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WELLNESS

HR Manager's
Toolkit for Mental Wellbeing

A handbook for HR Managers to integrate mental health practices in work culture
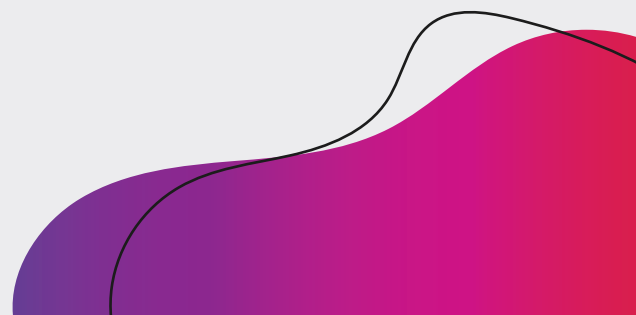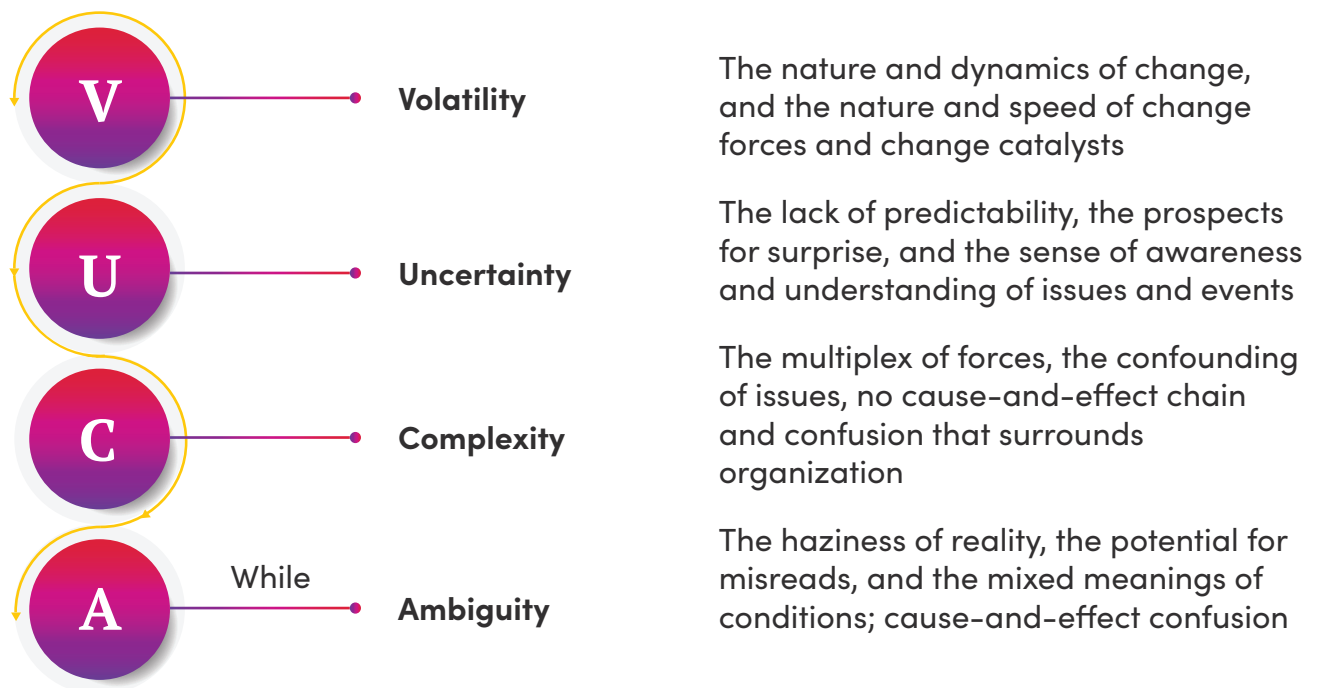
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SECTION A: PREPARE

A Mentally Healthy Workplace

Globalization has been a powerful and dynamic force for growth in the world economy, with rapid implementation of information technology, changes in increased automation, innovation and the resultant changes in organization structure. Employees worldwide confront as never before an array of new organizational processes – downsizing, contingent employment and increased workload. Established organizations face competition from new lean entrants in various segments. The pressure increases for organizations to thrive in the dynamic environment. This phenomenon was first coined into the acronym VUCA in 1987, based on leadership theories of Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus.

V	**Volatility**	The nature and dynamics of change, and the nature and speed of change forces and change catalysts
U	**Uncertainty**	The lack of predictability, the prospects for surprise, and the sense of awareness and understanding of issues and events
C	**Complexity**	The multiplex of forces, the confounding of issues, no cause-and-effect chain and confusion that surrounds organization
A	While **Ambiguity**	The haziness of reality, the potential for misreads, and the mixed meanings of conditions; cause-and-effect confusion

Organizations continue to grapple with VUCA dynamics, the recent pandemic proves to be one of the most extreme challenges, as it throws the entire world off balance. As businesses slowly recover, there is increasing focus on Planning, Mitigating Business Risks, Future Readiness, Recovery Systems and Managing Change to sustain themselves.

The impact of the increasing pressures, demands and uncertainty are felt by employees mounting to anxiety and worry. We see increasing cases of high achieving millennials facing a range of mental, psychological and physical discomfort manifesting as headaches, back pain, gastrointestinal disturbances, fatigue, sleep disorders, hypertension, substance abuse and diabetes.

This further results in dissatisfaction, disengagement, low morale, fatigue, increased time offs, human errors, reduced productivity and even burnout while, organizations deal with absenteeism, attrition, poor performance, as well as negative impact on profits.
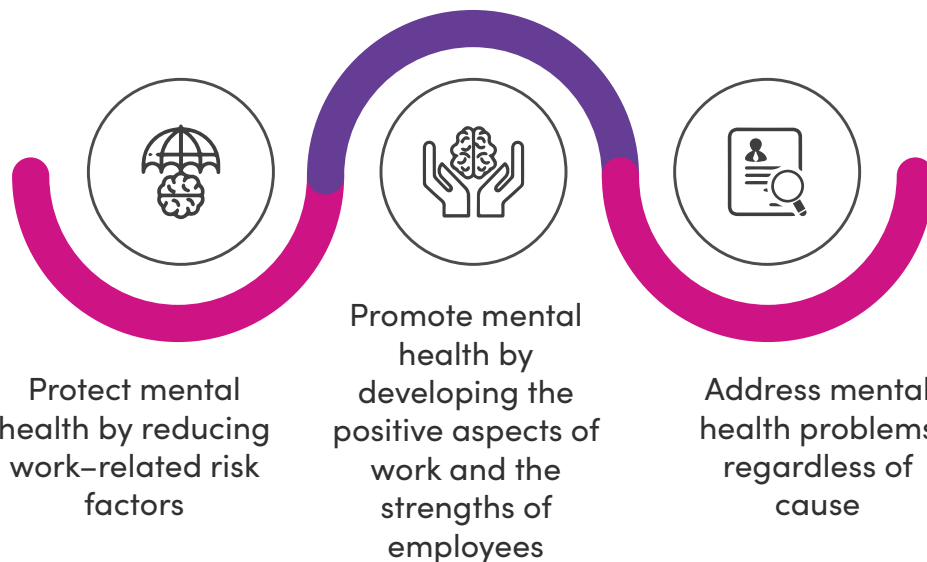
Prioritise Mental Health Practices

Globally, an estimated 264 million people suffer from depression, one of the leading causes of disability, with many of these people also suffering from symptoms of anxiety. A recent WHO-led study estimates that depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy US$ 1 trillion each year in lost productivity.

