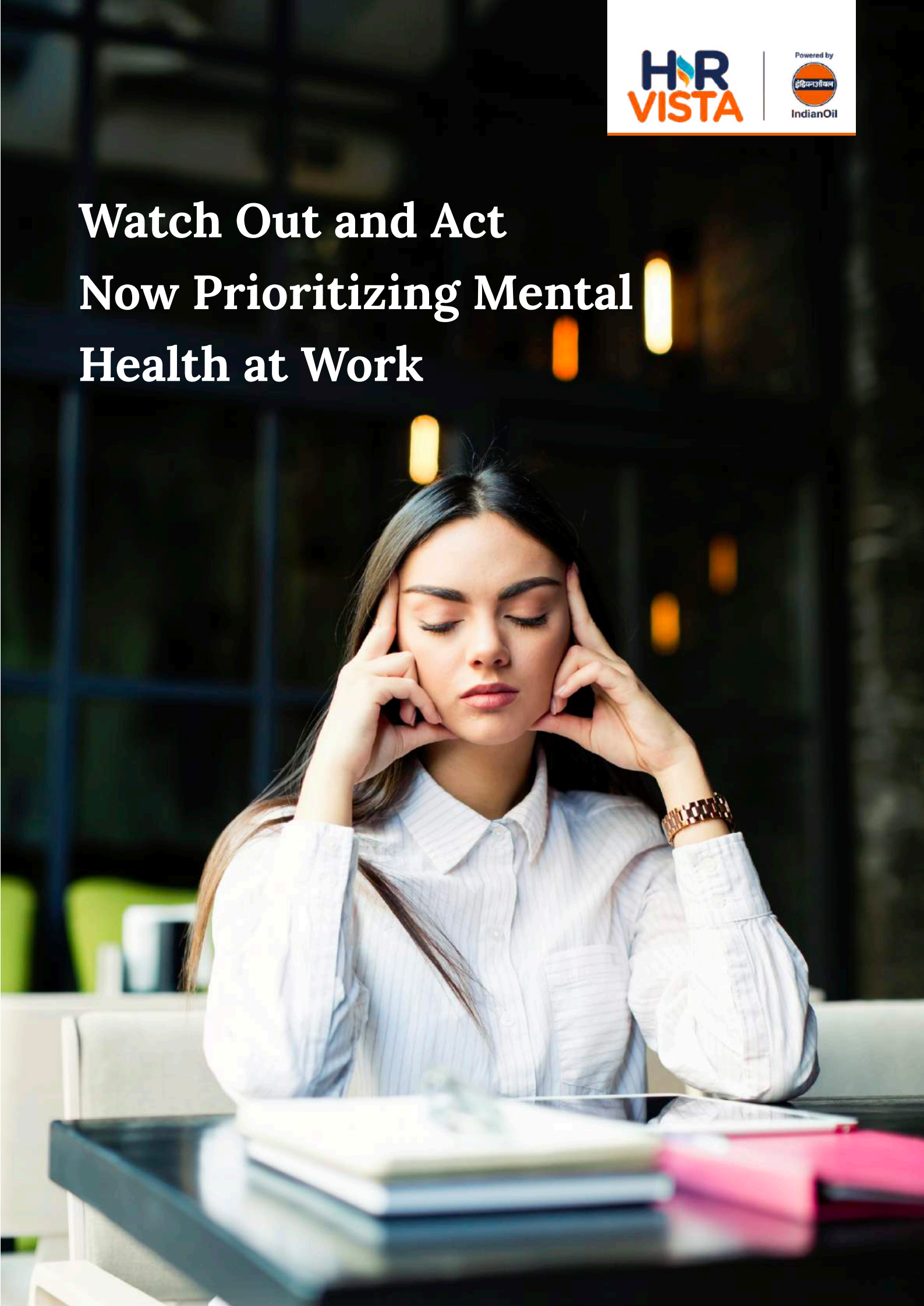
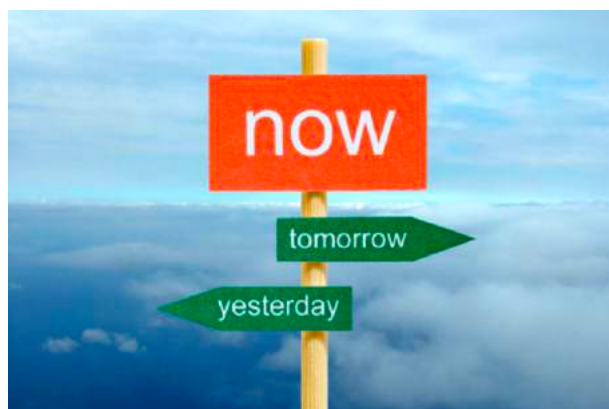


Watch Out and Act Now Prioritizing Mental Health at Work



Contents

Kissa Kursi Ka	6
Prioritizing Mental Health at Work	9
Title of the Manuscript	11
Love yourself the way you want others to do	15
Pursuing a Passion Outside of Work for Mental Wellness	18
Stargazing and Astrophotography	20
Moonlighting in Employment	23
Digital Wellbeing Way towards Mental Health	26
Practicing the Power of NOW	27
Health or Help what will you prioritize?	30
"Watch Out and Act Now!: Prioritizing Mental Health at Work"	32
Effective Time Management	34
The Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995- A Saga of Litigation	37
Role of Hr in ensuring a vibrant workplace	41
Embracing the Path: A Story of Leadership, Transformation and Adventure	43



Watch Out and Act Now! Prioritizing Mental Health at Work	44
Silver lining	46
Psychological safety in a team: Whose responsibility?	48
Promoting mental health at workplaces in India	50





Ranjan Kumar Mohapatra

Director (HR), IndianOil

Dear Readers of HR Vista,

As we all know, this fast-paced era has brought a world of conveniences and technological marvels. However, it has also made people more susceptible to various lifestyle diseases. Stress levels are rising, affecting people's physical and mental health worldwide, and triggering multiple psychological challenges. The sudden transition to the new normal has exacerbated these stress-related issues. Without timely and appropriate interventions, these psychological and emotional challenges can escalate into complications that impact wellness, work-life balance, and performance. Thus, I must commend the editorial team of HR Vista for bringing out an issue on mental health at the workplace. I believe sharing best practices such as these may bring about positive cultural shifts in the Indian HR fraternity.

At IndianOil, we have been focusing on developing a robust system to handle employees' physical health issues. We have provisions like nominated hospitals, corporation doctors, and part-time doctors to provide support in this regard. Intensifying our focus on mental health, we launched the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to support and guide employees in dealing with issues that could adversely affect their well-being and impact their on-the-job performance. I believe HR Vista would be the apt platform to facilitate the dissemination of best practices like the EAP can bring about positive cultural shifts in the Indian HR fraternity.

As Aristotle said, "It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light." The onus is on Team HR to help our teammates look towards light amidst the gloom. And that can be done when we prioritize mental health and create a supportive work culture.

I believe this edition of HR Vista will be a resounding acknowledgement on behalf of the Indian HR fraternity that sustained business success will depend on how we rise above disruptions through a human-centric focus.

In this edition of HR Vista, we have brought together diverse perspectives and experiences on the theme of mental health at the workplace, which I am sure will nourish your mind and soul. Whether you are an HR professional, a manager, or an employee, there is something in it to inspire, inform and motivate you to take action on mental health in your workplace. If the ideas and thoughts shared here to provoke some workplace transformation for you, we would be delighted.

Happy browsing!



Manish Patil

Editor-In-Chief, HR Vista

Executive Director (HR), IndianOil

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the current edition of HR Vista, where our writers bare their minds and souls on the criticality of mental health at work. HR professionals are responsible for creating a safe and supportive environment for our employees to thrive. And that process begins with appreciating the critical role that mental health plays in the overall well-being of our employees. With the increasing demands of the workplace, prioritizing mental health and ensuring that our employees have the support they need to thrive is more important than ever. Further the era of Covid-19 has taught us the ultimate lesson of how the unpredictability & suddenness of change creates an adverse impact on mental health of employees.

With growing awareness of the impact of mental health on overall productivity, many Indian organizations are taking diligent steps to reach out to employees on the sensitive issue of mental health. Companies recognize the need to prioritize mental health in the workplace, from providing access to mental health resources and creating open and supportive work cultures to implementing empathetic practices and policies. By creating a safe space for employees to discuss their mental health, we can break down the

stigma and encourage people to seek the support they need.

As such, it is more important than ever for organizations to provide support and resources for their employees. However, there are still several workplace myths, misinformation, glass ceilings and taboos that we need to rise above if the mental health issue is to be given its due priority. That is where the mutual sharing of ideas and experiences on platforms like HR Vista is so vital. By sharing and learning from each other's experiences, we can nurture that aspirational work culture that recognizes mental well-being as the cornerstone of business sustainability.

Before concluding, let me thank our esteemed readers for their continued support and engagement with HR Vista. Team HR Vista looks forward to your feedback and ideas on how we can continue to improve and provide valuable content for the Indian PSU HR community.

Happy Reading!

Editorial Team



Shri Ranjan Kumar Mohapatra
Patron



Prof. Radha Rani Sharma
Advisory Editor



Shri Manish Patil
Editor-In-Chief



Dr. M R Das
Editor



Shri Amit Gupta
Associate Editor

Consulting Editors



Mr. Pratyush Bannerjee



Ms. Vartika Dutta
IIM Amritsar



Ms. Vinti Mehrotra
Sage



Ms. P S Deepa
Deloitte

Industry Coordinators



Ms. Anubha Agarwal
EIL



Dr. Asheesh Srivastava
GAIL



Ms. Ritu Mathur
BPCL



Ms. Mehak Uppal
HPCL



Mr. Debasish Mukherjee
ONGC

IndianOil Coordinators



Mr. Tanmay Mukherjee
IndianOil



Ms. Pashmina Pusdekar
IndianOil



Ms. Kavitha Ravikumar
IndianOil



Ms. Naveli Singh
IndianOil



Mr. Dipdyuti Chowdhury
IndianOil



Mr. Mudit Shukla
IndianOil



Ms. Sonal Karki
IndianOil



Ms. Swetha Rathod
IndianOil



Mr. Angshuman Bhattacharya
IndianOil

Kissa Kursi Ka



By - **Dr Prashant Pradhan, IOCL**
pradhanpm@indianoil.in

Dr Prashant Pradhan

Senior Medical Officer, IOCL Hospital Digboi

An Orthopedic surgeon since last 6 years, healing broken bones and dealing patients with joints pain and back pain.

Email: pradhanpm@indianoil.in

Abstract

Post covid, work from home has become a trend which has led to an increase in people complaining of back and neck pain. Even before the covid wave, employees with desk jobs used to be constant sufferers of back and neck problems. A lot of this has to do with the posture and human anatomy. Humans evolved from apes. As we developed from four-legged to two-legged beings, it was the SPINE which had to take the brunt. As the work can't be neglected,

there are certain things which are in our control and which can reduce the discomfort upto some extent.

Main Content

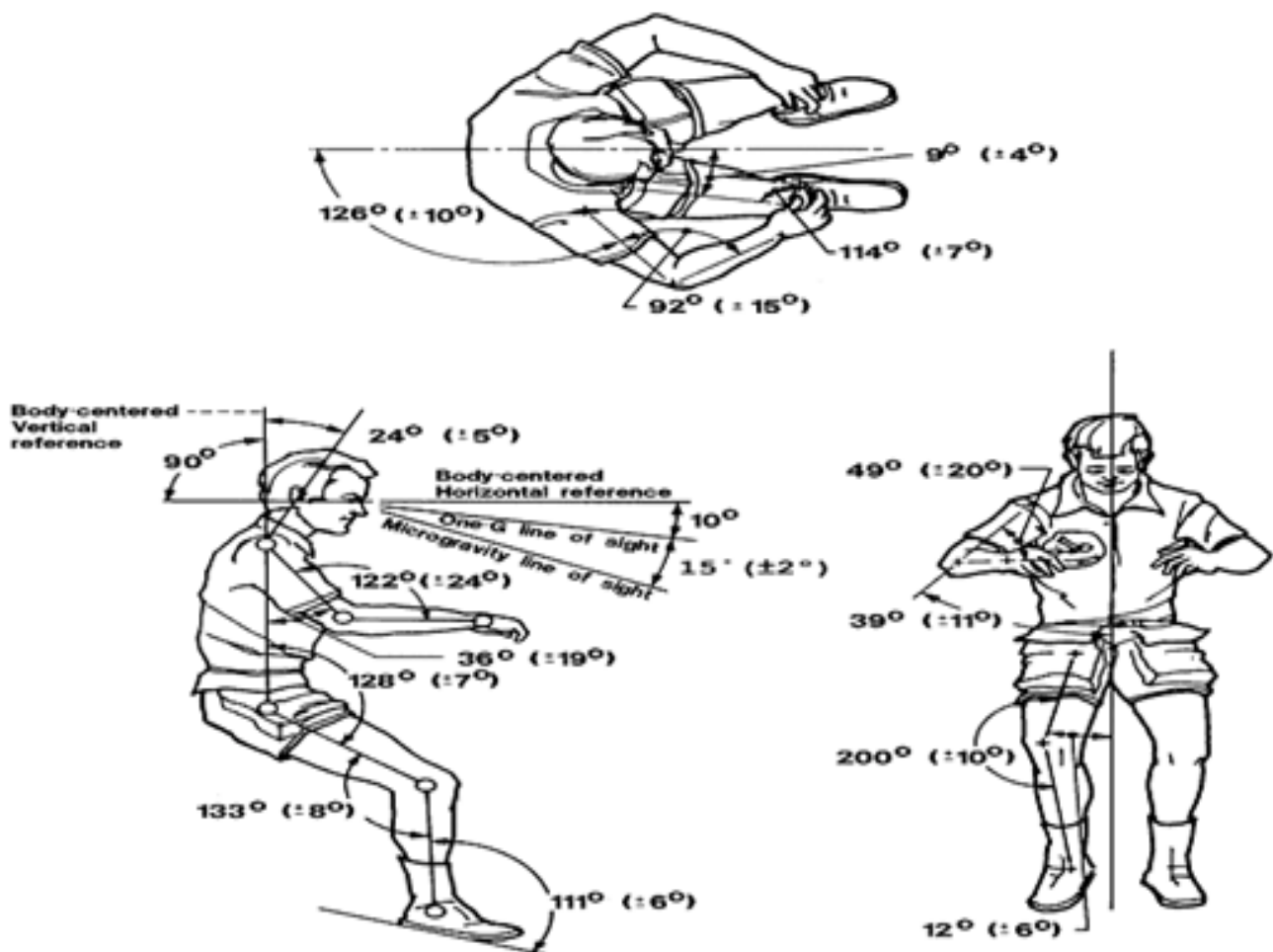
It was very appropriate when Dr Jug in Dear Zindagi says, "How many chairs do we check out before we find that one chair?" and draws similarities between choosing the right life-partner and choosing the right chair.[1] If not for all, at least for those office goers who spend maximum of their time on their chair in front of computer.(May be the total number of hours they spend on their chair, throughout their lifetime, exceeds the time spent with their spouse)



Neutral Body Posture

What form does the human body naturally assume when all physical influences, including the pull of gravity, stop affecting it? NASA conducted research using Skylab, America's first space station. Photos of crew members were taken while they physically relaxed in the microgravity conditions of space. These photos demonstrated that the body automatically entered into a particular posture with certain angles made by the joints and certain positions assumed by the limbs. NASA

later published specifications for what it called neutral body posture. [2]The neutral body posture (NBP) is the posture the human body naturally assumes in zero gravity. This offloads musculoskeletal stress and reduces pressure on the diaphragm and spine. Neutral body posture supports the natural curvature of the spine and body achieves equidistant spacing of the vertebrae and an ideal balance in the muscles, tendons and ligaments.



NASA - NASA TM-2003-104805 Evaluation of Neutral Body Posture on Shuttle Mission STS-57 (SPACEHAB-1)

So, here are five features you must look for in your life partner (read 'Office Chair'):

1. Adjustable lumbar support: should maintain a healthy lower back curve.
2. Adjustable armrests: should support elbows and forearms while positioning hands close to the mouse and keyboard.
3. Reclining backrest: should allow a recline range of 90° to 130° which reduces spinal pressure.
4. Height of seat: should allow the user's feet to plant onto the floor or a footrest.
5. Depth of seat: should be deep enough so that the back of the knees do not touch the front of the seat.



It's not an easy task to find that one chair and it may take multiple attempts but that should not deter you from keep trying. It may sound a bit harsh but some of us may never find the perfect chair and will have to accept it. So, in that case you need to avoid sitting for prolonged periods and take frequent breaks from sitting or else arrange a standing workstation. And I am sure while you are reading all this, your mind is still imagining the chair as a metaphor of life partner. WAKE UP!!

Along with that, try to do some DESKERISES in between work such as knee tucks, push up on the desk, wall push ups, wall squats etc. Simple stretching or 'angdai lena' also goes a long way in relaxing your muscles. So do that often even if you don't look as good as Aishwarya or Karishma. Take a frequent stroll down the lobby and stop worrying about what your gossiping fellow colleagues will say about it. Happy Working.

References

1. "Finding the right chair or a right person to love is tough, isn't it?" Dear Zindagi Take 5 : Find Your Chair
<https://youtu.be/Y3DlwnW-SmM>
2. <https://www.nasa.gov/offices/oct/40-years-of-nasa-spinoff/neutral-body-posture-specifications>
3. <https://ergonomictrends.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/what-is-an-ergonomic-chair.jpg>

Prioritizing Mental Health at Work



By - **Mr. Sushil Kumar, IOCL**
sushilk@indianoil.in

With technological advancement followed by the global pandemic situation we are spending more time in front of the screens than ever before with hybrid working or work from home culture. In today's age there is unlimited exposure, bombardment of information, which creates the continuous thoughts and emotions inside our minds. This constant thoughts and emotions inside our mind results in constant noise in our heads resulting in anxiety and stress in human physio system. This results in poor decision making due to poor brain waves. The poor brain waves may results in poor sleep, & memory, mental disorders such as Anxiety & depression, lowering of attention span and an inability to act with awareness. This effects the decision making process in case of urgency!

