

Beyond Wellness:

Holistic Health for a Thriving Workforce.



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Mrs. Rashmi Govil

Director (HR), IndianOil

Dear Readers of HR Vista,

With every edition of HR Vista, we continue to explore themes that resonate with the evolving realities of the workplace. The 13th edition brings into focus a dimension that has quietly moved from the margins to the core of organisational strategy. I commend the editorial team for curating a thoughtful and timely edition on the theme, “Beyond Wellness: Holistic Health for a Thriving Workforce.”

In recent years, well-being is no longer about occasional check-ins or surface-level interventions. It has increasingly become a business imperative. Forward-looking organisations now recognise holistic health encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions—as a cornerstone of long-term performance and sustainability.

This calls for a fundamental rethinking of how we support our people. It is about creating work environments that are not only safe and inclusive, but also responsive to the evolving needs of our workforce. From enabling open conversations around mental health to offering flexibility in how and when we work, workplace culture is being reshaped with well-being at its core.

For a complex sector like ours, these conversations hold even greater relevance. The demands of our industry—marked by sheer scale, operational intensity, a high degree of specialisation, inherent safety challenges, and the need for uninterrupted energy supply—require a highly motivated workforce. It is here that holistic well-being becomes an organisational responsibility, calling for both HR stewardship and collective participation.

This edition of HR Vista captures that vision with depth and clarity. It showcases voices from across the organisation who are experiencing and advocating for a culture where people can bring their best selves to work and grow meaningfully in the process.

I hope these stories and reflections inspire us to see well-being not as a checklist, but as a mindset that enables us to nurture people who are ready to tackle the challenges ahead.

Happy browsing!



Mr. Udit Jain

Editor-In-Chief, HR Vista

Executive Director (HR), IndianOil

Esteemed Colleagues and Readers,

It is a privilege to present the 13th edition of HR Vista, centered on the theme of “Beyond Wellness: Holistic Health for a Thriving Workforce.” As the nature of work continues to evolve, there is an increasing realisation that a thriving organisation depends on the well-being of our workforce.

This is brought to the fore in this edition, which features insights and experiences from HR executives across the oil sector. Each thought piece offers a distinct view of what well-being looks like in today’s workplace. Their contributions are drawn from real-world situations that include instances of stress and the steady pursuit of balance in environments that can often be demanding and fast-paced. The narratives in these pages reveal changing expectations among employees and a renewed emphasis on work environments that pay closer attention to human needs.

The theme ‘Beyond Wellness’ prompts us to delve deeper and look at how we truly care for individuals. Flexible work schedules, open conversations about mental health, practical guidance on financial wellness, and everyday acts of empathy are gradually becoming part of how colleagues support one another. These elements help create a sense of belonging and provide reassurance to the workforce in quiet yet meaningful ways.

For the HR fraternity as a whole, this shift carries both purpose and responsibility. We are in a position to introduce practices that recognise the varied needs of our people and to encourage a culture where well-being is integrated into daily routines. This could mean rethinking how teams collaborate, offering better access to wellness resources, or simply ensuring that individuals feel heard. When such efforts become part of daily work life, the impact can be game-changing.

I extend my sincere thanks to all the contributors who have enriched this edition and to the editorial team for their thoughtful curation. I hope these pages prompt readers to reflect on what holistic well-being means to them and how each of us can help create healthier and more supportive workplaces.

Happy reading!

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Can We Make a Difference?



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It was a pleasant Sunday evening, and I was flipping through the movie icons on the Television. And suddenly, I bumped into a recently released movie, "Mrs." on Zee 5.

as it came.

However, over time, she realised that the life she was leading was hardly a life anymore. Eventually, her innocence was considered reprehensible; her dreams



Starring the Dangal actress Sanya Malhotra as Richa, the protagonist, this short family drama had a realistic plot that kept me hooked throughout. The movie "Mrs." is about Richa, a fervent girl from a traditional Indian middle-class family who chooses to enter wedlock with gaiety. It is a journey of Richa traversing the journey from Miss to Mrs. in a conventional Indian family setup.

An altruistic person with an infectious smile and gentle gestures, Richa was what anyone would want as a daughter-in-law. She dedicates herself to the institution of marriage, leaving no stone unturned, being a good wife, a good 'bahu', and a good homemaker. So far, her dreams had taken a backseat in this process of unconscious transformation. Though dissatisfied at times, she wholeheartedly tried to accept the situation

were assumed incomprehensible, and her warmth was taken for granted by the people around her. Slowly and sadly, her cheerful exuberance turned into a melancholic depression. Finally, Richa, who'd entered matrimony with the highest possible optimism, dares to step out of the vicious circle, paralysed with helplessness.

The context of the movie seemed quite relatable, being born and brought up in the Indian culture. The correlation with the context was even higher for the older generation of our mothers and grandmothers.

Leaving aside the correlation, the greater question in hindsight that knocks the mind having seen this movie, is the extent to which one should take oneself for granted or let others do so. Reflecting upon the

Mahabharata is a testament to how costly peace can be and the extent to which one can sacrifice for the sake of peace. We've grown up listening to the Shloka:

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन। (You have right to action only, never to fruits)



None of us can disagree on the truth of this thought, but the extent to which we can accept it is way too subjective.

When life puts us in situations where our efforts to be understood fail, the most honest efforts go unacknowledged, and our dreams are jibed at, we are truly tested. Tested on our ability to judge the mental battle, decide what is a victory for us, and ultimately, which trade-off is worth the pain.

The movie is not about feminism alone, but a thought-provoking piece for each of us as an individual, reminding us to pose two questions time and again:

- Are we taking the people, their efforts, and situations around us for granted, selfishly thinking of our good only? If yes, then it is probably time to course correct ourselves.
- Have our efforts become too non-existent for the people around us? If yes, it is

the right time to realise the value of our actions and make it felt.

Let us open our eyes and ears around us to see.

*Maybe a **friend** who is suffering a trauma silently,*

*Maybe a **child** who is unable to express,*

*Maybe a **house help** who is waiting to be heard,*

*Maybe a **newcomer** who is feeling vulnerable,*

*Maybe **we ourselves** are suppressing our emotions.*

and pose the above two questions.

Quite possibly we could make a difference to their or our world!

Beyond Transactions: Redefining Talent Management for a Purpose-Driven Workforce



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Abstract

In today's dynamic business landscape, the traditional model of talent management—focused narrowly on recruitment, compensation, and compliance—has become outdated. Such transactional approaches risk reducing employees to “corporate robots,” disconnected from meaning and long-term growth. Modern employees expect more from their employers: purposeful work, opportunities for continuous learning, and a culture that values their well-being and voice. Organisations that fail to respond to these expectations face rising attrition, disengagement, and loss of competitive edge. This article explores the paradigm shift from transactional to transformational talent management. It argues that a holistic, human-centric approach—anchored in positive employee experiences, ongoing skill development, and alignment with shared values—is now a strategic necessity rather than an optional practice. Drawing on examples from leading organisations and initiatives, the article demonstrates how investing in employee growth and purpose not only strengthens retention but also unlocks creativity, resilience, and high

performance for the years to come. Practical insights and strategies are offered to help HR professionals align talent practices with the evolving expectations of the modern workforce.

1.0 Introduction

The competitive edge of any organisation today isn't found in its products or technology alone; it lies in the capability, creativity, and commitment of its people. As Richard Branson aptly said, *“Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients.”*^[1] This highlights that



talent is no longer a back-office function but the very foundation of sustainable success in today's world.

Yet, many organisations still cling to outdated and so-called “transactional” talent management models. Traditionally, companies have seen talent management as a linear process as below:

Attract top talent □ Offer competitive pay □ Hope for retention

While such an approach worked in the industrial economy during the 19th century, it fails in today's knowledge-driven era. Information is available everywhere today. The Internet has become a necessity of life. Research by Gallup (2023) shows that *only 23% of employees worldwide are engaged at work*, while low engagement costs the global economy nearly \$8.8 trillion annually in lost productivity [3]. This data clearly underlines that salary alone is not enough to motivate or retain talent.



Today's workforce—particularly millennials and Gen Z—demands more. They seek meaning, personal growth, and belonging. A Deloitte survey[2] revealed that *44% of Gen Z and 43% of millennials have left jobs because their values were not aligned with their employer's*, showing that purpose-driven engagement is now a critical retention factor.

For example, Google's famous "20% time" policy, which allows employees to dedicate a portion of their time to passion projects, has given birth to innovations like Gmail and Google News. This reflects how organisations thrive when they invest in individual purpose and autonomy.

To flourish in this environment, companies and especially HR must adopt a holistic, human-centric approach to talent management. This requires shifting from "managing" talent to cultivating it—creating ecosystems where employees are empowered, nurtured, and fulfilled. For instance, Microsoft's transformation under Satya Nadella[4] emphasised a "growth mindset" culture, where learning and experimentation are encouraged. This cultural shift has been credited with reviving Microsoft's innovation pipeline and strengthening its employer brand worldwide.

2.0 The Employee Experience as a Strategic Imperative

The concept of *employee experience (EX)* has shifted from being a corporate buzzword to becoming a strategic imperative for organizations. It refers to the sum of every interaction an employee has with their company—from the initial interview to the exit process.



A positive employee experience is no longer optional; it is the foundation of effective talent management and long-term organisational success.

Designing a strong employee experience requires more than perks or paychecks. It is about creating a workplace that is psychologically safe, inclusive, and supportive of both professional and personal well-being. Amy Edmondson, *a leading scholar on workplace*

psychology, defines psychological safety as "a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes"[6]. Such an environment enables innovation, collaboration, and trust.

Key elements of a strong EX include:

- **Seamless onboarding:** New hires who go through a structured onboarding process are 69% more likely to stay with a company for three years[7].
- **Career pathways:** Employees want clarity about their growth trajectory. LinkedIn's *2023 Workplace Learning Report* found that 93% of employees would stay longer if their company invested in their careers[8].
- **Feedback and recognition:** Frequent, meaningful feedback increases engagement. Gallup (2021) found that employees who receive daily feedback from their managers are 3x more likely to be engaged than those who receive feedback once a year.[9]

Companies like Adobe have worked on it and eliminated traditional annual performance reviews, which often felt judgmental, rigid and one-way. Instead, they introduced a new concept, "Check-ins"—a system of regular, informal, two-way conversations between managers and employees. This unique approach aids continuous development through open and clear communication, along with greater alignment to goals. As Adobe reported, this shift not only improved employee performance but also reduced voluntary turnover by 30%. [10]

Similarly, Airbnb, which calls itself a "community company," has invested heavily in employee experience by creating an EX-team dedicated to integrating HR, IT, and workplace design. This holistic approach ensures that employees' physical, digital, and cultural environments are aligned to create a sense of belonging. [11]

Ultimately, employee experience is no longer a "nice-to-have." It is a strategic lever for productivity, engagement, and retention. As Josh Bersin, a global HR thought leader, argues: "*Employee experience is the new battleground for competitive advantage*".[12]

Organisations that design EX intentionally will not only retain talent but also unleash higher levels of creativity and commitment.

3.0 Continuous Learning as a Retention Tool

In today's dynamic business landscape and comprehensive technological advancements like AI and Machine Learning, the half-life of skills is shrinking rapidly. Research by the World Economic Forum

estimates that by 2025, 50% of all employees will need reskilling, while 40% of core skills are expected to change.[13]

This accelerated pace of disruption means that knowledge acquired today may be outdated tomorrow and so on. With the current information revolution, the modern workforce is already aware of this reality and places a high value on continuous learning and upskilling opportunities.



For an HR person, this represents a strategic opportunity to redefine talent development. Traditional approaches that treat training as a one-off event—such as annual workshops or mandatory compliance courses—are no longer sufficient. Instead, organisations must embed learning into the very fabric of their culture; learning should be the way forward for doing work. Opportunities for the application of acquired knowledge must be provided. As Peter Senge famously wrote in *The Fifth Discipline*: “The only sustainable competitive advantage is an organisation’s ability to learn faster than the competition.” [14]

This integration can take many forms:

- Microlearning platforms that deliver bite-sized, on-demand learning tailored to busy professionals. The same can be shared as a daily capsule of information via email to employees. Already in practice in several domains of IndianOil.
- Mentorship programs that combine formal knowledge transfer with expertise. Grade-wise division should not be there.
- Relevant cross-functional/ cross-divisional projects may expose employees to diverse skills and perspectives.

Leading companies have already embraced this shift. For example, Salesforce has built “Trailhead,” a gamified learning platform offering thousands of free modules in areas ranging from AI to leadership. Similarly, Amazon’s Career Choice program pre-pays up to 95% of tuition for employees pursuing in-demand fields—even outside the company—demonstrating a deep

commitment to long-term professional development. [15]

The impact on retention is profound. LinkedIn’s *2023 Workplace Learning Report* found that 94% of employees would stay longer at a company that invests in their learning and development [8].

Continuous learning thus functions as both a skill accelerator and a loyalty driver. When employees feel they are progressing professionally, they are far less likely to seek opportunities elsewhere.

In this sense, learning is not just an HR initiative—it is a retention strategy and cultural cornerstone today. By embedding continuous learning into everyday workflows, organisations can simultaneously future-proof their talent base and nurture a workforce that feels valued, empowered, and ready for change.

4.0 Cultivating a Culture of Purpose

Today’s workforce wants to know that the hours they invest each day contribute to something larger and more meaningful. They are drawn to organisations that align with their personal values, champion sustainability, and create a tangible positive impact on society.

For employers, this shift is not a challenge but an opportunity. When people feel connected to a shared purpose, they bring more than just productivity to the table—they bring passion, creativity, and a genuine drive to make things better. Purpose-driven employees are more likely to innovate, build stronger team relationships, and act as brand ambassadors and role models both inside and outside the workplace.

HR leaders play a crucial role in making this connection real. It’s not enough to hang core values on office walls or post them on websites. Employees must see purpose in action. Employees need to feel the same. That could mean giving employees meaningful opportunities to volunteer and contribute to causes they care about. These practices make purpose not an abstract idea or narrative but a lived experience.

IndianOil has long understood the power of linking business with a higher mission. Its CSR initiatives go far beyond compliance and contribute meaningfully to the communities it serves—ranging from investment in clean energy and renewable projects, to support for education in rural schools, to healthcare and sanitation drives across underserved regions.

For instance, IndianOil’s “Nayi Disha” program has been empowering children from marginalised sections with education and digital literacy, while its investments in green hydrogen and solar energy show its commitment to a sustainable future. These initiatives allow employees to feel they are part of a

company that is not only an energy provider but also a force for national progress.

A powerful extension of this purpose-driven culture is IndianOil's newly launched *SwadhayayaNxt*—a digital learning platform designed to give employees easy access to continuous upskilling and personal growth. More than just a training tool, *SwadhayayaNxt* reflects IndianOil's core value NationFirst and that nation-building begins with people-building. By empowering employees to take charge of their learning journey—through self-paced courses, leadership modules, and emerging technology tracks—the organisation is not only future-proofing its workforce but also demonstrating that individual growth and collective purpose go hand in hand.



When employees see this alignment—between their personal development, the company's mission, and society's larger good—their engagement deepens naturally. They don't just show up for work; they show up with intent. As Simon Sinek reminds us, *"People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it."* The same applies within organisations: employees don't just stay for what the company gives them, but for why the company exists and how they can contribute to that story.

5.0 Conclusion

In essence, modern talent management is no longer about transactions but about transformation. The organisations that rise above the rest will be those that see employees not just as resources to be managed, but as flowers to be nurtured. By prioritising well-being, cultivating purpose, and embedding continuous development into everyday culture, companies unlock not only higher performance but also deeper loyalty and innovation. As Simon Sinek reminds us,

"When people are financially invested, they want a return.

When people are emotionally invested, they want to contribute."

The era of talent management as a mere administrative function is over. In today's world, employees expect

more than job descriptions and paychecks—they seek meaningful experiences, growth opportunities, and alignment with values. To truly succeed, HR must step forward as a strategic partner, reshaping the



employee journey into one that inspires, empowers, and endures.

A positive employee experience, continuous learning opportunities, and a strong sense of shared purpose are not just "nice-to-haves"; they are strategic imperatives. They determine whether an organisation will simply survive or thrive in an era where the power dynamic has irreversibly shifted from employer to employee.

Those who embrace this holistic, human-centric approach will not only attract the best talent but also unleash their people's full potential—creating workplaces where employees don't just work, but truly belong.

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From Wellness to Workforce



By - **Ashutosh Mishra**, IOCL
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A decade ago, corporate wellness programs were considered cutting-edge. Organisations proudly offered gym memberships, fruit bowls in the pantry, or an annual yoga session. These were well-intentioned efforts, but let's be honest—did they truly change how employees felt about work?

Many employees attended the fitness class, ate the fruit, and still left the office exhausted, disengaged, or even burned out. That's because **wellness alone doesn't guarantee vitality**. It's like filling a car with fuel but never checking whether the engine is running smoothly.

Today, the conversation has shifted. Organisations are realising that success isn't driven by employees who are merely "well" but by those who are **energised, resilient, and thriving**. This is the essence of **workforce vitality**—a more holistic, human, and strategic approach to employee well-being.

Why Wellness Alone Isn't Enough

Imagine an employee named Riya. She goes for her morning jog, eats healthy, and takes part in the company's wellness challenges. Physically, she's doing great. But at work, she's constantly anxious about deadlines, struggles to connect with her team, and feels uncertain about her career growth. Despite her healthy habits, she's drained.

Riya is not alone. Many professionals today manage their physical health but still feel emotionally depleted, mentally scattered, or socially isolated. This gap highlights a crucial truth: **wellness is only one piece of the puzzle**.

Vitality goes further. It's about helping employees feel alive, connected, and purposeful in both their professional and personal lives.

What Is Workforce Vitality?

Workforce vitality is the ability of employees to sustain energy, focus, and engagement over the long term. It's not just about "being well"—it's about **thriving**.

Think of vitality as four interconnected dimensions:

1. **Physical Health** – Encouraging movement, nutrition, rest, and preventive care.
2. **Mental Strength** – Building focus, clarity, creativity, and resilience against stress.
3. **Emotional Balance** – Cultivating trust, empathy, and psychological safety in teams.
4. **Social and Purpose** – Driven Well-Being – Nurturing belonging, collaboration, and a sense of meaning in work.



When all four dimensions are supported, employees don't just function—they **flourish**.

The Strategic Advantage of Vitality

Let's face it: leaders often look at well-being initiatives through the lens of ROI. And rightly so—businesses must grow, adapt, and remain competitive. The good news is, vitality delivers measurable returns.