Mental health interventions should be delivered as part of an integrated health and well-being strategy that covers prevention, early identification, support and rehabilitation.

WHO believes – *"A healthy workplace can be described as one where workers and managers actively contribute to the working environment by promoting and protecting the health, safety and well-being of all employees."*

An academic report from 2014 suggests that interventions should take a 3-pronged approach:

Protect mental health by reducing work–related risk factors

Promote mental health by developing the positive aspects of work and the strengths of employees

Address mental health problems regardless of cause

Their recent study estimated that for every US$ 1 put into scaled up treatment for common mental disorders, there is a return of US$ 4 in improved health and productivity.

US$ 1 — Scaled Up Treatment

US$ 4 — Return in Health and Productivity

Case in Point:
Du Pont's ICU Program

Du Pont's ICU Program is an awareness campaign made especially for the workplace, designed to reduce the stigma associated with mental health and foster a workplace culture that supports emotional health. Developed by DuPont's Employee Assistance Program, the ICU Program was delivered to each of their 70,000 employees worldwide. DuPont has since donated ICU to the Center for Workplace Mental Health, who now makes it available to employers across all sectors, industries, and sizes, cost-free.

I Identify

C Connect

U Understand
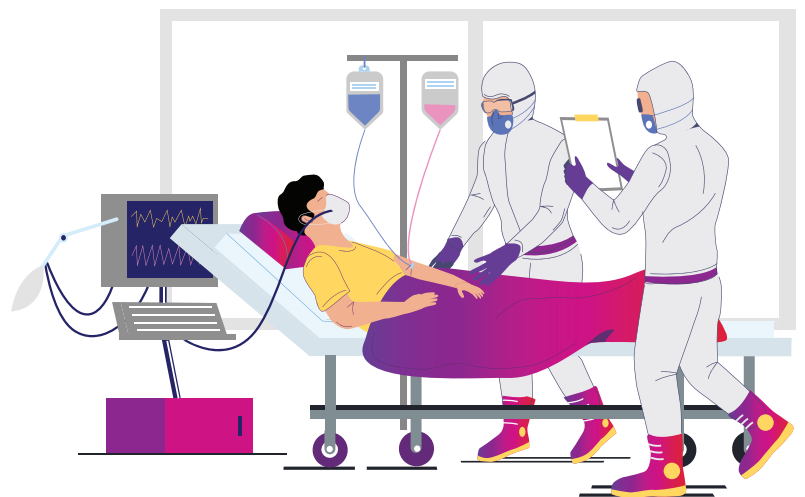
It suggests non-judgmental conversation starters such as "You're not your usual self."

Employees are discouraged from attempting to diagnose peers. "It's not a very complicated message. It's just encouraging people to recognize when another person is in distress and letting them know it's OK to be a normal, caring person and help them out," says Paul Heck, DuPont's global manager of employee assistance and work/life services.

"For a long time, there's been this sense that the workplace is this sterile, emotionless environment where you are supposed to check your emotions at the door," Heck says.

"When I'm carrying something heavy, you don't think twice about offering to help me. We're just suggesting that same courtesy can apply to people who are demonstrating distress."

Case in Point:
PwC's Be Well Work Well Initiative

"When corporate well-being practices are combined with individual commitment to healthy behaviors and attitudes, it leads to a positive impact not only on the individual, but on their teams and client relationships"

This is a key finding from the Well-Being Learning Project, one of the largest studies to date of a corporate well-being effort. This research, conducted over a six-month span and featuring data collected from more than 1,400 partners and staff, examined the behaviors at the individual, team and organizational level that truly make a difference in people's well-being and in overall business.

Personal Habits

Habits that help you feel energized, renewed and more productive

Team Habits

Habits that will help you and co-workers

Quick Wins

Habits that can help you prioritize your well-being in as little as five minutes

"Since the launch of PwC's Be Well, Work Well effort, we've heard consistent feedback from our people that prioritizing well-being has made a noticeable impact on their personal and professional lives. Research—and feedback from our people—prove that a focus on well-being isn't a soft skill. It's a core business skill needed to sustain high performance in and outside of work. By prioritizing well-being, we improve our collective ability to thrive in a world that's moving and changing faster than ever." PwC

Amongst others, PwC also has moved from 9-5 work hours to everyday flexibility, compressed weekdays with 3day weekends, Kindness Campaign, World's Largest Corporate Group Meditation initiatives to promote mental wellbeing.

Organizational Factors impacting Mental Health

There are many risk factors that may be present in the working environment. Most risks relate to interactions between type of work, the organizational and managerial environment, the skills and competencies of employees, and the support available for employees to carry out their work. For example, a person may have the skills to complete tasks, but they may have too few resources to do what is required, or there may be unsupportive managerial or organizational practices.

Risks to mental health include:

◈ Inadequate health and safety practices

◈ Poor communication and management practices

◈ Limited participation in decision-making

◈ Low reward and control over one's area of work

◈ Low levels of support for employees

◈ Inflexible working hours

◈ Unclear tasks or organizational objectives

◈ Unsuitable tasks as per individual's competencies

◈ High workload

◈ Discrimination and harassment

◈ Stigma associated with mental health

◈ Job loss and Job insecurity
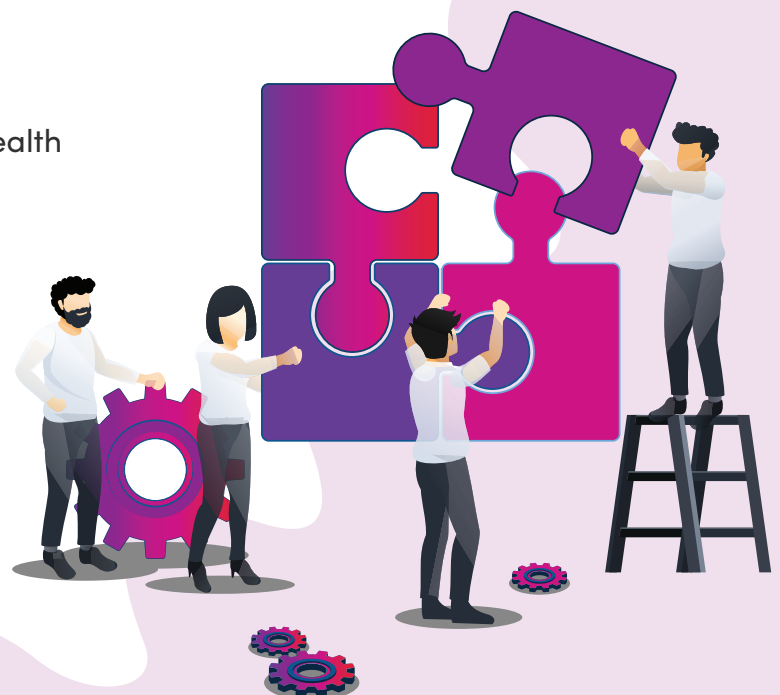
Managers and HR Professionals doubling up as therapists and coaches

Leaders, managers and HR professionals are expanding their roles to coach employees through regular checks ins on how they are doing and what help they need to succeed. But when employees are under stress and the need for coaching comes in the form of emotional support, the manager-as-coach risks stepping into the role of manager-as-therapist if they are not careful about how they prepare for and conduct coaching conversations.