It is essential to have intuitive abilities and better decisions making power or soft skills like communications or negotiations.

Often we caught in a chain of thoughts or emotions where we can imagine scenarios that do not exist or have a low chance of manifesting. There is game play of emotions and thought pattern that keep you tossing up and down and minds totally gets engaged in it. So your mind goes either in past or in future. In the past we regret and for future we get anxious. So our mental health gets effected which in turn effects our body. It effects have intuitive abilities and better decisions making power or soft skills like communications or negotiations.

It is like stretching the rubber continuously without relaxing it. Relaxing the mind is very important. Once mind relaxed then only we can give our energy to the work for good output.

So in today's world, prioritizing mental health is very important for enjoying every moment of life and growing through it. Prioritizing mental health is important to avoid feeling low. The feeling low results

in less enthusiasm to do any thing in life. Sometimes even the basic daily routing also begins to feel heavy and one start avoiding social interactions. So prioritizing mental health is very important nowadays. The attitude towards our life needs to be changed. Are we just here for materialistic gain. A balance approach is needed, need to change the life style.

Prioritizing mental health is nothing but disciplining the own life. By applying the disciplines of yoga to the body as well as the mind, we can lead emotionally healthier lives. Some life style practices, breathing exercises known as Prayanaama or Sudarshan Kriya can bring the equanimity in the mind. The Bhagavad Gita, an ancient holy scripture of our country says "Samatvam Yog Uchyate" which means yoga is that which brings equanimity. It's a well known fact that in every one's life has ups and down. The ups and down can come in the form of external events or situations or through persons which results in emotional disorders. The regular practices of Yogic practices eg Asaans, prayanamas, Sudarshan Kriya (a breathing rhythmic practice), meditations can bring the mind slowly to that state where we are immune to praises, or insult, successes or failures enjoying every moment of life and growing through it. This state of mind should be full of enthusiasm but not of over excitement and unrealistic expectations. Inculcating these qualities in our life is essentially required which can happen when we start practicing yogic practices.

In Patanjali Yoga Sutra: Yogic practices is explained as "Yoga Chitta vritti nirodha" that means that yoga is that which can restrain the thoughts waves. The mind which gets entangled in thoughts patterns needs to be regulated. Awareness of thought pattern is important and once this happens then skill in action develops.

Another definition in Bhagvad gita "Yogah karmasu kaushalam means skill in action is yoga. What ever we do in the life, it has to be done with skills, to deal with

different situations in life or in work. With yogic practices, intuitive abilities develop and one can start making better decisions, be it soft skills like communications or negotiations.

How to develop that :

Through Yogic practices which teaches both physical disciplines (Physical hygiene, Asanas) and mental disciplines (Yama and Niyamas and Meditations).
When to start : Right now : Attha Yoga Anusasanam.

It helps in improving the level of Serotonin hormone and we feel good. Yogic practices are very ancient and has been practiced since thousands of years. With practice our oxytocin level rises and this creates an upward spiral and move towards positivity. It heals your emotional health and get rids if unwanted thoughts that are unhealthy. Yogic practices heals your physical body, settle body and casual body.

(Sushil Kumar)
DGM(HSE), BD,CO
PF : 29129

Yogic practices are without any side effects. It has a capacity to heal our emotional disturbances. The healthy flow of energy happens. With health flow of energy , harmony between mind, body and soul happens . It manages the traffic inside our own head.

The various asanas suggested for office sitting personal are , starting from OM chanting, followed by asanas for spine eg pendulum stretches, Marjari asana (Cat stretch) , Ardhashakrasana (Standing backward bend), Hastapadasana (Standing forward bend) , Vakrasana (Spinal twist) , Bhujangasana (Cobra pose) , Viprit Karni , Bhramari and Nadi Shodhana (Alternate nostril breathing) etc .

So let us invest you one hour daily to take care of your rest 23 hours. Let us have a harmony between body, mind and soul so as to improve your mental health.

Singed Declaration:

The content is original and unpublished / or not under consideration for publication with other journals

The perils of success



By - Mr. Dipdyuti Chowdhury, IOCL
dipdyuti@indianoil.in

Dipdyuti Chowdhury

DGM (Security), Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. Guwahati, Assam, India.

Mostly worked in administrative and logistics aspects of oil marketing.

Email: dipdyuti@indianoil.in

Abstract

This article is taken from the case study of a successful corporate executive, who sought psychiatric assistance to overcome issues of anger management.

Main Content

The Perils of Success. (A case study)

Diwakar has everything going well for him. He has been recently promoted, and among his batch mates, he is an object of envy. The organization he works for has allotted a bigger accommodation to him, in view of his promotion, and he has just moved into spacious bungalow. His family is happy with the new arrangement where his daughter gets a study room all to herself.

A great feeling of gratitude engulfed Diwakar when he thought about his organization. He started working with a lot of zeal and involvement. He also got to spend quality time with his family by taking them out on trips and holidays, whenever time permits. At one point, Diwakar, a small-town boy, thought to himself – life cannot get any better than this.

One day, Diwakar came home with a headache and told his wife, "Please make a cup of strong coffee, I need it for this headache." She gave him the beverage. After one sip from the cup, Diwakar lost his cool. He started shouting, "I asked for coffee and you gave me tea. What's wrong with everything here, no one listens to me and things don't move unless I shout".

His wife quietly took the cup away and replaced it with a cup of coffee. Diwakar was too stressed and the tension

in his home became palpable.

That night, Diwakar's wife told him, "We need to discuss something and alone, and no mobiles please". Diwakar was ready to say sorry to his wife for the incident in the evening and carry on, but his wife said, "I don't want your apology. I understand you have work pressures. I have already forgiven you. The matter I want to discuss is more serious – You are not the same person I knew. You have changed. You are too stressed now-a-days and you need to address it yourself." She was a much matured woman and she continued, "I have prepared dinner for you with your favourite dishes but just make one commitment to me – just accept that you are having a problem".

Diwakar was in two minds - whether to argue with his wife, giving some explanation or to ruminate on her words. He took the second route. He said, "Give me some time to think".

Next day, early in the morning, after he got home after a jog, he called his younger daughter and asked, "Darling, tell me the truth. Have I changed? Or am I still the father you loved to be with". His daughter replied, "You are still the father I love and respect but your behaviour has undergone a marked change".

That day after reaching office, Diwakar was a bit disturbed. He thought of his long struggles as a boy from a middle-class household to his current position as a senior executive of a huge company. He thought of his loving family and his extended family of friends and well-wishers. He decided to take his wife seriously because a few days back a friend had told him, "Why do you suddenly lose your temper. Learn to control your anger".

Diwakar took an appointment with a psychologist and after office hours went to meet him. His wife is used to him coming home late from work, and hence there was no issue on the home front.

The first question the psychologist asked him after the initial introduction was, "Who brought you here". Diwakar said, "Nobody knows, I came on my own". The psychologist smiled and said, "In that case, my friend you are already half way home. The first step towards a cure is taken when the patient himself accepts he has a problem".

The psychologist continued, "Today, We will not discuss your problems. We will discuss a topic that you like. You look like a sportsman. Can we discuss about sports and cricket because it's also one of my favourite topics". Diwakar agreed and both had a long and friendly talk about the game of cricket and the Indian Cricket team's World Cup win in 1983.

When he took the psychologist's leave after nearly one hour of discussion, the psychologist prescribed some medicines. He asked Diwakar to take them for one week and then meet him. Diwakar went home, and after having dinner with his family, took a tablet and had slept deeply that night.

Next day on a whim, he checked the details of the medicine on the internet and found that the psychologist had prescribed a medicine for anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder. Initially, he was furious at the psychologist for considering him mad, but after some time of ruminating, he decided to give this psychological treatment a genuine try.

It took six months of counselling and medicines for Diwakar to be the fine person he once was. Diwakar continued to be self-driven, hardworking, and above all, matured with a deeper view and understanding of life. He remained competitive like he was but with compassion and love for all.

I asked the psychologist, who is my friend, to explain how Diwakar was treated. The psychologist explained a few issues pertaining to the process and public misconceptions.

This is what he told me:

There is no personality that can be called "normal". Normal is a word we casually use but no one is normal – everyone is unique and different. Everyone, in their walk of life, face external stimuli which is same for all, but how each person reacts to those stimuli decides what happens to them. Every person reacts differently to the same external environment.

In the case of Diwakar, he was internalising every

incident. With a success story behind him, he set very high standards for himself and whenever something went wrong, he blamed himself internally. This caused stress within him. This stress created a vicious cycle - As the stress built up, he became less efficient. Less efficiency led to things going wrong adding up to the already existing stress and the cycle is repeated..

The psychological aspect of the "internalizing nature" of some people requires explanation. Say a newspaper headline announces the sudden collapse of a road over bridge with the death of a few people. Many people will read it, feel bad and move on. A few others will imagine how horrible the tragedy was. They will then imagine whether the bridge which they regularly cross is in a good condition or not. This negativity builds up and they start thinking about the consequences if the over bridge in their city collapses and the tragedy involves their family. This depressing thought results in the body releasing many stress hormones and unnecessarily the person gets a panic attack. Diwakar was internalising every stimuli of the environment.

I gave him the medicines to bring him from a state of extreme hypersensitivity to a more manageable level. Please understand, "only medicines" do not work, neither does "only counselling". We have to decide on a judicious mix of both. The role of counselling is important but the use of medicines that lower the hyperactive state is also necessary. Prescribing medicine is again a risky proposition. It has to be under very controlled conditions. A high dosage of medicines will make him dull and addicted to the medicines. He might even suffer from withdrawal symptoms. So, these are to be strictly monitored by a competent psychologist.

Unlike many, I never advise my clients to go on a holiday or take a break. You have to go to the root of the issues and find solutions to them. Going on a holiday might temporarily give him some space, but it's like curing a headache due to bad eyesight with an aspirin. The moment he returns to his work from the holiday, he will again start boiling over. Moreover, in this modern world, you cannot take a man away from his work, he will always remain connected to the issues of the office.

Many people during this phase of hyper stress take recourse to unethical love affairs. This is very bad. Maximum office romances happen because both the

man and woman suffer from some unresolved issues and seek solace in a furtive friendship or an affair. These kinds of unethical love affairs result in more unreconciled issues and more mess in their lives. In Diwakar's case, luckily nothing like that happened.

The fundamental fact is that I made Diwakar accept that in due course he needs to accept the world with its imperfections. So, when a junior does not deliver as per his expectations, instead of blaming himself and the junior, he should ruminate on how to ease the task for all. Anger is a strict no. The more you harangue your juniors, the more stressed you become and this results in more inefficiency. One psychologically deviant person can cause the same deviation in all the people around him. Diwakar's wife is a matured lady and I really admire her calm and cool response to his frequent bouts of anger.

Look at a conductor who conducts a symphony orchestra. The joy of music is written large on his face as he directs the musicians to play their instruments. One or two musicians might make a mistake, but the conductor along with the team will move forward brushing aside the errors and inconsistency and create something that is divine, inspiring and beautiful. This is the spirit in which all creative efforts of humanity thrive. Office work is no less creative than a symphony orchestra. If you love life you will learn to love your work. Constant work that makes you happy is the greatest cure for all major health issues.

Finally, the art of forgiveness is something that needs to be imbibed. Hatred is an acid that corrodes the vessel which holds it. Diwakar's success generated many foes and ego clashes developed on a day-to-day basis. This vicious ego clashes creates more inconsistencies and stress in his work life.

One day he complained to me about a colleague who is intentionally putting roadblocks in his path by raising random issues - small and meaningless. I told Diwakar, to be non reactive for some time. One day, I told Diwakar to call his rival for a cup of tea to his room and discuss anything but the office issues. Diwakar did that. Although friendship did not develop between the two, but the first ice breaking event happened.

Another day in a board meeting, his colleague brought in a list of errors in Diwakar's work. Diwakar reacted very politely by saying, "Thank you so much for pointing out these errors. I will definitely make all efforts to rectify them. Had you but told me these

things ten days back, maybe by now, I would have had the solutions to each of these issues. I also look forward to your help and guidance in solving them".

Later on, during the discussion, when he got an opportunity to pick holes in his rival's presentation, he did not do so openly but after the meeting, went to his rival's room and quietly pointed out the errors, and helped him in rectifying them.

I told Diwakar, "The biggest challenge for you is to defeat the enmity and not the enemy." With time, Diwakar stopped responding to each and every negative stimulus from his colleagues. This somewhat gave him an inner peace. His colleagues also stopped seeing him as a rival and more as a co-worker. In fact, many of the people who were jealous of his success started coming to him for suggestions and guidance.

You must have heard of the saying - failure is the pillar of success. The competitive modern society taught us how to deal with failure but not how to deal with success. Success is a very challenging event in a person's life. The seeds of great failure lie within every success. It might be hard to climb to the top but to stay at the top is harder. You need to understand the deeper implications of any success in your life.

There is nothing called a successful life. The modern trend is to create a fake world of competition and adulation that goes on in a cyclical manner. Competition is good because it brings out the best. Competition is also very dangerous when the stakes are high. Even the stakes are nebulous and created by marketing hype.

A successful person is not one with a huge bank balance or great designation. A successful person is one who is internally in a state of equilibrium. A person with equanimity will always be ready with fortitude for the unexpected. They will realise that every day will throw new challenges, but they will also have faith in their own capabilities to overcome them. In the face of failure, they will rationally analyse and rectify behaviour. They will not probe too deeply on the implications but will move on.

Gautama Buddha said desire is the root of all sadness. However, without desire how will society grow? How will humanity thrive? Therefore, the challenge is to channelized desire into creative output.

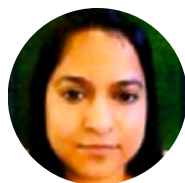
Life is easy if you inculcate these habits.

Realistic optimism, persistence, creativity and above all self-discipline.

Regarding Diwakar, I think I will not see him again but there are two conditions that he might go through in the future. One is relapse into a state of

hypersensitivity and suspicion or he might get totally disinterested in the normal things. In the second state, he will become completely listless and hence this state is worse of the two.

Love yourself the way you want others to do



By - **Deepika Soni, IOCL**

casonideepika@gmail.com, sonideepika@indianoil.in

Deepika Soni

Finance Manager.

Author is working with Indian Oil Corporation Limited as Finance Manager. She is a Chartered Accountant by profession and her primary area of expertise is Finance & Accounting with an experience of more than 11 years in the field. Author has a keen interest in ways of overcoming mental health issues and ways of mental and physical healing.

Email: casonideepika@gmail.com/
sonideepika@indianoil.in



Abstract: The neglected Child

Talking about mental health has always been a taboo in India. People, in general, are dismissive about mental health of others and of their own for that matter. Mental health has mostly been neglected and trivialized at a cost people in India generally fail to realise.

Shocking facts related to mental health at workplace came to light in survey conducted by Deloitte. Highlights of the same are as follows:

- Poor mental health amongst employees costs Indian employers around USD 14 billion annually in absenteeism, lower productivity and attrition.
- Around 47 per cent of professionals surveyed consider

workplace-related stress as the biggest factor affecting their mental health, followed by financial and COVID-19 challenges.

- According to the survey, 80 per cent of the Indian workforce has reported mental health issues during the past one year.
- Societal stigma prevents around 39 per cent of the affected respondents from taking steps to manage their symptoms.

The seeping wall

Mental health problems may occur as a result of external factors and the same may multiply and affect physical health and well-being in long run. We can take analogy with an example of a wall having seepage issues. If we paint it or tile it from outside instead of taking care of the root cause, the water will start seeping inside and affecting the foundations in long run. We might think that we can hide the mental health problems but it will make its way out in other forms such as physical health problems, lashing out on others, behavioural distortions, substance abuse, compulsive disorders, perfectionism, work-holism and other unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Workplace: The Second Home

In a 24-hours day, we spend roughly 10 hours or more on getting ready/ commuting to workplace and in the work place. Assuming a sleep of 8 hours, it would not be wrong to call office a second home when we are spending more than 60% of active hours in a day in office or activities related to office. Consequently workplace may govern majority of factors impacting our mind and behaviour. Certainly, work-force is exposed to all kinds of pressures, deadlines, stress and interactions in the workplace. With this fact, it becomes crucial to create behavioural patterns to cope with contrary environment and incidents occurring at workplaces.

Mental health is the greatest asset for an individual and for the organizations which are driven by these individuals. Organizations can play vital role in enhancing mental well-being by making the employees aware about mental health and motivating them to resort to adequate remedies.

The Key: True Self-Love

“Self-Love” is a term in vogue recently. It has been defined in numerous theories in past. There have been theories where in self-love is regarded as an expression of conceit and selfishness. In recent past, the term “Self-love” has been promoted as a positive trait in wake of mental health issues and is rather described as having adequate self-esteem, not-being self-dismissive and listening to our inner voices. It is needless to mention that mental health problems are the result of coping mechanisms adopted consciously or sub-consciously in response to stress and trauma to manage painful and difficult emotions. This means that ignoring inner voices and self-esteem requirements and not channelizing painful emotions in rightful manner may reflect on mental health. Making sense of self-love in a rightful way and assimilating habits for dealing with negative emotions and circumstances instead channelizing them into unhealthy coping mechanisms may do wonders for mental health.