- Companies with engaged employees outperform competitors by up to **21% in profitability**.
- Employees who feel cared for are **3.5 times more likely** to stay with their employer.
- Teams that experience strong psychological safety innovate at significantly higher rates.

When employees are energised and fulfilled, they bring their best selves to work. They collaborate better, solve problems creatively, and take ownership of outcomes. In other words, vitality is not a perk—it's a **strategic driver of sustainable performance**.

Moving From Wellness to Vitality: Practical Shifts

Transitioning to a vitality-focused culture doesn't require a massive overhaul overnight. It starts with intentional steps. Here are practical ways organisations can move beyond wellness:

1. Redefine Flexibility

Flexibility isn't just about allowing remote work—it's about recognising diverse needs. A parent juggling school schedules, a caregiver supporting elderly parents, or a young professional pursuing higher education all have different rhythms. True flexibility respects these realities, enabling employees to balance work and life seamlessly.

2. Prioritise Mental Health

Normalise conversations about stress and burnout. Provide access to confidential counselling, mental health apps, or mindfulness sessions. More importantly, train managers to listen empathetically and spot early signs of struggle. Mental well-being must be woven into the fabric of work, not treated as an afterthought.

3. Encourage Genuine Connection

Teams thrive when people feel they belong. Foster informal interactions—team lunches, mentoring circles, or even virtual coffee chats. Encourage cross-functional projects where employees can learn from one another. Strong relationships reduce isolation and fuel collaboration.

4. Empower Growth and Purpose

A sense of stagnation drains vitality. Provide learning opportunities, career coaching, and clear development pathways. Even more, connect daily tasks to a larger mission. When employees see how their work contributes to a bigger purpose, they feel energised to give their best.

5. Recognise the Whole Person

Recognition shouldn't only be about KPIs and targets. Celebrate resilience, teamwork, creativity, and values-driven behaviour. A simple, genuine "thank you" can spark motivation more powerfully than financial rewards alone.

The Human Element

At its heart, vitality is about treating employees as whole human beings, not just resources. It's about understanding that behind every title is a person with dreams, fears, families, and passions.

Consider the ripple effect: when an employee feels mentally supported, emotionally valued, and connected to purpose, that positivity extends

beyond the workplace. It strengthens families, uplifts communities, and even inspires future generations. Workplaces that cultivate vitality don't just create better professionals—they help build better people.

The Leadership Imperative

This shift requires courageous leadership. Leaders must ask themselves tough questions:

- Am I creating an environment where people feel safe to be themselves?
- Do my policies respect the whole life of an employee, not just their work hours?
- Am I modelling vitality myself—through balance, resilience, and authenticity?

Leadership sets the tone. When leaders embody



vitality, it cascades across teams and shapes culture.

Looking Ahead

The organisations of tomorrow will be judged not just by their financial success, but by how well they support the vitality of their people. This isn't about being "soft"—it's about being sustainable. Burned-out employees cannot fuel long-term growth. Thriving employees, however, become the foundation of resilience, innovation, and adaptability.

It's time to see wellness not as a checkbox but as a stepping stone to vitality. **Wellness keeps people alive; vitality helps them thrive.**

When organisations embrace this shift, they unlock not just higher productivity but deeper loyalty, stronger cultures, and a workforce that is truly alive with possibility.

Vitality is more than a strategy. It's a promise—to employees, to leaders, and to the future of work itself.

More Than Fitness: The True Health Factor



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Introduction: A New Era of Health Awareness

We are fortunate to live in a time when discussions about health increasingly include not only physical health but mental well-being as well. On the flip side, maybe, more than as a matter of choice, these discussions could have been wrought upon us by the increasing number of diseases and deaths that are also being reported these days. It was not so long back that the entire bustling world was brought to a sad standstill by the COVID pandemic, which claimed many among us. As we get back to our lives, we struggle with the discussions and disputes involving the possible side effects of the vaccines and the recovery from the disease that has been brought upon our bodies. There are not too few of us who believe we are worse off (be it lungs or heart health) for the disease that hit almost all of us by the end of its third wave. Let us just hope we are just being falsely anxious in this regard. However, the truth might be, the increasing number of deaths involving cardiac arrests of fit, health-conscious, even athletic youngsters is painful and disturbing, calling forth the need for words to be followed with actions.



Listening to Our Bodies: Awareness Without Anxiety

As we are evolving, so are the diseases. The most we can do is look out for ourselves and our loved ones. Though well repeated, at the end of the day, it many times comes down to listening to your body and being aware. By this, I personally am much against consulting a doctor or Google at the slightest discomfort one may be in, but what I feel right is to be observant without falling prey to anxiety. Everyone knows that eating well

and sleeping well are important, but so is eating and sleeping at the right time as well. In the absence of a good night's sleep, both body and mind suffer- one feels physically exhausted, emotionally taxed, irritable and stressed.

Food Hygiene and Balanced Nutrition

Food adulteration and food hygiene are other factors. Not much can be done on the former, as it lies much beyond our individual scope, but a lot can be done on the latter. Limit eating outside, and for the people who find happiness in eating out and talking over a dinner date, Happiness from indulgence is valid, but health deserves equal space — seek the balance. There are several kinds of diets that are being followed these days, but not all can work with everyone. For all, a little bit of home-grown, whatever it may be, can always help your gut, both in feeling and in health. If soiling your hands can brighten your mind as well as lighten your gut load, let us go by the all-too-famous Surf Excel ad: "Daag acche hain". Another most important thing is eating just the right amount, to fight the temptation to overeat your favourite food. If you want to live long like the Japanese, fill just 80% of your stomach, as the well-celebrated book Ikigai reveals. In fact, Ikigai is all in all a good reference for a healthy, happy life. So, now you know where to look!

Mental Health: The Invisible Battle

In the present fiercely competitive world, failures and rejections are seen not as a deterrent but as the end. Sadly, suicides are increasing, calling for the need to



discuss mental health as much or more than physical health. Physical health deterioration most often gives symptoms to oneself and our near ones, while mental health issues are well-hidden from even the dearest ones. Meditation and yoga are the most advised and well-proven ways of self-help to relieve stress and anxiety and to detach our minds from the inner turmoil as well as outer chaos. But beyond a point, having a confidante for oneself and being a confidante for our best ones are most important.

Nature, Passion, and Happiness: Pillars of Well-being

Connecting with nature can help both physically and mentally. It can alleviate stress and anxiety and instill gratitude, happiness, and positivity. And while we fail to look for it, we get injected with the much-needed vitamin D dosage at no extra pain.

Paulo Coelho very rightly said: “Where your heart lies, there lies your treasure.”

It is most important to look out for your happiness for your mental health. Happiness comes from a variety of sources. There is this happiness that comes from bonding with others, and then there is the happiness that comes from bonding with yourself, investing in your interests and having and following your passion, whatever it may be: gardening, cooking, photography, etc. I personally know a handful of people who very ardently follow their passion apart from their job, and I can vouch for it that they are a much happier lot than they would have been without it. I find happiness in painting. I believe one must definitely have a passion. A job cannot be your passion. And if you still feel so, well! Go ahead, find yourself a second passion and waste some time on it, too. I am motivated by what someone said: “Time you enjoy wasting is not time wasted,” and I strongly feel: “To be happy, you must first keep yourself happy.”

Balancing Passion with Leisure

And even with work, life and hopefully a hobby, one must take care not to get drowned in passion but free some time for leisure too. In this context, I would like to quote the ending lines of the poem from W.H.Davies titled Leisure which resonates with the importance of leisure:

“A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare”

A Holistic Approach: Lessons from Bhutan and the Workplace

Bhutan’s unique measurement of collective happiness — Gross National Happiness (sometimes called Gross Domestic Happiness) — offers an inspiring model. Organisations could adopt similar measures to assess

and enhance employee contentment, potentially leading to greater satisfaction, lower absenteeism, and reduced turnover.



Conclusion

True health goes beyond fitness. It encompasses physical well-being, mental health, emotional happiness, meaningful connections, and overall balance in life. By embracing this holistic view and acting on it, we can create healthier, happier lives for ourselves and those around us.

Beyond Wellness: Holistic Health for a Thriving Workforce



By - Megha Suhjani, IOCL
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Abstract

In the evolving landscape of modern work, the conversation around employee well-being has shifted from basic wellness programs to a more comprehensive, human-centred approach—**holistic health**. The phrase “A healthy mind resides in a healthy body” is more relevant than ever, especially when considering the profound impact of the workplace environment on both mental and physical health.

This article explores the critical role organisations play in shaping a culture that supports not just productivity, but also emotional intelligence, empathy, and psychological safety. While some argue that empathy may hinder long-term success, a deeper understanding reveals that empathy, when balanced with accountability and boundaries, is a strength—not a weakness. It enables leaders and teams to connect authentically, navigate challenges with resilience, and foster sustainable performance.



The workplace is no longer just a site of output; it is a living ecosystem where human needs, aspirations, and emotions intersect. A truly holistic environment acknowledges these dimensions—offering autonomy, reducing stressors, and encouraging creativity and growth. This article argues that organisations that invest in such environments are not only enhancing employee satisfaction but are also building the

foundation for long-term innovation, loyalty, and success.

Ultimately, this is not a new concept. As humans, we are wired for empathy, connection, and emotional intelligence. By embracing these qualities in the workplace, we return to what we’ve always known: that thriving organisations are built on the well-being of their people.

Introduction

We often hear the phrase, “A healthy mind resides in a healthy body.” While this timeless wisdom



emphasises the connection between mental and physical well-being, one of the most influential—and often overlooked—factors in maintaining both is our **workplace**.

In today’s fast-paced professional world, we spend a significant portion of our lives at work. The environment we operate in—physically, socially, and culturally—plays a pivotal role in shaping our overall health and happiness. As organisations evolve, so must their understanding of what it means to support their workforce—not just through perks and benefits, but through intentional, human-centred design of the work experience.

The Role of the Organisation

In the pursuit of productivity and performance, the organisation’s role is **fundamental**. It’s not just about setting goals and meeting deadlines—it’s about cultivating an environment where employees can thrive both professionally and personally.

A truly **holistic workplace** is one where essential human needs are acknowledged and respected.

Employees are given the **freedom to work creatively**, the **space to grow**, and most importantly, a **stress-free atmosphere** that supports their mental and physical health.

Yes, deadlines and deliverables are critical—they drive progress and ensure accountability. But the **quality of the environment** in which these goals are pursued makes all the difference. When organisations prioritise well-being alongside performance, they foster a culture of **sustainable success**.

Empathy: A Strategic Asset

There is a school of thought that argues **empathy may hinder long-term organisational success**, suggesting it could lead to leniency, reduced accountability, or emotional burnout. But this view often stems from a **misunderstanding of what empathy truly is**.

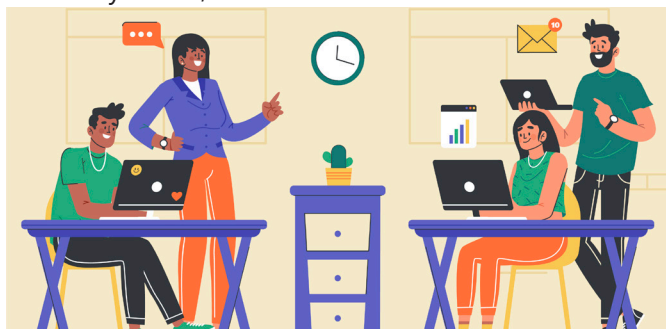
At its core, **empathy simply means being human**—understanding others, acknowledging their emotions, and responding with compassion. It doesn't mean compromising on performance or letting emotions override decisions. In fact, **emotional intelligence**, which includes empathy, is what enables us to **set healthy boundaries, navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, and stay productive without losing our humanity**.

Empathy doesn't dilute professionalism—it **enhances it**. It helps leaders connect, teams collaborate, and individuals feel valued. And when balanced with clarity, accountability, and purpose, empathy becomes a **strategic asset**, not a liability.

The Workplace: Our Second Home

We naturally empathise with our children, family, and loved ones. We listen, support, and care deeply—but we also know when to be firm, when to set boundaries, and when to guide with structure. This balance is what makes relationships strong and nurturing.

The same principle applies to the **workplace**, which, for many of us, is our **second home**—an extended



family of sorts. Just as in our personal lives, empathy at work doesn't mean leniency or lack of discipline. It means **understanding without compromising, supporting without enabling, and leading with both**

heart and clarity.

When organisations embrace this mindset, they create cultures where people feel safe, respected, and motivated—while still being held to high standards. It's this blend of compassion and accountability that builds trust, drives performance, and sustains long-term success.

Building a Holistic Work Environment

So, what does a holistic work environment look like in practice? It includes:

Psychological safety: Employees feel safe to express ideas, ask questions, and admit mistakes without fear.

Autonomy and flexibility: Trusting employees to manage their time and tasks fosters ownership and creativity.

Physical wellness: Ergonomic workspaces, access to healthy food, and opportunities for movement support physical health.

Mental health support: Counselling services, mental health days, and open conversations reduce stigma and promote resilience.

Purpose and meaning: Connecting daily work to a larger mission enhances motivation and fulfilment.

The Long-Term Payoff

Organisations that invest in holistic well-being are not just creating happier workplaces—they're building **resilient, innovative, and loyal teams**. Studies consistently show that companies with high employee engagement and well-being outperform their peers in profitability, retention, and customer satisfaction.

Moreover, in an era where talent is mobile and values-driven, a commitment to holistic health becomes a **competitive advantage**. It signals to current and future employees that the organisation sees them not just as resources, but as **whole human beings**.

Conclusion

The future of work is not just about technology, efficiency, or output—it's about **people**. And people thrive in environments where they are respected, supported, and empowered.

By embracing empathy, emotional intelligence, and holistic health, organisations are not stepping away from performance—they are elevating it. Because when people feel well, they work well. And when they work well, organisations flourish.

In the end, it's not a radical idea. It's a return to what we've always known: a thriving workforce begins with being human.

Simulacra of Commitment – Hidden Threat to a Thriving Workforce



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Introduction

In today's hyper-competitive corporate world, the office lights that burn late into the night are often seen as symbols of commitment, ambition, and drive. Many leaders still valorise the last person to leave the office, and employees silently applaud those who sacrifice evenings and weekends at the altar of "Simulacrum of Productivity." But beneath this glowing façade lies a costly illusion—one that mistakes physical presence for meaningful performance, and busyness for impact.

This is the Simulacra of Commitment: the deceptive appearance of productivity created by extended work hours, where effort is measured by visibility rather than



value. It's a phenomenon that thrives in organizations with outdated success metrics, where employees feel compelled to put in long hours to highlight their discernibility, not because the work demands it, but because the culture rewards it. Ironically, what is often hailed as dedication is frequently a sign of poor time management, unclear priorities, or worse—an unhealthy culture of fear-driven conformity.

In such a FaceTime culture, productivity becomes performative. Efficient individuals stay late not because they are producing better results, but because leaving on time might be misinterpreted as disengagement. This misalignment between true performance and perceived dedication slowly erodes organizational health. It fuels burnout, stifles creativity, undermines

trust, and eventually leads to disengagement and attrition—especially among high-performing employees who value autonomy and work-life balance.

This article unpacks the roots and risks of this performance mirage. It explores why this mindset persists, how it quietly sabotages success, and what leaders can do to shift from a culture of appearances to one of strong impact. The goal is not just to diagnose the problem, but to illuminate a path forward—one that embraces efficiency, well-being, and intentional performance as the true hallmarks of success.

Historical and Cultural Origins – The Colonial Psyche

The widespread valorisation of hyper-visibility and symbolic labor in postcolonial societies cannot be fully understood without excavating the psychosocial and structural legacies of colonization. In nations once subjected to imperial dominance, a distinctive behavioral schema evolved—one in which social advancement was less a function of merit and more a performance of strategic subordination. This performative alignment with authority, far from being incidental, became an ingrained survival strategy across generations.

Under colonial regimes, the general populace was systematically disempowered, with agency concentrated in the hands of a privileged few—typically foreign administrators and their appointed intermediaries. This gave rise to a culture where the path to modest advancement, protection, or even basic stability often depended not on contribution but on compliance, loyalty, and hyper-attunement to power. A cognitive architecture emerged in which servility became synonymous with opportunity. Individuals learned, often at a subconscious level, to associate personal gain with the ability to anticipate and appease authority figures.

Even decades after political independence, this logic of deferential opportunism continues to permeate postcolonial bureaucracies and enterprises. The



archetype of the "dutiful subordinate" who seeks proximity to power through performative allegiance—extended hours, unnecessary presence, uncritical agreement—remains alive. The colonial master has simply been replaced by the modern superior: a corporate authority figure whose favor is seen as both aspirational and transactional. This behavioral continuity reflects what postcolonial theorist Ashis Nandy described as the "internalization of oppression," where the colonized subject begins to reproduce the architecture of servitude even in ostensibly liberated contexts.

This is further compounded by the structural reality of modern institutions in many postcolonial nations—marked by rigid hierarchies, opaque accountability mechanisms, and politically infused power dynamics. In such ecosystems, formal channels of recognition are often subordinated to informal networks of influence and patronage. The result is a pervasive culture of over-demonstration, where employees feel compelled to project loyalty, compliance, and hyper-availability, often at the expense of authentic productivity. This "ritual of visibility" becomes a mechanism of self-preservation and advancement in a system where meritocracy remains aspirational rather than operational.

Scholars such as Partha Chatterjee and Frantz Fanon have explored how colonial structures continue to manifest in postcolonial institutions, particularly through what Fanon termed the "psycho-affective economy" of colonialism—where the colonized subject is conditioned to seek recognition through subjugation. Moreover, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory

identifies high power distance—a metric particularly pronounced in formerly colonized societies—as a predictor of deference-based organizational behavior, where subordinates tend to unquestioningly conform to perceived authority (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

In stark contrast, work cultures in historically non-colonized or colonizing nations—such as Scandinavian countries, Germany, or the Netherlands—tend to exhibit markedly different norms. These societies emphasize flatter hierarchies, role clarity, transparency, and the primacy of outcomes over appearances. Employees in these environments are neither expected nor incentivized to perform availability theatrics; instead, their contributions are measured through objective deliverables, creative output, and collaborative impact. Research by the OECD and Gallup (2022) highlights that nations with stronger egalitarian traditions and clearer organisational governance structures tend to experience higher employee engagement and lower rates of burnout—not because employees work fewer hours, but because they work in environments that prioritise substance over symbolism.