Walking this line between coaching and therapy is particularly relevant today in the time of COVID-19, as almost every employee's performance is being impacted by stressful circumstances related to the pandemic. Even when we are not in a time of global crisis, managers must be cautious of finding the balance between empathetic listener and office therapist.

Therapy

is meant to "help people with a broad variety of mental illnesses and emotional difficulties." - American Psychiatric Association

Coaching

is "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential." - International Coaching Federation

On the surface, coaching and therapy may appear very similar, because they are both commonly practiced by two individuals sitting down together to discuss what is getting in the way of the coachee/ client/ employee reaching his/ her goals. Beyond this similarity, coaching and therapy have significantly different intentions.

How can a manager-as-coach avoid crossing the line into manager-as-therapist?

When managers ask their people how they are doing, especially in times of difficulty, emotions are bound to come up and some of them may be painful. Of course, managers can listen and empathize, but they are not equipped with the tools to help employees unpack the baggage they may bring to the situation. Especially when the employee is experiencing significant stress, challenge, or even trauma, listening with empathy may not be enough. What the person needs is therapy and would need ready references of the organization's EAP resources and pool of internal/ external therapists.

Remember to 'Empathise' not 'Analyse'

Balancing Layoffs, Furloughs, Pay Cuts and Mental Health

A survey by the Indian Psychiatric Society revealed that during Lockdown 1.0 itself, there had been an alarming 20 per cent rise in mental health concerns. The crisis has also compounded the issues of those with existing psychological symptoms.

The effect of this crisis has been devastating on the economy as well. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMEI):

◈ The average employment reduced from 404 million in March 2019 to 282 million in April 2020, which means that about 122 million people have lost their jobs, including 27 million youth.

◈ From an estimated 78 million entrepreneurs and businesses in 2019–20, we were down to approximately 60 million by April 2020.

Layoffs:

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to about 30,000 jobs being lost in the IT and BPO sectors in India, with 60,000 being sent on leave without pay. Several startups that had just started to break even are seeing a sudden vendor consolidation and budget cuts that are leading to massive layoffs across the sector.

Furloughs:

Besides layoffs, several companies have resorted to furloughs in a bid to control costs, especially for projects where clients belonged to sectors such as non-essential retail, hospitality and travel – the hardest hit in the pandemic.

Pay cuts:

IT companies, a bulk of whose costs are manpower-related, have also cut salaries, including Tier I players. At an average across the industry, senior management has seen pay cuts of between 15–20 percent while mid-management has seen cuts of 10–15 percent on average.

Moving to complete remote working, has brought with it, its own series of technical, collaboration and ergonomic challenges with delayed response time, lack of visual cues, connectivity issues, domestic chores balancing, isolation and worry.

What the experts say:

As a manager charged with dismissing a wide swath of employees, you're pulled in different directions: Your heart goes out to people, but you have a responsibility to the organization. The key first is to have Self-Care measures in place and keep compartmentalise Personal and Professional worries.

If you're the one making the decisions about layoffs, Joshua Margolis, professor at Harvard Business School, recommends asking yourself one question:

Is downsizing your workforce truly necessary?

On behalf of the workforce, you need to spark resourceful, creative thinking about how your organization can save as many jobs as possible. Can we make sacrifices elsewhere? What are our other options to reduce costs? Lay-offs must be the last resort, and if we must do layoffs, make every effort to "avoid multiple rounds" of cuts.

Gather information that the people letting go would need

If you decide layoffs are necessary or others have made that decision for you, then make sure you're prepared before you reach out to the affected employees. Figure out how and when you will deliver the news to your employees on an individual basis and what the message will consist of – timing, benefits, severance. Make sure to watch out for signs of distress.

Be direct, human and empathetic

Your message should be clear, concise, and unequivocal. Express gratitude for their hard work and dedication. Then offer a short and simple explanation about the economic conditions that led to the layoff. Find a way "to engage your emotion" and cultivate a "calm and low-key" manner.

Offer assistance

Provide support and counsel to the people you've laid off, but don't promise things you can't deliver. Be helpful. Provide information on where your employee should go for government benefits. Offer ideas about job opportunities at other organizations. Offer to serve as a reference.

Mental Healthcare Governance in India

The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017,

by The Government of India, in lines aims to provide mental healthcare and services for persons with mental illness and to promote, and fulfil the rights of such persons during delivery of mental healthcare and services. This Act is applicable to those who have "substantial" impairment in thinking, mood, perception, orientation or memory that grossly impairs judgment, behaviour, capacity to recognize reality, or ability to meet the ordinary demands of life. This law does not apply to all persons with mental illness. In simple words, it applies to those who have severe mental disorders.

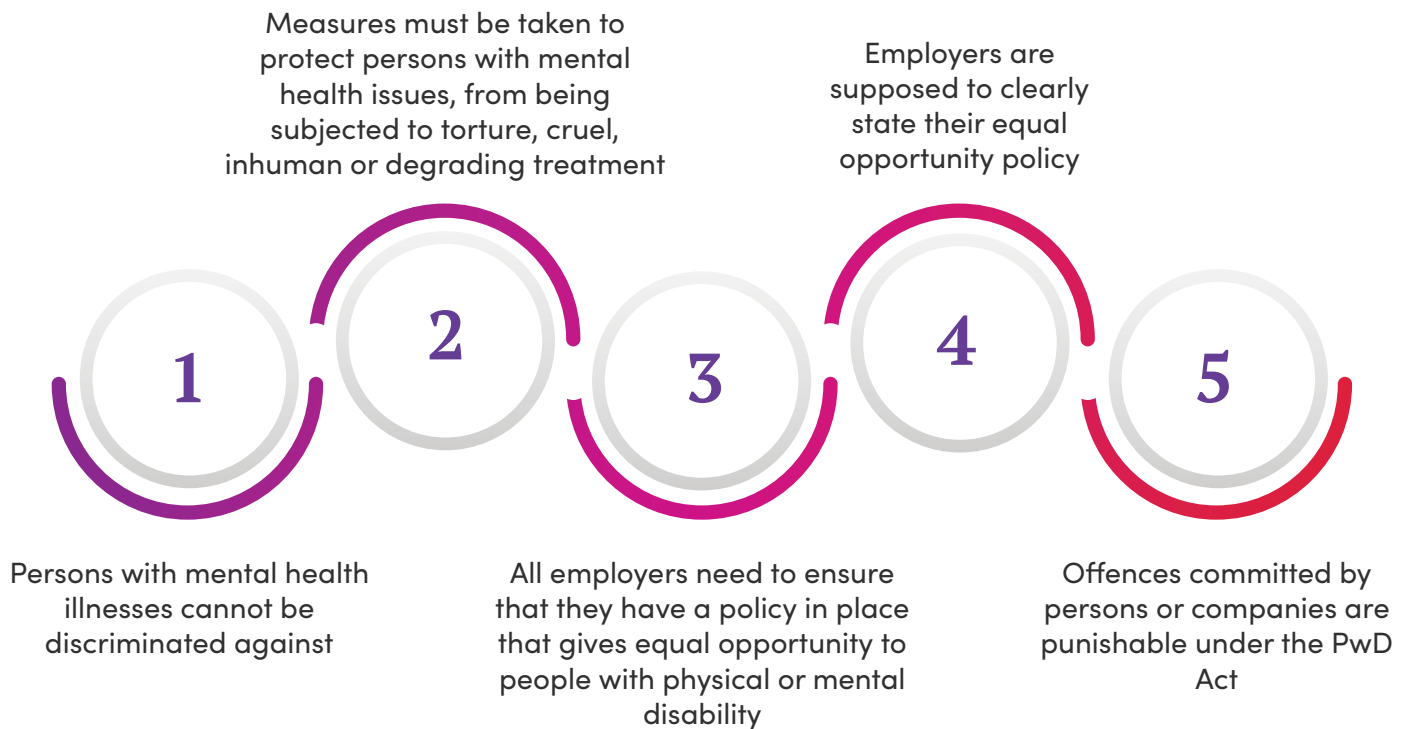## The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (PwD), 2016,

looks at the rights of those with any kind of disability, physical or mental, it defines "person with disability" as meaning a person with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders her/his full and effective participation in society equally with others.