Some of the ways to adopt healthy thought-patterns and habits good for mental health are as follows:

• Acceptance and positive self-talk

The only thing we can control is ourselves and we have no control over external circumstances and other people. Hence, accepting this fact and doing positive self-talk is very important. This may include analysing the situation and the role we can play to overcome it and taking the right action. If we cannot control the situation then this fact must be accepted and positive self-talk must be resorted to process any negative emotions.

• Pranayam and Breathing exercise

Pranayam is a method recognised internationally to be beneficial for immediate relief from sudden heightened anxiety. Taking deep breath and imagining that we are expelling the anxiety out of our body provides immediate relief from a non-pathological anxiety.

• Talk to someone you feel safe with

Sharing the thoughts and inhibitions is an important way to vent out negative emotions. Feeling any kind of negative emotions such as anger, jealousy, fear, and rage is being human. Sometimes we think them as negative and refrain from sharing these with anybody. But rather, sharing any kind of emotions with someone you trust will help in self-realization and processing that negative emotion in a better way rather than letting it sit somewhere in your sub-conscious brain and bother you later on.

• Peaceful walk and meditation

When our mind and body are exposed to stressful environment, our brain releases stress hormones such as cortisol, adrenaline etc. to cope with that situation. No human body is made to survive in situation of chronic stress and inordinate exposure to these stress hormones results in gradual deterioration of mental and physical health. Meditation or peaceful walk helps in calming the body by generating happiness hormones.

• Nature and Sunlight

Spending time with nature and sunlight has dramatic effect on mind and body. Half-an-hour in sunlight and nature daily can help in elevating mood. Morning sunlight helps in generating Vitamin D which counters conditions like depressed mood and anxiety.

• Enough sleep and music

Lack of sleep aggravates anxiety and mental exhaustion. Hence, sleep must not be compromised and in case of difficulty sleeping, drinking calming drinks such as Chamomile tea and performing “Yoga-Nidra” meditation may help. Listening to music helps in generating happiness hormones which will help in calming the effects of stressful environment.

• Travel and technology detox

Excessive use of mobile phones and laptops creates brain-fogging effects. Reducing screen time consciously will save a lot of time and bring clarity and mindfulness. Besides, it is said that travel is food for soul and travelling can bring a drastic freshness in stressful situations. Sudden travelling in stressful situation could prove to be a healthy escape or coping mechanism.

• Healthy Diet

Including healthy food in daily diet which is rich in

vitamins and minerals can have direct impact on mental health. Again there is no need of paradigm shift in diet which often ends up in vain. Making small changes such as cutting added sugar, having a single healthy meal, consuming healthy fats instead of unhealthy fats can help in long run. Foods rich in vitamins and minerals will help in calming the impact of stressful environment.

• Pursuing a hobby or indulgence

Pursuing long forgotten hobbies or a new hobby may have calming effects. Occasionally availing therapeutic treatments such as a head massage or visiting salon can relax nervous system. This also helps in developing a sense that true happiness is not tied just with activities which result in achievement of materialistic achievements but also with leisure activities. Being a high performer may prove exhausting in long run.

• Family and pets

Spending time with family and pets has therapeutic effects on mind. It helps in reducing anxiety, stress and anxiousness. It also helps in building positive emotions such as trust, gratitude and compassion.

• Therapy

Last but the most important, is connecting with a professional therapist. These days when people are getting aware about mental health, there has been enhancement in availability of psychologist and therapist. They are not solely available for recommending medications but also for alternative therapies such as talk therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, trauma-recovery programmes etc. Therapists provide proper guidance if we don't have any one to listen or we are unable to express ourselves completely to friends and family. No matter how much mature we become, there may be times when we might need advice in our weak moments. Therapies are available as easily as online and over chat. Hence, turning to a therapist should no longer be viewed as a taboo and therapies could be resorted to more often than not.

Conclusion:

Ignoring our own feelings and requirements of our inner-being is the grimmest form of lack of self-love. Our body and mind have their own way of reflecting their requirement in form of mental and physical

disorientation. All the lifestyle disorders such as anxiety, blood pressure, diabetes etc. are results of chronic exposure to stressful environment, overthinking patterns and trauma. Hence, providing our body, mind and soul the things which are nourishing would help in overcoming any dysfunction, be it mental or physical. For adopting a healthy life style, it is not necessary to make radical changes in life. In fact adopting any kind of healthy habit slowly one by one can do wonders. Say, instead of going to gym for rigorous exercise, taking 15 minutes of walk and 15 minutes of meditation can change the game. After all, you definitely deserve your own time and attention.

References:

1. Statistics on problems associated with mental health issues in India.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/poor-mental-health-of-employees-costs-indian-firms-14-bn-yearly-survey-122090800661_1.html#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20survey%2C%2080,steps%20to%20manage%20their%20symptoms.

2. Meaning of Self-Love

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-love>

3. Impact of stress on mind and body

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20046037>

4. Activities for generating happy-hormones


<https://www.healthline.com/health/happy-hormone#music>

5. Coping mechanism

<https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/coping-mechanisms>

Declaration

It is hereby submitted that the content in the article is original and not under publication in any other Journal. References have been taken from few sources and the same are indicated in article



Pursuing a Passion Outside of Work for Mental Wellness



By - **Mr. Ciny Mathew Philip, IOCL**
PHILIPCM@indianoil.in

Ciny Mathew Philip

*Chief Manager (Corporate Communications & CSR), Gujarat Refinery,
 Indian Oil Corporation Limited*

A gold medallist in Communication Studies, Ms. Ciny Mathew Philip is a Corporate Communications professional, with 20+ years of experience in Indian Oil Corporation Ltd., Currently working at Gujarat Refinery, she has rich experience in internal & external communications, brand building, media relations; with in-depth understanding of Oil & Gas sector, socio-economic environment and developmental issues for strategic communications and advocacy.

Email: philipcm@indianoil.in

Abstract:

The pressures of modern work culture, covid pandemic and social media omnipresence is leading to stress and anxiety leading to burn-out, depression and ill-health – both mental and physical and negatively impacts people's wellness.

In this scenario, individuals need to proactively take efforts for their mental wellness and happiness. One of the best ways to do so is to re-discovering the joys of hobbies from the childhood days can lead to relaxation and emotional and mental healing.

While the negative impacts of social media are well recognised, apps and social media can also help individuals to pursue hobbies and wellness. Here, use of social media intentionally by curating whom to follow, what to watch and read and controlling time spent on social media platforms is at the crux of leveraging social media for hobbies and relaxation. Pursuit of hobbies outside of work can help in achieving mental wellness and a wholesome life.

Main Content

Pursuing a Passion Outside of Work for Mental Wellness

A poem written more than a hundred years ago lamented the lack of time for pursuit of leisure. W H Davies poem 'Leisure' proffers the profound question "What is this life, if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare", and is more relevant today than when he wrote it.

We often hear the advice to be passionate about our work. The fad of 'hustle culture' pressurises people to work tirelessly, without rest, and to be constantly productive and make money. The undue pressure to maximise every second of every day to be successful and ahead of others negatively impacts the individual's wellbeing due to the stress and anxiety which leads to burn-out, depression and ill-health – both mental and physical. Adding fuel to the fire, the reality of being constantly connected to the world through social media, constantly checking the phone notifications, the pressing need to project an 'image' to the world by posting selfies and pictures to avoid FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) is leading to feelings of unease, dissatisfaction, and anxiety for many.

Further the covid pandemic led to health and wellbeing emerging as one of the biggest issues of our times. While presenting this year's Union Budget, the Finance Minister said the coronavirus pandemic has accentuated mental health problems in people of all ages and highlighted the need for better mental health care for Indians.

Research shows that Indians suffer higher stress levels than most workers globally. Multiple studies and surveys have established that Indians are in need of work-life balance and stress management solutions. Responding to the rising need for emotional and mental wellness of their workforce, organisations have put in place various initiatives to support the overall performance and health of employees. Employees feel that their companies should be doing more to support their mental health. However, at the individual level too, people need to proactively take efforts for their

mental wellness and happiness.

Living in the moment, controlling the urge to be at the top of the game, valuing familial ties, appreciating the little joys of life and prioritising physical and mental wellness are some of the ways to counter the ill-effects of our modern life. This is where the importance of pursuing passion & hobbies comes to play. Re-discovering the joys of hobbies from the childhood days can lead to relaxation and emotional and mental healing.

Unlike the recognition and rewards at the workplace, which are mostly beyond the control of employees, hobbies can actually help in realising the self-actualization or self-fulfilment needs of the Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid. Hobbies can further growth motivation and a sense of achievement, beyond the professional goals and targets. Though hobbies maybe viewed by many as unprofessionalism, frivolous waste of time and resources, it is far from the truth. Instead, hobbies help people to be more productive at the workplace, boost self-confidence and revitalise which positively impact the quality of work and life, itself. Some of the best hobbies that elevates people's mood include music, painting, gardening, trekking, exercising, cooking, sports, creative writing, learning a new language or skill, social work, amongst such others.

Ironical that it may sound, but Social Media and apps (which are addictive and cause emotional and mental stress and ill-effects) can also help individuals to pursue hobbies and wellness. Social health apps are enabling people, especially the millennials and z generation to monitor eating and sleeping habits, exercise, track footsteps and running, meditation, among others. These include, amongst others, apps such as Calm, HealthifyMe, hydration tracker – WaterMinder, Pomodoro apps, etc.

The caveat while using social media, is to be not on autopilot or drift mindlessly or drown in the sea of content. Use of social media intentionally by curating whom to follow, what to watch and read and controlling time spent on social media platforms can enable people to have access to motivational posts, life-lessons, productivity hacks, management insights, learn new skills, deriving inspiration from others experiences, socialise and collaborate with others having similar hobbies, creative content including books, poems, articles and more.

Studies corroborate that hobbies can lower stress levels, and blood pressure and levels of the stress hormone cortisol. So if you had a hobby as a child, it is time to rekindle that passion or even discover newer interests. If still you feel that you have no time for hobbies, it's time to ask yourself whether you are denying yourself of a host of wellness benefits that will enrich your life and of those around you.

As the author, William Lyon Phelps, said, "The happiest people are those who think the most interesting thoughts. Those who decide to use leisure as a means of mental development, who love good music, good books, good pictures, good company, good conversation, are the happiest people in the world. And they are not only happy in themselves, they are the cause of happiness in others", mindfully pursuing leisure and hobbies can be the answer to a generation of people who exasperatedly exclaim, 'Where's the time!' and complain about their stressful lives or lack of work-life balance. They are the ones who most need to pursue hobbies and leisure for a wholesome life. Let not what is essential to our wellness, be lost in the cacophony of the inessentials.

Declaration:

I hereby declare that the article: 'Pursuing a Passion Outside of Work for Mental Wellness' is original and unpublished / or not under consideration for publication with other journals.

(Ciny Mathew Philip)

Stargazing and Astrophotography



By - **Mr. Tabish Aziz, IOCL**
azizt2@indianoil.in

Tabish Aziz

Assistant Manager (Construction), ERPL Barauni, Pipelines

An amateur astrophotography enthusiast with two telescopes observing night sky time to time for past 3 years.

Email: azizt2@indianoil.in

Abstract

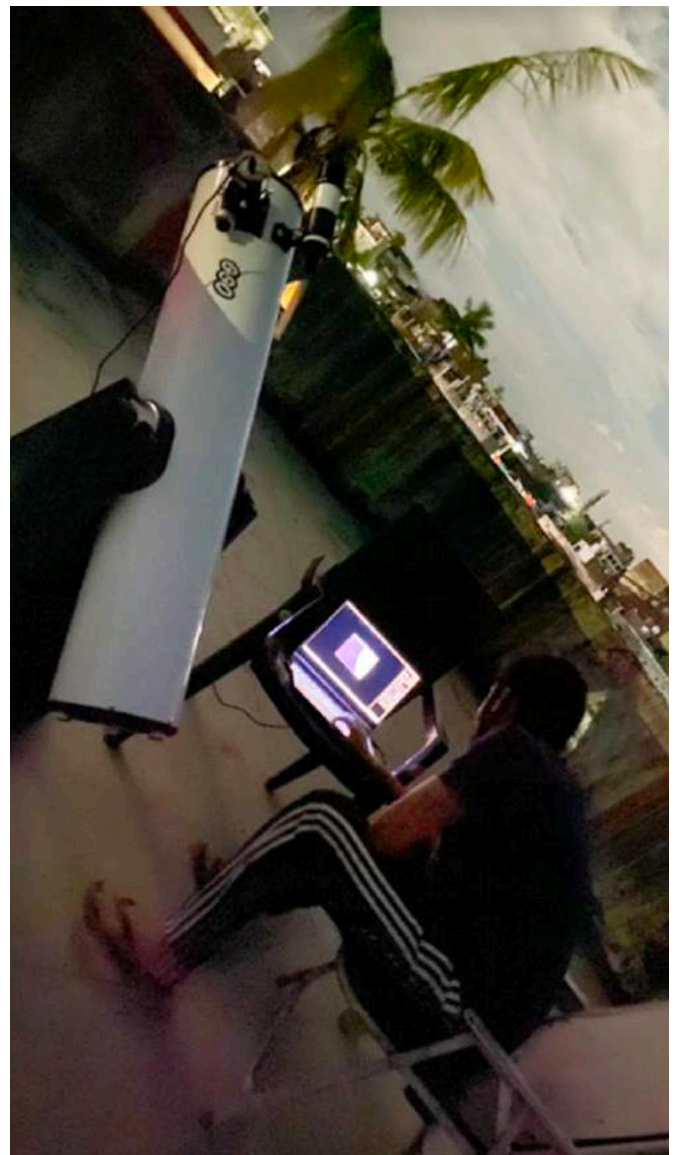
Working as a construction engineer looking after laying of critical cross country LPG pipeline can be tiring for one's body and for one's mind too. Star gazing in peace has always found me relief. But with technological advancements reaching every village, the night sky has become polluted and not many constellations can be seen through naked eye. Getting a telescope opened a Pandora's box. Looking at the cosmic events unfolding through one's own eyes is really magical. To be able to see the details of planets like Jupiter and Saturn live, or rather delayed by a few minutes (owing to travel time take by light) is truly amazing. Watching the nebulas, the birth place of stars to watching comets leaves oneself in awe. Trailing the moon and its phases, exploring its mountains and valleys and seas that have been walked upon by few at closeness is magnificent. The purpose of this article is to encourage youngsters or anyone with passion for astronomy and to show the ease with which that passion can be taken up.

Main Content

Astrophotography is an art where one needs dedication and patience to obtain good results. It is different for different class of celestial objects. For intra solar system objects like Moon, Satellites, Planets, Comets and obviously The Sun requires less investment and specialised instruments as compared to Nebulas or galaxies like Andromeda and other far off objects.

A good starting tool for stargazing in offbeat location where light pollution is less, is a pair binoculars, whereas for cities, a basic Refractor Telescope (costing

8-15k) is good. With these one can easily spot craters on moon, Jupiter and its four distinctly visible moons, rings of Saturn, a comet passing by, etc. For Sun, a filter is required to avoid any damage to eye. Going for a bigger telescope in budget, a dobsonian telescope (costing 30k onwards) is best. With this, one can see the cloud bands and storms on Jupiter, watch the rings of Saturn wobble over days.



An 8" dobsonian used to observe moon and planets at terrace in Begusarai, Bihar. You can see the city light pollution lighting up the night.

The night sky is a very happening place, ever-changing, beautiful and intriguing. We know very well about major objects in night sky. With respect to us on earth, every object follows different routines and many events are available to be observed throughout the year.

The Sun has many colder regions (with respect to sun) which are visible to us as darker spots on the surface of sun. Observing sun is in fact amongst the most difficult tasks and we need extra filters and patience to observe the changes occurring on the hot ball of plasma.

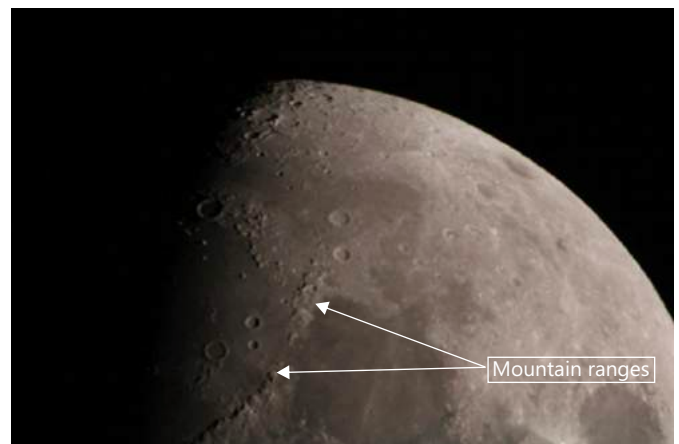


Sunspots as visible from the eye piece of the telescope. This was viewed using a special solar filter.

When viewing the partial moon, the line dividing the dark and lit part is called as terminator. The region near terminator is the place where sun's rays are slant and thus the shadows are formed and we can observe various mountains, valleys and craters easily.



This image shows one of the most beautiful craters on the surface of the moon. Located near the South Pole of Moon and called Clavius crater, it is famous for five craters inside it in a spiral shape. This image is superposition of 453 frames.



The mountain ranges on moon are shown here. The dark grey portions are the seas on the moon which have huge deposits of Titanium.



This image of Jupiter is a superposition of 13000+ frames, taken in over 3 hours. Here, the wind bands of

Jupiter are clearly visible along with The Great Red Spot (in center, just south of Equator). The V cut denotes the absence of few pixels in that area. Being so far away, the camera lens is able to capture very few pixels in each frame, thus necessitating capture of huge number of frames to obtain a good image.