Furthermore, organizations in egalitarian cultures often actively discourage sycophantic behaviour, viewing it as detrimental to innovation and corrosive to trust. Leaders in these contexts are trained to detect and mitigate flattery, recognising it as a barrier to honest feedback and critical thinking. The organisational ethos is grounded in principles of mutual respect, merit-based recognition, and psychological safety—conditions rarely afforded in overly hierarchical, politicised environments.

This juxtaposition reveals a powerful truth: in postcolonial workplaces, inherited servility masquerading as dedication perpetuates symbolic productivity. In contrast, in societies with more equitable and transparent structures, symbolic labor finds little room to flourish. For HR leaders seeking to reform workplace dynamics in postcolonial contexts, this is a call to engage in institutional introspection. It is not enough to introduce productivity metrics or work-life balance policies; one must interrogate and deconstruct the very cultural scaffolding that equates presence with value and deference with competence.

Social and Psychological Drivers – The Ego Theater and the Hidden Economy of Time

Beyond the historical entrenchments of subordination and servitude that shape the behavioral architecture of post-colonial societies, the modern workplace often amplifies these undercurrents through a unique



interplay of social and psychological motivations. This segment seeks to illuminate how a confluence of internalised insecurities, status-seeking behaviors, systemic inefficiencies, and opportunistic exploitation has evolved into a full-blown socio-psychological phenomenon — a kind of ego theater masquerading as professional diligence.

In many hierarchical organisations — especially within post-colonial socio-economic systems — the desire to be visibly engaged beyond normal working hours is often not driven by the actual requirements of the role but by an acute craving for recognition and validation. Employees, particularly those lacking distinctive competence, often adopt performative dedication as their singular Key Performance Indicator (KPI). Rather than delivering results through innovation or efficiency, they project an illusion of industriousness, hoping to carve a niche through visibility rather than value.

This performative effort is fueled by a potent mix of psychological drivers: a false sense of achievement, the desire to be seen as more committed than peers, and a pathological need for hierarchical approval. In such

environments, trivial gains — whether in the form of superficial praise, non-monetary perks, or perceived proximity to power — become disproportionately motivating. Employees derive pseudo-satisfaction from staying late, even when the office hours remain functionally unproductive.

Adding further complexity is the latent sadistic impulse observed among certain mid-level managers, who mirror the behaviour of former colonial gatekeepers. These individuals reinforce extended presence as a symbol of loyalty and subtly penalize efficiency that does not conform to the visual grammar of sacrifice. In such settings, subordinates may be coerced into mimicking such behavior to avoid being labelled uncommitted — a dynamic that only exacerbates systemic inefficiencies.

Moreover, there exists a burgeoning subterranean economy within the workday. In many corporate setups, employees use formal work hours for personal activities — whether indulging in office gossip, pursuing social media, or engaging in alternative income streams such as day trading. The hours intended for professional output are often hijacked for informal socialising or covert freelancing. This misallocation of time forces these same individuals to linger after hours, not as a reflection of dedication but as a cover for earlier dereliction.

This is further incentivised in some corporate cultures by material inducements such as overtime pay, subsidised meals, cab services, and access to empty offices conducive to their side hustles. The workplace is thus gamified: the longer one stays, the more perceived (or real) benefits one can extract, turning workspaces into sites of opportunistic exploitation rather than productivity.

Psychologically, this behaviour is also reinforced by the fear of being outshone. In high-power-distance cultures, where appearing subordinate to peers can be psychologically distressing, the need to appear the 'last one standing' becomes a compulsive act of social signaling. What emerges is a climate of mutual surveillance, where employees gauge each other's departure times to calibrate their own, thereby institutionalising the illusion of commitment.

This dysfunction is not merely anecdotal. A study by Harvard Business Review (Perlow & Porter, 2009) found that high-performing employees were often forced into presenteeism to avoid being perceived as less committed. Similarly, Deloitte's 2021 Global Human Capital Trends report indicated that in many companies, the unspoken norms around visibility often outweigh performance metrics in influencing promotions and recognitions.

In contrast, many Western firms actively discourage after-hours work and instead track performance via deliverables, innovation indices, and employee well-



being metrics. In such ecosystems, late sitting is viewed not as a virtue but a sign of poor time management or overcommitment, both considered operational liabilities.

Understanding the social and psychological drivers behind the illusion of commitment requires us to recognise that such behaviours are not always consciously malicious. Rather, they are deeply embedded adaptive strategies developed in response to flawed reward systems, impervious evaluation frameworks, and historically inherited power structures. Breaking free of this cycle necessitates a conscious recalibration of what constitutes value and a move toward cultures that honour outcome over optics, and substance over symbolism.

Fractured Realities – The Multilayered Fallout of Performative Work Culture

The ramifications of performative presence—where being seen is mistaken for being effective—extend far beyond lost productivity metrics. They permeate the human psyche, corrode social ecosystems within organisations, and impose a debilitating inertia upon institutional machinery. When simulacra of commitment are mistaken for authentic contribution, the collateral damage unfolds in cascading dimensions—personal, interpersonal, and systemic.

Dislocation of Self, Time, and Meaning

At the individual level, the distortion of work-life boundaries becomes both a symptom and a perpetuator of identity erosion. Employees, either by internalised compulsion or socio-professional

coercion, surrender their personal hours in pursuit of superficial affirmation from hierarchs. The result is a creeping domestication of human time—where evenings, weekends, and moments of familial intimacy are cannibalised by the hollow theatre of extended presence.

This chronic encroachment on personal time has contributed to an alarming uptick in familial instability, emotional alienation, and psychosomatic stress. Studies have shown that long work hours with little emotional return lead to increased divorce rates, anxiety disorders, and a decline in life satisfaction (Kelly et al., 2014; APA, 2021). The modern employee becomes a paradox—hyper-visible in the workplace, yet existentially absent in their own life.

Moreover, this culture renders the notion of “efficiency” suspect. Those who perform their tasks with dexterity during official hours are often penalised by implicit expectations to remain present longer—not for deliverables, but for deference. Over time, this fosters internal dissonance, disillusionment, and ultimately, disengagement.

Networked Negativity and Subcultural Decay

Within the organisation’s social sphere, the performative ethos spawns a negative feedback loop. Flattery, masquerading as loyalty, becomes the currency of social capital. As a result, employees with manipulative inclinations—often driven by a sadistic desire to dominate subordinates—emerge as cultural doorkeepers. Through subtle forms of coercion and passive-aggressive tactics, they co-opt colleagues into this performative machinery. What emerges is not a collaborative ecosystem, but a hierarchy of appearance over substance.

This is further compounded by the network effect. Toxic social norms tend to replicate themselves through peer pressure, political maneuvering, and subtle acts of exclusion. In such ecosystems, those with negatively skewed mindsets do not merely survive; they thrive. They manipulate perceptions, weaponise gossip, and orchestrate subtle social pressures to coerce others into similar patterns of behaviour. Talented, purpose-driven individuals, unwilling to engage in such theatrics, are either marginalised or eventually exit the organisation altogether. Studies in organisational psychology have consistently shown that toxic employees have higher retention rates in highly politicised work environments, while high-performing employees tend to leave due to misalignment with values (Harvard Business Review, 2016).

Such environments actively resist self-improvement. Time that could be allocated to upskilling, reflective thinking, or innovation is instead monopolised by

performative labour and social theatrics. In many public sector organisations, the consequences are particularly dire. Without dynamic performance filters or flexible exit mechanisms, these individuals embed themselves deep within the system—ossifying its ability to evolve. Their sustained presence not only blocks institutional renewal but also incubates a regressive ethos that sees learning as optional and timelines as fluid.

Institutional Entropy and Cultural Necrosis

At the systemic level, the performative paradigm incurs costs that are both measurable and insidious. From inflated utility expenses, over-reliance on overtime incentives, and logistical redundancies, to hidden costs like burnout, presenteeism, and talent attrition, the economic implications are substantial. Research by Harvard Business Review (2019) and Deloitte (2021) underscores the billions lost globally due to presenteeism and misaligned performance incentives.

But financial haemorrhage is merely a symptom. The deeper malady is cultural entropy. Institutions dominated by empty rituals and timeline inflation suffer from strategic fatigue. Projects are delayed not due to complexity but due to a shared tolerance for procrastination masked as commitment. Individuals with a “make time stretch” mindset thrive, while those oriented towards outcomes suffocate under layers of inertia.

This entropy is particularly existential for veteran organisations. Here, political patronage, bureaucratic rigidity, and lack of performance-based accountability enable such corrosive archetypes to not only survive but ascend. These individuals, whose greatest skill lies in navigating optics rather than delivering value, act as ideological viruses—replicating the worst behaviours and slowly hollowing the organisation from within. If left unchecked, such cultures become so internally depleted that revitalisation becomes nearly impossible, culminating in a kind of institutional death by apathy.

The Way Out – Reclaiming Authenticity, Reconstructing Organisational Ethos

Dismantling the elaborate architecture of performative dedication requires more than procedural reform—it demands a cultural and cognitive metamorphosis. The undoing of simulacra must begin with the unmasking of its utility: when organisations recognise that performative presence yields no real value, they are poised to substitute illusion with substance.

Firstly, at the individual level, employees must be encouraged—and psychologically permitted—to reclaim ownership of their time and value systems. This entails decoupling professional worth from

visual labor emblems like “late stays” or ostentatious busyness. Organisations must foster environments where self-regulation, deep work, and results-oriented performance are celebrated over optical impressions of diligence. Recognition systems must evolve to prioritise contribution over prominence, enabling even the silent outperformers to flourish without social penalties. This shift can be accelerated through the introduction of transparent KPIs tied to quality, innovation, and collaborative impact, rather than sheer hours logged.

Secondly, psychological safety must be institutionalised as policy, not a platitude. Many employees engage in theatre not out of malice, but from an ingrained fear of invisibility and irrelevance in hierarchical ecosystems. This fear thrives in the absence of trust. Leaders, therefore, must be trained not merely in managerial control, but in fostering environments

where people can dissent, innovate, and withdraw from unnecessary performativity without penalty. The Google Project Aristotle famously highlighted that teams with the highest performance scores were not those that worked longest or flattered best, but those where members felt safe enough to be authentic, ask for help, and admit failure.

From a managerial and cultural standpoint, leadership has an indispensable role in reshaping



the organisational psyche. Leaders must actively disavow the latent glorification of “availability theatre” and instead model behaviour that honors boundaries, efficiency, and work-life symmetry. This might include the deliberate practice of leaving work on time, encouraging their squads to take leave and rejuvenate, publicly appreciating those who complete tasks with precision rather than persistence, and critically, resisting the urge to conflate long hours with loyalty. Leaders who openly acknowledge and reward effectiveness, even when it’s quiet or invisible, create the conditions for authentic productivity to flourish.

Structural interventions are equally vital. Organisations must build checks against the institutionalisation of presenteeism by embedding autonomy frameworks within job designs. Flexible scheduling, asynchronous

collaboration models, and the decoupling of compensation from overtime hours can all serve to dismantle the economic incentives fueling illusory effort. Moreover, introducing learning incentives—such as promotion-linked skill accreditations—can realign employee focus from politicking and superficial compliance to genuine capability-building.

The role of technology and data is also crucial in this recalibration. Intelligent analytics systems that evaluate outcomes rather than activity logs can reorient attention toward effectiveness. AI-based productivity monitors (focused not on surveillance but pattern optimization) can help identify inefficiencies and recommend workload redistribution, ensuring that high performers are not punished with chronic overburden while others hide behind shadow labour.



Finally, at the societal level, there must be a broader discursive shift. The mythology of noble sacrifice through overwork must be deconstructed in public narratives—through media, education, and policy. Young professionals must be taught to view time as an economic and emotional asset, not merely a corporate resource to surrender. As studies from progressive economies such as Denmark, the Netherlands, and New Zealand reveal, cultures that value psychological safety, balanced lives, and results-driven labour produce not only healthier citizens but also far more resilient institutions.

To envision a future liberated from simulacra, organisations must cease rewarding the illusion of commitment and begin designing systems that cultivate real, sustained, and evolving human contribution. The path to authentic productivity is not paved with visibility, but with trust, autonomy, and purpose.

Restoring the Real – Toward Cultures of Authentic Contribution

In the dramaturgy of modern professional life, workplaces across much of the postcolonial and bureaucratic world have become arenas of performance rather than production, where gestures of diligence increasingly eclipse genuine outcomes. The architecture of organizational life is often scaffolded not on effectiveness, but on elaborate rituals of presence—what scholars have termed availability theatre, presenteeism culture, or the simulacrum of commitment. In these spaces, work is no longer defined by value-creation, but by visibility inflation—a transactional ritual aimed at pleasing the watchful gaze of the hierarchical superior rather than fulfilling the purpose of one's role.

This phenomenon is particularly endemic in legacy corporates shaped by colonial administrative patterns, where timeserved is still mistaken for work accomplished. These systems reward optics over outcomes and loyalty over leadership. When commitment becomes something to be displayed rather than embodied, the very grammar of organisational culture collapses under its contradictions. Employees learn to manage impressions, not responsibilities. Competence gets confused with compliance. And soon, entire ecosystems are sustained not by performance, but by a shared pretense of it.

The damage is cumulative and corrosive. Individuals pay with their well-being, sacrificing personal time to indulge in a spectacle that offers neither true recognition nor fulfillment. Socially, the ethos of sycophantic diligence gets reinforced through networks of mimicry, where those most committed to performative flattery ascend faster than those committed to actual excellence. Organisationally, the long-term cost is devastating—manifested in skill stagnation, attrition of top talent, and a chronic inability to adapt to external shifts.

Yet, there are countermodels that illuminate what restoring the real could look like. Companies like Atlassian, Basecamp, and HubSpot have challenged the orthodoxy of presenteeism by shifting toward outcome-based evaluation systems, asynchronous work cultures, and radical transparency. Atlassian's "Team Playbook" framework, for example, focuses on trust, clarity of objectives, and health of collaboration—not time logged or face shown. In contrast to the performative servility often seen in postcolonial administrative structures, these organisations consciously cultivate cultures of psychological safety, where contribution matters more than choreography.

The World Economic Forum (2023) has warned that

employee burnout—driven in part by cultures of performative overwork—is among the top threats to global productivity.

Likewise, a Harvard Business Review study (2019) found that companies with strong cultures of trust and intrinsic motivation outperform competitors by up to 400% in revenue growth over a 10-year span. These are not abstract philosophies—they are economically consequential paradigms.

The antidote to simulacra is not stricter enforcement or digital surveillance tools that monitor keystrokes, webcams, or attendance. Such mechanisms only deepen the illusion. Instead, the pathway forward lies in re-centering the purpose of work itself. Leaders must be willing to deconstruct inherited hierarchies and reimagine power as enabling rather than overseeing. Feedback must move from being a one-directional judgment to a reciprocal conversation. Organisations must invest in designing jobs that *earn commitment rather than demanding their performance*.

Perhaps most critically, performance architecture needs to be rebuilt from first principles. In systems where the flattery of superiors has long substituted for meaningful growth, the time has come to reward critical thinking, candor, and capability. Failure to do so risks institutional decay—not just of productivity, but of purpose.

This is not merely an operational challenge; it is a cultural reckoning. A reckoning that demands we stop asking how long employees stayed and start asking what value they created. That we replace the rituals of diligence with the reality of contribution. That we no longer reward the illusion of going the extra mile, but instead cultivate environments where people *go the necessary mile—with clarity, autonomy, and integrity*.

Fit to Refine



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Abstract

In a world where workplace wellness often takes a backseat to deadlines and demanding schedules, the FOB block at Haldia Refinery is setting a new

walls. Inspired by colleagues, many team members who were once indifferent to fitness are now embracing healthier lifestyles, taking part in activities like badminton, strength training, and mindful eating.

This culture of fitness is enhancing team morale, boosting productivity, and fostering a sense of unity across shifts and age groups. In a high-pressure industrial environment, the FOB block's approach to workplace wellness demonstrates that taking care of health isn't a luxury—it's a necessity.

This article explores how the FOB block is redefining what it means to be "fit for work," showing that strength, consistency, and well-being can thrive even in the most demanding professional settings.

Fit to Refine: How We're Building Strength Beyond the Shift

In most industrial workplaces, health and fitness are often relegated to an afterthought—something to worry about once the shift ends. But in the FOB block of Haldia Refinery, we're flipping that narrative. Here, health and wellness aren't just personal goals; they're a part of our workplace culture.

We jokingly refer to ourselves as the "fit block," but there's a lot of truth behind the name. Step into our unit on any given day, and you'll find more than just process charts and maintenance routines—you'll see people making conscious efforts to stay active, eat right, and prioritise their well-being. In a place known for discipline and precision, we've extended that mindset to our physical and mental health.

It all started with a few individuals pursuing their own fitness journeys. Our most senior colleague, for instance, is deeply committed to yoga. No matter what shift he's on, he always carves out time for his daily routine. Rain or shine, busy or free, his mat comes out, and his session begins. His quiet consistency has been nothing short of inspirational.

Then we have our sports enthusiasts—badminton players who organize friendly matches in the evenings, and even a javelin thrower who bagged a silver at the PSPB Tournament. And of course, there's a growing



standard. What began as a few individuals pursuing personal fitness goals has evolved into a thriving culture of health, discipline, and motivation. From yoga practitioners who never miss a day, regardless of shift timings, to gym enthusiasts logging two-hour sessions after long workdays—even during refinery shutdowns—the commitment to wellness is woven into the fabric of daily life here.

This transformation hasn't just stayed within the gym

tribe of gym-goers, myself included, who clock in serious hours post-shift. Two hours at the gym, even after a long day of work, is the norm for some of us. During the last plant shutdown, many still showed up at the gym—right after completing 12-hour shifts. That kind of dedication speaks volumes.

What's most heartening is how this focus on health has become a collective movement. It's no longer limited to a few fitness fanatics. Colleagues who were once indifferent toward health are now watching what they eat, asking for gym recommendations, or joining early morning walks. The positive peer pressure is real—and it's working.



A particularly powerful example is one of our teammates who was recently diagnosed with a diabetes scare. Instead of letting it slow him down, he took it as a personal challenge. He revamped his diet, took up regular exercise, and stayed consistent. Today, his energy levels have gone up, his morale is higher than ever, and his sugar levels have gone down. His story has become a case study in the power of self-discipline and lifestyle changes.

In a high-stress, high-demand environment like ours, wellness is often overshadowed by urgent deadlines and physical labour. But we're learning that maintaining good health isn't

just beneficial—it's essential. It improves our focus, reduces fatigue, and helps us handle challenges better. Simply put, a healthier workforce is a more effective one.

What makes our block special isn't that we have the best gym equipment or follow the latest fitness trends. It's the mindset. We're redefining what workplace wellness looks like—one yoga session, one walk, one

gym rep at a time.

