

HEALTH AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic isn't just a physical wellbeing issue—it's also a mental health issue and will require special attention from all of us. We are clearly in exceptional times; with 24-hour media pouring news about death tolls; various—often divergent—views on social media; working in isolation; managing work alongside caring responsibilities; a fast-moving environment; and an overwhelming sense of urgency. Amidst this unparalleled time, how to keep the work-force active mentally and physically has been a testing challenge for many organizations. This article deals with the aspects that motivate the employees and boost their best performance in this exceptional crisis. The article talks about the strategies that the organizations need to adopt in reopening phase to fetch the best performance in the employees.

Key Words: Performance, wellness, motivation, skills, resilience, leaders, organization

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the Aberdeen Group published its human capital management trends report. The report's general message shared that we need to focus on our people because as organizations invest in systems and more efficient technology, human capital is being systematically reduced.

This advice is proving to be even more applicable to today's global COVID-19 challenges. Our talent is being stretched extremely thin while needing to adapt to the dynamic changes in how we work and live in this pandemic ridden world. After interviewing many senior business leaders, Harvard Business Review notes that most business leaders think about recovering from this crisis in three phases being: 1. Shelter in Place phase, 2. The Reopening Phase, and 3. The Post COVID-19 Phase. These leaders all agree that "Human Need" stands at the forefront of any possible recovery and must be prioritized in all 3 phases.

In a recent article by McKinsey Quarterly, the authors proclaimed that organizations would need to focus on four general areas during the reopening and post-COVID-19 phases. These areas are

1. to Recover Revenue
2. to Rebuild Operations
3. to Rethink the Organization
4. The Adoption of Digital Solutions

Interestingly, much like the authors from Harvard Business Review, McKinsey Quarterly stresses that companies will need to rethink their operating models based on how their people work best during these phases.

In my opinion, one of the most significant insights for businesses in a post-pandemic world will be the business value that employee health has on the organization. In a "pre-pandemic world," business leaders often prioritized operations, processes, and profit to ensure organizational success. In a "post-pandemic world," employee well-being and operational fitness will be the critical drivers for organizational resilience, agility, and growth and cannot be ignored.

Unfortunately, coming out of the "Shelter in Place Phase" and moving into a "Reopening Phase" will require even more energy and agility from our workers. According to The American Psychological Association, many of these workers are already suffering from stress, exhaustion, and burnout from living and operating in isolation. Nearly 7 in 10 employees indicated in a survey by mental health provider Ginger that the corona-virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is the most stressful time of their entire professional career, which has aligned with stark increases in new prescriptions of anti-depressant, anti-anxiety, and anti-insomnia medications. Published in an article by Human Resource Executive, findings indicate not only the stress-induced impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees, but its major implications for employers as well. According to Ginger, 88% of workers reported experiencing moderate to extreme stress over the past 4 to 6 weeks. Among those reporting stress, 62% noted losing at least 1 hour a day in productivity and 32% lost at least 2 hours a day due

to COVID-19-related stress. Prior to the pandemic, use of anti-anxiety and anti-insomnia medications were both on the decline from 2015 to 2019, down 12% and 11.3%, respectively. In the time frame February'20 to May'20, new prescriptions for anti-anxiety medications exhibited a 37.7% increase, stressing the vital need for therapeutic involvement. If employee health and well-being is not addressed in a timely fashion before the "Reopening Phase", employees will likely be sprinting out of the starting gates with lots of enthusiasm, but will not have the energy capacity to maintain their momentum for very long, thus increasing the risk of rapidly plummeting into states of chronic fatigue, disengagement, and presenteeism. If you're unfamiliar with the term, "presenteeism," it means that people show up at work while being exhausted, depressed or ill. They might be physically present, but they lack the mental capacity to maintain decent quality work output. Presenteeism is the practice of being present at one's place of work for more hours than is required, especially as a manifestation of insecurity about one's job. Presenteeism is the act of showing up to work sick, injured, overly fatigued or otherwise not operating at normal levels of productivity. Research shows that presenteeism due to illness, depression or other ailments is a common but often unaddressed issue that can be very costly.

Whether we like it or not, people can be either a viable source of revenue or an organization's most significant liability. The Aberdeen Group report emphasized the dire need to invest in people so that they can remain a reliable source of productivity and profit. What this research and other current reports are telling us is that these four areas – health, stress, happiness and performance – are intricately linked. And the balance between them affects the whole organization. The higher the levels of stress and fatigue, the greater the chances that people will not have the capacity to be happy and productive at a sustainable pace.

The close link between health, happiness, and stress is illustrated by the health-performance pyramid I initially designed while training elite athletes, but have since been adopted for executives as well.



Health Performance Pyramid (Daane, 2010)

At the bottom of this pyramid is our "Wellness" that lays the foundation for our capacity to be able to perform in all areas of life. The World Health Organization defines wellness as "a state of complete mental, physical, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Wellness is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a healthy and fulfilling life. Wellness is more than being free from illness; it is a dynamic process of change and growth. "...a state of whole physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the non-existence of disease or infirmity."By managing our nutrition and exercise, we can achieve overall wellness. Wellness is especially important as we age because regular exercise and proper nutrition can help prevent a variety of ailments including cardiovascular disease, obesity, and fall risk behaviors. This means our wellness is much more than a passive state of existence but rather an active process of living that is characterized by the pursuit of health, vitality, fitness, and fulfillment. An essential marker for wellness is our personal "Energy." People who have high levels of wellness are typically characterized as being positive, happy, and energetic. Ultimately our capacity for performance diminishes if we do not set ourselves up for success by building wellness first.

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Without adequate levels of wellness, our resilience to stress and related stressors decreases, resulting in lower levels of motivation to apply ourselves in the best way possible, communicate with empathy, be engaged in the business, learn new skills, and so on. Resilience refers to how well you can deal with and bounce back from the difficulties of life. It can mean the difference between handling pressure and losing your cool. Resilient people tend to maintain a more positive outlook and cope with stress more effectively.

In the face of crisis or tragedy, finding a sense of purpose can play an imperative role in resilience-building. This might mean becoming involved in your community, cultivating your spirituality, or participating in activities that are meaningful to you.

Resilience can bring motivation to work harder. It is through motivation that the human resources can be operating by making full use of it. This can be done by building willingness in employees to work. This will help the enterprise in securing best possible utilization of resources.

Employers are often looking for skills that go beyond qualifications and experience. So it is important to have a variety of skills in employees.

If we as leaders are seeking to maximize our employees' performance during the reopening phase, it's up to us to make certain that we set them up for success first by ensuring they have the capacity to consistently perform at their best once they come out of the starting gates.

REFERENCE

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- [2] Marcel Daane is the author of his critically acclaimed leadership book and App called: "Headstrong Performance" and is a renowned neuroscience and leadership researcher exploring the link between physical and mental wellness and their impact on leadership and performance capacity in individuals, teams, and organizations.