Although clearer image can be obtained with the help of a more powerful camera, but looking through the eyepiece, the tiny storms in white band just above equator is always visible clearly. The light coloured bands are called as zones and they have higher concentration of Ammonia, are near to poles where as the dark coloured bands are called belts and have low

concentration of ammonia are near the equator. Jupiter's atmosphere is an ever changing place, owing to its fast rotation in just over 9 hours compared to earth's 24 hours. The changes are easily observed over a single observation session, about 2-3 hours, with the 4 visible moons revolving around it. An interesting fact about Jupiter is that, Jupiter is the reason that Earth is habitable as it deflects the randomly moving debris and rocks from outer solar system and from outside also, from hitting the inner solar system planets, including Earth. The massive gravitational field attracts the small rocks and most of them gets stuck in the Lagrangian points of Jupiter's orbit.

Moonlighting in Employment



By – Mr. Bibhas Biswas, IOCL
bibhasb@indianoil.in

Introduction:

Moonlighting has become today's buzz word in service industry specially IT services industry. The same has become big talking point, especially after getting the news of termination of the services of 300 employees who were working for its competitors as side hustle by one of the leading IT major of India Wipro despite being on regular payroll of the company mentioning integrity violation.

Moonlighting is kind of escape route for the employees from mundane routine work and learning new things while following their passion. However, it is also raising concerns about employee burnout, physical as well as mental health issues since the major purpose of holiday or rest hours are violated in this case.

The entire industry is divided over the policy and argument that moonlighting is unethical and such practices can only have short-term gains. As per various news articles, while major IT companies like Infosys, IBM or TCS has condemned and flagged concerns about the practice. In their official statement, TCS has also informed that moonlighting is an ethical issue and against its core values. Though, they have not yet taken any action against any employee similar to Wipro. On the other hand food delivery companies such as 'Swiggy' or fintech company 'Cred' have endorsed such policy of allowing on-payroll employees to take up work or projects apart from their regular employment. Other IT major, Tech Mahindra also have no objection to employees taking up secondary jobs and has supported the idea of side hustles.

Even the Minister of State for Skill Development, Entrepreneurship, Electronics and Information Technology, believe that there's no problem with employees involved in dual employment. As per his opinion, this is the age of employee-entrepreneurs and companies must now understand there has been a structural shift in the minds and attitudes of the young Indian tech workforce. He also said that the days when

employees signed up with big tech majors and spent their lives on the job were long gone.

So, what is Moonlighting?

Moonlighting refers to the practice of certain employees with full-time job or having a employment contract with them takes up a side job may be freelancing work or something similar. The moonlighting concept allows workers of a company to take up alternative jobs apart from their primary job to earn some extra money. Post pandemic world, present remote work culture in many organizations has definitely helped employees to take up this practice for financial gains.

Moonlighting – A new concept?

Do we mean that these practices did not exist in pre-pandemic era? The answer is no. Many employers in earlier days also faced same issues. One of Delhi based news article published earlier mentioned that as per vigilance report some PF staffers were moonlighting for private sector and they were caught by the officials.

In the year as early as 2012, the Madras High Court held termination of one employee as valid when he was found to be employed as a director of another company. In another case, in the year 2016, the Punjab and Haryana High Court held that terminating the employment of a driver who was engaged in double employment as completely valid.

What is driving employees for Moonlighting?

Experts mention that the first thing that drives employees is definitely the compensation and financial benefit they are getting out of it. For the last 10 years we have not seen much improvement in compensation package of entry level executives in software industry. Presently, due to availability of proper technology and know-how of the market, employees are seeing moonlighting as easy way of earning well.

Since, the gig economy has opened up, and there are various gig platforms available globally where one can register and work for anybody around the world with handsome amount for short duration projects. If we cite example of Indian techie, they can get paid in dollars and earn more and that makes this practice more attractive.

The overnight US shift to remote working did away with long commutes and brought flexi time facility. So the techies got extra time in their hand to spend which they utilised effectively by involving in smaller side projects and earn extra income.

IT professionals shared that when the pandemic struck, various projects related to digitization initiatives were up for grab e.g. website development to app creation etc. Being short duration one-off projects, these were taken as quick ways to supplement income. The techies opting for such side jobs did not see it as a direct conflict of interest since these are not full-time engagement and they normally work on these projects as side hassles.

The technology requirement in IT industry is ever-changing. One has to master the practical know-how while entering to the market as job seeker. Employment opportunities come to the individual with better experience in certain niche technologies in demand. Though, in full time job in maximum cases employees work on mostly old technologies or there are minimul opportunities provided to employees to learn new technologies as per their choice or market demand. So, employees tend to utilise their free time in gaining experience in niche technologies or learning new tools. Having experience on these fields has obvious added advantage in competitive job market. So through these side hassles employees gain hands-on experience on these technologies or tools or platforms which otherwise is not available to them in their present job.

Moonlighting and Labour/Employment Laws in Different Sectors:

Labour/Employment Laws:

As of now, there is no better clarity in the employment contracts and no prohibition under the Indian employment law, except under the below mentioned labour acts.

Section 60 of the Factories act 1948 imposes restriction on double employment and mentions that no adult

worker shall be required or allowed to work in any factory on any day on which he has already been working in any other factory, save in such circumstances as may be prescribed.

The definition of 'worker' under section 2 (s) of the Industrial Disputes Act 1947, also mentions that any person employed in any industry to work for a reward, whether the terms of employment be expressed or implied. In this context, at the one hand it is implied that employer has to take care of the wellbeing of the employee and on the other hand employees also required to provide his complete devotion to duty.

Industrial Employment Standing Order Act, 1946 also binds employees with the employment condition of employer during their full tenure nature of job. Section 8 under Schedule I-B of the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Central Rules, 1946 states that employees should not work against the interest of an industrial establishment by taking dual employment in addition to their normal routine work.

In addition various Shops and Establishment Acts of the states also lays down relevant provisions regarding dual employment. As example, section 9 of the Delhi Shops and Establishment Act 1954 states no person shall work about the business of an establishment or two or more establishments or an establishment.

Private Sector:

The relevant section of Factories Act is only applicable to employees working in Factories covered under the act. So, companies that are not covered by the Factories Act must specify the rules or related to double employment by way of inserting proper clause in the appointment letter or employment agreement or offer letter.

As per present practice, the below mentioned clause as general practice is signed by employees of private sector as a part of their Offer of employment or the employment agreement: 'During your employment with the Company, you shall not, without the Company's prior written consent, directly or indirectly employ or engage with any other person, business or entity, whether or not for any gain or profit, irrespective of whether it is during or outside your hours of work in the Company. Additionally, you are not allowed to undertake any other gainful employment, engagement, business, assume any public office or private office, honorary or

remunerative position, without prior written permission of the Company.'

It is understood, if employment letter mentions that he is under full time employment agreement, then even in case the person is not working for the company during off days or beyond working hours and is giving that time to another organisation, that can be termed as a breach.

Public Sector:

Rule 15 of Central Civil Services Conduct Rules 1964 prohibits employees to take private trade or employment. It mentions, 'Subject to the provisions of sub-rule (2), no Government servant shall, except with the previous sanction of the Government-(a) engage directly or indirectly in any trade or business, or (b) negotiate for, or undertake, any other employment...'.

The service conditions in Public Sector Undertakings normally governed by Conduct, Discipline and Appeal Rules and it prohibits employee through inserting following clause – 'No employee shall, except with the previous sanction of the Competent Authority, engage directly or indirectly in any trade or business or undertake any other employment. Provided that an employee, may without such sanction, undertake honorary work of a social or charitable nature or occasional work of a literary, artistic or scientific character, subject to the conditions that his official duties do not thereby suffer; but he shall not undertake or shall discontinue, such work if so directed by the Competent Authority'.

Various guidelines related to Vigilance are also acting a major role for preventing dual employment or income of any Public Sector employee. Employees are mandated to declare their income beyond certain permissible amount as part of their employment condition with transparency, thereby upholding vigilant practices inside the organisation.

Conclusion:

According to various employment surveys there is a huge gap of employees actually employed in India and their coverage in various social security schemes including PF. There are certain issues of pay parity and long hours of work among the employees working under various employers. For coping up the situation arising out of inflated economy a certain part of the employed individuals are taking up the option of dual

employment or moonlighting.

However, this is also raising concerns among the employers about data security and safeguarding proprietary information. The employees should not indulge in such practices which can breach the confidentiality. Being transparent organisation, employers should create such culture of openness that they can easily sit with their employees and have candid conversation about upholding the interest of their employees be it working in niche technology or playing guitar in a music band. When required the moonlighting clause or conflict of interest clause should be added and signed with the free consent of both the employee and the employer.

According to one survey conducted by the author through social media platform, 47% respondent desire that moonlighting should be allowed when it doesn't violate the data confidentiality of his employer or there is no conflict of interest involved. On the contrary 38% respondent thinks that moonlighting is actually cheating your present employer. In this post covid era, since most of the companies are again returning to normalcy and calling their employees to work from office, it would be difficult for the employees to moonlight.

However, implementation of modern age concepts like four day work schedule may raise concern among the employers. There is also need of specific employment laws on the matter. It is expected that in near future more clarity and transparency will be brought in to reduce disputes and maintaining congenial IR environment.

Digital Wellbeing

Way towards Mental Health



By - **Ankita Srivastava, IOCL**
SRIVASTAVAANKITA@indianoil.in

Well it started today, when I suddenly got a prompt on my android phone stating “check your digital wellbeing”. Curious, I checked the page to find who is tracking by digital wellbeing and for sure why?

It showed, for Week 47 in 2022 (Nov 21-27), I had a daily average screen time of 5hrs 48 minutes. I was taken aback! Shocked, wanting to know more, I scrolled further. It detailed, for a “non-social media active” person like me, I spent 9 hrs 30 mins on facebook, 8 hrs 42 mins on Whatsapp and 4 hrs 24 mins on Youtube. I was surprised as it didn't count my time on Twitter. Then it reckoned to me as I operate Twitter through my PC so, left unaccounted. It also displayed the screen time while driving, which thankfully was just 1 min (though I wonder how I managed to scroll my phone while driving). Another, highlight of the scroll was the benchmark which was set by the tracking app was “daily average screen time on phone of 4 hrs”, which of course is another eye opener of how times have changed and truly where are we heading!

For the unversed, Digital wellbeing is a new term coined by the Gen Z. Digital Wellbeing, lets you to know which apps and websites you use most and set daily limits. Once you hit the limit, those apps and sites pause and notifications go quiet. So you'll spend only the time you want, exactly where you want.

Coming back to my realization, thanks to my phone, I spent some time introspecting. A study by Harvard Medical School suggests that digital devices can interfere with everything from sleep to creativity. The growing human brain is constantly building neural connections while pruning the less used ones. Digital Media plays an active role here as much of what happens on the screen provides impoverished stimulation of the developing brain compared to reality. The article further states, it also disrupts with sleep patterns by suppressing the secretion of the melatonin hormone. The study rightly suggested a “balanced approach to screen use”. We need to be flexible enough to evolve with technology but choose how to use it right. After all, fire was a great invention for mankind but we had to learn that it can burn everything if not used with care.

We are constantly filling our precious time with the most convenient and effortless option of using Digital Media for our information, entertainment, connection, networking and distraction. Some out of compulsion, demanded due to work & faster requirements while other due to excessive

compulsion of being overboard. I purposefully did not mention “time constraint” as a reason for if we truly analyze our time, we surely have enough to spend it mindfully. Gone are the days, when we used to flip an Oxford dictionary for learning new words, finding correct pronunciations and enhancing our vocabulary. The need is not felt today, as we can get desired information by asking alexa or siri (right or wrong – who is bothered). We are all part of superimposing the information readily available, making it correct just by numbers. We are all constantly wanting and eagerly creating and strengthening our digital identity rather than the real one. We get pleasure and acceptance through our virtual engagement with anonymous people. Strangely, we are forgetting who we are, what we really want to do and how we must spend our time today for a healthy tomorrow.

Today, there is an entire industry working on advising people towards mental and physical wellbeing. We are talking about Yoga, meditation, laughter therapy, counselling and what not. Still, World's most developed nation, US ranks 35th on World's Healthiest Nations by Bloomberg 2019 and 122 on Happiness Plant Index 2020, while back home, India is even worse at 128. We are busy in emulating others, seeking global acceptance whilst forgetting our roots, alienating ourselves from nature and even struggling to breathe clean air.

As a country, we are looking forward to being a net zero nation by 2070, IndianOil has taken a step ahead by committing to be net zero by 2046, but the question is, while the country heads are busy engaging at geopolitical level, framing policies and framework for creating green future, are we really planning to be part of this change? Are we truly bothered in ensuring our mental and physical wellbeing? Are we ready to make conscious choices for ourselves and our next generations?

Let's take some time, to mull and graduate towards our wellbeing by being aware of digital media distractions, track and quantify our screen time with only the necessary and unavoidable, have regular sit-downs and conscious screen free time for routine activities, make efforts in engaging with nature and people in person and affirm to yourself daily that “only a happy and healthy me shall build the future”.

(Ankita Srivastava)
 Manager (Corporate Communications)
 Barauni Refinery

Practicing the Power of NOW



By - Mehak Uppal, HPCL
Mehak.uppal2@hpcl.in

Mental health at work is now a business priority. Employees must be trained to build their consciousness and emotional Intelligence to regulate emotions in tough situations, develop the patience to deal with difficult people, motivate oneself and the team, being gently assertive, ensure unbiased decision-making, enhance effective communications and promote DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion). Clearly, it is in the interest of business to promote employees' mental health and the cost of not doing it is quite high.

It can be promoted by making employees aware of the practices that support cultivation of a healthy mind. As per Harvard Business Review, employers must offer regular training on this aspect. The operative word is 'regular' because mental health challenges aren't going away. It requires regular, unending action.

One author quoted often around this subject is Eckhart Tolle. His book "Power of NOW" has had a strong positive influence on millions of people globally. An International bestseller, it has been translated into 52 languages.

The book promotes living in the 'Now' as a powerful practice that can transform all aspects of our lives including professional. It informs that living in the Now can ensure that we lead a life of grace, ease and lightness. Apart from that, it will eventually have an Impact on collective consciousness.

This book aims to cater to Maslow's top most hierarchy of needs i.e. Self-actualisation. It makes for quite a heavy read. Some of the key concepts mentioned in the book are listed below for reference. Many of these concepts are inter-related and bleed into each other.

Just like Eckart Tolle, let me request the readers to apply this knowledge internally to become more aware of your own nature, rather than using it as a tool to dissect others' behavior.

BEING

The first concept mentioned in the book is Being. It is described as Eternal, ever present and a concept that is beyond birth and death. It is an invisible energy field that gives life to what we perceive as the physical body. It is all

around, within us and ensures that Everything is connected. He deliberately does not use the term God as the word has loaded connotations for all of us.

Focus on the Present



If we silently watch our mind even now, we will realise that it is either in the past or in the future. Our mind is forever wandering. It goes in the past, haunted or smitten by the memories. These memories could range from some insignificant incident that happened an hour ago, to something major that occurred years ago. It is like a tape which plays time and again without a stop button.

Alternatively, the mind moves into the future - either fearful or in our own daydreams. If we make it a habit to regularly observe our mind, it might take us by surprise. It is practically a ping-pong ball!

Eckhart says that no event occurs in the past or future. Life is just a continuous stream of present moments over time. The past is a collection of once-present moments that have passed. The future is filled with several present moments that are yet to arrive. We are effectively missing out on life every time we oscillate between the past and the future.

As the past and future are simply alternative versions of the present, there are no advantages to worrying about them. If we can simply focus on the present, we will only be dealing with minor problems as they arise.

Relationship With Mind

Mind is the instrument that takes us from past to future. It is a disease to be not able to stop thinking. So how do we stop the incessant chatter? Thankfully, there's a way and it is not as difficult as one might think.

All we have to do is observe the thoughts that it produces. Yes, it is that simple. Eckhart suggests that we observe our thoughts as they come and go in our mind space without engaging or battling with them. Slowly, we will start dis-identifying from our mind and the light of our Being/Consciousness, which is above these thoughts, will grow stronger.

Let's inverse the popular mantra by Rene Descartes "I think, therefore I am" to "I am, therefore I think".

Pain Body

After thoughts, let us examine our emotions. Next concept he introduces is Pain Body. It is an accumulation of painful life experiences that were not faced fully and accepted when they happened. After some years, they create an energy entity consisting of old emotions.

The emotional pain that we experience leaves behind a residue. That residue can survive only if we identify with it, so it tries hard to feed off us.

Again, the answer is to stay in the present where the true power lies. The moment we OBSERVE our pain body, the identification is broken. That's when we will find our innermost strength (Being).

Fear

He specifically touches upon the emotion of fear. Many a time, the psychological condition of fear is divorced from any true and immediate danger. It is based on assumptions. The tricky point is that we cannot possibly cope with something that is only a mind's projection.

Identification with mind gives it more energy, observation of mind withdraws energy from it. The more we live in Now, more we are free of pain and suffering.

Ego is Destructive

Our Ego has a negative Impact as it controls us through our thoughts and emotions. Eckart says that its existence depends on misery and therefore it causes unconscious destruction by baiting us into accepting our thoughts/emotions as our identity. It is scared to lose its identity which depends on remaining separate from the Being. It is known that more you battle with your Ego, stronger it becomes.

So what is the solution? The more we live in Now, more flexible is our Ego, more we are free of pain and suffering. Primarily, Dwell in Now and pay brief visits to past and future.

Surrender vs Resign

Surrender to the reality of a situation and then take steps to create a different path. There is a difference between resignation and surrender. While one denotes helplessness, the other denotes conscious decision. Surrendered actions involve letting go of judgment while seeking change.