We still have our deadlines, our shutdowns, and our share of challenges. But through it all, we've made space for something more enduring: a commitment to ourselves.

As I often say, "Being healthy isn't about chasing abs or the perfect BMI. It's about being able to live fully, work harder, and grow older without relying on a bag full of medicines." And here at FOB, we're doing our bit to make that a reality.

So yes, we may work in a refinery block—but we're also refining something just as important: our health, our habits, and ultimately, our lives.

A Comparison Between the Vishaka Guidelines and the PoSH Act



By - **Bibhas Biswas, M(HRD), PLHO**
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PoSH Act

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act



Introduction

Sexual harassment is a longstanding societal issue that has plagued workplaces, often undermining women's dignity, safety and right to equal opportunity. Until the late 1990s, there was no formal legal definition or statutory remedy addressing workplace sexual harassment in India. This gap was first addressed by the Supreme Court of India in 1997 through the landmark Vishaka vs State of Rajasthan judgment. The judgment laid the foundation for the Vishaka Guidelines, which were judicially enforceable directives ensuring the protection of women from sexual harassment at workplaces.

In 2013, the enactment of The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, commonly known as the POSH Act, marked a crucial shift in the legal landscape. It codified and expanded upon the Vishaka Guidelines, transforming them into a comprehensive statute.

The Vishaka Case and Guidelines

The Vishaka Guidelines emerged from a public interest litigation filed in the wake of the Bhanwari Devi gang

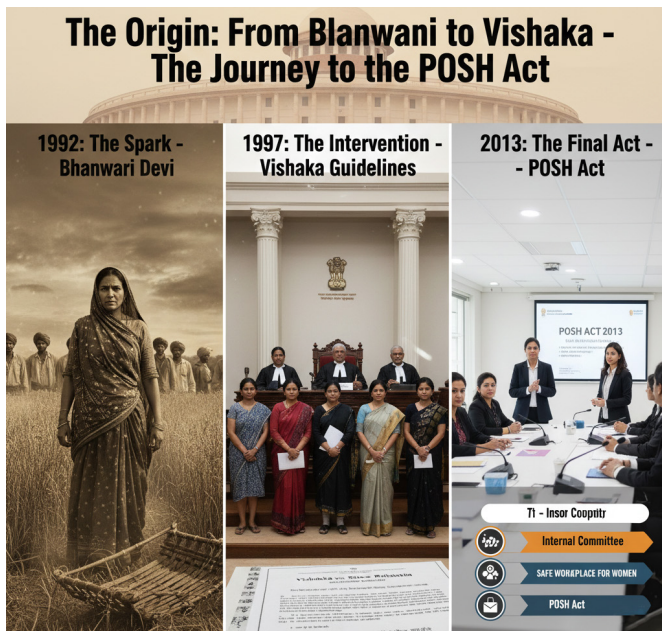
rape case. Bhanwari Devi, a grassroots worker in Rajasthan, was gang-raped by five men in retaliation for preventing a child marriage. The local trial court exonerated the accused, prompting outrage and legal activism.

In response, the Supreme Court in Vishaka & Ors. vs. State of Rajasthan (1997) acknowledged the absence of legislation dealing with sexual harassment at the workplace and held that such harassment violated Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21 of the Constitution. It used India's commitment to CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) to establish binding guidelines until Parliament enacted a law.

The Origin: From Bhanwari Devi to Vishaka

The Vishaka Guidelines were not born in a vacuum. They emerged from the tragic story of Bhanwari Devi, a grassroots social worker from Rajasthan, who was gang-raped in 1992 by five men, allegedly in retaliation for her attempt to prevent a child marriage. Despite the brutality of the crime, the trial court acquitted the accused, citing flimsy reasons. This sparked nationwide outrage and led a group of

women’s rights organisations to file a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court.



In its 1997 judgment, the apex court acknowledged the absence of any domestic law to address sexual harassment in the workplace. Referring to international treaties like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which India had ratified, the Court laid down a set of guidelines to be treated as binding law until formal legislation was enacted.

Thus, the Vishaka Guidelines became India’s first legal instrument to define sexual harassment and prescribe preventive and remedial measures at the workplace.

Enactment of the POSH Act (2013)



The POSH Act, passed in 2013, filled this legislative vacuum. It provides detailed definitions, procedural mechanisms, institutional structures like Internal Complaints Committees (ICC), and prescribes penalties for non-compliance. It was the conclusion or final outcome of the years of judicial advocacy and social movement led by women’s rights organisations and legislators.

Why the POSH Act Was Needed

While the Vishaka Guidelines served as a powerful precedent, they had limitations. Being judicial directions, their enforcement was inconsistent. Many organisations, especially in the private and unorganised sectors, either ignored or poorly implemented the guidelines. Recognising the need for a dedicated statutory framework, the Indian Parliament passed the POSH Act in 2013, a comprehensive law that not only expanded upon Vishaka but introduced clarity, structure and accountability.

The ‘POSH Act’ goes far beyond the skeletal framework provided by ‘Vishaka’. It defines key terms like “workplace,” “aggrieved woman”, and “employee,” mandates strict compliance from employers, outlines the formation and functioning of Internal Committees and prescribes penalties for non-compliance.

Core Philosophy: Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal

Both the Vishaka Guidelines and the POSH Act are built on a three-pronged approach- prohibition, prevention, and redressal of sexual harassment. They recognise that sexual harassment is not only a violation of dignity but also a barrier to women’s fundamental rights in workplaces.

The POSH Act, however, formalises this approach with statutory clarity and enforceable obligations on employers and institutions. Unlike Vishaka, which was interpretative in nature, the POSH Act provides codified legal protection.



Comparative Overview: Vishaka Guidelines vs POSH Act

Nature	Judicial guidelines with the force of law until legislation is passed	Statutory legislation passed by Parliament
Coverage of Organizations	Public, private sector units -unclear on NGOs or informal sector	All sectors private, public, NGOs, hospitals, educational institutions, sports bodies, and even domestic workers
Definition of Workplace	Vague - limited to organized settings	Expanded to include any place visited during work
Who is Protected?	Broader definition includes full-time, part-time, contract workers, interns, volunteers	Any working woman without clarity on volunteers/interns
Definition of Sexual Harassment	Broadly defined - includes unwelcome physical/verbal conduct	Codified in Section 2(n) of the Act - includes quid pro quo and hostile work environment
Complaints Committee	Mandatory Internal Committee; composition loosely defined	Detailed provisions for ICC including qualifications, tenure, powers
Redressal Process	Time-bound inquiry recommended	90 day inquiry deadline; 180 day limit on appeal; detailed stages defined
Remedies Available	Disciplinary action by employer	Compensation, interim relief, disciplinary actions, transfer, written apology
Employer's Responsibilities	Vague responsibilities	Mandatory training, policy display, ICC formation, compliance reports
Penalties for Non-compliance	Not specified	Fine up to Rs.50,000, cancellation of licenses on repeated violations
Appeal Mechanism	Not specified	Appeal provision under Service Rules or Industrial Employment Act

The Legal and Social Impact

Achievements of the Vishaka Guidelines

- Pioneered recognition of sexual harassment as a human rights issue.
- Set minimum standards for employer accountability.
- Enabled courts to offer relief in the absence of legislation.

Advancements under the POSH Act

- Institutionalised complaint mechanisms through ICC and LCC.
- Enforced timelines and accountability.
- Encouraged gender-sensitisation initiatives and workplace audits.
- Brought within its fold informal sectors, remote workplaces, and gig economy workers.

Despite these advancements, implementation gaps remain. Many organisations are either unaware or non-compliant, particularly in smaller establishments and government offices. Reporting remains low due to fear of retaliation, stigma or lack of trust in institutional redressal systems.

Limitations and the Road Ahead

While the POSH Act is a commendable leap forward, it still faces challenges:

- Underreporting due to workplace power dynamics.
- Poor functioning or absence of ICCs in smaller firms.
- Inadequate training or awareness sessions.
- Lack of clarity in dealing with third-party harassment or male victims.

There is also the growing concern that organisations treat compliance as a box-ticking exercise rather than a cultural shift. Further reforms could include:

- Extending protection irrespective of gender.
- Creating a central registry for ICC compliance.
- Simplifying the complaints mechanism with digital tools and ombudspersons.
- Greater transparency and anonymised disclosure of ICC outcomes for trust-building.

The POSH Act marked a paradigm shift in Indian employment law. It moved beyond reactive redressal to proactive prevention. It put the onus squarely on employers to create safe, respectful, and inclusive workplaces. Importantly, it empowered women,

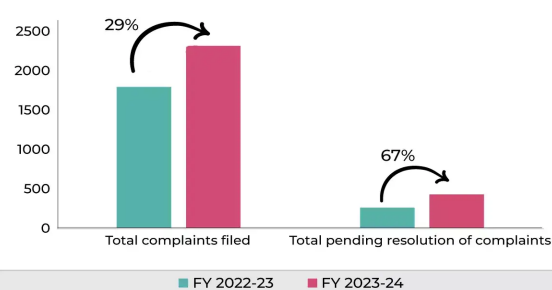
especially from vulnerable backgrounds, to raise their voice against injustice without fear of being silenced.

Compliance with the Act is no longer a “good-to-have” checkbox but a legal necessity. Employers must invest in legal training, awareness drives, and periodic audits of workplace conduct to prevent both legal and reputational damage.

Post-POSH Developments: Successes and Gaps

Despite its strengths, the POSH Act still faces implementation hurdles. Many private companies and even government departments fail to constitute compliant ICCs. Victims often hesitate to report harassment due to fear of retaliation or career damage.

Data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) suggests that while workplace sexual harassment



Source: Udaiti Foundation

complaints are on the rise, they remain underreported. The number of cases filed annually under this category is far below the actual incidence levels.

Further, the law only protects women, leaving out men, transgender and non-binary individuals. Critics also argue that POSH doesn't adequately address third-party harassment or harassment in remote working setups, which is a rising trend or new normal post-COVID pandemic.

Conclusion

The Vishaka Guidelines were a bold first step crafted by the judiciary in the absence of a statute. They created legal recognition for workplace sexual harassment and paved the way for future reforms. But being limited in scope and enforcement, they could only do so much.

The POSH Act, in contrast, is a detailed, enforceable and comprehensive law that reflects India's growing commitment to workplace safety and gender equality. Yet, laws alone cannot bring change. It requires organisational will, employee awareness and social empathy to turn policy into practice.

As workplaces evolve, so too must our mechanisms of justice and protection. Whether through amendments, better awareness, or technological tools, the journey from Vishaka to POSH must continue until every workplace, from corporate offices to rural factories, becomes a space of dignity, safety and equality for all.

Pause & Breathe – You’re Alive!



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Holistic Health Framework

Living Organisations

1

Physical Well-Being

Health checks, ergonomics, fitness, nutrition.

2

Mental & Emotional Well-Being

Counselling support, resilience training, peer circles, and a culture that normalises asking for help. Keeps minds sharp and spirits steady.

3

Social & Relational Well-Being

Connection at work is oxygen. Team retreats, volunteering, mentoring, and genuine opportunities for belonging nurture this dimension.

4

Spiritual Well-Being

Giving employees the chance to align work with meaning, personal passions, and continuous learning.

Transforming into Living Organisations through Holistic Wellbeing

Yesterday evening, I boarded my usual metro. It was late, the sun had already set, and my eyes were begging for a break from the day’s endless screen time with office work. So, I thought, fine, no phone today—let’s see what the “aaj ki duniya” looks like for a change.

Well...it was a full-on circus! People were running across walkways, speed-skating on escalators, and flying down the stairs. I just stood there thinking, “Itni kya jaldi hai bhai!” Why’s everyone running like there’s a “Buy One Get One Free” sale inside? But the striking part? Almost every single runner had two companions, their AirPods lodged in their ears and their smartphone glued to their hands.

So, picture this: a crowd of humans, rushing at lightning speed... while staring at their screens. When I reached the platform, I noticed the ladies around me...different

ages, variant dressing styles, but one common pose - head down, eyes locked on phone, thumb scrolling like a treadmill workout. The metro arrived, I stepped in... and zoom, hundreds of passengers sitting in perfect silence, faces glowing like they’d been recruited as extras for a sci-fi movie.

Flashback to ten years ago, trains and buses used to be noisy. People laughed, gossiped, shared stories, and even fought over seats. It was chaotic but alive. Now? Around 1500 passengers in one metro, and nobody is engaging! Everyone’s ‘together,’ but actually alone, lost in reels, memes, and whatever trash the social media vomits in the name of “content”.

So, the big question that looms large is - have we become “smart” thanks to technology? Or are we just politely handing over our humanity and well-being to our phones, one scroll at a time?

Health in a fast-paced world

Health today extends far beyond the traditional idea

of just being physically fit or free from illness. In our fast-paced world, where maintaining physical health itself can feel like a challenge, the definition of health has broadened into something much deeper and more holistic. With the rapid rise of artificial intelligence, the overwhelming influence of the internet, and the constant presence of social media shaping how we live, think, and connect, true wellbeing now demands more than exercise and good nutrition. The future calls for a balanced approach that nurtures not only the body, but also the mind and emotions, embracing mental resilience, digital mindfulness, and social harmony as essential parts of what it means to be truly healthy.

Even for organisations, the way forward for an engaged and healthy workforce requires an integrated approach that nurtures the physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions of employees' lives. A global survey by McKinsey covering over 30,000 employees in 30 countries discovered that only 57% of workers reported having good holistic health. Burnout symptoms were prevalent, especially among women, younger workers, and those with lower financial security. Importantly, the survey found that holistic health is a stronger predictor of outcomes like innovation, job performance, and longevity than metrics like engagement or happiness alone.

Redefining Workplaces around the World

The idea of holistic health is no longer a "nice-to-have" programme but a prerequisite in current times. Across the world, companies are weaving wellness into their workplace strategies, and HR is right at the heart of this transformation.

Many multinationals are already leading the way. Giants like Salesforce, Google, Unilever, Cisco, Adobe, Johnson & Johnson and HP have introduced a mix of initiatives like on-site gyms and fitness classes, mindfulness and meditation programs, healthier food choices, ergonomic workspaces, counselling services & therapy, and even flexible or hybrid work models to support work-life balance. Deutsche Bank, Philips and upGrad have gone a step further by linking health goals directly to performance reviews, making well-being a measurable priority.

Some standout programs around the world are truly inspiring. Hilton's "Give a Dream, Live a Dream" offers paid sabbaticals so employees can pursue passions or volunteer for meaningful causes. Buffer, a social media marketing company, fosters belonging and connection by organising community-driven activities like CSR projects and team retreats. Wipro's WeRe (Wellbeing & Resilience) program combines training with trauma-informed coaches and AI-driven tools that detect psychological strain, ensuring support is

timely and proactive, and the Amigo Circle fosters positive impact on employee wellbeing through an informal employee resource group.

Taken together, companies aren't just focusing on productivity anymore, they're investing in people as whole human beings.

How Indian PSUs are embracing Employee Wellbeing

In recent years, Indian Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) have begun to recognise that employee well-being isn't just a "nice extra" but a core aspect of sustainable performance. Several PSUs are now rolling out meaningful programmes to safeguard both physical and mental health. IndianOil was the first Indian PSU to win the Global Healthy Workplace Award 2021 and the Hall of Fame 2024 by Arogya World Healthy Workplaces, recognised for its sustained efforts towards fostering mentally, physically, and emotionally healthy workplace practices. Meanwhile,



NTPC has introduced a "Health Champion Scheme" that empowers selected employees across units to propagate healthy living, access to wellness/yoga centres, and a better work-life balance. IREDA is organising preventive health camps, extending diagnostic tests and medical consultations not just to permanent staff but outsourced employees too. GAIL launched "Spandan – Monthly Wellness Hour", a regular initiative designed for all their site offices to pause, reflect and attend to physical, emotional and mental well-being.

These are promising beginnings. But for many organisations, there remain gaps and opportunities for improvement. Some areas that need attention include:

- **Consistency and Reach:** Many initiatives are episodic and do not always reach remote employees, shift workers or outsourced manpower.
- **Cultural Barriers & Stigma:** Even when mental health programmes exist, utilisation tends to be low, often due to stigma, poor awareness, or fear of negative consequences to career. Many employees may view these programs as symbolic rather than sincerely supported by leadership.
- **Integration & Accountability:** Linking well-being with roles, leadership responsibilities, and performance often remains weak. There is scope for integrating wellness into performance metrics, leadership training, and day-to-day work culture so that well-being becomes part of the workflow and not just an add-on.
- **Monitoring & Feedback:** There is much less systematic feedback, outcome tracking, or data on impact in many companies. Questions like “Did this wellness hour reduce stress?” “Did the health camp lead to early detection of serious conditions?”, or “how many employees availed mental health counselling?” are often unasked or unmeasured.

For HR professionals, the exciting frontier is turning these isolated practices into holistic ecosystems where mental health, physical health, social wellbeing and emotional & spiritual wellness are not separate silos but parts of one integrated employee experience. With consistent investment, leadership buy-in, and commitment to culture change, organisations have the potential to set new standards in employee wellbeing.

Living Organisations

Holistic well-being is not some fluffy HR fad. It rests on a solid framework that companies can adopt, adapt, and measure. Think of it as a four-legged chair — if even one leg is weak, the balance goes off.

1. **Physical Well-Being** – health checks, ergonomics, fitness, nutrition. This is the most visible leg, but without the others, it can't stand strong.
2. **Mental & Emotional Well-Being** – counselling support, resilience training, peer circles, and above all, a culture that normalises asking for help. This keeps minds sharp and spirits steady.
3. **Social & Relational Well-Being** – connection at work is oxygen. Team retreats, volunteering, mentoring, and genuine opportunities for belonging nurture this dimension.
4. **Purpose & Growth (Spiritual Well-Being)** – no, not incense sticks in the office, but giving employees the chance to align work with meaning, personal

passions, and continuous learning. Purpose makes the Monday blues less blue.

When organisations design their HR strategies around these four pillars, they move from wellness “tick-boxes” to a living ecosystem of well-being. The framework provides the scaffolding, but leadership commitment breathes life into it.

Looking to the Future

If organisations truly want to thrive, they've got to treat holistic well-being not as a Friday yoga session or a one-time wellness camp, but as the oxygen mask every employee needs before diving back into deadlines. After all, today's workforce isn't the same. Gen Z comes with a turbocharged mix of ambition and anxiety, constantly juggling career FOMO with Instagram-worthy life goals. The women workforce, too, is carrying double and triple shifts—balancing work, home, and the invisible load of expectations. For them, well-being is not a perk; it's survival. If companies can create spaces where employees feel healthier, happier, and just a little more human, they won't just boost productivity—they'll spark loyalty, creativity, and maybe even joy.