The National Policy on Safety, Health and Environment at Work Place,

as laid down in the Constitution of India, believes that without safe, clean environment as well as healthy working conditions, social justice and economic growth cannot be achieved and that safe and healthy working environment is recognized as a fundamental human right. Education, training, consultation and exchange of information and good practices are essential for prevention and promotion of such measures.

The key highlights for employers are:

Measures must be taken to protect persons with mental health issues, from being subjected to torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment

Employers are supposed to clearly state their equal opportunity policy

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

Persons with mental health illnesses cannot be discriminated against

All employers need to ensure that they have a policy in place that gives equal opportunity to people with physical or mental disability

Offences committed by persons or companies are punishable under the PwD Act

While, the regulatory asks by the regulatory laws are minimal, many organizations provide a range of additional mental health provisions, especially with the increased pressure due to the increasing isolation, anxiety and work pressures of the pandemic

ACTION STEPS:

◇　Diagnose the organizational factors responsible for mental health of employees

◇　Include Mental Health Practices as part of People Strategy

◇　Involve Professional Therapists as part of your initiatives

◇　Sensitively manage mental health of employees letting go

◇　Ensure your HR Policies are compliant with Mental Health laws

SECTION B: BUILD AWARENESS

De-Stigmatize Mental Health within Management

Mental health isn't always easy to see, especially when you are on video calls, emails and phone calls. And with so many people struggling with mental illness today, just because you can't tell someone is struggling, it doesn't mean they aren't. Mental health affects all aspects of life, including work time.

Why do employees feel uncomfortable talking about their mental health?

Mental illness is a very personal and private matter, which is why talking about it can make people feel uncomfortable. People fear that talking about their mental illness will make people feel like they have permission to ask them questions as if they were a patient at a counseling office. They also fear that it permits people to judge them.

In the workplace, employees fear that admitting they have a mental illness will lead to them getting passed up on promotions or being seen as less competent and given fewer responsibilities as a result. They are afraid that their co-workers will bully them and exclude them from after-work drinks, lunches, office chats, and other activities.

Promote Self-Care Practices starting with Top Management

"The coronavirus is turning out to be a critical leadership stress test. It has challenged virtually every contingency plan and risk mitigation strategy that leaders have ever envisioned." - Gallup highlights in its recently published "3 Strategies for Leading Effectively Amid COVID-19".

Have candid discussions with leaders on their mental health stressors and strategies they use to overcome as well as encourage self-care resilience practices within them. You may want to host internal café style programs with leaders in the spotlight.

Prioritize immediate discussions on organizational factors impacting mental health

Communicate your findings through different mediums like check-ins, surveys, focused discussions on factors highlighted by employees that are causing stress and worry, in a periodic manner. Some organizations have included mental wellbeing metrics as part of performance scorecards. Follow through and provide assistance to the leaders to prioritize mental health and carry out relevant changes.

Leaders as role-models to champion change

The more leaders would practice self-care strategies for their wellbeing, the more they would encourage and promote their team members to care for themselves as well. Leaders can share their examples on how they have overcome any challenges in order to de-stigmatize mental health conversations. They can conduct mindful check-ins focusing on seeing how team members are coping with change.

The tone that leaders set, makes all the difference in the effectiveness and adoptability of various EAP (Employee Assistance Program) practices.

Handy Pool of Resources

You must create a repository of material and resources that is easily accessible to employees from their mobile phones and computer systems. Encourage leaders and managers to refer employees to the material as part of regular team briefings. They may want to make themselves available to clear any doubts any team member may have. You must prepare ready reckoners, handbooks, e-modules, videos, helpline numbers, internal and external therapists contact details.

You can make use of internal communication networks like newsletters, weekly email updates, promotions and campaigns to drive employees to access the resources.

Indicators of Work-related Stress

Stress is a necessary part of our lives and can have both beneficial and negative effects. The stress response is primarily determined by our perception of an event, transition, or problem. Finding a balance in our lives and managing our stress can be a challenge. An important first step is recognizing the degree to which we are affected by the stress in our lives and then move toward strategies to make it better. The following are series of self-assessment scales to help us determine the degree and type of stress we are experiencing and how well our stress coping skills are working.

How frequently do you find yourself experiencing such problems as headaches, problems going to sleep or staying asleep, unexplained muscle pain, jaw pain, uncontrolled anger, and frustration? Using the table below, assess the frequency that you experience these common symptoms of stress.

SYMPTOMS	Almost all day, everyday	Once or twice daily	Every night or day	2-3times per week	Once a week	Once a month	Never
Headaches							
Tense muscles, sore back and neck							
Fatigue & Lethargy							
Anxiety, worry, phobia							
Difficulty falling asleep							
Irritability & Restlessness							
Bouts of anger							
Boredom							
Depression							
Eating too much or too little							
Gas, cramps, constipation							

The more often you experience these symptoms of stress, the more likely stress is having a negative impact on your life. You may be so used to feeling a certain way that you assume this is normal. Look back over the Symptoms of Stress Table. Are there symptoms of stress that you would like to eliminate or change?

Perceived Stress Scale

A more precise measure of personal stress can be determined by using a variety of instruments that have been designed to help measure individual stress levels. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a classic stress assessment instrument. This tool, while originally developed in 1983, remains a popular choice for helping us understand how different situations affect our feelings and our perceived stress. The questions in this scale ask about your feelings and thoughts during the last month.

In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way; rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

For each question choose from the following alternatives:

In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way; rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

0 – never	1 - almost never	2 – sometimes	3 - fairly often	4 - very often

_____ 1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

_____ 2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

_____ 3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?

_____ 4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

_____ 5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?

_____ 6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

_____ 7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

_____ 8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?

_____ 9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?

_____ 10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Figuring your PSS score:

You can determine your PSS score by following these directions:

First, reverse your scores for questions 4, 5, 7, & 8. On these 4 questions, change the scores like this:

0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1, 4 = 0.

Now add up your scores for each item to get a total. My total score is _____.

Individual scores on the PSS can range from 0 to 40 with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress.

◈ Scores ranging from 0-13 would be considered low stress.

◈ Scores ranging from 14-26 would be considered moderate stress.

◈ Scores ranging from 27-40 would be considered high perceived stress.

The Perceived Stress Scale is interesting and important because your perception of what is happening in your life is most important. Consider the idea that 2 individuals could have the exact same events and experiences in their lives for the past month. Depending on their perception, total score could put one of those individuals in the low stress category and the total score could put the second person in the high stress category.