Do not confuse surrender with an attitude of "I can't be bothered anymore" or "I just don't care anymore" because this attitude is tainted with negativity or resentment.

When Eckart says surrender he means that we must Surrender our resistance to the present moment. Therefore, we do not react but respond in any given situation. How do you know you have surrendered? When you feel light, clear and deeply at peace; then you have surrendered.

Stop Waiting

Are you a habitual waiter? If we look closely, our mind seems to be in a mode of waiting for the next event even when there's no need for it. It has been so trained that it starts thinking of the next task even before the first one is finished.

Right now, the mind is thinking questions like - how much time left to finish reading this article? What's next? It's almost never completely in the present moment.

Just like it rushes ahead in these moment-to-moment situations, similar understanding can be applied to the broader scheme of things. We wait to achieve life's next milestone, promotion, children's admissions etc. We assume that one day when that particular desire is fulfilled, life will be fine. However, when that milestone is achieved, we start waiting for the next one.

Observation

Since observation is an important tool, it is important to discuss certain points mentioned regarding observation:

- Don't make an identity of what you observe, just continue observing. Identity denotes certain kind of rigidity or a preference.
- Don't judge, appreciate, condemn what you observe in your own self. Move beyond the binary of good and bad by viewing every experience as potentially moving you toward peace.
- Remember that whatever you observe is temporary – your thoughts, emotions, behavior
- Do not resist any kind of uncomfortable revelations. When something feels dark, all you have to do is switch on the light of awareness and it will

automatically reveal the path ahead. So, watching itself is enough.

- Become mindful of each moment
- Reach a point where you will be observing the thinker in you and a higher level of consciousness will awaken. The past will melt away in the light of awareness

Breathing

Apart from observing thoughts/emotions, another tool to stay in the present is through Breath. Breath is always in the present moment. Become aware of your breath and gently start following the path it follows in your body. By virtue of following the breath, also become aware of the NOW.

Impermanence



Become aware of the impermanence all around. Nothing remains static - our thoughts, emotions, behavior, life situations, seasons, weather - they all undergo change with time. Our physical attributes also undergo a change. Geographically, we know that there was a sea where now the mighty Himalayas stand. Water becomes clouds, clouds become rains, rains become river.

Cycles of success and failure come and go. Down time is essential for spiritual growth.

All we need to remember is that waves may arise on the surface but all is calm in the depths of the ocean. Similarly, through all these changing entities, what remains constant is the Being.

Be Permanently Alert

Eckart exhorts us to aim for sustained living in the Present. Many people tend to think that if they don't feel something, if they numb themselves in the face of pain using work, drugs, substance abuse, anger, suppression, projection etc, then they have found a resolution to the circumstance. But suffering does not diminish when you make it unconscious. It is important to Stay present, stay

conscious, be on our guard.

Manifest Your Flow of Energy

Eckhart says that unconsciously we make a choice to divert our energy either towards the Mind or the Self. To direct it towards the self, he suggests that we start becoming present to the inner energy/ Being Initially for 10-15 minutes at a time. Such a practice will create permanent flow of energy in due course of time. In turn, it will also give birth to the ability to find creative solutions in different situations.



HR Intervention

Eckart suggests small activities/ meditations in each chapter of the book and encourages the reader to invest time to experience the Being.

These exercises can be offered to the employees as separate modules with small capsules. The ongoing training can assist employees in becoming self-sufficient to find solutions to the mental health challenges faced in their daily lives. In this way, it could form a strong supporting component of the Employee Assistance Programme.

By accessing the Power on Now, each employee will operate at his/her optimum level while taking care of his/her own well-being. Thus, it will lead to effective contribution towards achieving the overall goals of the Corporation.

Health or Help what will you prioritize?



By - Mr. Pawan tak, IOCL
pawant@indianoil.in

Pawan Tak

Assistant Manager(HR)

P&BD having experience in General Unit HR/HRD/A&W/L&D across 3 different locations of IOC. Fitness, Sports and Video Gaming Enthusiast.

Email: pawant@indianoil.in

When you open the WHO website, you find some weird facts like- '15% of working age adults were estimated to have a mental disorder in 2019'. Well, it seemed like that article goes back to Pre-Covid era in 2019. That figure must have certainly increased owing to the large scale loss to human life and global economies resulting in loss of jobs and businesses. No one can contest the fact that COVID19 has heavily contributed for low mental health at workplaces for many.

The Pandemic, Global Geo-Political Crisis, Fears of Inflation, Environmental Concerns, Digital Information Bursts, Societal Pressures of emerging kinds „etc have been major contributors of depleting Mental Health at Work. So, where are we heading? Well, certainly not towards spirituality or mental equanimity but rather to unfortunate issues like early-age cardiac arrests, heart attacks, blood pressure, diabetes., strokes and what not.

You open whichever browser you like and type keywords like 'Mental Health' , 'Workplace Mental Health', 'Dealing with Workplace Stress' „etc you'll come across all sorts of theory on types of stress (I came across some 4-5 different types categorization with at least 3-4 sub-categorizations). One can find enough tools claiming to put you in ZEN mode or maybe achieve NIRVANA. Some may even succeed too given the reputation of few players in this field. But are we missing the big picture here. Well, I too thought of penning down my observations regarding the Mental Health at Workplace

Gauging your Mental Health (Employees):

Answering to self on questions like: How often you go to your colleagues for a cup of tea-coffee or just a little chit-chat, How often your colleagues come to you to lighten up themselves, Are you perceived as an irritable person at workplace, Are you perceived as a cry-baby, Do you appreciate your colleagues on small things, Do you share your personal issues with your peers or colleagues or even seniors, Do you feel stressed before coming to office.

If you find yourself uncomfortable in above situations, you might be in the right hand side of mental-health continuum. The Workplace Mental Health theme does not have a BLACK or WHITE answer. You can't be always on extreme ends of this theme. Rather, it is a mental health continuum 1 with mental health (left) and mental illness (right) at extreme ends where one shifts his position across a range as her situation improves or deteriorates². The idea is to gauge the extremity of your situation.

Acknowledge the various stimuli causing burn-outs:

Feeling of tiredness, longing for weekend at the start of the week, losing temper at your colleagues or finding a lone spot to chain-smoke at work. These situations (not limited to) are classic examples of burn-out at work. When you are already mentally exhausted, your mind doesn't have a bandwidth to process other job tasks. One needs to identify whether the underlying causes are PERSONAL or PROFESSIONAL.

PERSONAL issues may be ranging from financial insecurities, marital issues, family health or upbringing issues with kids.

PROFESSIONAL issues may be bullying, harsh behaviour by seniors, inability to mix up with colleagues, fear of lower appraisals, inability to grasp nuances of job role, tight timelines, feeling of meaningless job role.

Acceptance is the key to one's issues. Without singling out and acknowledging the cause, one cannot move to the left hand side of the mental health continuum. The greatest inventor of many human miseries is not some known personality or character; if one go deeper into inner self we'll find that it is our mind itself. We create all sorts of imaginary situations in our minds putting us in unpleasant situations and with people whom we find consider unpleasant.

Find ways/Seek Help to address the burn-outs:

There is no panacea to beat the workplace stress and mental tiredness. Whether or not, one is aware of the underlying causes which causes burn-out; it is always better to seek PROFESSIONAL HELP from trained counsellor or therapists. It has always been a societal taboo that seeking professional help in treating mental health issues is something out of the way and usually leads to social neglect of the individual.

Apart from seeking medical/professional help, one can resolve many issues at workplace by properly communicating one's issues/apprehensions/weaknesses/misunderstandings

- Talk to bosses regarding issues related to behaviour, attitude or clarity on job role
- Apprise seniors regarding personal issues faced. Some worthy advice may come out of it
- Approach your corporate mentor
- Approach your trusted friends

Maintaining PHYSICAL HEALTH reduces a lot of stress by reducing stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. Exercising also stimulates production of Endorphin chemicals in the brain which are natural pain killers and mood elevators cites an article by Harvard Health Publishing.

BREATHING exercises or aerobic exercise relaxes your body and builds a lot of stamina in absorbing physical and mental stress over a period of time.

EATING HABITS along with exercising goes a long way in help you keep yourself active, elevated and boost a constant supply of mood elevating hormones. Consulting professional dieticians in this regard is always a better option to suit to individual body type.

Prioritizing your ambitions and aspirations (Personal & Professional):

Many a times people fail to create a balance between their personal aspirations and professional ambitions. It is always fine to say 'NO' to your seniors for sometimes putting in that extra oil in your work when you have some pressing personal issues concerning your family. Andreaa Vanacker 3 in one of the Forbes article states Leaders who understand the distinction between ambition and aspiration can reflect on how they are motivating their employees to ensure high retention. If we focus on engaging the "minds" of employees by fuelling their ambitions, we will not be able to truly catalyze their creativity and allow them to reach their full potential. What is more likely to maximize their motivation is when we can engage their "hearts" through a deeper connection around how their individual purpose can be realized through the organization's purpose.

Gauging the Mental Health of your Workforce (Employer):

When world no. 2 tennis player Naomi Osaka bowed out from French Open last year due to depression and anxiety issues, it sent huge shock waves across the sporting community. This is a classic example when management fails to gauge the mental health of their workforce before they enter a stage of sudden break-down. It is pertinent for the employers to talk more and more about issues of mental health through Town-Halls, Advisories, Health Camps, Engaging Professional Consultant through

Webinars., etc.

One such series of workshops was organized by IndianOil was under the theme: Paramarsh - IndianOil's Employee Assistance Programme - Interactive Workshop on Emotional Wellness. When employees attended the webinars under that theme, it was visible how the workforce was talking about similar issues, sharing their concerns with the consult in-person or sharing their views/concerns with their peers/friends at the workplace. These programs instil confidence in workforce that talking about these issues is not a Taboo and let you identify and acknowledge your burn-outs and put you in acceptance mode.

Create a Vigilant Culture (Employer):

You are sitting at your workstation depressed by some personal issues clubbed with management advisory on working extra hours for some project. You are almost at your breaking point when your close colleague senses something and comes to you and asks you to join for a coffee break at canteen. Leadership in many ways through their regular communications and team building exercises create an environment of more collaboration than competition. When there is collaboration, comes trust and camaraderie, and eventually empathy which is required for the workforce to shift to the left hand side of the mental health continuum.

Communicate upon the theme very often (Employer)

When the Leadership Style changes from Theory X to Theory Y4, then it is imbibed in the company's culture where managers view their employees as the most valuable asset. Any corporation would make extra efforts to ensure that their human capital is safe, sound and healthy to yield dividends. It is imperative for corporations to communicate upon the theme of Mental Health at regular intervals and take proactive and corrective measures to ensure that people are working with positive energy and vibrancy rather than distress.

Take Care of Your Employees And They Will Take Care of Your Business

~ Richard Branson

Bibliography:

1. (Frisch, Cornell, Villanueva, & Retzlaff, 1992)
2. <https://positivepsychology.com/mental-health-continuum-model>
3. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/08/30/ambition-vs-aspiration-why-leaders-need-to-understand-the-difference/?sh=5ac3eacd85b8>
4. Book: The Human Side of Enterprise by Douglas McGregor

“Watch Out and Act Now!: Prioritizing Mental Health at Work”



By - Beni Kinha, Nectar Factor
www.nectarfactor.in

Psychology drives the biology...biology carries the psychology...if you watch carefully; you will realize

that you feel fatigued when you have to do a task rather than you like to do it...

Employees like to go to office Or have to go to office' defines the work/workplace is creating a #stress or

not...the one line KRA or challenge for Team HR to work on...

The holistic definition of complete health is "Physically & Mentally self reliance, not dependable neither on

medicines nor tranquilization". #stress is a holistic word for #depression, #anxiety, emotional

outburst/swing, concentration problem etc.

● According to different sources/reports

- Prescriptions for major #depression up 14% after 2016
- only 1 out of 20 Indians with mental illness gets treatment
- Hypertension Diabetes biggest killers

● WHO research

- 19% of the population suffer from mental problem or disorder
- By 2022 #depression will become the largest illness
- 30% of children n teenagers suffer from mental illness
- Almost 50% of mental illness starts before 14
- In India approximately 67% population suffer from #stress or mental illness

In the same organization, some thrive and few feel suffocated and not able to perform as per capacity.

We generally hear at home or in friend circle that due to

office pressure one is suffering from the #stress (#depression or #anxiety).

Is really a complete office creating a #stress? The building or the work station or computer or the machine or product is creating #stress...you will find that it's not the complete office but few of the dimensions. Workload, Role, #responsibility, Relationship or #Worklifebalance etc. you will find there shall be one or two reasons for #stress and if we identify and address those concern areas with the help of superiors and empathetic approach of HRD the same person starts performing.

There are scientific tools from clinical psychiatric and psychological approach to identify and solutions through modern medical science as well social and spiritual approach.

Sign of #stress:- There are many signs of #stress, name a few are

- Panic attacks
- Hyperventilation
- Obsessive Behavior
- Fear and Phobias
- Irritability and Anger
- Eating Disorders
- Sleep Problems
- o Headaches and Migraines
- High Blood Pressure
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome

#stress has effect on body, behaviour, thoughts, emotions and health.

One of the biggest Sources of #stress are Change, Family, Teen age children & work.

#stress is manageable with counseling, therapy, spa, exercise, hobby, meditation, yoga, nature, time management, music, self care, right choice of food & drinks, color/sound/aroma/oil/music/dance therapies & sports.

● Steps to Positive mental Health

- Be flexible in your thinking
- Accept reality
- Live in the moment
- Take care of yourself
- Express feeling
- Set & Work towards goals
- Realistic thinking
- Manage your time
- Develop hobbies and interests
- Selective relationships

One must develop the spiritual way in own life. Develop a balance between Need and Want, art of Gratitude and forgiveness.

All negativity is caused by an accumulation of psychological time and denial of present.

Unease, #anxiety, tension, #stress, worry –all form of fear are caused by too much future and not enough presence.

Guilt, regret, resentment, graveness, sadness, bitterness and all form of no forgiveness are caused by too much past and not enough presence.

Smiling & Laughter Helps to strengthen Immune System, Reduce #anxiety, #depression and #stress, Improve Mood, Reduce Pain, Increase Blood flow+ Oxygenation & Improves Heart Health.....

Hasnte Raho...Hansa te Raho.....zindgi hai Jee ne ke liye..Khool ke Jee te Raho..

Jago, Utho, Khelo, Khulo ...Khilo



"Together we make Blissful society"

BENI KINHA



Life Skill/ Human Architecture/ #stress Management/ Corporate Spirituality
In-house & 'Out un Bound' facilitation
+91 93507 50794 www.nectarfactor.in

Effective Time Management



By - Suraj Sharma, IOCL
surajsharma@indianoil.in

Rohan came to his workdesk on Monday morning . After a Sunday's party he was feeling bit less energetic ,but he knew he had to make this important note sheet which require Director's approval . This notesheet was on a policy which was vital for the Learning and development department in which he was working .

While having a cup of tea served by the office boy he started rummaging through emails and clearing the inbox. Lo, there were some mails requiring immediate attention , then there was this irritating mail from the colleague Neha .Not answering to it would demean the streture of Rohan.

When he was about to click send button after drafting a strong mail to Neha with a befitting reply , he was summoned by his Executive director . A new event was on the way which suddenly took all the priority . Rohan was supposed to call 10-15 fellows to arrange for nitti-gritties of the event . Not to mention that he was receiving Whatsapp messages from his fiancée Sonika in between and not replying to her warm messages would put Rohan as a very cold and unromantic fiancé.

After Lunch , Now Rohan was committed to complete this important notesheet but suddenly his colleague Ashwini peeped in to discuss about the role of L&D in innovation . Rohan thought that disposing his colleague without inputs will not be prudent hence he gave him all the inputs required .

Just after completing discussion with Ashwini , Rohan received a call on landline from his training vendor that some of the payments have not been reflected on his account . Rohan immediately logged in to SAP and checked entries and got to know that finance has stopped 2 payments as the signature in the invoice was missing but he knew that signatures are not required as bills are digitally signed . He called Finance department to explain about the invoices . He had heated discussion with the clerk there to make him convince to accept the bills .

Now it was 6 o'clock in the evening and Rohan was already feeling very exhausted . Suddenly His Director called him and asked about the status of note sheet reminding him the deadline of today . Rohan had no choice but to sit late till 10 in the night and finish the notesheet , but he was mentally and physically so

exhausted that even coffee shots were not being helpful and to make situation worse Sonika invited him for the dinner.

Was Rohan overworked ? or he was less efficient ?

Today we are living in a world which is full of distraction and there are myriad activities which ask for our attention .The "Pings, dings and rings" of devices condition us to respond immediately to minor tasks, but often crowd out more important work.

The key to better time management is Prioritizing and utilizing your attention span wisely .

Some tips for better time management are :

1) Prioritize Goals while managing your time - When number of tasks are more you need to rank them in terms of importance and urgency.

One needs to complete tasks first which are both important and urgent then striking a balance between urgent and important and important but less urgent.

2) Identify when you are at your sharpest and use this "prime time" effectively- We all have time of peak energy and low energy which keep fluctuating in a day's time. It is called Circadian rhythms which is physical, mental, and behavioural changes that follow a 24-hour cycle . Some of us are more energetic in the morning whereas some are in the late hours of evening .Just after lunch many feel trough in the energy, but a second wind comes after say two hours of lunch time . One should identify these peak times and utilize them for more creative tasks whereas low energy times can be for routine tasks .

3) Recognize what distracts you and refocus quickly- Gadget notifications , email pop ups, unwanted calls and colleague's interventions are distractions which we need to control . While doing important tasks, gadgets notifications can be turned off. We need not to respond all the emails then and there . One should learn to say no and/renege requests from others so that one has time for what matters most. Evaluate yourself and others by important work produced , not by long hours or always being available. Examine your daily habits -sleep, food, physical activity , time spent on screen etc. and aim for good choices as often as possible. Reflect on your days

and use those insights to develop good habits.