An Appeal to the Leaders!

Dear leaders, pause, breathe, and remember...you're not running a factory of machines, you're nurturing a garden of living, breathing, sometimes sleep-deprived, occasionally scrolling, always evolving human beings. And that's where the real growth lies!

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H.E.R.O. in the times of Wellness



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The proof at hand



In a 2023 case study by Kurukshetra University, on about 200 Police Personnel in Haryana, it was established that Psychological Capital (PsyCap) parameters were positively affecting their general well-being, emotional strength, and job satisfaction.

Another study done by the University of Allahabad in 2025 sought to examine, among other things, whether individual PsyCap affected the organisational team's performance. It observed employees from Indian Organisations and established that individuals with high PsyCap uplift team dynamics and outcomes, thus contributing to team performance.

Studies, such as the above and others, have established the direct correlation between positive PsyCap components and Organisational performance. It is now accepted that individual and team PsyCap are instrumental in driving exceptional job performance and employee engagement, ultimately contributing to the success of the organisation.

The H.E.R.O. cape

Defined by professor Fred Luthans and his associates (2007), Psychological Capital or PsyCap is "individual's positive psychological state of development and it is characterised by: (1) having confidence (Self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (Optimism) about succeeding now and in the future;

(3) persevering towards goals, and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (Hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (Resiliency) to attain success"

The present article will discuss further the four pillars of PsyCap and illustrate the opportunities that IndianOil is providing to enhance these characteristics of its workforce.

The core components of PsyCap are as follows:

HOPE: Snyder et al. (1991) define hope as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-oriented energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)." The path need not be quick, but it must be achievable. Hope also includes the ability to generate alternate paths in order to overcome obstacles.

At IndianOil: Key examples where at IndianOil interventions are targeted to assist development and augment employees' efforts at being 'Hopeful' are as follows:

a. **Setting SMART goals:** Employees are encouraged to set specific, measurable and time-bound goals during the Goal-setting phase of the Performance Management cycle.



b. **Pathway Thinking:** Several role-play-based workshops and simulation-based training inputs are provided to achieve organisational goals – a key

example being the USPEEK workshops – AI-enabled sessions in which Field Officers were coached on sales pitches based on their individual capabilities and real-world scenarios as an intervention to achieve the OTOG (One Team One Goal) targets in the Marketing Division.

EFFICACY: Psychologist Albert Bandura in 1977 defined Efficacy as “the belief in one’s capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations.” Efficacy is strengthened by

Mastering experiences: Achieving difficult goals by persevering, even in the face of adversity.

Vicarious experience: Learning from the experience or success of others similar to you

Social persuasion: Encouragement from others also enhances one’s efficacy.

Physiological Feedback: If the activity affects the body and emotion positively, then it enhances the belief in the person’s efficacy.

At IndianOil: The umpteen opportunities at IndianOil for self-development, such as the self-learning portal Swadhayay, options of MOOC through Ekalavya, are initiatives of the Organisation to enhance the efficacy of its employees. Not only its employees, but IndianOil also educates its Channel Partners, such as Customer Attendants (CAs), LPG Delivery persons, etc., through the learning portal Sampark. Additionally, it’s one-of-a-kind initiative of Academy on Wheels, which is a learning academy for CA’s inside of a bus which moves from location to location, is a true testament of the organisation’s commitment towards enhancing channel partners’ experiences.

RESILIENCE: Resilience is defined as: “positive psychological capacity to rebound, to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure, or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility” (Luthans, 2002). Resilience appreciates the ability to come back stronger after stressful work events. This is a test of the person’s ability to cope with challenges through mental, emotional and behavioural flexibility.

At IndianOil: Note-worthy initiatives at IndianOil where the organisation is grooming the grit and mental well-being of its workforce are:

a. Employee Assistance program: With an aim to support employees in navigating daily work-life challenges and enhancing their overall well-being, launched in 2021, “Paramarsh. The corporate-wide employee assistance program hosts sessions on wellness, nutrition, and counselling, under the aegis of which a variety of topics are discussed, such as “Caring for Ageing Parents” or “Traditional vs Gentle Parenting.

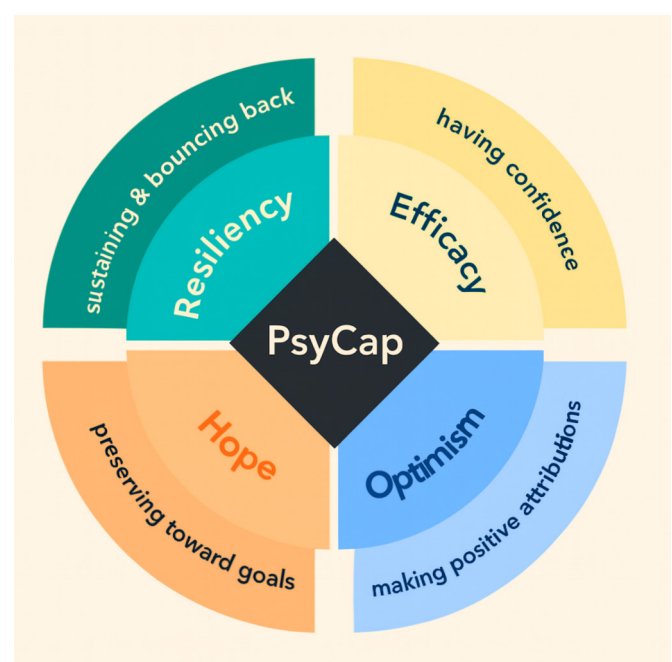
b. IndianOil Wellness Programme 4R 4U: Focussing on the physical and mental health well-being of its employees, the IndianOil 4R 4U program was developed emphasising the principles of Realize- your Willpower, Revive- your Health/ Body, Rejuvenate- your Mind, and Reinvent- your Success/ Growth, guiding IOCIans towards not only professional success but also a life of purpose and balance.

c. Cultivating a Growth mindset by learning from failure: Various departments, such as HSE (Health, Safety and Environment) or Vigilance, circulate case studies through Corporate Broadcasts so that lessons learnt from these incidents are shared with all to ensure implementation of best practices and prevent recurrence of negligence.

OPTIMISM: Scheier and Carver (in the 1980s) defined optimism as a set of generalised positive outcome expectancies. Optimistic people are confident that desired outcomes will occur and that their efforts will succeed. They attribute negative or adverse outcomes to temporary, external circumstances.

At IndianOil: Some interventions at IndianOil where the organisation is grooming the eco-system of Optimism are:

a. Open-mic with Chairman: In a marathon session of 12 hours of a unique Townhall initiative, the Chairman of IndianOil virtually interacted and conversed with nearly 300 employees across 145+ locations, responding to their queries, sharing feedback and voicing ideas. It set an example of open communication. Any misgivings about the organisation or industry were suitably allayed, and transparency was enhanced, thus aiding in creating a responsive, inclusive and people-centric workplace.



b. Peer support networks: To encourage sharing of positive experiences and coping strategies, IndianOil has instituted initiatives such as Abhigyan – its home-grown mentor-mentee network with a branch for reverse-mentoring where senior employees are open to gaining know-how from juniors.

<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/10172058-we-thrive-in-environments-that-respect-us-and-allow-us>

Where do we go from here?

To further cement the effect of PsyCap parameters on the performance of IndianOil, specifically, it would be worthwhile to:

- Undertake studies, in collaboration with academia, to observe the correlation between the H.E.R.O. parameters and organisational KPI's such as:
 - Sales Growth
 - Incident Free duration
 - Employee absenteeism
- Conduct and document interviews, focussed group discussions to capture narratives where the H.E.R.O. traits have helped overcome employee challenges.

Conclusion

In the words of Timothy R. Clark, the founder and CEO of Leader Factor, "... But when the environment nurtures psychological safety, there's an explosion of confidence, engagement, and performance." Undoubtedly, PsyCap remains a strategic asset. It prevents employee stress and burnout. The tenets of H.E.R.O. focus on building a mentally strong and resilient workforce that is adaptable and forward-looking.

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A morning tea, a newspaper and one curious pattern



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Author information

Rajat is a passionate HR professional with over 18 years of experience, dedicated to building thriving workplace cultures where people can excel.

He has developed and implemented HR strategies that align with business goals, foster engagement and promote diversity and excellence. As a true people person, he is living a dream - supporting others and making a positive impact. Outside of work, Rajat enjoys travelling, meeting new people and exploring nature.

Sunday mornings are usually slow and comforting, a hot cup of tea in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Last Sunday was no different, until something curious caught my eye.

Flipping through the pages, I noticed a pattern: one car advertisement after another.

Honda. Hyundai. Mahindra. Toyota. Volkswagen. Maruti. Six different brands, different models, different features, different taglines.

But one thing was strikingly the same: every car was red.

I paused. Surely, this could not be a coincidence.

The Psychology of Red

Red demands attention. It is bold, passionate and energetic, a colour that makes people stop mid-scroll or mid-page. In advertising, red is often used to evoke urgency and excitement.

And when it comes to cars, red represents more than paint. It symbolises aspiration, speed and the “Wow” factor, emotions that sell the idea of the car, long before specifications like mileage or boot space come into play.

That pattern of red cars reminded me of something deeper, the way HR and business strategy need to align. Just like those brands unknowingly converged on red to spark attention, HR and business functions must align on the emotional and strategic levers that truly move people. Our HR initiatives must be designed to spark engagement, growth and purpose, not just policies and processes, but emotionally resonant experiences.

HR should not lead with numbers alone. We must communicate purpose, people impact and possibilities. Because emotions drive behaviour in consumers and in employees. And understanding that how we show up often determines whether we are seen or simply scanned over.

So, the next time you see a red car in an advertisement, remember it is not just about colour. It is about clarity of message, emotional strategy and the power of quiet alignment.

Let us keep driving that synergy forward, with purpose and yes, with a little splash of bold colour when it counts.



The Compassionate Commute and Benign Stress: A New Road to Well-Being



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Abstract

In today's demanding work environment, achieving genuine well-being requires a holistic approach that integrates personal habits with scientific insight. This article explores a transformative path to resilience by introducing the daily practice of the "Compassionate Commute"—a simple ritual of empathetic connection that fosters immediate calm. It reframes stress as a potential ally, distinguishing between performance-enhancing challenge stressors and energy-draining hindrance stressors. Drawing from diverse fields, the article synthesises lessons from longevity-rich Blue Zones, the neurochemistry of happiness, and the cognitive reappraisal of limiting beliefs. It culminates with an evolved understanding of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, arguing that the most critical resource for modern professionals is their capacity for continuous learning and adaptation. By consciously nurturing physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions, we can build a sustainable foundation for well-being that turns pressure into growth and fosters a more fulfilling professional and personal life.

Before we begin, let's try a small exercise I practice every day.

I call it the Compassionate Commute. Whether I'm on a bus, in the metro, or even visiting a temple, I pause to notice the people around me. Each of them carries hopes, worries, and quiet prayers. For a few moments, I silently add my own wish for their happiness: that their burdens lighten, their wishes come true, that their day becomes a little easier. I make it a habit to stand, allowing others to sit and be comfortable.

This simple habit fills me with unexpected warmth—sometimes I literally feel it in my hands—along with a deep sense of calm. Even now, as I write these lines, I can feel the warmth in my fingers and the joy in my heartbeat.

Introduction – The Whole Picture of Well-Being

Holistic well-being views life as an interconnected

web. Our **physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social** dimensions don't stand alone; what happens in one inevitably ripples into the others.

Take a simple example: a lingering back pain. At first, it's purely physical, but the discomfort can disturb sleep, drain patience, and trigger frustration or sadness.



Soon, emotional energy dips, social interactions feel harder, and even mental focus at work suffers. One strain spreads across the entire system.

Let's explore how each dimension can be nurtured to build a more balanced, resilient life.

1. Stress is Good!

Stress is often treated as the villain of modern work life, yet research shows it can also be a performance booster. The key is knowing the difference between two kinds of pressure:

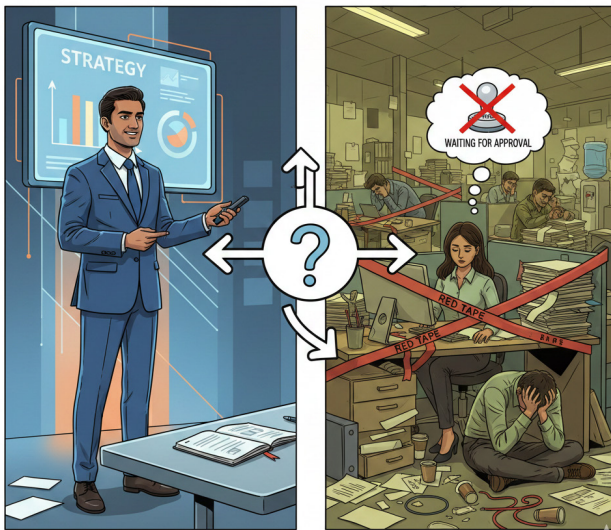
- Challenge stressors—tight deadlines, critical presentations, ambitious targets. These sharpen focus and can lift engagement and results.
- Hindrance stressors—office politics, unclear responsibilities, unnecessary red tape. These sap energy and morale.

That's why preparing for a board presentation can feel energising, while chasing endless approvals feels draining.

The positive side of pressure is known as **eustress** (from the Greek eu, meaning "good"). Athletes before a big match, sales teams closing a major deal, or project leaders hitting a launch date all draw on this surge. A

CHALLENGE STRESS

HINDRANCE STRESS



moderate level of stress heightens alertness and fuels top performance, too little breeds complacency, too much leads to burnout.

Managed well, stress becomes a strategic ally in both productivity and growth.

1. The Biochemicals of Well-Being

The art of well-being is incomplete without its science. Our moods and sense of balance are guided by a remarkable set of natural chemicals. By choosing activities that spark these “feel-good” messengers, we can give our well-being a daily boost.

- **Dopamine – The Reward Molecule:**
- That spark of excitement before a holiday or a long-awaited success? Dopamine fuels the anticipation and motivates us to keep reaching for goals.
- **Oxytocin – The Bonding Molecule:**
- Shared laughter with friends, a warm family dinner, or genuine teamwork at the office releases oxytocin, deepening trust and connection.
- **Endorphins – The Pain-Killing Molecule:**
- A brisk walk, a challenging workout, or even a hearty laugh triggers endorphins, easing discomfort and lifting mood—proof of the classic “no pain, no gain.”
- **Serotonin – The Confidence or self-esteem molecule:**
- Taking on a tough project, giving our best effort, and succeeding boosts serotonin, bringing calm confidence and a sense of achievement.

Knowing how these natural chemicals work lets us design days that nourish body and mind—whether

that’s a team workout, a mindful break, or celebrating a win together.



1. Blue Zones – Lessons in Longevity and Well-Being

Longevity and holistic well-being go hand in hand. Blue Zones—regions like Okinawa (Japan) and Sardinia (Italy)—are home to people who regularly live past 100. Their lifestyle offers valuable lessons for enriching our own well-being:

1. **Natural Movement:**
2. Residents don’t hit the gym intentionally. Their daily routines—gardening, walking, climbing stairs—naturally keep them active with moderate exercise throughout the day.
3. **Diet:**
4. Diets are largely plant-based (around 95%), and meals are taken on small plates, often sitting on the floor. Simple habits like bending to eat and using smaller portions signal the body to moderate calorie intake.
5. **Stress Reduction:**
6. One day a week is devoted to slow nature walks and reflection, which helps reverse inflammatory responses in the body—a strong marker of both happiness and health.
7. **Life Purpose – Ikigai:**
8. Having a clear reason to live, or ikigai, gives every effort meaning. When life has purpose, striving feels natural, not stressful.
9. **Pro-Social Engagement:**
10. Strong bonds with family and friends create

security and well-being. Social connection stimulates the vagus nerve, promoting relaxation, and improves heart rate variability—a central indicator of long-term health.



By adopting even a few of these practices, we can enrich not just our lifespan but also the quality of our daily life and holistic well-being.

1. Mental Templates: Limiting Beliefs and Cognitive Reappraisal

From childhood, we develop mental “templates” or frames—beliefs about ourselves and the world—that shape how we think, feel, and act. Over time, some of these become **limiting beliefs**, subtly undermining our well-being. For instance, we might feel overlooked because of our background or doubt our capabilities. These patterns can fuel pessimism and reduce resilience.

Cognitive reappraisal is a powerful tool to counteract this. It involves consciously reframing our thoughts to create a more balanced, constructive perspective:

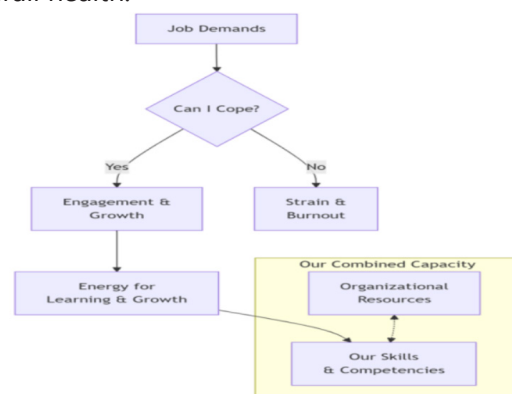
1. “Life is not fair.”
2. Reappraisal: Life is good at times and challenging too. Challenges and joys are both part of life’s natural rhythm. My task is to adapt and move forward.
3. “People are selfish.”
4. Reappraisal: Adam Smith’s “Invisible Hand” theory reminds us that societal good often emerges from individual pursuits. The baker provides bread not out of pure charity, but to earn a living. Healthy self-interest is a natural part of human interaction and can drive collective benefits.

5. “I am not good enough.”
6. Reappraisal: I am good in some areas and average in others. I am a work in progress and working towards improving myself in my deficit areas.

By consciously reappraising limiting beliefs, we can shift our mindset from pessimism to resilience, enhancing both personal well-being and professional performance.

1. Gratitude

When we focus on the good things people do for us and cultivate genuine gratitude, it does not erase the life’s challenges we face, but it broadens our perspective, reminding us that our miseries do exist, but they are not the entirety of our lives. Gratitude helps us experience more positive emotions, savour meaningful moments, and even supports better overall health.



A Final Door to Well-Being..

Before concluding, there’s one more key to holistic well-being: the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory**.

It explains how work-related demands and personal resources must stay in balance; we can extend the idea to life as a whole.

When job demands rise, we draw on our personal resources. If those two sides fall out of balance, dissonance, unhappiness, and dissatisfaction can follow, undermining our well-being.