Signs of Anxiety and Worry

Everyone can expect to have the occasional bout of anxiety—maybe you get nervous before an important meeting or a client—but sometimes, that anxiety doesn't subside. If left unattended, it may have severe repercussions on overall mental health. When to seek a professional:

Excessive worry:

including health, money, or family problems—but on a larger scale. They continue to worry about those things even when there's not a clear reason to worry. This anxiety is also often hard to control, and makes it difficult for sufferers to focus on their daily tasks.

Sleep Problems:

Stress and anxiety can cause sleeping problems, or make other issues, like falling and staying asleep, worse. Because sleeping disorders can lead to anxiety—or anxiety can lead to sleeping disorders—it's best to talk to a therapist to determine the underlying causes and what you can do to correct them.

Irrational Fears:

Some anxiety isn't generalized at all; on the contrary, it's attached to a specific situation or thing—like flying, swimming, animals, or crowds. If the fear becomes overwhelming, disruptive, and way out of proportion to the actual risk involved, then it may need treatment.

Muscle Tension:

Near-constant muscle tension—whether it consists of clenching your jaw, balling your fists, or flexing muscles throughout your body—often accompanies anxiety disorders. This symptom can be so persistent and pervasive that people who have lived with it for a long time may stop noticing it after a while.

Chronic Indigestion:

Sometimes, anxiety can cause more than a "butterflies in your stomach" feeling. In fact, digestive issues—nausea, diarrhea, indigestion—are some of the main complaints linked to anxiety disorders,

Speaking up in front of a group:

Most people get at least a few butterflies before addressing a group or otherwise being in the spotlight. But if the fear is so strong that no amount of coaching or practice will alleviate it, or if you spend a lot of time thinking and worrying about it, you may have a form of social anxiety symptoms.

Self-Consciousness:

In these situations, people with social anxiety disorder tend to feel self-conscious, as if all eyes are on them, and they often experience blushing, trembling, nausea, profuse sweating, or difficulty talking. These symptoms can be so disruptive that they make it hard to meet new people, maintain relationships, and advance at work or in school

Panic or a Feeling of Dread:

Picture a sudden, gripping feeling of fear and helplessness that can last for several minutes, accompanied by scary physical symptoms such as breathing problems, a pounding or racing heart, tingling or numb hands, sweating, weakness or dizziness, chest pain, stomach pain, and feeling hot or cold. These are most of the times, due to the 'fight or flight' response by the body and may need professional help to manage the triggers.

Flashback:

Reliving a disturbing or traumatic event—a violent encounter, the sudden death of a loved one—is a hallmark symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which Persistent self-doubt and second-guessing is a common feature of anxiety disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder

mechanisms like avoid reminders etc.

Perfectionism:

If you are constantly judging yourself or you have a lot of anticipatory anxiety about making mistakes or falling short of your standards, then you probably have an anxiety disorder. Perfectionism is especially common in obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), which, like PTSD, had long been viewed as an anxiety disorder.

Compulsive Behaviours:

When a person's obsessiveness and intrusive thoughts are accompanied by compulsive behaviour, whether it's mental (telling yourself It'll be all right over and over again) or physical (hand-washing, straightening items) then it may be an obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Self-Doubt:

Persistent self-doubt and second-guessing is a common feature of anxiety disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder. In some cases, the doubt may revolve around a question that's central to a person's identity or relationships, like "Am I a good person, as much as my co-workers are?"

Workplace anxiety is real, it's growing, and employers need to do more to address the problem. If someone is feeling anxious at work, recognising the signs is the first step to making improvements. This may include a frank discussion with the employee about working hours, workload, how he feels, candid discussions and confidentiality.

There are self-care practices that can be helpful, however, if the symptoms go unaddressed, they may keep growing into a bigger disorder.

You must encourage employees to reach out to a professional therapist to get help.

SECTION C: CATALYZE CHANGE

Interconnectedness of Culture, Systems and Processes on Mental Health

Life affects all of us differently, and certain factors can affect our mental health and influence how we think and respond to challenges and opportunities in life. Being aware of how challenges in life can affect our mental health may make it easier to understand when one is struggling. As per studies, the following determinants broadly influence the risk of mental health and wellbeing:

Life-course:

Prenatal, Pregnancy and perinatal periods, early childhood, adolescence, working and family building years, older ages all related also to gender;

Parents, families, and households:

parenting behaviours/attitudes; material conditions (income, access to resources, food/nutrition, water, sanitation, housing, employment), employment conditions and unemployment, parental physical and mental health, pregnancy and maternal care, social support;

Community:

neighbourhood trust and safety, community based participation, violence/crime, attributes of the natural and built environment, neighbourhood deprivation;

Local services:

early years care and education provision, schools, youth/adolescent services, health care, social services, clean water and sanitation;

Country level factors:

poverty reduction, inequality, discrimination, governance, human rights, armed conflict, national policies to promote access to education, employment, health care, housing and services proportionate to need, social protection policies that are universal and proportionate to need.

Source: WHO European Review of Social Determinants of Health 2014

Employers therefore have a significant role in potentially reducing or exacerbating mental disorders among working age populations and should institute better employment practices to ensure that the organizational factors impacting mental health are under control.

In these uncertain times, how businesses respond will have a lasting impact on employee behaviour including, engagement, productivity and loyalty.

There are many uplifting examples of organizations that have displayed exemplary practices, with CEO's taking salary cuts, medical benefits getting extended, offering financial aid, virtual engagement sessions, workouts, supporting community small businesses etc.

Organizational Practices that can be adopted

#1   Periodic Dipstick Surveys

Since there's virtually no limit to the number of metrics that can be monitored and analyzed, it's important to identify the aspects of mental well-being that matter the most to your organization. As you look for data-driven solutions, focus on the metrics that are relevant to your unique culture and decision-making processes through periodic anonymous dipstick surveys.

Findings

Solution

Outcome

◆ Financial Stress

◆ Low Life Satisfaction

◆ Budget Coaching for Employees

◆ 47% increase in Life Satisfaction

#2   Drive Mental Health Inclusion

Ensure that your organization has a robust employee assistance programs (EAP) compliant with the regulatory laws. It should help your employees with personal or work-related problems, such as substance abuse, emotional distress, or occupational distress. You should hire an EAP service provider, based on the specific needs of your employees.

In addition, Wellness programs offering education and knowledge by experienced professionals, on a range of subjects to manage mental health should be frequently provided. You must keep a repository of video, e-modules, toolkits that employees can easily access.

In order to promote mental health inclusion, some organizations have made one counselling session per month mandatory for employees and leaders, while maintaining privacy and confidentiality.

#3   Leverage Employee Communities and Networks

Some firms have set up platforms for their employees to form virtual groups sharing common interests and hobbies. These groups are encouraged to self-drive discussions, sessions, learnings, videos, organize talks, create safe spaces, listening to each other, socializing and host healthy engagement competitions etc.

#4   Do not expect an ROI

While monitoring existing employee data trends, are useful to analyze decisions at a broad level, like what kind of program to launch, or whether they are satisfied with the current support. Many organizations however, refrain from individual data tracking - mental health counseling sessions, frequency, discussion points. In fact, their message would aim to communicate the offerings being a safe space, highlighting privacy and confidentiality.

Case in Point: Google's Blue Dot Initiative

Blue Dot is a network of Googlers who simply listen to those who reach out to them. It's not therapy, and they don't tell anyone how to fix their problems. They just want to make it OK to talk about mental health.