4) Develop a broad toolkit of productivity strategies-

One should preload the calendar with upcoming important projects and block off work times. There should be timely monitoring of progress of important long-term projects and timetable should be so designed as to have scope to accommodate few urgencies . Upcoming problems should be anticipated, and alternate plans should be kept ready in case primary plan does not work.

5) You cannot Multitask- Multitasking is a myth . You can provide attention to one task only at a time only you can shift your attention from task A to task B and this shifting has its own demerits .What we consider as multitasking is actually “task switching” and it makes us slower and more error prone. It is better to finish 'job A' and then switch to 'job B' for efficient working.

6) Identify “Time Sinks” and avoid them – Time sinks happen when you and your team repeatedly and avoidably lose a lot of time on certain low value tasks, ineffective processes . These situations arise due to miscommunication , lack of clarity or rivalries at workplace. Work that is barely used, not valued , or tied to an outdated part of the business should be identified and one should strive to eradicate such processes, relations, and tasks to be more effective. address time sinks by figuring out the root cause and considering multipole solutions.

7) Delegate - You cannot do all the jobs by yourself . effective delegation is the key . one should identify the sub tasks in which team members are good at and they should be delegated suitably. For example , if you enjoy writing but dislike budgeting , partner with someone who enjoys the tasks you do not.

Make time work for you by developing smart and good habits which helps you staying energetic throughout the day .

To harness Physical Energy :

- Get plenty of sleep
- Exercise
- Take nutritious diet

To harness Emotional Energy :

- Defuse negative emotions and fuel positive thoughts
- Develop holistic view of the situation and look at upsetting situations through new lenses.

To Harness mental Energy :

- Take short breaks throughout the day to rejuvenate
- Set aside time for thinking and planning

To harness Spiritual Energy :

- Do more activities which fulfils you
- Allocate time and energy to what you consider most important.
- Live your core values.

Time management should be such that we should feel accomplished yet energetic at the end of the day.

We all have 24 hours , it is how we chose to dispose them makes us a good or bad time manager.

Source – Harvard managementor courses

Rohan came to his workdesk on Monday morning . After a Sunday's party he was feeling bit less energetic ,but he knew he had to make this important note sheet which require Director's approval . This notesheet was on a policy which was vital for the Learning and development department in which he was working .

While having a cup of tea served by the office boy he started rummaging through emails and clearing the inbox. Lo, there were some mails requiring immediate attention , then there was this irritating mail from the colleague Neha .Not answering to it would demean the streture of Rohan.

When he was about to click send button after drafting a strong mail to Neha with a befitting reply , he was summoned by his Executive director . A new event was on the way which suddenly took all the priority . Rohan was supposed to call 10-15 fellows to arrange for nitti-gritties of the event . Not to mention that he was receiving Whatsapp messages from his fiancée Sonika in between and not replying to her warm messages would put Rohan as a very cold and unromantic fiancé.

After Lunch , Now Rohan was committed to complete this important notesheet but suddenly his colleague Ashwini peeped in to discuss about the role of L&D in innovation . Rohan thought that disposing his colleague without inputs will not be prudent hence he gave him all the inputs required.

Just after completing discussion with Ashwini , Rohan received a call on landline from his training vendor that some of the payments have not been reflected on his account . Rohan immediately logged in to SAP and checked entries and got to know that finance has stopped 2 payments as the signature in the invoice was missing but he knew that signatures are not required as bills are digitally signed . He called Finance department to explain about the invoices . He had heated discussion with the clerk there to make him convince to accept the bills .

Now it was 6 o'clock in the evening and Rohan was already feeling very exhausted . Suddenly His Director called him and asked about the status of note sheet reminding him the deadline of today . Rohan had no choice but to sit late till 10 in the night and finish the

notesheet, but he was mentally and physically so exhausted that even coffee shots were not being helpful and to make situation worse Sonika invited him for the dinner.

Was Rohan overworked? or he was less efficient?

Today we are living in a world which is full of distraction and there are myriad activities which ask for our attention. The "Pings, dings and rings" of devices condition us to respond immediately to minor tasks, but often crowd out more important work.

The key to better time management is Prioritizing and utilizing your attention span wisely.

Some tips for better time management are:

1) Prioritize Goals while managing your time - When number of tasks are more you need to rank them in terms of importance and urgency.

One needs to complete tasks first which are both important and urgent then striking a balance between urgent and important and important but less urgent.

2) Identify when you are at your sharpest and use this "prime time" effectively- We all have time of peak energy and low energy which keep fluctuating in a day's time. It is called Circadian rhythms which is physical, mental, and behavioural changes that follow a 24-hour cycle. Some of us are more energetic in the morning whereas some are in the late hours of evening. Just after lunch many feel trough in the energy, but a second wind comes after say two hours of lunch time. One should identify these peak times and utilize them for more creative tasks whereas low energy times can be for routine tasks.

3) Recognize what distracts you and refocus quickly- Gadget notifications, email pop ups, unwanted calls and colleague's interventions are distractions which we need to control. While doing important tasks, gadgets notifications can be turned off. We need not to respond all the emails then and there. One should learn to say no and/renege requests from others so that one has time for what matters most. Evaluate yourself and others by important work produced, not by long hours or always being available. Examine your daily habits -sleep, food, physical activity, time spent on screen etc. and aim for good choices as often as possible. Reflect on your days and use those insights to develop good habits.

4) Develop a broad toolkit of productivity strategies- One should preload the calendar with upcoming important projects and block off work times. There should be timely monitoring of progress of important long-term projects and timetable should be so designed as to have scope to accommodate few urgencies. Upcoming problems should be anticipated, and alternate plans should be kept ready in case primary plan does not work.

5) You cannot Multitask- Multitasking is a myth. You can

provide attention to one task only at a time only you can shift your attention from task A to task B and this shifting has its own demerits. What we consider as multitasking is actually "task switching" and it makes us slower and more error prone. It is better to finish 'job A' and then switch to 'job B' for efficient working.

6) Identify "Time Sinks" and avoid them – Time sinks happen when you and your team repeatedly and avoidably lose a lot of time on certain low value tasks, ineffective processes. These situations arise due to miscommunication, lack of clarity or rivalries at workplace. Work that is barely used, not valued, or tied to an outdated part of the business should be identified and one should strive to eradicate such processes, relations, and tasks to be more effective. address time sinks by figuring out the root cause and considering multipole solutions.

7) Delegate - You cannot do all the jobs by yourself. effective delegation is the key. one should identify the sub tasks in which team members are good at and they should be delegated suitably. For example, if you enjoy writing but dislike budgeting, partner with someone who enjoys the tasks you do not.

Make time work for you by developing smart and good habits which helps you staying energetic throughout the day.

To harness Physical Energy:

- Get plenty of sleep
- Exercise
- Take nutritious diet

To harness Emotional Energy:

- Defuse negative emotions and fuel positive thoughts
- Develop holistic view of the situation and look at upsetting situations through new lenses.

To Harness mental Energy:

- Take short breaks throughout the day to rejuvenate
- Set aside time for thinking and planning

To harness Spiritual Energy:

- Do more activities which fulfils you
- Allocate time and energy to what you consider most important.
- Live your core values.

Time management should be such that we should feel accomplished yet energetic at the end of the day.

We all have 24 hours, it is how we chose to dispose them makes us a good or bad time manager.

Source – Harvard managementor courses

The Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995- A Saga of Litigation



By - **Gunjan Jain, IOCL**
gunjanj@indianoil.in



By - **Awadhesh Mishra, IOCL**
awadeshk@indianoil.in

Background:

In the year 1971, family pension scheme (FPS-71) was introduced by amending 'the Employees' Provident Funds & [Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952](#)', providing for payment of family pension in the event of death of the member while in service.

Subsequently, The Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995 (EPS-95) was brought into force on 16.11.1995 replacing the existing FPS-71. The EPS-95 is a 'Defined Contribution-Defined Benefit' Social Security Scheme. The corpus of the Employees' Pension Fund is made up of the following:

- (i) monthly contribution by the employer @ 8.33% of wages; and
- (ii) monthly contribution from Central Govt. through budgetary support @ 1.16 % of wages, up to an amount as stipulated from time to time.

Since then, the EPS-95 has been a bagful of litigations and has a continuous history of being entangled in legal disputes as detailed in the sections below.

FPS-71 vs EPS-95

When the EPS 95 was introduced various Trade Unions and Political Parties opposed this Scheme. Many Establishments, Employees Associations etc approached High Courts against implementation of the EPS-95, on the grounds that it is unreasonable, arbitrary, and discriminatory leading to depletion of PF to a great extent by diversion of 8.33% employer's share and pension payable under the new scheme is not commensurate to the accruals in the pension fund.

EPS 95 was challenged in the High Courts of Madras, Kerala and Karnataka. Further, appeals were filed against orders passed by these High Courts. Some of the employers sought exemption from implementation of EPS 95 since they had pension scheme of their own. Such applications were rejected by EPFO and consequently it led to filing of petitions or appeals before Supreme Court against these rejections. The matter finally landed

before Supreme Court vide Special Leave Petition (SLP) (Civil) in year 1997.

While in 1998, Hon'ble Supreme Court ordered for maintaining status quo; in the year 1999, vide an interim order, the Apex court ordered the employers to obtain option from the employees regarding their willingness to opt between erstwhile FPS-71 and the EPS-95. This interim order, it appears that initially was not noticed by many organisations. However, subsequently, employers started seeking options from the employees and parallel accounts were operated and maintained towards the membership under either FPS-71 or the EPS-95, based on the option exercised.

Four years later, the matter reached finality & the Apex Court vide order dated 11.11.03 upheld the validity of the EPS-95 and FPS-71 ceased to exist. Since inception, it was the first time that the clarity in the matter arrived and organisations including CPSEs geared up for implementation of EPS 95 thereafter in a full-fledged manner.

Litigations Continue..

When EPS 95 was introduced under Clause 11(3) of the Pension Scheme, the maximum pensionable salary was limited to Rs.5,000/-, which was subsequently enhanced to Rs.6,500/- per month w.e.f. 08.10.2001. A couple of months after the Pension Scheme was framed w.e.f. 16.11.1995, a proviso was added to Clause 11(3) w.e.f. 16.03.1996 permitting an option to the employer and an employee for contribution on salary exceeding the ceilings of Rs.5,000/- or Rs.6,500/- (w.e.f. 08.10.2001) per month. In such cases 8.33% of such contribution on full salary was required to be remitted to the Pension Fund. Thus, this proviso enabled the employees to contribute towards EPS 95 @ 8.33% on their actual pensionable salary rather than the prescribed ceilings as said above.

The litigation woes of the scheme did not end with settling of the matter in Nov.' 03. A group of retiring employees sometime in the year 2005 contested the above said amendment of 1996 contending that the same was not within their knowledge and, therefore, they

may be given the benefit thereof. The plea was not accepted by EPFO on the ground that the proviso visualized a cut-off date for exercise of option viz, the date of commencement of Scheme or from the date the salary exceeded the ceiling amount of Rs.5,000/- or 6,500/- p.m, as may be & since the request of such employees was subsequent to either of the said cut off dates, the same cannot be acceded to.

The matter became sub-judice again since the aggrieved employees moved to High Court of Himachal Pradesh under Article 226 of the Constitution. The said Writ petition was decided in favour of the appellant-employees by the learned single Judge against which EPFO made an appeal before the Division bench in year 2012. The Division Bench vide its judgement dated 22.07.15 reversed the said decision upholding the view of EPFO that under the proviso to Clause 11(3) of the Pension Scheme there was a cut-off date.

While the litigations continued, new amendments also had been made in the EPS-95 which inter-alia included the amendment made in 2014 by omitting the proviso to clause 11 (3) by G.S.R. No.609 (E), dated 22.08.2014 (with effect from 01.09.2014). The amendment inter-alia stipulated that :

- *The pensionable salary shall be the average monthly pay drawn in any manner including on piece rate basis during contributory period of service in the span of sixty months preceding the date of exit from the membership of the Pension Fund.*
- *The existing members as on the 1st day of September, 2014, who at the option of the employer and employee, may exercise fresh joint option to contribute on salary exceeding fifteen thousand rupees per month. However, the aforesaid members have to contribute at the rate of 1.16 per cent on salary exceeding fifteen thousand rupees as an additional contribution from and out of the contributions payable by the employees for each month.*
- *Further the fresh option shall be exercised by the member within a period of six months from the 1st day of September, 2014.*
- *It was also provided that if no option is exercised by the member within such period it shall be deemed that the member has not opted for contribution over wage ceiling and the contributions to the Pension Fund made over the wage ceiling in respect of the member shall be diverted to the Provident Fund account of the member along with interest as declared under the Employees Provident Fund Scheme from time to time.*

Meanwhile, during the period 2004 to 2014 many cases were filed in various forums and High Courts including Kerela High Court, praying for payment of pension on higher wages by allowing to contribute on higher wages under EPS-95. Many rulings went in favour of the employees and on being aggrieved by such orders EPFO appealed to the Hon'ble Supreme Court by filing 8 SLPs in series. The said SLPs were disposed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court vide orders dated 31.03.2016 & 12.07.2016. After dismissal of the aforesaid SLPs by the Apex Court, compliance of the orders in the respective Writ Petitions was required to be made.

Thereafter, two SLPs were filed by employees of M/s Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation against the orders of the Division Bench of Hon'ble High Court of Himachal Pradesh disallowing the option for contributing to Pension Fund on higher wage. The Hon'ble Supreme Court disposed off the SLPs vide order dated 04.10.2016 (R.C. Gupta Vs RPFC Shimla) allowing the petitions and decided the matter of pensionary benefit on higher wages with detailed order examining the provisions of the EPF Scheme, 1952 and EPS-95 and also citing the orders passed by the Apex Court for dismissal of SLPs filed by EPFO with reference to the orders passed by Hon'ble Kerala High Court.

Subsequent to this judgment of Hon'ble Supreme Court, many groups of employees belonging to Exempted Establishments approached EPFO for extending the benefits to them also. However, EPFO found that the Supreme Court order is not applicable to the exempted establishments. Being aggrieved by this decision employees belonging to exempted establishments filed petitions in various High Courts challenging the decision of EPFO and claiming for benefits misrepresenting the instant judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

EPFO filed a petition for transfer of all such petitions filed in various High Courts to the Hon'ble Supreme Court to have uniform and finality in the matter. Accordingly, all such cases were transferred to the Hon'ble Supreme Court and an interim order dated 15.12.2017 was passed in the said transfer petition wherein it requested the other High Courts to await for the outcome of the order passed by the High Court of Kerala in the cases reserved for judgment and only thereafter to proceed further in the matter and that too subject to further orders to be passed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in these matters.

Landmark judgement pronounced by Supreme Court on 4.11.2022

In the timelines of EPS 95, 4th November'2022 became another milestone when the Hon'ble Supreme Court

disposed off the matter finally. The apex court decided that:

- Provisions of notification no. G.S.R. 609(E) dated 22nd August 2014 are legal and valid.
- No flaw in altering the basis for computation of pensionable salary.
- Amendment shall apply to the exempted establishments. The employer and the employee, simultaneously with exercising option shall also have to give an undertaking of transferring the employers' contribution at the stipulated rate maintained by the trusts, which shall be equivalent to and not lower than the sum which would have been transferable, had such fund been maintained by the provident fund authorities.
- Who all can get pension on higher wages:
- *Employees who exercised option and continued to be in service as on 1st September 2014,*
- *The members, who did not exercise option, as per paragraph 11(3) of the pension scheme (as it was before the 2014 Amendment) would be entitled to exercise option. Their exercise of option shall be in the nature of joint options. Time to exercise option shall stand extended by a further period of four months.*
- *Employees who retired prior to 1st Sep'14 without exercising any option have already exited from the membership thereof. They would not be entitled to the benefit of this judgment.*
- *The employees who have retired before 1st Sep'2014 upon exercising option shall be covered by the provisions of the para 11(3) as it stood prior to the amendment of 2014.*
- Contribution @ of 1.16 per cent of their salary as an additional contribution is held to be ultra vires the provisions of the parent Act i.e. EPF 1952 Act. For the period of six months or till such time any amendment is made, whichever is earlier, the employees' contribution shall be as stop gap measure. The said sum shall be adjustable on the basis of alteration to the scheme that may be made.

SC verdict: a mixed bag of hopes

The above verdict provides a mixed bag of hopes and one earnestly hope that the scheme does not again gets drawn into legal battle.

The Apex Court did not find any flaw in altering the basis

for computation of pensionable salary. EPFO enhanced the basis of computation of pensionable salary taking twelve months of average pay in the year preceding the date of a member's exit from the pension fund to taking average monthly pay drawn during the contributory period of service in the span of 60 months of average pay in the year preceding the date of a member's exit from the pension fund. The contention of EPFO in this regard was that it has to be done to achieve a clearer picture of the pensionable salary to eliminate the possibility of fluctuations in pay drawn in the last 12 months for determining the quantum of pension. However, while it may be true to some extent in case of unorganised labour/manual labourers, it will have a depressing effect on the pensionable salary in the case of the employees of organised sector included those of the exempted trusts.

The verdict has clearly omitted those employees who exited the membership from the scheme prior to 1st Sep'14 without exercising option. However, on the same hand the Hon'ble Court has inter-alia observed that the scheme as it stood before 1st September'2014 did not provide for any cutoff date. Thus, there is a possibility that the section of employees who retired prior to 1st Sep'2014 may approach the Court to reconsider their cases.