The most critical resource we can cultivate is our own ability to adapt and grow. When new challenges arise, we don’t just draw on static resources—we must draw on our capacity to learn.

This balance is achieved by consciously nurturing our inner resources across five key dimensions:

- **Physical:** Stay active and care for the body—it’s the foundation of all energy.
- **Mental:** Meditate, practice mindfulness, and

continuously learn to keep the mind sharp and adaptable.

- **Emotional:** Reframe challenges and nurture resilience to navigate uncertainty.
- **Social:** Seek connection and offer kindness to build a supportive network.
- **Spiritual:** Act with compassion and cultivate empathy to maintain a sense of purpose

Consistently fuelling these reserves strengthens the “resources” side of the scale and supports true, holistic well-being.

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ESTJ vs. INFP: A Tale of Two Opposite Personalities



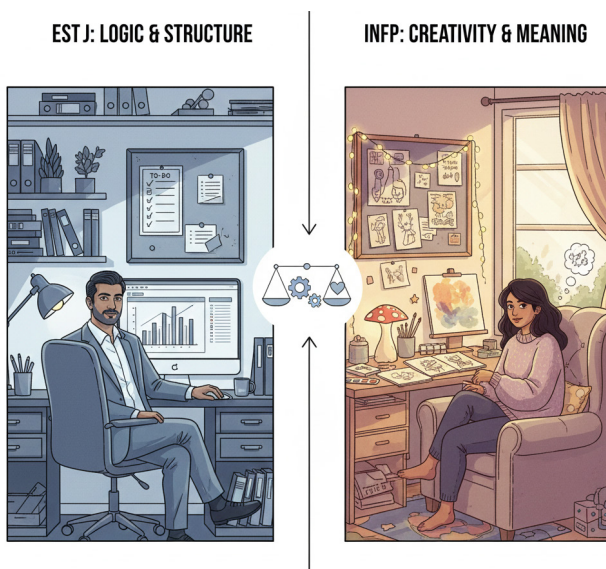
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Abstract

This article examines the contrast between ESTJ and INFP personality types. While ESTJs bring structure, discipline, and efficiency, INFPs contribute to creativity, empathy, and meaning. Examples show how their collaboration balances results with human connection, proving that opposite traits can strengthen workplace outcomes.

Introduction

The **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)** identifies 16 personality types, each with distinct approaches to life and work. Among them, the ESTJ and the INFP stand as exact opposites. While ESTJs thrive on structure, order, and results, INFPs are driven by ideals, empathy, and creativity. Though vastly different, these two personalities can complement one another in surprising ways, especially in professional environments where balance between efficiency and meaning is essential.



Understanding ESTJ: Extraverted, Sensing, Thinking, Judging

The ESTJ, also known as The Executive, is practical, realistic, and dependable. They have a strong preference for order, efficiency, and structure, making them natural leaders who set clear direction

and ensure goals are achieved. Their strengths lie in reliability, clarity, and disciplined execution.

A real-world example of this personality is **George W. Bush**, who is often cited as decisive, structured, and action-oriented.

Understanding INFP: Introverted, Intuitive, Feeling, Perceiving

The INFP, or The Mediator, is imaginative, empathetic, and deeply guided by values. They seek authenticity and harmony in relationships and work, thriving best in flexible, creative, and meaningful environments. Their strengths include creativity, adaptability, and idealism.

J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, is often described as an INFP—deeply imaginative, guided by values, and focused on meaning rather than rigid structures.

Example 1: An Oil Refinery Shutdown

During an annual maintenance shutdown of the Atmospheric Distillation Unit (AVU):



- The ESTJ Approach



- Designs a strict schedule for pump overhauls, inspections, and valve replacements. Monitors progress closely to ensure production restarts on time.
- Motto: "Safety procedures first. No delays allowed."
- **The INFP Approach**
- Notices contract workers are exhausted after long shifts. Suggests staggered breaks and motivational sessions to maintain morale.
- Motto: "A motivated worker is a safe worker."

Outcome: The shutdown is both efficient and people-friendly, with safety and productivity going hand in hand.

Example 2: Preparing a Client Presentation

A refinery team is tasked with presenting a quarterly performance report to a client.



• The ESTJ Perspective

Focuses on accuracy, structure, and timeliness. Stresses stick to the data. Follow last quarter's format. Keep it clear. Ensures that the presentation is technically sound and professionally organised.

• The INFP Perspective

Thinks about how to make the presentation engaging and impactful. Adds visuals, stories, and human angles that connect emotionally with the client.

Suggests: "Let's highlight how our project improved community welfare and safety culture."

Outcome: The client receives a presentation that is not only factually solid but also engaging and memorable.

Conclusion

The ESTJ and INFP may stand on opposite ends of the MBTI spectrum, but when they collaborate, they bring out the best of both worlds. The ESTJ provides discipline, structure, and execution, while the INFP ensures creativity, empathy, and purpose. Whether in the high-pressure environment of an oil refinery or in the boardroom during client presentations, this unlikely duo proves that opposites don't just attract—they balance and strengthen each other.

The Divine Interlocks



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Abstract

In today's corporate world, often analogised to the battlefield of Kurukshetra, professionals face pressures that lead to burnout, stress, and systemic well-being crises. Drawing wisdom from the Mahabharata and the **Bhagavad Gita**, this article frames a crucial challenge from the perspective of an Oil & Gas Professional. If we meticulously engineer external **Safety Interlocks** to protect our physical assets & avoid accidents at the Oil & Gas Installation, what are the equivalent, proactive safeguards for employee health and spirit?

Reimagining the timeless dialogue between the warrior prince Arjuna and his divine mentor, Lord Sri Krishna, the discussion unveils **Nine Divine Interlocks**. These principles are not reactive wellness mandates but profound internal disciplines, ranging from Nishkama Karma (Detached Action) to Sthita-Prajna (Steady Intellect) and Isvara Pranidhana (Surrender to a Higher Purpose).

This article offers a philosophical and practical framework for cultivating internal resilience. By shifting focus from managing stress reactively to embedding these systemic, internal checks!

Main Content:

Setting: The vast, humming expanse of a modern Oil & Gas Installation Site. Steel structures gleam under the sun. Alarms chirp and machinery hums with controlled power. Arjuna, a brilliant

and dedicated SIC (Station-In-Charge), stands beside his mentor and confidant, Krishna, a man of serene wisdom who often accompanies him to the Site.

Arjuna: Krishna, look at this. See that compressor station? If the discharge pressure builds too high, an interlock automatically shuts the system down. If a gas detector senses a leak, an ESD valve isolates the section in milliseconds. We have engineered hundreds of such safeguards. They are logical, proactive, and non-negotiable. We protect these assets with such impeccable wisdom & technology.



But Keshava, what about us? At times, many of us work under immense pressure. Deadlines build up, expectations surge, and conflicts spark. Yet, there are no interlocks for the employee spirit. Why do we not apply this profound principle of proactive safety to our own well-being? What, O Madhava, are the interlocks for a meaningful and healthy work life?

Krishna: (A gentle, knowing smile plays on Krishna's lips. He places a comforting hand on Arjuna's shoulder.)

A discerning question, Partha. You seek to protect the employees, not just the Installation. The wisdom you seek is not in external systems, but in internal

discipline. The interlocks for the soul have existed for eternity. They are not built of circuits and valves, but of conscious practice. They are not for the machine, but for the master of the machine.

If you are ready to listen, I shall reveal the nine divine interlocks that you can activate within yourself, here and now, on this very battlefield of your work.

Krishna's Nine Interlocks for Well-being at Work:



1. The Interlock of Nishkama Karma (Detached Action)

- **What it prevents:** The emotional whiplash of success and failure.
- **Krishna explains:** "Arjuna, your obsession with the outcome is the source of your greatest anxiety. This is the faulty pressure gauge. You have a right to your actions, but never to the fruits of your actions."
- **How to follow it smartly:** Pour your entire focus into the quality of your work. Make **excellence your process**, not your goal. When you submit a report or finish a presentation, let it go. Your role was the effort! The outcome is governed by many factors beyond your control. This interlock **decouples your self-worth from external validation**.

2. The Interlock of Mauna (Strategic Silence)

- **What it prevents:** Wasted energy in pointless arguments and gossip.
- **Krishna explains:** "A warrior's greatest asset is his conserved energy. Not every challenge is a call to battle. Many are mere noise."
- **How to follow it smartly:** Before speaking in a

meeting or replying to a provocative email, invoke a five-second pause. Ask yourself: 'Will my words serve a purpose or just my ego?' You will find that silence is often the most powerful and intelligent response. It preserves your energy for the fights that truly matter.

3. The Interlock of Atma-Vichara (Daily Self-Reflection)

- **What it prevents:** Mindless momentum and deviation from your path.
- **Krishna explains:** "A chariot that is not inspected daily will eventually fail in battle. Your mind and spirit require the same maintenance."
- **How to follow it smartly:** Schedule a 10-minute 'shutdown sequence' at the end of your workday. Do not use this time to plan for tomorrow. Use it to reflect on today. 'What was the single biggest energy drain?' 'What was a moment of genuine satisfaction?' This simple diagnostic check allows you to make small, daily course corrections, preventing a major system failure.

4. The Interlock of Aparigraha (Non-Possessiveness with Ideas)

- **What it prevents:** Ego-driven attachment to a single solution.
- **Krishna explains:** "The wise person is open to all streams of knowledge. You are dedicated to the project's success, not to the worship of your own design. The moment you declare an idea 'mine,' you make it vulnerable to attack, and your mind is closed to improvement."
- **How to follow it smartly:** When presenting an idea, treat it as a gift to the team's collective intelligence. Be the first to ask, "How can this be made better?" Actively encourage critique and be genuinely ready to discard your own concept if a superior one is offered. This interlock shifts the focus from **personal victory to organisational progress**.

5. The Interlock of Sthita-Prajna (Steady Intellect)

- **What it prevents:** Emotional overreaction during a crisis.
- **Krishna explains:** "One of the steady intellect is unshaken by pleasure or pain, profit or loss. Your greatest value to your team is not your speed in action, but your **stability in chaos**. If the pilot panics, the ship sinks."
- **How to follow it smartly:** In a high-pressure situation (an unexpected shutdown, a sudden deadline shift), pause and consciously observe

your own physical reaction. The tightening in your chest, the rapid pulse. Take three slow, deep breaths. This momentary pause prevents you from making a rushed decision driven by fear. Your intellect, not your instinct, must steer the response

6. The Interlock of Viveka (Wise Discernment)

- **What it prevents:** Absorbing the toxicity and stress of others.
- **Krishna explains:** "In your workplace, anxieties fly like arrows. A boss is stressed, a colleague is panicked. You are not a shield meant to absorb every blow."
- **How to follow it smartly:** When confronted with someone's negative energy, mentally take a step back. Acknowledge their state with empathy. 'I understand this is frustrating,' but **do not internalise their emotions**. This interlock creates a firewall between their chaos and your inner calm.

7. The Interlock of Ahimsa (Non-violence in Communication)

- **What it prevents:** Creating a psychologically unsafe and toxic environment.
- **Krishna explains:** "Words can be sharper than any weapon. The wounds they inflict on a team's morale are deep and slow to heal."
- **How to follow it smartly:** When giving feedback, address the **action, not the person**. Instead of 'You were wrong,' try 'The approach we took led to an unexpected outcome. Let's explore why.' Instead of blaming, focus on collaborative problem-solving. This interlock ensures that even difficult conversations build trust rather than destroy it.

8. The Interlock of Indriya Nigraha (Mastery over Inputs)

- **What it prevents:** Digital distraction and mental fragmentation.
- **Krishna explains:** "Your senses are the gateways to your mind. Today, these gateways are besieged by a thousand enemies: notifications, breaking news, endless messages. An unguarded mind cannot focus."
- **How to follow it smartly:** You must become the gatekeeper. Turn off all non-essential notifications on your devices. This is non-negotiable. Dedicate specific blocks of time for 'input' (checking messages, etc.) and blocks for 'output' (deep, focused work). You control the flow; you are not at its mercy.

9. The Interlock of Isvara Pranidhana (Surrender to a Higher Purpose) • What it prevents: The crushing

weight of believing you must control everything.

- **Krishna explains:** "You are an actor in a vast, divine play. When you realise your actions serve a purpose greater. A contribution to society, the welfare of your family, the good of your team, and the stress of personal control diminish. You act with dedication, but the heavy burden of the result is lifted."
- **How to follow it smartly:** Connect your daily task, no matter how small, to its ultimate contribution. The spreadsheet you finish is a small but vital link in the chain that delivers energy to the world. Acknowledge that the universe has its own vast system of interlocks. **Do your utmost and trust the rest to the natural, universal order**. This is the ultimate relief valve.

(Krishna falls silent. The hum of the machinery seems to fade into the background. Arjuna's eyes, once clouded with doubt, are now clear and determined.)

Arjuna: I see now, Madhava. We build external interlocks because we do not trust the components. The path you show requires me to trust and train the ultimate component- Myself. These nine interlocks... they are not policies to be written, but practices to be lived. They are the true engineers for a work life of purpose and peace, even in the midst of battle.

Krishna: Exactly, Arjuna. The outer world will always be a Kurukshetra. The real victory lies in establishing this unshakable order within. Now, pick up your bow. The work awaits, but this time, you fight not as a victim of circumstance, but as a master of yourself!

Unlike Bills, Learning Notifications Don't Pop Up When They're Due



By - **MAYANK KUMAR SHARMA, IOCL**
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Every month, our phones light up with reminders—credit card bills, EMIs, insurance premiums, and electricity dues. The moment that notification arrives, our mind immediately prioritises it: “How do I clear this quickly?” Urgency takes over, and everything else pauses until the payment is done or arranged.

But here is the question we rarely ask: What reminds us, when our learning is overdue?

Unlike bills, no push notification warns us that our skills are becoming outdated, our curiosity is fading, or our cognitive agility is slowing. The decline is subtle—silent even. Over time, the mental fog thickens. Creativity wanes. Problem-solving feels harder. Frustration quietly builds.

And yet, we keep moving forward. Deadlines, meetings, and deliverables keep us busy, distracting us from the fact that without new knowledge, we are draining an ocean with a cup. We don't pause, we don't reflect, and we don't renew as if we are trained to do it.

The truth is, our minds need nourishment as much as our bodies do. We don't work only to pay bills or maintain lifestyles. We work to flourish, innovate, and grow. Just as food fuels the body, learning fuels

imagination, resilience, and adaptability—the very qualities that help us thrive in uncertain times.

So how long can we go—days, weeks, even years—without intentional learning? The answer defines whether we remain relevant or risk irrelevance.

Holistic health goes beyond wellness programs and physical fitness initiatives. A thriving workforce requires intellectual vitality—the constant renewal of skills, ideas, and perspectives. A short chapter from a book that sparks reflection, a podcast that shifts a mindset, or an online course that unlocks a new capability—these are not luxuries; they are necessities.

Perhaps it is time to design our own “learning notifications” just as Netflix or Hotstar prompts us to continue watching. Platforms like Coursera, Udemy, or Swadhyaya can serve as nudges to continue learning. But the most powerful reminders must come from within—from a mindset that values curiosity as much as compliance, growth as much as goals.

Because, unlike bills, learning is not a burden we clear. It is an investment we compound. And the dividends it pays—clarity, confidence, creativity—are what truly sustain a thriving workforce.



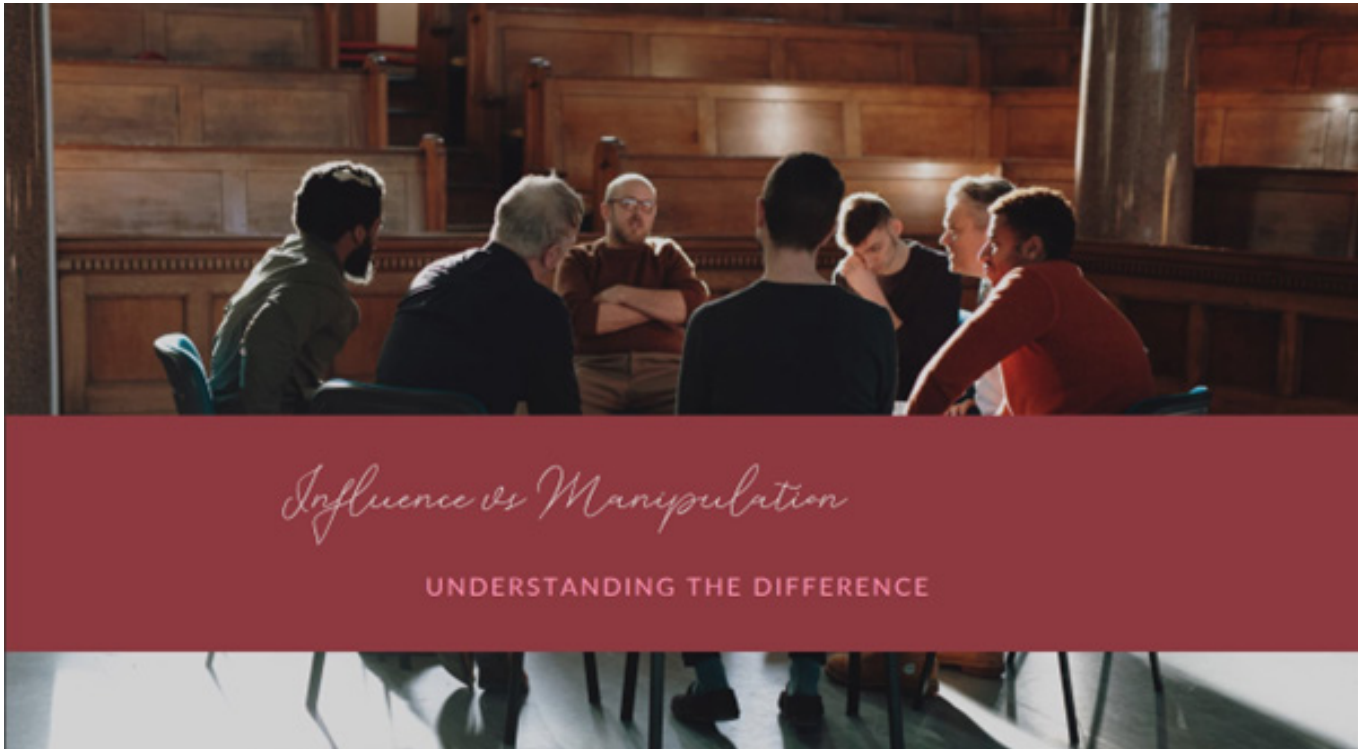
INFLUENCING V/S MANIPULATION



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Influence vs Manipulation

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

Abstract

A Gen-X and a Millennial get talking about the evolution from an individual contributor to a managerial role. The power of influence, the concept of manipulation, and the thin veil that separates manipulation from influence are all discussed.