Founded in 2016 by Rachael Bleakley, she recalls,

"We knew there would be appetite for this but it was so hard to measure in the beginning; the last thing we wanted, was asking Googlers to tell us when they had a 'chat'.." "We also had to be careful we weren't putting Googlers in potentially difficult situations if they got into a chat that was slightly out of their depth."

Today, Blue Dot has seen popularity and success with this initiative, without keeping an eye on metrics. This in turn has translated into confidence by employees and created a strong employee network of concerned individuals.

- ✓ Googlers can select an appointment time with a Listener from any region that works for them

- ✓ Self-guided e-modules on Active Listening a hit with learners

- ✓ Passionate Googlers add the Blue Dot in email signatures, expecting a 'Hey what's that Blue Dot' conversation than 'Hey tell me about Mental Health'

#5 Specific Provisions for Diverse Groups

In this period of heightened uncertainty, a perceived lack of control and the spread of misinformation increases risks of bias, racism, discrimination that can impact people in the workplace and beyond. As human beings, we often have biases that allow us to efficiently make judgements and decisions without access to every piece of information. However, in the workplace when our minds are distracted, we must be even more careful that our biases do not contribute to the inequities or exclusion.

Biases typically exist in terms of gender, race, sexual orientation, culture, and we must be careful not to discriminate or exclude in other areas like parenthood, marital status, home environment, personality style, education, socio economic background etc.

Organizations must therefore make sure to strengthen inclusive practices for mental health of diverse groups, by keeping an eye on inclusivity of policies, group norms, protocols etc. They must also check-in periodically and offer mental health resources support.

#6 Modify Policies and Practices

To ensure that organizations have Mental Health as a priority, and to reduce stress on everyone, be as generous and flexible as possible in updating policies and practices in reaction to the pandemic and civil unrest. For example, you may need to take a closer look at your rules and norms around flexible hours, paid time off, performance management, paid-unpaid leaves, sabbaticals as well as relieving policies.

Case in Point: TrueFit Corporation

Kenneth Wheeler – Director, People and Culture at True Fit Corporation, highlights that most Start-Ups expect employees to keep operating at their peak performance without enough practices and time for recovery, which may further lead to poor physical and mental health. Practices they have incorporated include:

- Employee Engagement activities with the entire workforce – Stand-up comedies, Escape Games, IPL virtual matches

- Rolled out one relaxation holiday clubbed with one weekend every month to serve as an extended weekend

- Covid Insurance policy in addition to the existing Healthcare policy amount raised three times

#7   Invest in creating a pool of resources

To manage easy access to mental health resources, many organizations have invested in creating customised courses on their e-learning platforms based on the common issues and triggers within employees. Some of the resources that you can invest in include

– e-modules, webinars, guided meditations, app subscriptions, helpline, chat support, mentors, coaches, childcare forum, fitness plans, diet assistance, professional therapists
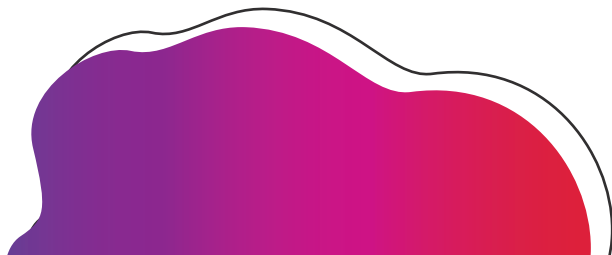
Team Health Practices to support wellbeing

Even in the most uncertain of times, the role of a manager remains the same: to support your team members. That includes supporting their mental health. The good news is that many of the tools you need to do so are the same ones that make you an effective manager.

1. Learn the Signs and Symptoms around Mental Health

Intentionally checking in with each of your direct reports on a regular basis is more critical than ever. Now, with so many people working from home, it can be even harder to notice the signs that someone is struggling. Go beyond a simple "How are you?" and ask specific questions about what support would be helpful. Wait for the full answer. Really listen, and encourage questions and concerns. Be careful not to be overbearing; which could signal a lack of trust or a desire to micromanage.

When someone shares that they're struggling, you won't always know what to say or do. What's most important is to make space to hear how your team members are truly doing and to be compassionate. They may not want to share much detail, which is completely fine. Knowing that there is a safe space where they can share their concerns is what matters.

Stay updated on some of the signs and changes in your team members to watch out for.

2. Conduct effective conversations around Mental Health

One silver lining of the pandemic is that it is attempting to normalize mental health conversations. Almost everyone has experienced some level of discomfort. But the universality of the experience will translate into a decrease in stigma only if people, especially people in power, share their experiences. Being honest about your mental health struggles as a leader opens the door for employees to feel comfortable talking with you about mental health challenges of their own.

When managers describe their challenges, whether mental-health-related or not, it makes them appear human, relatable, and brave. Research has shown that authentic leadership can cultivate trust and improve employee engagement and performance.

3. Assist in creating psychologically safe workplaces

We all respond differently when we encounter a big change. Some of us flip into "fix it" mode and become more transactional in encounters with employees. Some of us go quiet.

In times of crisis, it's essential to not lose sight of your human side or the organization's cultural values. Instead, channel them into positive strategies and actions that will protect your employees' well-being and improve your workplace culture over the long term.

Recognizing that your employees are human and that they will be more distracted right now. Acknowledge that this is a troubling time and that you anticipate that business might slow and employees will be less productive.

Being vulnerable and encouraging your employees to share their struggles would also help in creating psychological safety.

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4. Reinforce Healthy Habits for Mental Wellbeing

Verbally supporting mental health is a starting point, however, modelling it so that your team members feel they can prioritize self-care and set boundaries, will have a bigger advantage. More often than not, managers are so focused on their team's well-being and on getting the work done that they forget to take care of themselves.

Make self-care your priority by defining boundaries and model healthy behaviour.

For example, share that you're taking a walk in the middle of the day, having a therapy appointment, taking out time to play the guitar or prioritizing family time so that you don't burn out.

5. Leverage Peer Support in building Empathy

We mirror the behaviours of those around us, and leaders are uniquely positioned to serve as influential role models for compassionate acts and demonstrating care for people's basic needs. Showing interest in employees' feelings can be key to recovery, especially if such acts are visible and leaders cascade them throughout the organization. Checking in on individuals and their families, expressing gratitude either with words or small tokens of appreciation, setting up a company-wide thank-a-thon, or publicly recognizing compassionate acts taken by others are all gestures leaders can take to show empathy for those around them. Leaders should also encourage and raise the profile of compassionate acts on the part of employees to further foster a culture of empathy in the team.

Emotional support involves letting employees know that they are being cared for and that they should feel comfortable discussing work and non-work-related challenges. Encourage team members to connect with each other beyond work related topics. Inspire them to learn about what makes them unique, celebrate each other's wins, be sensitive and lend a helping hand to those who need one.

Assign buddies and peer coaches to add a layer of mutual support. Attending to every team member's needs will quickly exhaust the capacity of most managers. To distribute that responsibility, you could organize team members into pairs with each individual assigned as a buddy and peer coach to their assigned colleague. This shared leadership model creates a second layer of mutual support and guards against emotional isolation. Ask the buddies to check in daily and assess overall engagement and well-being.

6. Help alleviate Stress and Anxiety through Team Engagement and Fun Activities

Leaders who demonstrate hopefulness, team purpose and optimism in the future are better able to help their team members reconnect with meaning and purpose in work, especially under stressful conditions. Stress and fear freeze initiative, tie up creativity, and yield compliance instead of commitment. The constraints are often the enabling factor that spark innovation. We all are social beings and thrive when we are able to positively engage and contribute to the team. Invite your team to use team engagement platforms to host fun events, hobby competitions, use humour to build positive energy.

