

Beyond stress management: towards integral wellness

Abstract

The prevalence of acute stress and stress-related problems in the corporate world has forced corporate management to the need for a greater attention to employee wellbeing. But most of the wellness practices of the corporate world are peripheral. The concept of “Stress-management” is a limited approach to corporate health. Similarly, some of the corporate wellness practices like in-house gyms, picnics or flexitime, though helpful, are cosmetic remedies which try to alleviate symptoms but do not heal the malady at its roots. The long-term solution to the chronic problem of corporate stress lies in building a culture of integral wellness.

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The four-fold wellness

In a holistic perspective wellness may be defined as the inner and outer felicity, which an individual feels in the act of living, working and interacting in a community. This experience of wellness, to be integral, has to embrace all the four dimensions of the human organism: Physical, Vital, Mental and Spiritual. The physical is the material sheath or body or the material environment. The vital is the source of our sensations, emotions, desire and the vital energy, anima, which animates our body and mind. The mental is the source of our thoughts, perceptions, ideas, ideals and values. The spiritual is the deepest and innermost source of our individuality. Here is a brief outline of the nature or content of four-fold wellness and the path to achieve them.

Physical well-being

- i. Regular exercise and right nutrition
- ii. A material environment which is gentle, pleasing and harmonious to senses
- iii. Lots of fresh and clean air, sunlight and open space
- iv. Ecological harmony and attunement with physical nature
- v. Certain amount of outer peace, security and prosperity

Vital and emotional well-being

- i. Joy and freedom of action, creation, achievement, play, adventure and exploration
- ii. Selfless service to the common good of all.
- iii. Inner and outer harmony and mutual goodwill among people
- iv. A collective environment and a system of government which is kindly compassionate, fair and just.

Mental well-being

- i. Clarity and mutual understanding
- ii. Peace, tranquility and benevolence in the emotional and mental consciousness
- iii. A certain amount of rest, relaxation and leisure and sufficient inner space to pursue our higher evolution in the psychological and spiritual domains.

Spiritual well-being

Awakening of the spiritual self in us and a harmonious integration of the body, life and mind around this spiritual core of our being. When the psychological environment of the community is saturated with these factors of integral wellness, especially force of Peace, Goodwill, Understanding and Compassion then it has a beneficial impact on the health and performance of people in the organization. On the other hand, if the psychological environment of the community is full of anxiety, tension, ill will, mistrust, suspicion, then it will have an adverse effect on the wellbeing and performance of people and no amount of in house gyms, picnics and parties or courses in stress-management can neutralize the negative impact. So educating the work force on the concept and practice of holistic wellbeing should be an integral part of performance management.

The strategic implications

This brings us to the question how to implement this vision in the corporate life. Here are some strategic initiative and principles for evolving corporate wellness policies and practices based on the integral vision of wellness which we have discussed earlier.

- i. The first step is an attitudinal change. The employee has to be viewed not as a knowledge-skill engine for achieving the bottomline or deadlines of the organization but as a living soul with a body, life and mind progressing towards a divine goal which includes the realization of her highest and total human potential.
- ii. There must be a balanced approach to performance and wellness or in otherwords an equal emphasis on performance as well as wellness. The corporate world makes a systematic, scientific and planned attempt to achieve business goals like productivity, profit, quality, customer service or innovation. But a similar attempt is lacking in the domain of human wellbeing. If the corporate world want to create a more humane and healthy work-place there must be a similar systematic, scientific and planned attempt towards a continuous enhancement of human wellbeing in all the four dimensions which are discussed in this article.
- iii. The concept, principles and practice of total wellness have to become an integral part of the education and training programme for employees at all the levels of the corporate hierarchy.

- iv. The backbone of mental health is inner peace and equanimity. Every employee has to be taught how to maintain and establish inner peace and equanimity under all circumstances. The methods and practices of Indian yoga can be of great help in this task.
- v. What is Peace to inner being, Security is to outer life. A reckless hire-and-fire culture, with constant downsizing, where people live in perpetual anxiety over their jobs is inimical to wellness. A reasonable job-security is essential for achieving sustained wellness in the corporate life. If this is not entirely possible in the present fast changing business environment, the corporate world has to evolve a more compassionate and humane alternative to downsizing. For example industry associations like NASSCOM or FICCI in India, networking with other institutions like placement services or NGO's can evolve a social security net which can help employees who have lost their jobs due to downsizing find alternative employment or in upgrading their skills.
- vi. The managements of organizations have to make a conscious effort to create a human community based on the triune principles of French revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity which are the foundations of social sustainability and wellbeing.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.