A small call for help and guidance turns into an engaging discussion on power, authority, influence and manipulation, exploring various alleys of the corporate world and understanding action, intent behind action, positive behaviours, important negative behaviours and ways to measure these at the workplace.

The conversation touches upon lateral leadership, command control forms of leadership, and which form works better while influencing without power derived from authority.

Some questionnaires, like the Machiavellian Personality Scale and Gaslighting at Work Questionnaire, have been discussed to measure toxic behaviours in the workplace. The importance of positive intent, shared vision, and team goals is also explored in this piece.

The piece flows in the form of a story, a casual problem question by Sneha Kapoor, a Millennial, posed to Rajesh Nair, a Gen-X, leading to deeper analysis and discussion on managerial evolution, influencing as a key factor in growth. Their discussion provides critical insights and learnings to both. Their reflections and application of their learning cause successful outcomes in both their workplaces.

Influencing and its alter-ego, manipulation, are ubiquitous in business organisations thriving on primal human instincts of insecurity, power and control.

The phase of doubt and questions

Sneha Kapoor, a Millennial, with a decade or more in a large, hierarchical Public Sector organisation, is finding herself in a bit of a spot. She's sincere in her work and has been a great individual contributor. Her organisation entrusts her with a new project, trusting in her execution capabilities, and she is informally asked to lead the project with some other team members who are "equal" to her in terms of "seniority" – the bugbear which still matters above



everything else in deciding power and authority in Indian PSUs. By virtue of the organisational structure and hierarchy, she lacks seniority and authority. If she passes up this opportunity out of fear and lack of authority, it may well be way into her late forties that she might ever derive any positional authority, if at all. Confronted with the situation, she dials her **Gen-X senior colleague, Rajesh Nair**, with whom she had worked when she joined this organisation, with the question, **“How does she influence without the authority?”**

S’s situation is typical of many large organisations with rigid growth structures and implicit seniority bias. Navigating these waters can be tricky. It can also be surprisingly enriching from a leadership development perspective.

The phase of self-discovery through listening and discussion

With his experience in the hierarchical set-up of over two decades, Rajesh tells Sneha that as employees grow up in the organisational hierarchy, they are required to increase their circle of influence beyond the limited confines of their reporting chains or matrix. Learning to influence without authority is a must-have in a manager’s skill repertoire.

He tells her that while we join an organisation, it is all about the knowledge and skills which one possesses and the effective deployment of these in meeting the objectives of the organisation, often under clear instructions of a superior. However, with time in the organisation, the organisation’s expectations of you change. You are no longer expected to play the role of the solo vocalist. Your role is expected to naturally expand and become part of a team, and sync with the rest of the team and your role. Gradually, you are expected to influence/lead/command part of the team/ project, and if adept at it, you may be made

in charge of the entire Team/ project. Your role as an influencer plays a key part in the success of this evolution.

In such circumstances, command and control leadership-the “I leader, you follower” approach -doesn’t get a manager very far. It calls for a more lateral style of leadership. Lateral leadership counts among a manager’s most essential skills, and comprises a constellation of capabilities – from networking and coalition building to persuading and negotiating. Though honing these skills takes time and patience, the payoff is worth it. Sneha feels it is now the right time to practice and imbibe the practices of lateral leadership, where influencing is a key skill.

Nair presents a powerful thought to Sneha that, unless one possesses unusually high expertise or charisma, **influencing stakeholders is the toughest battle that remains to be won on the organisational turf.** And it presents itself in myriad ways with remarkably high frequency in one’s work life. Having one’s way with diverse people and groups may become a headache for most.

The ability to persuade people is essential to grow in any career, as it is needed to successfully negotiate, to gain the support of stakeholders at your company, and for leaders and managers to encourage their team to enact the changes you want to see and create value.



The Phase of Reflect, Deep Dive, Read, Learn, Discuss and Churn

Somewhere, while exploring the theme of “influencing”, Sneha reads about the term “manipulation” being utilised as a substitute for influencing. Rajesh meets Sneha during an internal corporate brainstorm retreat. Their conversation veers to the topic of

“manipulation”. She ambushes him with the statement, “Isn’t influencing a form of manipulation?”.

Rajesh recollects their previous conversation, chuckles and replies...The aim of both may be the same – to make the other(s) decide or act as per your wish – but the crucial difference is that in influencing, you let the person whom you are trying to influence make the choice – you don’t take away their power of independent choice. In manipulation, you take away the **power of choice** from the individual. At the same time, the line separating influence from manipulation is thin. In influencing, the means adopted are largely benign and are focused towards achieving a higher, positive purpose. Manipulation is misleading, often to satisfy petty and individual interests. Influence is transparent; manipulation is tricky.

She is struck by the profoundness of the statement and is more inclined to research the nuances of “manipulation”.

She researches into the available studies of leading international journals to understand that underlying intent matters. Influence is a neutral term and simply denotes the capacity to have an effect on others; it involves persuasion where the recipient maintains freedom of choice, it aims to make the other see the shared vision, and creates a win-win situation. Manipulation, in contrast, carries negative connotations and is about control, often via disguised or exploitative tactics that serve the manipulator’s interests and may harm the target. Influence is transparent and respects others’ autonomy, whereas manipulation is deceptive and imposes hidden agendas. Manipulation can come from anyone in the workplace, regardless of position.

Manipulation is the darker side of power and influence. When one becomes individual-centric and desires power and influence for power’s sake, rather than to achieve common goals, an undesirable scenario of toxicity and maliciousness presents itself. This spoils the working experience for everyone and hampers long-term productivity.

It is also true that manipulation is not taboo in the complex and toxic high alleys of the corporate world, where success is determined only by your winning rates. The end always matters, but means are seldom questioned.

Spreading lies and falsehoods about others is, of course, the most primitive method of manipulation. The manipulator at the workplace may use it shamelessly on his subject(s) to gain their trust and thus make them do as per his/her bidding.

Common Manipulation Tactics include the following: -

- **Casting Self-Doubt:** Inducing guilt or making someone question their competence through criticism, gaslighting, passive-aggressiveness, or the silent treatment
- **Superficial Charm:** Using praise or favours to coax someone into accepting extra or undesirable tasks
- **Social Comparisons:** Highlighting others as role models to make the target feel inadequate or compelled to comply
- **Misinformation:** Spreading false information about others to alter perceptions and foster dependence on the manipulator.



Sneha wonders if it isn’t important to measure this toxic trait of manipulation in the workplace. A quick reading provides interesting insights. There are several validated measures and psychometric scales designed to assess manipulation and related behaviours in the workplace, such as the Gaslighting at Work Questionnaire (GWQ) and the Machiavellian Personality Scale (MPS), among others.

Gaslighting at Work Questionnaire (GWQ): - The GWQ is a 12-item scale specifically developed to measure gaslighting behaviours perpetrated by supervisors towards their subordinates in the workplace.

The scale’s factor structure includes two main dimensions: **trivialization** (undermining the subordinate’s perspective) and **affliction** (inflicting psychological pain).

The questionnaire measures the supervisor’s trivialising and pain-afflicting behaviour with various questions which help assess the frequency

of certain toxic behaviours. This is measured over a period of 6 months to understand the manipulation exercised by the manager at the workplace.

Machiavellian Personality Scale (MPS):- The MPS, as developed by Dahling et al. (2009), is a 16-item scale consisting of four subscales: amorality (5 items), desire for control (3 items), desire for status (3 items), and distrust of others (5 items). Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree). The scale is used to predict job satisfaction, task performance, and counterproductive work behaviours.



The phase of we learn from each other and practice

In one of their by-now regular conversations on the theme, Rajesh learns about GWQ and MPS from Sneha. He is fascinated by such measures and their use at the workplace. At his work-unit, where he heads the HR, he proposes to introduce a “Workplace Manipulation” survey utilising the GWQ method. His suggestion finds favour with the local Management grappling with the problem of high attrition, as toxicity and manipulative behaviour are cited as one of the top reasons by employees at the time of departure. The survey helps identify the “high manipulators”, and he, along with the management, takes steps to counsel some, isolate others and turn out a few and thus improve the workplace culture and reduce attrition. It gets Rajesh a much-cherished elevation to VP-level, before time.

With time, Sneha gleans through her keen observation and reflections that influence is an outcome of established credibility over years of work and patience. It is not a shortcut and can’t stand the test of time if it is negative and manipulative. The façade unravels at some point.

Only the genuine endure and eventually grow to thrive. It is important for organisations to always emphasise and encourage positive behaviours, while identifying and isolating negative behaviours and taking measures to correct them.

The phase of internalising key behaviours

Sneha gradually imbibes new behaviours and starts practising them at the workplace, eventually finding acceptance and success in her new role, where influencing is key. Over time, she gets recognised as a “high-value” employee who has the ability to work across functions and influence others to achieve group goals. She is identified as a “Hi-Po” and earmarked for marquee trainings and stretch assignments. She draws up her ready reckoner on influencing without authority, which comprises the following behaviours:-

Effective communication:

One of the top skills every manager must have is communication. Communicate the top three important things you want done, do it mindfully, politely, and pay attention to your body language and tone. A smile is always welcome.

Take time out to connect with people, without work outcome in mind:

It is always important to know your peers and colleagues across various teams, bond and connect with them. Be open to sharing information and knowledge that can be shared. Connecting over a cup of coffee with any colleague can be surprisingly refreshing and offers a different point of view.

Your work is not all that matters; how you make others feel is what they will remember about you

Every conversation is important, every reaction is a vibe and a feeling you send out. Keep it positive, be real and confident. People are far more likely to respond better to a pleasant persona than one that sets them off. While this seems easy, it is challenging for most, given the amount of stress people deal with on a daily basis.

Take Initiative:

Be present at organisational events and initiatives. Be aware of what’s happening and see where you can contribute. All organisations have forums where they encourage you to participate and contribute. This builds better engagement and bonds.

Be shameless about asking for help and resources:

You don’t have to do everything on your own. You are not the first person doing anything. In some

form, people have tried things before; feel free to reach out and ask for help and advice. Pick up the phone and just call or message.

**Much as you want to feel valued, so do others.
Appreciate good work:**

Be generous with compliments and appreciate good work. Spread a good word about those who help and do good work. This creates a positive work environment and makes working with people easier.

Sneha is feted as the " Manager of the Year" in her large hierarchical organisation. She looks back on her journey with contentment and a desire to move ahead with greater purpose and energy.

Both Rajesh and Sneha realise that their synergistic exploration of the subject of influence and manipulation needs to be presented to a larger audience, and they decide to submit a co-written article, based on their research and experience, to HR Vista – the quarterly HR Magazine powered by IndianOil.

Wellbeing Amidst the Deadlines! What's Your Story?



By - **Shruti Bajaj, IOCL**
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Abstract

Mental health, wellness, and workplace wellbeing dominate today's conversations—in boardrooms, surveys, and social media alike. Yet behind the word clouds are real stories of stress, burnout, and emotional strain. The highly digital, fast-paced, volatile, and uncertain world of work has reminded us of a timeless truth: the growth of organisations cannot come at the cost of people's holistic well-being. After all, organisations are made by people—and people must thrive if workplaces are to truly flourish.



The Story of Yash

Yash, a young and dynamic officer in a fast-growing tech organisation, was promoted to Senior Associate after just two years of stellar performance. On paper, he was flourishing—an enviable career trajectory and a recent marriage to Raavi, a diligent professional herself.

Yet, Raavi noticed something troubling. Despite his achievements, Yash's shoulders slouched, his eyes drooped, and his forehead stayed furrowed. He was not the energetic, spirited man she knew. With comforting care, she asked him to look at himself in the mirror. For the first time in years, Yash paused. He

traced his tired face with his hands, sighed deeply, and allowed himself to feel what he had long ignored.

"Just relax. It's been a long while," Raavi whispered.

Memories of the past two years came flooding back—endless workdays, weekends lost to meetings, skipped vacations, ghosted calls from family, even on his own birthday. His diet had been reduced to tubs of ice cream at midnight, his friendships dissolved, and moments with Raavi were replaced by glowing screens just to ensure a before-time delivery to outperform the other teams!

This is not only Yash's story. It is the story of countless professionals—Priyanka, Rahul, Advika, Ashfaq, Riya... the list is endless.

The Turning Point

Ironically, Yash's most recent project before his promotion was an AI-enabled platform for employees to connect anonymously with psychiatrists, psychologists, and counsellors for mental health support.

But at what cost? Two team members had resigned, one had ghosted meetings, and the rest slogged under suffocating deadlines. They themselves had become the very users of the platform they had built.

The morning after his reflection with Raavi, Yash walked into his CEO's office. Humbly, he confessed:

"Gauri, I need to say something to you! This is about the most recent platform that we launched pompously on our foundation day... I think we shouldn't have developed this platform at all. Why must our workplace become so stressful that employees are forced to seek external support?"

To his surprise, Gauri, the CEO—an elegant, confident woman—listened calmly, smiled, and replied:

"Yash, what stopped you from telling me sooner that what we need is not a platform, but happy, thriving teams?"

Her words struck deep. She painted a vision of workplaces where meetings felt like family tea-times,

special days ended early, birthdays were celebrated with teams, and heated debates sparked innovation rather than burnout. A workplace where employees returned home with energy to tell their children stories and came back the next morning refreshed.

She concluded warmly:

“You are right, Yash. We don’t need this platform. Let’s close it together, just as we launched it. And invite Raavi, my mentor & coach—she is the true mastermind behind this moment of clarity.”

For the first time, Yash left her office with a sense of accomplishment far greater than his promotion, smiling endlessly!

Beyond Platforms: Reengineering Workplace Wellbeing



Yash’s journey highlights a critical paradox of our times: organisations invest in wellness policies, apps, and digital platforms, yet overlook the cultural fabric that shapes everyday experiences of employees and, indirectly, of their families. True wellbeing is not about another login screen or anonymous chat—it is about the lived reality of how people work, interact, and are valued amidst Zoom and Teams and WhatsApp!

Lessons for leaders:

- **Culture & Ethos over Platforms** – Technology can support wellbeing, but it cannot replace a workplace culture where balance, empathy, and respect are non-negotiable.
- **Deadlines vs. Lifelines** – A deadline should never outweigh a person’s mental or physical health. Productivity cannot come at the cost of life.
- **Human Connections Matter** – Celebrations, small wins, and informal bonds nourish teams more

than any policy can.

- **Leaders as Mirrors** – Employees often hesitate to speak up, but leaders must create safe spaces where concerns can be voiced without fear.

Food for Thought

As leaders, the real question is not whether you have a wellness app, a policy, or a survey in place. The deeper questions are:

Does your workplace integrate life and work, or does it drain one for the other?

Do your deadlines lead to growth or to exhaustion?

Do you measure success by output alone, or by the thriving lives behind that output?

Employees are not resources to be optimised. They are humans first—parents, partners, friends, dreamers.

When organisations honour that humanity, they don’t just meet targets; they build resilient, innovative, and loyal teams.

Reflection

Yash’s story is a reminder that wellbeing begins not with platforms but with pauses—with leaders daring to ask what must be done differently. It begins with mirrors that reflect tired shoulders and furrowed brows, with partners who whisper “just relax”, and with CEOs who say, *“We don’t need another tool—we need happy people.”*

The workplaces of tomorrow will not thrive on burnout disguised as dedication. They will thrive where smiles are real, families feel included, and careers grow alongside healthy, peaceful lives.

So, as a leader, ask yourself today:

What kind of workplace do you want to create? One that survives on deadlines, or one that thrives on life itself?

The Changing face of Public Sector Units



By - **Shubhra Hajela, Founder & CEO**
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The changing face of Public Sector Units (PSU)



For decades, India's Public Sector Units (PSUs) have built the nation's physical and industrial backbone — powering cities, connecting regions, and providing stable livelihoods to millions. Today, they employ over 31 lakh people and contribute nearly 9% of India's GDP. These numbers represent more than economic might — they symbolise trust, continuity, and service.

But the world in which PSUs operate is changing faster than ever. Digital transformation, energy transition, public accountability, and generational shifts are reshaping what work feels like and what employees expect. Younger, more diverse professionals are entering systems designed for predictability and permanence, yet today's world demands speed, agility, and emotional resilience.

Under these conditions, employees are looking beyond job security — they seek psychological safety, autonomy, and purpose. Historically, PSUs have excelled at structural welfare: pensions, housing, healthcare, and stability — all of which have built immense loyalty. They have also led in occupational safety through compliance-driven processes and strong governance.

However, as frameworks like ISO 45003:2021 and guidelines from the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) and SCOPE emphasise, the next evolution is about integrating psychosocial well-being into the core of leadership and HR practice. This means not

just preventing harm, but enabling people to thrive — mentally, emotionally, and socially.

When PSUs balance physical safety with psychosocial well-being, they shift from protecting employees to empowering them. That is where the real opportunity lies — in cultivating cultures where people feel energised, connected, and proud to serve.

S.No	PSU name	Initiative	Why does it stand out?
1.	Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL)	Global Healthy Workplace Award 2021 for combining physical and mental well-being	Aligns with international standards for holistic well-being
2.	Bank of Baroda	Enhanced Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for employees + families: 24x7 helpline, confidential counselling, digital mood tracker	Tech-enabled, family inclusive, holistic approach
3.	SJVN Limited	"Employee Wellness Resiliency Program" via a SaaS platform for stress/burnout assessment and lifestyle support	Systemic, digital, and recognised by <i>Great Place to Work</i>
4.	GAIL (India) Limited	Monthly "Spandan Wellness Hour" and "Wellness Week" with Ayurveda, sound healing, etc.	Regular, recurring, embedded into work routines
5.	Vedanta Limited	Confidential 24x7 emotional support with AI-led tools, buddy program for new mothers, mindfulness & art therapy	Holistic, tech-enabled, inclusive of family responsibilities
6.	NMDC Limited	Dedicated mental health talks for women employees on resilience	Targeted approach for specific demographics
7.	Hindustan Zinc Limited	Campaigns "#ReachOut" and "#WeHearTheQuiet", online counselling, sound therapy, digital detox hour	Focus on culture/awareness, not just clinical interventions
8.	THDC India Limited	10 km marathon promoting physical + mental connection	Builds community, morale, and leadership visibility
9.	JN Port Authority	Inclusive International Day of Yoga wellness campaigns for employees + families	Integration of community, family, and mind-body well-being
10.	Cairn Oil & Gas Limited (Vedanta)	Engaged 500+ youth in mental health awareness sessions	Extends well-being focus beyond employees to the wider ecosystem

Leading by example: PSU initiatives in employee well-being

Across India, several PSUs are already integrating well-being into the rhythm of work. Their initiatives offer valuable lessons for organisations looking to embed well-being as a cultural practice.