Though, there is a confusion as to what amount is required to be remitted to EPFO by the exempted trusts in respect of their employees', but from the judgement of the Apex Court it is clear that the entire relevant corpus with applicable interests earned thereon will have to be remitted to EPFO. There are many exempted trusts who have given higher rate of interest to their members than the declared rate of interest by the EPFO. Now, whether EPFO will demand the interest amount based on declared rate of interest or the higher rate of interest disbursed by the exempted trusts remains a question. Thus, it will be prudent for serving as well as eligible retired employees to do a cost benefit analysis before submitting their options for higher pensions keeping the outgo and the probable returns in mind.

Moreover, the Supreme Court suggested that an employer's contribution to pension can be increased as a possible solution to compensate for the employee's contribution of 1.16%. There is a concern that this may result in increasing the employers' financial burden in the process. This may lead to a possible scenario where some employers may decide to adjust the burden of 1.16 % from and amongst the 3.67 % employer's contribution towards the PF contribution.

In as much as the Apex Court has ruled that the

Contribution @ of 1.16 per cent of their salary as an additional contribution is held to be ultra vires the provisions of the parent Act i.e. EPF 1952 Act; a thought may be given to discontinue seeking any additional contribution over and above the ceilings i.e. Rs. 15000/- from any of the party concerned.

In conclusion it can be said that the provisions of the EPS-95 in its journey of 27 years have been subject to litigation from its inception in different courts starting from District Consumer Forums. Now with the Hon'ble Supreme Court verdict in the matter, it can only be hoped that there will be no further litigation over EPS 95! otherwise the acronym 'EPS' for some may be relatable to 'Employees Pain Scheme'???????

REFERENCES

- [1] Case Name: Employees Provident Fund Organisation Vs Sunil Kumar (Supreme Court of India) Date of judgement: 4.11.2022, Appeal No.: Civil Appeals Nos. of 2022)
- [2] Case Name: R.C. Gupta & Ors. Etc. Etc. Versus Regional Provident Fund Commissioner Employees Provident Fund Organisation & Ors Etc., Civil Appeal No(S).10013-10014 OF 2016
- [3] G.S.R. No.609 (E), dated 22.08.2014
- [4] <https://www.researchgate.net/>
- [5] <https://www.indialegallive.com/magazine/employees-pension-scheme-epfo-supreme-court/>
- [6] Various other articles available on web.

By: Ms. Gunjan Jain, SM(HR)
Shri Awadhesh Kumar Mishra, GM (HR)

Note: The views/opinions expressed in the article are those of the writers, in their personal capacity.

Role of HR in ensuring a vibrant workplace



By - Raghav Joshi
vmaheshwari@indianoil.in

Raghav Joshi

Head: PSU 2.0 Leading with compassion

Sub head: Diversity & Inclusion

Designation: Legal Officer

Division: Emp Relations, Legal & Corporate Affairs

Section: Legal

Role of HR in ensuring a vibrant workplace: leading with acceptance, compassion and inclusion with focus on LGBTQ+ employees

Law as the balancing factor between human wants and social welfare emerges as instrument of social change. Law and society, both are organic concepts. Social advancement leads to growth of law and the converse is also true. The concept of law as social engineering was expounded by a famous American scholar of law in the early 20th century which provides for striving a balance between competing interests in society. Given the march of law and society, both international and domestic, in the direction of expanding human rights, jurisprudence and our Fundamental Duty as a citizen of our country, necessarily means that we become inclined towards acceptance of requirements of our society, be it even a small segment of society.

The last two decades have witnessed tremendous progress in establishing civil rights for the LGBTQ+ community. To quote an example, the Federal Government in Australia enacted Same-sex Relationships (Equal Treatment in Commonwealth Laws – General Law Reform) Act, 2008 to provide equal entitlements for same-sex couples in matters of, inter alia, social security, employment, taxation. In India, the Hon'ble Supreme Court on 6th September 2018, ruled in *Navtej Singh Johar Vs Union of India* (AIR 2018 SC 4321) that Section 377 of Indian Penal Code was unconstitutional "*in so far it criminalises consensual sexual conduct between adults if the same sex.*"

Despite major changes in laws and norms surrounding the issue of same-sex marriage and the

rights of LGBTQ+ people around the world, public opinion on the acceptance of homosexuality in society remains sharply divided by country, region and economic development. India has always been a scion of diversity and more so unity in diversity. Diversity implies and embodies inclusion, which is not merely limited to homes, but encompasses all walks of life, including workplace.

To thrive as an intelligent enterprise, an organization needs an inclusive culture that empowers people to run at their best, enables pooling of more intellects and the many minds in the organization to create a greater sense of community, and consequent progress. The statement subsumes understanding, acceptance, compassion and inclusion of LGBTQ+ in workforce of an organization. People of LGBTQ+ community who work in an organization suffer from various actions on part of employers and colleagues which includes lack of awareness, sensitivity, suspicion, sexual harassment, intrusive questions about personal life including children, marriage, negative aspirations on mental health, etc. It is beyond doubt that all such actions by employers/ colleagues and inaction on part of management leads to tremendous suffering by an individual employee, whose insecurities increase, efficiency decreases and he or she may even quit. Therefore, it is very important for the management and the human resource department to come up with and implement policies which encourage, promote and keep alive the principles of acceptance, inclusion and diversity in their organizations.

Brief insights into the various corporate giants who have made progress in this uncharted territory of acceptance, compassion and inclusion in workplace:

1. Mahindra Logistics Limited: Mahindra Logistics Limited (MLL) unveiled its LGBTQIA+ policy, along with a robust plan to hire people from the community. MLL's diversity and inclusion policy extends employee benefits to the queer employees and same-sex partners, which includes but is not limited to adoption

leave for single LGBT parents, 'compassionate leave' (in case of death of a family member), counselling services for LGBTQIA employees and their immediate family members, including their partners. In addition, MLL has pledged equal opportunity and non-discrimination for queer employees in any process of hiring, relocation, training, transfer, career development, promotions, etc.

2. Godrej: In Godrej employees are allowed to select gender when they join the company. Terminology such as 'spouse' has been changed to 'partner'. LGBTQ individuals are given a three-month paid break for primary care-giving if they choose to adopt. Health insurance coverage includes same sex partners. Godrej launched Project Rainbow, a focused hiring platform for LGBTQ candidates who want to apply for internships or full-time employment positions at the company. Medical insurance coverage at Godrej cover same-sex partners as it would other family members of the employee.

3. Infosys: An official employee resource group called "Infosys Gays Lesbians and You" (IGLU) was created to bring together their LGBT employees. The focus of this group is to encourage open discussions on policy changes that are needed and the support that can help LGBT employees perform better in the workplace. Infosys also works actively in hosting workshops and sessions to raise awareness and foster a culture of respect.

4. Tech Mahindra: In 2019 added a few initiatives to its Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) policy aimed at supporting employees from the LGBTQ+ community which included work from home during first year of parenthood, 12 week of adoption leave for same-sex parents.

5. IBM India: The company set up a employee resource group which allows employees who belong to queer community to discuss with senior employees various issues ranging from alternate sexuality, queer pride events to career advancement. Periodic programs are conducted to build awareness amongst employees about LGBTQ+ community so that employees accept those amongst themselves who do not conform to hetero-normal behaviour.

Any discussion on rights if LGBTQ+ community is incomplete without shedding light on Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which provides *"all are equal before the law and entitled to equal protection without discrimination"*. Article 23(1) of the UDHR further contemplates protection against

unemployment, by recognising the rights to work, free choice of employment, and just and favourable conditions of work, along with the protection against unemployment.

The path to inclusivity begins with companies changing their policies or creating new ones in order to provide a safe environment for LGBTQ employees and to extend them the same benefits as all other employees.

These are a few guidelines for the HR personnel to develop upon the principles of diversity and inclusion practitioners as they focus their efforts towards LGBTQ+ community inclusion. However, to sum up the efforts of the above organizations, it can be concluded that period awareness programs, regular interaction with senior employees, provision of official LGBTQ+ community employee groups, adoption/ parenthood provisions go a long way in making workplace a safe, congenial, and harassment free zone. This will not only support a community in our society which has so far been suffering, but will also give an organization the opportunity to harness human resources which have remain untapped so far, leading to growth of not only the organization, but also the community and the nation as a whole. Human resource is the backbone of an organization, especially of an organization predominantly engaged in consultancy services. Policy changes do create a positive impact, but the real change comes with positive change in the attitudes of employees, which can be done by group activities, awareness programs, etc. The role of the HR Department is crucial in implementing these policies of inclusion and diversity and ensuring that these policies are not rendered a mere piece of document or lip service in due course.

Bibliography

1. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/global-hr/pages/india-inclusion-lgbtq-employees.aspx>
2. <https://www.mahindra.com/news-room/knowledge-centre/impact-stories/the-logistics-of-diversity>
3. <https://www.shrm.org/shrm-india/pages/lgbt-inclusion-at-the-workplace.aspx>
4. <https://indiaculturelab.org/assets/Uploads/Godrej-India-Culture-Lab-Trans-Inclusion-Manifesto-Paper3.pdf>
5. <https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/lgbtq-employment-protections-in-india>
6. <https://www.ibm.com/impact/be-equal/communities/lgbt/>
7. <https://www.infosys.com/sustainability/resources/documents/human-rights-statement.pdf>

Embracing the Path: A Story of Leadership, Transformation and Adventure



By - **Varsha Maheshwari, IOCL**
vmaheshwari@indianoil.in

I'm a rising sun, light that illuminates the world, I am proud IOCian!" to be more precise I'm a strong independent woman having marketing experience of more than 16 years. I was efficient in what I was doing, Things were fine, till "Change" came to visit. I was asked to lead a totally new team / profile for which I did not have extensive domain experience. I was asked to develop and lead a high performing team and contribute to business outcomes.

I was looking for a coach who could hand hold and show me the way. In the meantime, I had feedback from the grapevine that some of the new team members opined that I may not be appropriate person to take on this role. This left me discouraged and doubtful, even though I had lead a high performing team in the earlier role for many years. I felt why am left on my own and shouldn't there be an easy, quick and effective way to tap into industry expertise and leadership.

Then suddenly a light came in darkness, and I have been nominated for prestigious training programme of IIPM which is beautifully curated to develop unique strength in women leaders by understanding their barrier to success and create action plan to overcome them.

A journey of transformation in me through self-realization and personal development, made possible through the collective learning experiences and inspirations provided during the training programme-Aarohi at IIPM. The concepts were purposefully woven together in a format to reinforce the importance of balance across multiple versions of self, highlighting personal development experiences, adventures, and the resultant growth as a person and leader in me. It had led to work-life balance and selfawareness which had contributed development as a leader.

We women executives rarely have an opportunity to come together and share their leadership experiences in a learning environment that has direct relevance and personal impact. Aarohi was designed to create this environment. It addresses leadership issues that affect us, in a forum that hones in on the unique challenges women encounter. It creates a network of today's senior

women leaders, empowering them to take hold of their careers and aim for the top.

I was assigned a personal coach, who has instilled confidence by reiterating that openness and willingness to learn is key and helped in journey of leadership.

These were no sessions where we were provided with readymade answers! It led us to explore the things and go in deeper about our self. We shared our own leadership story with peers, and getting fresh eyes on personal challenges, beliefs, as well as hearing perspectives on problems from other women from different backgrounds facing similar issues was a really powerful way to gain confidence in myself and my own journey.

Leadership skills provided encouraged us to find new, innovative ways of developing and managing people. The programme delivered both the analytical, research-based piece and the personal development toolkit that empowers us to dig deeper and build self-awareness. It challenges us to think hard about our self and really explore the depths of personal insecurities as well as strengths. It has allows us to grow from strength to strength.

After few weeks, changes started showing both in personal and professional behaviour, which led to change in team behaviour. They were trusting each other, motivated and helping each other and growing together. This had made me much more confident and enjoyed working with the team and vice versa and working towards the growth of organization.

I feel extremely privileged, grateful and proud to be a part of Aarohi 4.0 Women Leadership Program and sincerely thank team IIPM for such a great training programme and showing us a path of a beautiful journey of leadership.

Watch Out and Act Now! Prioritizing Mental Health at Work



By - **Vinti Mehrotra**
vinti.mehrotra@ficci.com

Vinti Mehrotra

Joint Director and Lead, HR Desk, FICCI Quality Forum, FICCI

Normalizing Mental Health at Workplace.

Vinti leads the HR vertical for Industry at FICCI Quality Forum-the training and consulting wing for FICCI. In her current role she consults Industry HR spanning various sectors of Indian Economy and finding sustainable solutions on their People specific issues. Her key focus is to help organisations build structural long-term capability through People Strategy, Structures, Processes, Leadership & Learning interventions and managing Diversity and inclusion. In her current role she is committed to creating to the growth of the industry through capability building and HR advisory services. She engages with Industry Senior leaders to understand their specific needs and curate people interventions around them. She has over 18 years of work experience and functionally she has been an LND and DEI specialist.

Email: vinti.mehrotra@ficci.com

Abstract

Mental Health issues are not new at the workplace, it has always been there a very long time now. With a black swan event like COVID 19 in the backdrop which fundamentally challenged the way workplace behaviours are redefined, we must introspect as organisations if we are paying enough attention towards mental health of employees and what are the steps have, we have taken to 'normalise' the whole issue. This article is an endeavour to enable organisations to bolster their focus on mental health and wellbeing journey.

Main Content

Why Mental health needs focus now – more than ever before?

Let us understand that why are we hearing this term – Mental Health more often than not-specially at workplaces, few numbers will help and set a context-

- 1 billion - people live with a mental disorder and it is expected that in the next 10 years, depression will put more burden on nations than any other disease*
2. < 2%- Countries spend less than 2% of their health budgets on mental health. For India, it is less than 1 % *
3. About 50% of mental health disorders start by the age of 14 itself *
4. India was the only country where the percentage of our youth (15-24) that felt people experiencing mental health issues should reach out to others was a minority **

Source - * WHO

** UNICEF

By now with these numbers in sight, it's evident that we cannot ignore this issue anymore and if required face it-face head on if we want a healthy, happy and engaged workforce which is key to the success of any organisation. In fact, it's no more a 'nice thing to do' rather it's a business imperative in the current scenario as healthy employees – both physically and mentally drive more engagement which in turn fosters productivity and better performance.

Self-health check- Assessing the terrain

In the Indian context, we have diverse set of companies which are on the continuum as far as maturity towards mental health is concerned and each of these journeys are different. Its best to start from where they are and decide where they want to be. The companies need to self-diagnose and check where they are in the journey – from strategy, systems, processes, leadership vision, integration in benefits programs etc standpoint and decide where and how will they want to start.

Creating Awareness- 'normalising' mental health'

We also need to create enough awareness about the topic, somehow over the years we have paid so much and perhaps only focus on the physical health and discounted mental health challenges as 'personal' issues; not

knowing that being healthy or 'looking 'healthy isn't enough- its holistic health- physical and mental which is crucial for overall employee wellbeing. Another impediment is that more often than not talking about mental health is considered a taboo in our society-thanks to years and years of conditioning on the subject. No one wants to talk about mental health openly as they do on physical health.

It's a catch 22 situation- unless we normalise mental health, no one is willing to come out and talk about his/her challenges both at personal and professional front and unless we have more and more people talking openly about it, we can't normalise the whole thing. In such a scenario, companies must come out with structured learning strategy which includes building capability across levels and hierarchies including leadership. More often than not managers and leaders inadvertently cause mental health issues to their teams, not because they want to but because they are not trained enough how to handle situations at work which later may lead to burnout, stress, anxiety, and whole set of mental health issues. Also, managers and leaders in the want of not showing their vulnerable side and fighting their own demons; may also face mental health issue-creating a vicious circle.

Tone from the Top

Mental health should not be considered as an initiative which is left in isolation on learning department for doing sessions, webinars, and trainings alone. For all mental health programs to fructify in real sense, the leadership needs to walk the talk- they need to have conviction on the importance of the topic and ensure its aligned and tied with the organisational strategy. It could be as simple as talking about their own mental health issues, sharing their own stories in town hall meetings, their communication on the social media – all this brings in authenticity and make employees also comfortable to come forward and talk about their issues openly.

Taking help from experts

Understanding mental health issues is a complex thing- and we need experts – psychologists and psychiatrists who can understand symptoms and suggest solutions- at emotional and cognitive levels. We must have systems and processes where employees struggling with MH issues are comfortable confiding and getting support to overcome these challenges. Companies onboard EAP solution providers anchored on technology platforms to provide complete support to employees. Another approach which is seen in many matured organisations is to create Employee Resource Groups (ERG's) which act as

an informal or sometime formal community which provides support to employees struggling with MH issues. These are trained champions who not only understand challenges at a high level but guidepost them to experts- it serves a dual purpose- it normalises mental health- when employees see a number of champions who are one amongst them who rally the cause, they become more and more comfortable in coming forward and seek help when required plus they are seen as credible allies who are available to the employees at workplace most of the times.

Its time that we make a sustainable shift in the whole way we approach Mental Health, we must understand as organisations, leaders, and managers that its ok to be not ok and gone are the days when these issues were pushed under the carpet conveniently. As leaders we must understand that employees bring their whole self to work, and it's imperative that we make an environment at workplace which is conducive to overall wellbeing and employees feel that sharing their mental health issues is simply not a weakness but comes from place of enormous strength.

Sadly, too often, the stigma around mental health prevents people who need help from seeking it. But that simply doesn't make any sense. Whether an illness affects your heart, your arm or your brain, it's still an illness, and there shouldn't be any distinction...we should make it clear that getting help isn't a sign of weakness it's a sign of strength and we should ensure that people can get the treatment they need."