Here are some ideas you could take inspiration from:

- **Virtual Team Games** – Tambola, Trivia, Scribble

- **Create your own Quiz** – Kahoot, Mentimeter

- **Health Challenge** – Pushups, Number of Steps, Meditation

- Virtual Scavenger Hunt and Escape Games

- Create a story

- Talent Hunt

- Book Review

7. Host Café style informal Learning sessions

Who doesn't like to grab a cup of coffee and engage in an interesting conversation with their colleagues? Before beginning this activity, you can ask your employees to submit what they would be sharing with their peers. After that, you can randomly select some of the submissions and ask the employee to share it with others the next day. This way, you not only encourage your employees to learn new things but also instil respect for each other among your employees. Different team members could take turns to present on a subject of their choice. This is a great way to develop public speaking skills, intellectually stimulate and engage team members as well as add dimension of meaning to employees. Remember to make it a stress relieving interactive session for participants.

Some themes could be:

- Global Issues and Sustainable Goals
- The latest in Data Science, AI and ML
- Professional Social Media Networking

- Emotional Intelligence
- Building Resilience
- Wisdom from New Age Leaders

Self-Care Practices for Individuals

The COVID-19 pandemic differs from other mass trauma events in ways that make it especially toxic: large geographic scope, unpredictable in nature, and the sudden wide-spread disruption to our economies and health systems. What is particularly difficult about the pandemic is not knowing when or how it will end.

As scientists race to find a vaccine and public health officials wrestle with strategies to contain its infectious spread, coping mechanism experts say a critical survival strategy must include the practice of at-home self-care. If we don't learn how to manage ourselves, then how are we going to get through this, right?

Here are some Self-Care Strategies that individuals must practice on their own:

1. Be Compassionate with Yourself and those around you

Times of high stress can bring out both the best and the worst in people — it's wonderful when it brings out the best, but it's completely natural and understandable when it brings out the worst. At times like these, we must ensure that the words we use to speak to ourselves and others are compassionate. Try to be mindful of how you're feeling and acting on a given day, and forgive yourself for the times when you might not be at your best. Recognize that this is also the case for those around you, and work to forgive them too.

- ✓ It's OK if you cry in the shower
- ✓ It's OK if you're irritable to a loved one
- ✓ It's OK if you overeat
- ✓ It's OK if you did not exercise
- ✓ It's OK to want to stay in bed
- ✓ It's OK if someone said something to upset you
- ✓ It's OK if anxiousness and worry cloud your mind
- ✓ It's OK if you can't focus today

2. Focus on Your Circle of Control and Influence

The Circle of Concern, Control and Influence is a well-established concept by Stephen Covey and often cited by many. The Circle of Concern includes everything that you are personally concerned about, including government affairs, the environment, and even things closer to you like a neighbour's garden. These are elements that may impact daily life, but you have no direct influence over them. If you were to focus on these matters excessively, it drains your energy and impacts your attitude towards elements within your Circle of Influence and Control.

Your Circle of Influence, on the other hand, are things that you can directly influence, adjust, or change with a tangible outcome. These include your health, quality of work, and the charitable causes that you wish to support.

The Circle of Control, has things that you can directly control. For example –

✓ The food that you eat

✓ How you spend your time

✓ How you choose to act

✓ Who you spend time with

✓ How you plan and organize

✓ What thoughts you choose to reflect on

✓ How you spend your money

✓ What hobbies you take time out for

✓ What skills you work on
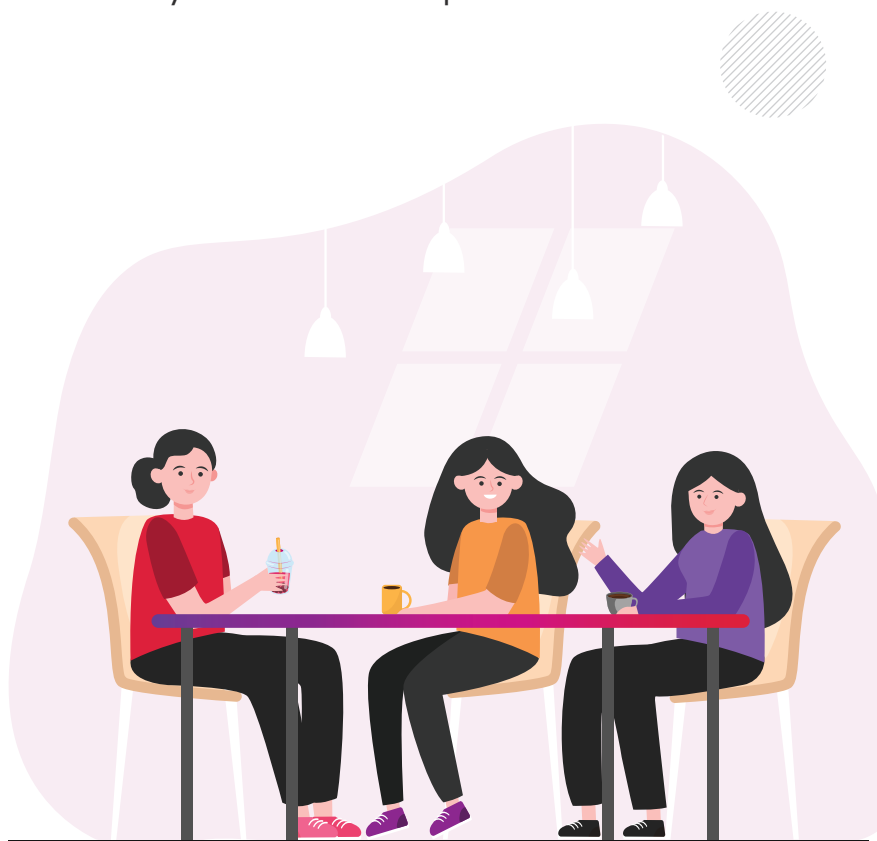
Stephen Covey explains "As long as we are working in our circle of concern, we empower the things within it to control us." However, when we focus on the circle of influence and the things we can control, our circle of concern shrinks! The impact of this can be tremendous, including less anxiety, more positive attitude and energy and influencing others' attitudes in a more positive way. When we focus on the circle of concern, worry can control us. When we focus on the circle of influence, we have the power!

3. Segment your Work life and Personal life

Different individuals have different preferences regarding whether to segment or integrate their work and family roles. Employees who prefer to create and maintain a clear partition to separate their work and family domains could avoid the impact of their work issues on their families. 'Segmenters' prefer to create highly impermeable boundaries to maintain separation between work and family, while "Integrators" prefer to maintain highly permeable homework boundaries to blend work and family aspects.

With the transition to Work from Home for employees, the lack of segmentation seems to have an adverse effect on the mental well-being, quality of sleep, tiredness, fatigue and feelings of productiveness.

Planning specific tasks in advance to segment work and personal life would help create a clear divide in our minds, which would then translate into increased productivity.

The idea is to have a routine to log into work at a specific time as well as log out at a regular time. Here are a few things you can do to segment:

- Wake up at the time same as you would when going to work

- Get your morning chores done early before you log in to your work day – Breakfast and Lunch Preparation, Spouse and Children's chores, Household chores

- Shower and get ready for the work day by changing into work clothes (even if no video presence is required)

- Log in to work at a regular time in a dedicated corner in the house. Do not work in bed.

