for who they are and what they do.
- 74% wanted manager to listen, understand, and respond.

When you understand what people really want, initiatives and interventions fron the company help with having productive employees and are able to retain them for longer periods of time. The same survey also indicated:

- 3% wanted their manager to be a friend or companion.
- 14% wanted interesting conversations with their manager.
- 24% wanted their manager to care for them.
- 25% wanted emotional support from their manager.
- 29% wanted a cheerful or happy manager.
- 29% wanted their manager to be fun-loving or good-humored.

General Conclusion

A coach-mentor needs to be able to hold multiple perspectives in mind and to look at challenges and issues from different viewpoints. What enables a person to change, but rather a series of constructions that are more or less useful for evoking change. This leads us to a common sense conclusion that successful coach-mentors will be guided more by the situation they face than by following any single theory or dogma. They will have the knowledge, skill and confidence to be able to adjust their style flexibly, even in the course of a single conversation, in response to the situation they are facing. To do this they will, of course, need to be able to understand interpret, respect and sometimes apply techniques from all competing brands and approaches that contribute to the emerging coaching and mentoring profession. As Carl Jung (1998) said: 'Learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of the living soul. Not theories, but your own creative individuality alone must decide.'

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