MICHELLE OBAMA

Silver lining



By - **Mr. Karan Gupta**
karang@indianoil.in

I would like to start this article with an extremely personal anecdote that happened very recently courtesy my writings for HR Vista. This incident left me with varied emotions and occupies a very special place in my heart. I have this habit of sharing my HR Vista writings on various social media handles to reach a wider audience and many times appreciations, feedbacks and acknowledgements follow. In one such incident around 6 months back, I received a congratulatory message from a college friend. We have not been in touch for many years now and it was a pleasant surprise to hear from her. We cherished our old college days and she even pushed me to write more often.

And then last month, courtesy social media only, I found out that my friend passed away. The news came as a shock. She was battling Cancer for last two years but she didn't even mention this, the last time we spoke. She was a fighter!!!

It made me remember the famous quote of Yann Martel from his book 'Life of Pi' – "I suppose in the end, the whole of life becomes an act of letting go, but what always hurts the most is not taking a moment to say goodbye"

To even think about this news brings grief to me, however, I'm still thankful to God for that last conversation. I feel many times in life, while moving forward, we disconnect ourselves from those, who once occupied a special place in our lives. How we shared countless memories, had numerous conversations and somehow with passing of time and our busy lives, we lose touch and sometimes the friendships too.

This time I thought that I should write about friends – School Friends, Mohalla Friends, College Friends, Coaching Class Friends, Sports Team Friends or may be The Office Friends. Although people say that most work cultures are not that conducive for real friendships, yet I feel we all have that one office friend

who can walk that extra mile for us and never let us feel lonely in this highly competitive professional world.

With an ode to friendship, let me bring a very simple yet magical incident from my life that taught me that even the worst of days can bring with them the most unexpected outcomes. So, here it is another adventure of my official life "Silver lining"

Let's start by elaborating on my office's location - situated in posh south Delhi, also known as Lutyen's Delhi, with numerous stunning parks and interesting archeological sites around it, the office complex had an adjacent petrol pump having a 24*7 operational convenience store. The story goes more than a decade back when I joined my 1st job. Like every eager and curious youngster, I started my professional journey by asking numerous questions every single day and tried learning from my seniors.

Because of living alone and my limited cooking skills, on most days, my breakfast would mean Corn-flakes/bread-butter/boiled eggs etc. And for the remaining days, when time becomes a constraint, the breakfast would depend on office pantry or the convenience store at the petrol pump. Like one such day, I reached office just in time without having any breakfast.

As we all came, the team was told that an urgent requirement has come in and we need to provide the deliverables within a short span of 2 hours. Accordingly, tasks were assigned to all team members. I straightway started working and soon my computer screen was moving back and forth from one excel file to another. I was confident that I would complete my part on time and thankfully, I did. Thereafter, my senior started further working on that data and found some discrepancy. Upon checking, we found that I had downloaded the wrong excel file and hence, the data prepared by me was erroneous. I was taken aback. It was a blunder. I was extremely furious over myself for

doing such silly mistake during this critical time. I felt that I had let the whole team down because of my carelessness.

My senior didn't say anything to me and started working on the data afresh. I requested him to let me work on it again, but considering the tight schedule, it was not feasible. I was feeling both embarrassed and apologetic at the same time. I still recollect that miserable feeling and how I believed that it was the worst day of my life.

Meanwhile the revised report was prepared by my senior and everyone got relieved. My friend and colleague Suman was watching me from a distance and knew what was going on in my mind. She came and said, "I knew you have not eaten anything since morning. Let's go downstairs and have something". I was in no mood to go anywhere, and the feeling of hunger had already vanished because of my morning blunders. But I feel that's what friends are there for. They made you do things that otherwise you won't be doing at all. She literally ordered me to come with her to the convenience store.

With all my sadness intact and a dejected look, I started walking with her. It was a big store with many segments including food & beverages, fiction/non-fiction books, Music CDs etc. One of my favourite pastime in the store would include going through the available books on the book counter while my friends/colleagues would get the billing done.

I straightway went towards the books section, that was adjacent to the billing counter. Although I was going through the books, yet my mind was still thinking about that slipup. Suman got me a sandwich and was standing at the billing counter. Suddenly, I heard Suman calling my name multiple times in a low husky voice. I was reading and annoyingly turned towards

her. A gentleman was standing just beside me checking some shaving cream from the adjacent counter. As I turned, Suman immediately pointed towards him and uttered "Look, Kapil Dev".

For a cricket fanatic like me, it was a moment beyond words. I couldn't believe my ears. I immediately looked and it was The Great Kapil Dev standing in front of me. And now I couldn't believe my eyes either. I was speechless. My childhood hero, (the Greatest Allrounder) Kapil Dev.

It was a distinctive feeling that gives me goosebumps even today. With my senses already in awe of this moment, I straightaway extended my hand towards him and said, "Sir, I'm a big fan". He was kind enough to shake hand with me and smile. Those were not the days of selfies, and so I just fetched the bill from Suman's hand, requested the billing attendant for a pen and asked Kapil Paji for an autograph on the other side of the bill, that he happily gave. Later I got to know that Kapil Dev lives nearby only and hence, was out there at that store for some grocery shopping.

From the worst of my life to my life's most memorable moment, I had quite an adventure that day. Till date, I still had such fresh memories of that day.

That day I learnt that each day comes with its own silver lining and we need to accept it the way it is. But another important lesson from that day that I learnt much later in life is that for many years, I felt that meeting Kapil Paji was the silver lining for that day but later, I realized that it was friends like Suman who are my real silver lining for life.

Until next time mates, do get in touch with some old friends!!!

Psychological safety in a team: Whose responsibility?



By - **Rashmi Datt**
rashmi.datt@gmail.com

As soon as I waded into the sea in the beautiful (and luckily) deserted Goa beach on a grey rainy morning, I heard a whistle. The orange-clad life-guard emerged from nowhere, and shouted a warning: Don't go beyond this point, the sea is choppy today.

I immediately felt a sense of reassurance- somebody was watching my back.

I reflected that as coaches, trainers and facilitators, we have a responsibility to create a space of safety for the group, even while encouraging them to deep dive in their inner selves to see their blind spots and shadows. It's difficult to see our dysfunctional behaviour patterns, but if we want to grow we need to confront them. A good facilitator or coach will push members out of their comfort zone. At the same time, they will create boundaries that members know are assured: confidentiality, timeliness, being held in a space of mutual respect... The client is responsible for her own growth and has the wisdom to find her own solutions even while being supported. And that any feelings, questions, disagreements, discomfort, resistance that the client brings into the exploration are all okay.

Similarly, leaders have a responsibility to create a safe environment for their team.

Organizations, especially factories go through a great deal of trouble to ensure physical safety for their employees. There are safety week celebrations, safety awards, safety training, a Safety Manager, etc. But what about ensuing psychological safety?

Psychological safety has a fairly practical definition. Amy Edmondson describes it as "the shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking." How many times have you heard a leader say "Everyone should feel free to share their real views"? But how many times have you seen post-meeting, when people are leaving the room meaningful glances are exchanged between a few, and everyone is thinking the same thing: 'This will never work.' And not a single voice was raised.

Real safety in a team is best measured by how willing

team members are to speak up with confidence that they will not be diminished or rejected in some way.

Some ways in which I've seen leaders reduce or disregard team members in a meeting:

1. While a team member is making a presentation, leaders start looking at their phone. Or worse,
2. They start chatting/ giving instructions in a whisper to the person sitting on their right hand side.
3. Everyone has worked hard and prepared their presentations; but the first one gets derailed because of excessive questions/ going into details, then the rest are rushed and some are not heard at all.
4. Some of the points made are quickly dismissed/ interrupted by the leader - and the perception is that the dismissal is based on 'who' has said it rather than 'what' has been said.
5. Nobody knows when the meeting will end, as the track record is that meetings go beyond the scheduled time.

It doesn't mean the leader should not push the team for results, or not demand excellence or demand completion to non-negotiable deadlines. But when safety is present, dissent is welcomed, mistakes are not only tolerated but presented for learning. There is a "lightness" to how people interact.



Do you agree that these leader behaviours create anxiety, leading to people not giving their best? Have you seen other behaviours in your environment which causes people to feel unsafe?

Here are three tips for senior leaders to promote psychological safety within their teams are:

1. Be Genuinely Curious

During meetings, invite perspectives and contributions from everyone. Provide clarity on purpose and direction, but also use conscious, inclusive language like, "We want to hear from you" and, "Help us shape this next initiative."

Listen deeply. If you're one of the senior most in the room, ask junior colleagues for their ideas first. Listen more, talk less and build on suggestions to show acknowledgement: "That's an interesting angle we hadn't considered. How can we incorporate it next time?"

2. First listen, and then unfurl your thoughts

One of Nelson Mandela's leadership practices was, 'Lead from the back—and let others believe they are in front', which he followed by not telling people what to do, but by first letting them speak, and then creating a consensus.

As a boy, Nelson Mandela was brought up by Jongintaba, king of the Thembu tribe, who influenced Mandela deeply. When Jongintaba met members of his court, he spoke only after all everybody had voiced their views. The chief's job, Mandela learnt from his guardian, was not to tell people what to do but to form a consensus.

Richard Stengel, Managing Editor, Time magazine, (who collaborated with Nelson Mandela on Mandela's his bestselling autobiography, Long Walk to Freedom, in 1993), writes that when he worked with Mandela, the latter often called meetings of his kitchen cabinet inner circle at his home in a suburb of Johannesburg. The small group of men, Ramaphosa, Thabo Mbeki, and others, would sit around the dining-room table or in his

driveway, and shout —to move faster, to be more radical—and Mandela would simply listen.

When he finally did speak at those meetings, he slowly and methodically summarised everyone's points of view and then unfurled his own thoughts, subtly steering the decision in the direction he wanted to without imposing it.

3. Don't just share your successes, but also challenges

When we are transparent, and share both our strengths and vulnerabilities, ie even the times when you faced a project failure, what we learnt from it, you are role modeling intellectual honesty, the ability to self-reflect, and being real. In the process you are empowering others to speak up when quality is at stake, or there are critical gaps in outcomes.

4. Connect, human to human

When we appreciate others, through emails, or speaking in meetings and spread awareness, champion individuals who have raised a new idea, established a new process or constructively questioned something, we are sending a message about our own inner security.

Other ways are: Taking part in reverse mentoring programs, or partnering with employee resource groups to immerse yourself in environments where you can hear from diverse individuals.

Finally, success is about leading by example; genuinely noticing the value that lies in everyone; and recognizing that everyone wins when organizations eliminate barriers to honest, open contribution.

The paradox of understanding what is happening in your team is that if you lack safety, by definition no one will tell you.

Rashmi Datt, CEO Vedadrama, Founder, Dialog Services: Psychodrama Emotional Intelligence Coach

Promoting mental health at workplaces in India



By - P S Deepa, Deloitte
psdeepa@deloitte.com

Deepa is an Executive Director in Deloitte India and works primarily in the Consulting business and in the strategic priority of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) for South Asia. Mehak works with HPCL, Chandigarh, India



Introduction

Erinda Shah is the Founder and the Managing Director of MHFA India. She has completed her MA in Social Work and has been working since 2000 with various international and national organizations like WHO, UNICEF, ActionAid, The Banyan to mention a few. She is trained as a Psychotherapist by the European Association for Psychotherapy, Vienna. She is a National Accredited Mental Health First Aid Instructor.

Please share your reflections on the evolution of mental health in India. How has this changed in India over the last decade?

A decade ago, and even until 2 to 3 years ago, mental health was typically associated with mental illness, though in reality mental illness and mental health are two completely different concepts. People are now starting to recognize and understand the difference. Mental health is absolutely a part of our day-to-day life. The WHO has defined and conceptualized mental health as a state of well-being. As I reflect on the evolution of mental health, ten years ago there were no conversations on mental health; the conversation



By - Mehak Uppal
mehak.uppal2@hpcl.in

was only about mental illness. The change has just started.

Mental health has come to the forefront in India since the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic was clearly the one watershed moment that has really changed everyone's perspective and the overall narrative of mental health. The pandemic has brought significant attention to mental health. It's been a milestone as organizations are investing on well-being too. There is more attention and more investment in mental health now, more than ever before.

We have witnessed a twenty percent rise in the incidence of mental illness cases across the world. It is inappropriate to say that not everyone felt or experienced poor mental health during the pandemic. Persistence of poor mental health post pandemic was a wakeup call that it was not just a momentary need. Now, we witness more people talking about mental health which is emerging as a key component of overall health and well-being, being recognized by all. Our focus on mental health is gradually shifting from reactive management to proactive prevention strategies including self-care.

In the last decade at the macro level, the Mental Health Care Act 2017 was enacted which has brought a huge change in how mental illness is being diagnosed, treated, and managed. The focus has been human rights of people with mental illness. Initiatives with focus prevention and community care are yet to occupy the central attention.

In recognition of the importance of mental health and well-being, the Government proactively launched the 24x7 Toll-Free Mental Health Rehabilitation Helpline KIRAN in 2020 by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 13 languages to provide relief and support to persons with Mental Illness. A good number of tele-calling centers have been announced in the 2022 budget by the Government of India.

The objectives of the tele-calling services are early screening, first aid, psychological support, distress management, mental well-being, psychological crisis management and referral to mental health experts.

It is also important to mention the efforts being made to regularize the professionals who work in mental health and assure more ethical services through National Commission for Allied Health Care Professions Act 2021.

In your view, why is mental health and well-being becoming a key priority for organizations in India? Do you see any differences based on the profile of companies such as the private sector and the public sector?

Mental health at workplaces reflects the mental health situation in society. Unfortunately, it can be summarized with a high prevalence of mental illness, a high gap of treatment and poor level of mental health literacy that mirrors in form of stigma, misconception, and prejudices. High level of poor mental health has an impact on business performance, attrition, absenteeism etc. and therefore has a higher cost attached to it, very often silently. There is gradually a shift taking place where organizations are acknowledging that mental well-being is as important as physical well-being. Workplaces in India are an integral component of this transition as mental well-being is becoming a part and parcel of our day-to-day life. This is certainly the right thing to do.

I truly believe that this is the right time for all organizations to spread knowledge and support mental health. There is a need for more awareness about mental health which has resulted in more conversations to address the stigma around mental health and an out-reach for help. Organizations need to preserve the well-being of their people and encourage them to look after each other.

Given the growing incidence of mental illness during the pandemic, mental health experts have been onboarded to help to workplaces resolve the issue or refer to external professional help such as a clinical psychologist/rehabilitation psychologist/psychiatrist.

The public and private sector is working in acknowledging the need to normalize the conversation and access to care in the regard to mental health problems and illnesses. I see the private sectors is working faster and in search of what's next to introduce

in the mental wellbeing domain. While public sector may need more time considering the large number of work force, diversity and spread across the country. For both sectors, it's important to have their team empowered and involved to assure ownership and progress.

What is your guidance to organizations to proactively promote mental health at work in India?

As is often discussed, mental health is a continuum which extends from being healthy to being ill across several parameters. Organizations therefore need to put in place resilient systems and forward-looking policies that address stigmas and support employees at work in being comfortable in bringing their authentic selves to work. Organizations should continue to provide employees with access to care including counselling services usually provided through Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).

It is important for organizations to adopt an integrated approach to well-being which includes prevention, treatment, and recovery. Initiatives must be undertaken to promote self-care among employees and as an important step towards a successful and impactful the need for quality mental health education for all. As part of training programs on mental health, we talk about positive coping as well as negative coping strategies. I believe that organizations should be undertake proactive measures, actions and interventions and ask the key questions - Is it evidence based, does it keep my team safe and finally, is it ethical?

The business case for mental health is very compelling for organizations to make investments in mental health. In your opinion, what should organizations in India do to prevent mental health conditions arising from work, be it anxiety or depression?

As mentioned earlier, mental illness has been there even pre-pandemic. It is a journey and a continuous process of investment and an ongoing awareness and education about mental health and mental illness. It is important to have regular conversations on mental health and focus on psychological safety. There is a need to emphasize on confidentiality of mental health discussions to build trust among people, to build empathy through skills and knowledge that prepares us on how to support one another. Employees must be

given access to reliable and professional care which may be in various forms. Organizations must be supportive of employees who may need to avail of therapy and medication. Yoga and mindfulness are some of the practices that also help in prevention which companies can easily adapt. While we are yet to have a legislation that protects mental well-being at workplaces, it is important for organizations until then, to provide for reasonable adjustments/accommodation through leave policies, flexible time schedules and other innovative practices.

How can organizations deal with the stigma associated with mental health?

It is important for organizations to address the stigma around mental health as it has an impact on thoughts and beliefs, which impact actions and behavior and in turn builds the organizational culture. There are several myths around mental health which must be addressed for which people need to be encouraged to participate in awareness and training sessions.

A realistic and implementable well-being strategy is a good tool to be developed by organizations to guide actions and priorities. We have just started this journey and strategies need to be flexible as the awareness and acceptance increases among team members. All the efforts should reinforce messages that well-being

starts with self. Employees should be encouraged to actively participate in such internal initiatives so that they provide support to one another. Sensitization sessions for line managers and senior leaders are some of the efforts that organizations must undertake, so that their actions and behavior are supportive towards their team members, including those who may be experiencing mental health challenges.

In your view, what should be the role of HR in mental well-being? What are the core skills that HR functionaries should develop to support mental health at work?

HR functionaries have the potential to play a key role in increasing overall confidence of people across the organization that promotes care for all.

HR teams should be equipped with basic skills as mental health first aiders. They should have a basic understanding of mental health and should be able to recognize signs, symptoms, and triggers for various mental health conditions. They should build the capacity to understand people at work, which includes empathy and other soft skills such as non-judgmental listening.

As I said, the journey has just begun and this time we need to all contribute and do it right.