- Manage your work space ergonomics for optimal productivity – Chair with back support, Desk at eye level, Proper lighting etc.

- Take scheduled and allotted breaks for managing domestic tasks

- Log out from work by making the switch from work laptop/ desktop, work clothes, work space and mind-set at a regular time

- Unwind with short stretches and walks and do not allow work to interfere with personal time

4. Don't Import your Work and Personal worries

With work and personal time increasingly getting blurred and overlapping, we often find ourselves worrying about work when not working and vice versa; we are worries about personal tasks while at work. Physical distancing does give your mind the signals to switch off; unfortunately, a lot of us find the Off Switch a little harder to reach out to than others.

Often, there would be a trigger in the form of an interruption – whatsapp text, emails, a call, the doorbell, children, spouse, siblings, app notifications etc. While, in other cases, an individual may be stressing about an important meeting or task.

In either of the cases, when you find your mind wandering into the other domain, you may want to make a note of the thought in a diary, journal, planner or a to-do list to address it at the right time later.

The second step would be to minimise the external distractions as much as possible. You could try going on using the silent mode, invisible on instant messaging, turn off app notifications during work timings. Similarly, turn off email, work text messages during your personal time. Although, this may not be successful if you are in a role that requires you to be available throughout.

5. Use Time Batching and Time Blocking to optimize 'Flow State'

Time batching is a productivity system that helps individuals focus on a group of similar tasks during a dedicated time period without interruptions. Batching time helps minimize distractions and interruptions for more concentrated workflow and attention to detail.

Time batching is effective because it builds structure and boundaries around blocks of time so that you can dive deep into specific tasks without interruptions that break up your workflow.

There are typically two types of tasks you can batch:

Low Productive Energy Tasks: Require lower levels of productive energy, ideal for short work sprints

High Productive Energy Tasks: Require high levels of productive energy, minimal distraction, high focus for longer periods of time

By time batching and blocking off set periods of time for these two types of tasks, you can achieve a state of flow, which is a mental state where you work efficiently and make meaningful progress toward a goal. Some people call this the "Flow State" as well.

6. Create and communicate Boundaries to reduce Decision Fatigue

Coined by Roy F. Baumeister, social psychologist and author of Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength, 'Decision Fatigue' occurs after a series of tasks requiring decision-making which results in low self-control and willpower. He discovered in a variety of studies that decision fatigue depletes self-control which results in emotional stress, underachievement, lack of persistence, and even failures of task performance.

In the absence of a routine, you may find yourself realizing that you've been in back-to-back meetings without getting around that important deliverable. Without boundaries in your daily schedule, it'll be easier to fall back into those bad habits like turning off your work laptop but then immediately picking up your phone to scroll through social media. Physically closing your laptop at the end of the workday and avoiding your email inbox first thing in the morning are two very effective ways for setting boundaries between your work and personal life.

Create boundaries in advance and communicate them to the stakeholders; – colleagues, seniors, different location teams etc. in order to miss important tasks and be more productive.

Similarly, you must set boundaries for your family members, friends and neighbours as well. For example, you may want to choose the grocery delivery slot for post work time, or make sure your children have their needs, toys, meals prepared in advance etc.

7. Nurture a safe Support System of people to talk to in difficult times

At a time when we most need our employees to come together and adapt to a truly unique set of circumstances, it is quite possible to see a rise in team conflicts, working styles and disagreements. This combines with loneliness and isolation, is enough to take a toll on the mental health of individuals.

It's important for us to have a support system of individuals with diverse backgrounds to talk to and listen to. You can start with being there for individuals who need your advice and support. Be it work colleagues, old school and college batch-mates, family, mentors, coaches or professional therapists.

A lot of Mental Health service providers and coaches host regular talks, webinars and interactions with interested viewers. You could stay updated on their LinkedIn pages and learn from the experts as well as pose any questions you may have as well.

There are some online anonymous groups where people can chat about difficult situations. While chat and talk support are offering by many mental health service providers.

You could also make time for the corridor talks just the way you did when you were going to the office.

The important part here would be to nurture and gradually grow a safe group of people who you know you can reach out to when you need to talk.

8. Develop a Self-Care Toolkit

A lot of successful self-care strategies involve a sensory component - touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell. You could work on creating a handy list of sensory components that give a sense of safety, comfort and positivity.

Taking time out to take comfort regularly every day, as well as in times of stress, would be a productive strategy to invest in.

You should try coming up with at least one thing for each sensory component. This would look different for everyone. For example:

- **For touch, a soft blanket or stuffed animal**

- **For taste, a favorite snack or drink**

- **For sight, a picture of loved ones or from a fun vacation**

- **For hearing, make a playlist of your favorite songs**

- **For smell, a scented candle or essential oil diffuser**

Some things can engage more than one sense, like putting on a nice-smelling lotion (touch and smell) or painting in a coloring book (touch and sight).

ACTION STEPS:

- Ensure Organizational practices are well designed basis the unique needs and culture of the organization

- A robust resource pool is available for employees to access

- Leaders and Managers model enabling behavior and spread awareness

- Individuals are prepared with tools and resources for Self-Care

SECTION D: INSTITUTIONALIZE

How to Institutionalise Mental Health Practices

While there are many down sides to the COVID 19 pandemic, there are some significant upsides as well. One of the positive impacts, is that it made the world take mental health seriously, build empathy towards each other and drive initiatives towards mental health inclusion by the government, organizations, voluntary providers and the society at large.

Stewart Butterfield, Slack's CEO, told his employees, "We got this. Take care of yourselves, take care of your families, be a good partner. It is fine to work irregular or reduced hours. It is fine to take time out when you need it..." Currently, 100% of Slack's more than 2,000 employees in 18 offices around the world are working from home. Beyond the green light for flexible working hours, employees were also given a $500 stipend to make their new home work-stations ergonomic and comfortable.

Organizations that demonstrate commitment to the well-being of their workers at this time are more likely to be rewarded with increased employee loyalty, reduced levels of stress and higher levels of productivity, while organizations slow to address sick leave, paid family leave and mental health programs are now realizing the cost of failing to prioritize workforce well-being is less resilience and a weaker market position.

While it is uncertain about what a COVID 19 free future looks like, it is certain that the impact of the havoc created by the virus is sure to be felt on the world economy for years to come.

Organizations have to be prepared to manage the VUCA future and the challenges it poses with making the practices sustainable and institutionalise different ways and practices with a broader long-term approach.

Highlighted below are the ways which you can ensure that the practices are sustainable:

Integrate Mental Health Measures in People Management Metrics

Highlight the importance of ensuring that all employees have periodic check-ins and assistance. The signs may not be visible always and robust preventive practices should be an ongoing measure.

Regular Dipstick Checks

Include a monthly/ quarterly anonymous dipstick survey, to keep a close eye on the movement of the parameters and targeted interventions based on the findings.

Weekly/ Monthly Discussion Forums

Continue to have regular discussion forums on the key findings, decisions that need to be taken, additional resources as well as refresher awareness sessions.

Regular Coaching and Counseling

Communicate and promote the coaching and counseling services by internal and external experts. Lead by example and have managers and leaders take advantage of the services themselves as well as share their experiences to their teams.

Recommend e-modules and resources every month

Spotlight one e-learning module every month, that focuses on one aspect of mental health. You can supplement this with monthly campaigns and reward and recognition as well.

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