

Employees' Wellness and Company Health

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In India, many organizations boast of 10 to 100 PPM (parts per million) defects of productivity, high achievement, quarterly profit, overall growth, market position, offshore projects and expansion plans. How many companies truly care and devote an exclusive department for its employees' wellness program? In today's business world you have chief information officers, chief financial officers and chief operating officers; why not add one to the matrix for Employee Wellness?

All that we have seen so far is a mere HR or the 'all-in-one' Personnel department that takes care of the attendance and sanctioning sick leave of the employees. Once a year it arranges for medical checkup and that's it. Beyond that they have absolutely no exercise on how to deal with staff wellness and improve the long-term health of the company. They mistake Wellness for Staff Welfare and attribute this to providing lunch, tea, celebrating birthdays, organizing tours and events. How many leading major companies in India do have a special research department to attend to the mental, physical health and risk status of the employees? Please don't relate with the medical wing and first aid. Employee Wellness Department is a unique department. An experienced person in the corporate landscape usually heads it as Chief Wellness Officer who is well versed in handling wellness program, can assess healthcare versus productivity costs and draw behaviour-condition relationship models. This department has continuous work and not seasonal. He is of course a doctor who keeps the employees healthy, happy and productive. This position should not be confused with Chief People Officer who

is the steering force of HR and executes workforce practices to achieve the objectives.

I admire the system in the US that is properly followed with a full-fledged department that concentrates only in the employee health, wellness appraisal, occupational risk forecast, appropriate health coverage, prevention and planning tool. Large or medium sized company, their presence is directly related with all current and future plans of the company projects. They are the right people to carry out workers' life evaluation on job satisfaction, work quality, health behaviour, emotional and physical health. In India, officers in Administration and Human Resources often refer an employee to ESI or any major medical institution to take care of his/her health. Despite recommendations, there has been no physical presence that speaks about the individual well-being plan and strategy to be recommended unless the work environment is hazardous or otherwise challenging. The EWD panel with behavioral economists, psychologists and medical officer can intervene, study cases, suggest remedy and design strategy to be followed by the HR and Departmental heads. In the US and Far East, this department is not at the theoretical level but physically existing and functioning to its core.

The EWD can augment plans to improve efficiency, work quality and quantity, reduce absenteeism due to hospitalization, improve retention, reduce replacement cost and reduce company expenses on employee medical bills. As the HR people always question the employees, dominate over and tend to suppress their voice, they cannot be a right fit to

present the perfect health picture of reality. Benchmarking is possible in this area provided the companies follow a matching scenario in basic access, culture, magnitude and nature of industry. The best model has to be customized by the EWD separately upon research. Similar to the fiscal balance sheet, the analysis of medical-productivity cost trend over a 5-year period is advisable.

In most private sectors in our country, in the annual CTC, the percentage of medical component usually varies and the net pay decreases accordingly besides statutory deduction. At the end of the fiscal year, a healthy employee is forced to present hefty fictitious medical bills of hospitalization for several thousands to claim his part of CTC due. Why this unhealthy practice of paying an employee his own money in a wrong way by stressing him unwillingly? Demanding fake bills to claim the actual due is something not advisable but followed by and large in India. Instead of this, monthly payouts can be on flat basis on salary and any extra claim above the ceiling can be monitored and recommended by this EWD committee. Since taxation is a transparent tool, fake bills shall be ignored totally by EWD as these don't account for extra medical expenses incurred by the organization. Total estimated Health care-Productivity cost trend is arrived in a natural way. This intervention planning tool has its own assessing capabilities. This would help improve culture, work timings, employee retention, give clean chit on the company behaviour, avoid mental stress to employees from fake bills and improve overall productivity savings. EWD can offer advice on future projects, realign the process and guide the Finance and Manufacturing teams based on the existing practices, employees' feedback and overall assessment.

Initially any management in India would look at the EWD as unwanted honorary department that swallows without ROI. But MNCs have been following this program with utmost reverence. For the program cost, the ROI it gives is satisfaction to employee population, better workforce engagement, improved retention, reduction in medical cost,

enabled stress management and fills any leftover gap in employees' relations. Personally I have seen many employees in top notch IT/ITES companies slogging for 58 to 65 hours per week with black ringed eyes and bile acidity. A tricky question is asked in the interview as to how good they are pressure resistive. To bag the offer, the candidates say affirmatively at that moment. The fact is their high performance has degraded within two years. While visualizing the bank balance and the credit of hefty salary every month, their energy boosted and sustained only for the first year but gradually approached to zero in the second.

Without healthy stamina to carry on with the regular work, the individual productivity score goes down drastically. Ultimately all earnings go to doctor and job dissatisfaction is that remains. At the maximum, HR can issue yellow card for the fall in productivity and cannot look into EWD factors. Unwilling to lose the salary they got used to and unable to withstand the unbearable pressure, the employees undergo mental torture pushing towards deterioration. Against the clause of confidentiality agreement and without the knowledge of employer, the staff carries home the unfinished extra work on laptop only to be shared by spouse or outsourced in capsules to friends. In this context, do you think setting up of EWD would be regarded most likely in our country? Enlightenment is needed for the top management now and to those with old school of principles.

Though the eminent HRD person, Late Dr.Udai Pareek said long ago that HR has come of age in India, I am of the view that HR has not yet earned a right place of respect and status recognition. Only those HR managers with influential proximity to the management can take it forward. Else the HR which has very little power to offer advice would view EWD as redundant without a second thought and a domain for the wellness program is a mirage. It is ripe time to look beyond the monetary costs and improve the health of the company through its employees' wellness. ROI is going to be surprisingly high than expected. ●