Emerging patterns

A close look at the above PSU initiatives reveals some emerging patterns in how these organisations are approaching employee well-being.

First, the most successful efforts treat physical, emotional, and social health as an interconnected system rather than separate programs. Initiatives that combine wellness, mental health support, and community engagement create a more holistic impact on employees' daily experience.

Second, well-being is increasingly being embedded through structured, recurring practices rather than one-off events. Monthly wellness hours, themed well-being weeks, and ongoing workshops ensure that care becomes part of the work rhythm, creating familiarity and consistency. These repeated touchpoints help normalise conversations around stress and mental health, reducing stigma, and making support accessible.

Third, organisations are turning to technology-enabled solutions to personalise care. AI-based assessments, digital mood trackers, and tele-counselling platforms allow employees to access help on demand and provide leaders with insights into workforce well-being. When thoughtfully implemented, such tools can complement human support and strengthen the culture of care.

Another important pattern is extending well-being beyond employees to families and communities. Recognising that employees' home environments influence their engagement at work, some PSUs have incorporated family-inclusive programs and community outreach. This broader lens demonstrates that well-being is systemic and relational, rather than limited to workplace interventions.

Finally, leadership involvement is key. When senior leaders actively participate in well-being programs, share personal experiences, or visibly support initiatives,



it sends a strong signal about the organisation's values. Programs without leadership modelling often fail to create lasting change, no matter how well-designed they are.

While these examples are inspiring, programs alone cannot sustain a culture of well-being. Engagement, accessibility, and measurable outcomes are critical for long-term impact. Without consistent support from leaders and alignment with organisational practices, even high-quality initiatives risk remaining symbolic.

Perhaps then the approach is to move towards a culture-driven well-being practice.

Why culture-driven well-being matters

Embedding employee well-being into organisational culture is no longer a "nice-to-have" — it directly drives motivation, performance, and resilience. In our consulting experience, organisations that adopt a systemic, culture-driven approach are better equipped to retain talent, foster innovation, and maintain high engagement, especially in complex, high-stakes environments.

Insights from organisational psychology have consistently highlighted that sustainable well-being requires deliberate design and continuous reinforcement. Programs must move beyond episodic interventions to become everyday practices, aligning workflows, leadership behaviours, and team norms to reinforce well-being consistently.

Simple but impactful measures — role clarity, manageable workloads, autonomy, peer support, and inclusive practices — can transform work from a source of stress into a source of purpose. Leadership coaching can normalise conversations about mental health, celebrate effort, and model balance. Measurement and feedback ensure these initiatives translate into lasting cultural change, rather than temporary participation.

The way forward

The future of employee well-being lies in embedding it into the fabric of everyday work. It is not a checklist of programs but a way of working, leading, and connecting. Organisations that

Integrating empathy, accountability, and evidence-based practices into routine workflows are more likely to cultivate resilient teams and sustainable performance.

The true measure of success is not the number of wellness campaigns or hours logged, but the extent to which well-being is felt, seen, and practised daily — supported by leaders, embedded in work structures, and experienced as part of the organisation's DNA.

Shift from compliance to culture

Culture-driven well-being is a strategic enabler of performance, engagement, and retention. In fact, Gallup's 2023 research shows that employees who feel cared for are 3.2× more likely to stay and 5× more likely to advocate for their organisation — a crucial advantage for PSUs constantly under public scrutiny.

This shift is thus in organisational mindset, and not just as a program. Well-being here is deliberately woven into daily work, creating systems that actively support mental, emotional, and social health, foster



meaningful connections, and align employees' efforts with organisational purpose. Standards such as ISO 45003:2021 reinforce the importance of integrating psychological and social well-being alongside physical safety. Evidence shows that culture-driven care drives higher engagement, lower attrition, stronger collaboration, and greater innovation. For PSUs, this approach strengthens motivation, resilience, and pride in service.

Embedding well-being into work, leadership, and community

For well-being to truly thrive in PSUs, it has to move beyond policy documents or appear in a once-a-year workshop to employee well-being experience - as **lived, felt, and seen** in the way work happens, leaders lead, and people connect.

The apt question then is- how can PSUs with their unique characteristics, like the sheer headcount, working style, complexities, establish such a culture that drives employee wellbeing experience. The answer is in no way straightforward, but it involves a gradual shift in mindsets and the intricacies of everyday work life. We have worked with multiple organisations and found that the following fundamental changes can deliberately mould employee experiences:

Redesigning work: The first step is making work itself less stressful and more meaningful. Too often, processes are complex, hierarchies rigid, and decisions slow — all silently draining energy. Giving teams clarity, autonomy, and the freedom to make decisions can transform daily tasks from a source of pressure to a source of purpose. Even simple measures like clearly defined roles, manageable workloads, and built-in “focus hours” make a world of difference. Studies show that employees with autonomy report higher engagement and lower stress — a simple win for both people and productivity.

Leadership that walks the talk: Employees notice what leaders do more than what they say. Leaders who model balance, celebrate effort, and openly discuss challenges send a powerful message: well-being is part of how we work, not an optional add-on. Check-ins during high-pressure phases, recognition for consistent effort, or even sharing stories of personal work-life lessons can normalise healthy conversations

about stress and emotional strain.

Building community and connection: Humans are social creatures — even in large PSUs; connections matter. Peer mentoring, cross-functional projects, storytelling sessions about the impact of work, and recognition programs create bonds that go beyond the office desk. These practices also shine a light on often invisible contributions: mentoring a new colleague, keeping a team cohesive, or quietly solving problems behind the scenes. Feeling seen and valued fuels motivation and strengthens the sense of belonging.

Inclusivity and growth: Well-being isn't one-size-fits-all. Employees bring diverse thinking styles, cultural backgrounds, and learning preferences. Designing programs that reflect this diversity — while providing opportunities for skill-building, mentorship, and rotational projects — turns daily work into a space for



growth. When people see that their efforts contribute to both their own development and the PSU's mission, their work gains meaning, energy, and pride.

From security to flourishing: The real magic happens when PSUs shift from compliance-driven welfare to culture-driven care. Safety, stability, and benefits are still essential — but now they coexist with energy, creativity, and engagement. The workforce is no longer just protected; it's enabled to thrive. Teams become resilient, motivated, and proud to serve, and the organisation itself becomes more agile and effective.

Forward-looking PSUs are already experimenting with these ideas. Some are integrating wellness metrics into performance reviews, others are launching mentoring

circles to break down silos, and a few are even piloting flexible work rhythms to reduce burnout. What these initiatives have in common is culture: well-being isn't a program; it's a way of working together every day.

Concluding thoughts

In conclusion, the journey from compliance-driven welfare to culture-driven well-being is both a challenge and an opportunity for PSUs. Embedding care into daily work, leadership behaviours, and team interactions transforms workplaces from protective environments into thriving ecosystems of engagement, creativity, and resilience. The organisations that embrace this shift will not only sustain performance but also cultivate pride, trust, and purpose among their people.

From an organisational psychology perspective, the key lies in systemic thinking, deliberate design, and behavioural sustainability — ensuring that well-being is experienced, measured, and reinforced every day. At Birdie Consulting, we see this evolution as a vital step for PSUs

seeking to future-proof their workforce, where care becomes culture, and culture becomes a strategic advantage.

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Will holistic health transform the workers into a thriving workforce?



By - R. Vengadasalopathy, IOCL
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Abstract

Abstract This article reveals a domain that has been forgotten—one that was practiced by people in the past those who achieved good health through mind-body coordination and the power of mental control.

Main Content



In the worldwide development of industries by continuous growth, and the emergence of new technologies, competition arises amongst the companies for growth, profit-making, marketing, and the stabilization of a its image. As a result, companies are adopting many new strategies to meet these challenges by upgrading equipment efficiency and empowering human resources. However, sometimes, these efforts cause abrupt changes that are not properly managed, hence disturb the workforce. On the other hand, every human being expects more from themselves than their physical stamina, potential, and work capacity. As a result, individuals work harder—physically and mentally—to develop themselves and their families alongside company growth, eventually feeling tired and exhausted. At a certain stage, their physical and mental health deteriorate, and they

begin to react to routine actions—even if the person does not recognize changes in their body. To cope, they may adopt unhealthy habits such as consuming recreational drinks to relax or refresh, which further deteriorates their physical and mental health. Ultimately, their work ability declines day by day, and productivity decreases—sometimes completely vanishing. Nowadays, companies are monitoring their workforce and providing hospital facilities, first-aid centers at the workplace, and medical assistance. In addition to medical advice, periodic health checkups and regular training are offered to workers to help them understand their health issues and how to protect themselves. Despite these measures still some people fail to recognize the signs and symptoms of their bodies.

Some companies, in advance, conduct awareness programs with the help of specialists—such as cardiologists, endocrinologists, gastroenterologists, and occupational health specialists. In this context, holistic health is an important topic to discuss. Everyone knows that any body movement is the result of mind-body coordination—when the mind gives a signal, it is transmitted as action in the body. Similarly, the mind is influenced by environmental and social factors. Based on this, a new term has emerged: psychosomatic disorder. Awareness of this condition can help reduce chronic medical issues.

Psychosomatic Disorder



A psychosomatic disorder refers to a long-term physical illness that cannot be explained by a medical condition but is induced or worsened by psychological factors such as emotional stress, depression, or anxiety.

The word “psychosomatic” comes from Greek: “psyche” means mind and “soma” means body. This highlights the deep relationship between mental and physical health.

Causes

- Prolonged distress
- Unresolved trauma
- Anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues
- Specific phobias (e.g., fear of heights, agoraphobia)

Symptoms

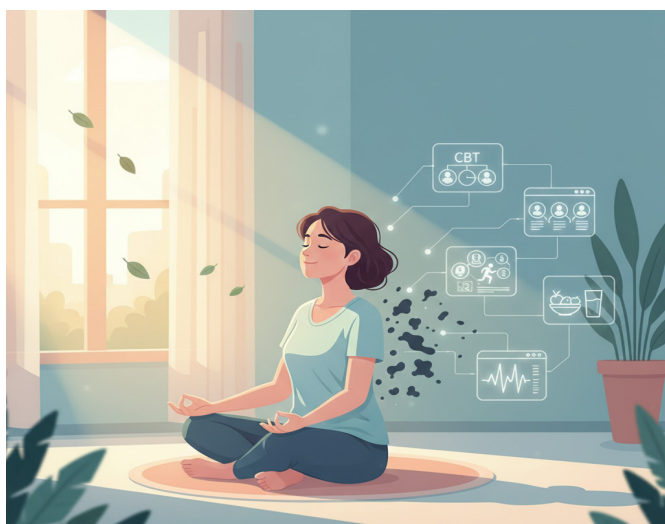
- Headaches, muscle pain, or back pain
- Gastrointestinal disorders
- Cardiovascular issues (chest pain, racing heart, or high blood pressure)
- Fatigue, sleep disturbances, or dizziness
- Musculoskeletal pain or muscle tension
- Skin issues
- Weakened immune system

Management

- Meditation
- Breathing exercises
- Relaxation techniques
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Stress management therapy
- Biofeedback
- Healthy lifestyle changes

Treatment

Consult a general practitioner or psychiatrist to diagnose the disorder and identify its root cause. A psychiatrist may prescribe antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, or treatments related to mental health, depending on the severity and underlying condition.



Conclusion

Today, everyone is thinking about holistic health. As discussed, physical illness is often linked to psychological distress. At the same time, physical well-being can also be enhanced through positive thinking patterns, self-motivation, and surrounding oneself with optimistic and supportive people to have a positive environment. Everyone should assess their own capacity and potential and strive continuously to develop these abilities by staying informed with current developments in their surroundings. To empower the workforce, teamwork should be encouraged to promote knowledge sharing and ensuring collective responsibility. Helping each other altruistically and practicing mindfulness at work can reduce stress and workplace pressure, leading to higher productivity, personal growth, and ultimately, organizational success.

A bundle of sticks is always strong; holistic health is always wealth.

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Ten Forces Quietly Redefining ESG in the Real World



By - **Abhishek Ranjan, BRILLIO**
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Abstract

Over the last decade, I have seen ESG travel a long distance—from a reporting exercise to a boardroom priority. What is interesting today is that ESG is no longer driven by idealism alone. It is being shaped by very practical business forces. Based on what I see across companies, investors, and institutions, these ten drivers are redefining how ESG is actually practiced on the ground.

ESG today is less about doing more and more about doing things right. The organizations that will lead are those that embed sustainability into decision-making, culture, and operations—not as a mandate, but as a mindset.

Let us read the top ten drivers that will shape ESG in 2026



1. ESG Has Moved from Values to Accountability

The most visible shift is at the leadership level. ESG outcomes are increasingly linked to CEO and CXO incentives. Boards are asking sharper questions, and sustainability is now influencing where capital gets deployed. Internal carbon pricing and ESG-linked investment decisions are no longer experimental—they are becoming part of mainstream governance. Some companies, in advance, conduct awareness programs with the help of specialists—such as cardiologists, endocrinologists, gastroenterologists, and occupational health specialists. In this context, holistic health is an important topic to discuss. Everyone knows that any body movement is the result of mind-body coordination—when the mind gives a signal, it is transmitted as action in the body. Similarly, the mind is influenced by environmental and

social factors. Based on this, a new term has emerged: psychosomatic disorder. Awareness of this condition can help reduce chronic medical issues.



2. Efficiency Is the New Sustainability Language

Sustainability conversations are no longer emotional; they are operational. AI-led energy management, predictive maintenance, smart buildings, and logistics optimisation are delivering hard savings. When sustainability improves margins, adoption becomes inevitable. This is why operational teams are now ESG champions.

3. Talent Is Voting with Its Feet

Employer branding today is deeply tied to purpose. Younger professionals, especially Gen Z, are choosing organizations that stand for something beyond profit. Companies that invest in wellbeing, safety, inclusion, and psychological security are seeing lower attrition and stronger engagement. ESG has quietly become a talent retention strategy.

4. Consumers Are Asking Hard Questions

Consumers are no longer passive. They want to know where a product comes from, how it is made, and what it stands for. Traceability, eco-labels, and transparency influence buying decisions. Ownership is slowly giving way to access through rent, reuse, resale, and refurbished models that are gaining ground, particularly among conscious buyers.

5. Purpose Cannot Be Cosmetic Anymore

Purpose-led branding works only when it is authentic.

Stakeholders are quick to identify greenwashing, and the backlash can be severe. The brands that stand out are those that back storytelling with data, impact, and consistency. Interestingly, employees have become the most credible brand ambassadors in this journey.

6. The Real ESG Risk Lies in the Supply Chain

For most organizations, the biggest ESG exposure does not sit within their own operations. It sits with suppliers. Scope 3 emissions, labour practices, and governance gaps are now under the scanner. Leading companies are moving beyond audits to capacity building, transparency tools, and ESG-linked supplier financing.



7. Circularity Is Creating New Business Models

The transition from linear to circular thinking is opening new revenue streams. Product-as-a-Service, buyback programs, refurbished products with warranties, and industrial waste reuse are becoming commercially viable. Circular economy is no longer a sustainability concept—it is a growth strategy.

8. Social Media Has Created Invisible Stakeholders

ESG issues can become public crises within hours. Activists, investors, and communities now use digital platforms to influence corporate behaviour in real time. Companies that actively listen, respond transparently, and engage early are far better positioned to manage reputation and risk.

9. Social License Determines Business Continuity

No community support means no long-term operations. Across sectors, projects are being delayed or stopped due to local resistance. Organizations are learning that shared value—jobs, infrastructure, and services—creates trust far more effectively than transactional CSR. Social license is earned, not granted.

10. Regulation and Investors Are Raising the Bar

Regulatory expectations around ESG disclosure, assurance, and performance are rising rapidly. At the same time, investors are integrating ESG risks into valuation and capital allocation. Compliance is now the minimum threshold; leadership lies in going beyond it with credible action and measurable outcomes.

Social Media - an Invisible Stakeholder in IR



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Abstract

Imagine a giant public notice board that never sleeps. Anyone can walk up to it, write their thoughts, share a photo, tell a story, or react to what others have written—and within seconds, thousands or even millions of people can see it. This is social media. Social media is not just about information—it is about stories. It turns facts into feelings, data into emotions, and events into narratives.

Social media transforms uncertainty into outrage long before reality has the chance to speak. It doesn't wait for the facts, it rushes to fear the future. Before the future arrives, social media already judges everything. Imagine a message as a spark. In the past, a spark would take time to turn into a flame. Today, it is like a gust of wind that can turn that spark into a wildfire in seconds.



In the epic Ramayana, the formidable warrior who remained invisible while attacking was Indrajit. As the son of Ravana, the king of Lanka, he used his powerful magical skills and celestial weapons to become invisible during battle, causing immense trouble for

Rama's army. His ability to strike unseen made him exceptionally dangerous, not because of physical strength alone, but because of invisibility and surprise.



Social Media and Industrial Relations

In modern industrial relations, social media has become an understated catalyst. It is shaping collective opinion through selective information, emotional framing and repetition, all while remaining an unseen stakeholder. Much like Shakuni in the Mahabharata, whose influence lay not in open battle but in manipulation through half-truths, calculated suggestions and strategic silence. Social media today is not merely a communication platform; it is a tool for narrative building and capable of shaping perceptions rapidly, often without verification or balance.

Industrial Relations in the Age of Instant Narratives

Industrial Relations had well-defined stakeholders. However, there is one another presence in the room. It does not carry an identity card, does not sign settlements, and is never formally invited. Yet, it listens to everything, amplifies emotions instantly, and influences outcomes silently but powerfully. Earlier rumours travelled slowly, allowing time for clarification, dialogue, and course correction. Today, a message typed in haste during a tea break can travel across the country in seconds. A half-truth, an emotional video, or an out-of-context photograph can shape perceptions long before facts find their footing.

What makes social media an "invisible stakeholder" is

its ability to influence the Industrial Relations climate without being accountable. Traditional stakeholders sit across the table, they listen, speak, compromise, and sign. Social media does none of these-but it watches. The contemporary IR ecosystem has expanded beyond traditional stakeholders. Alongside management, unions and employees, social media has emerged as a powerful and influential player.



Its Impact and Potential -

- **Powerful Narrative Builder:** It can swiftly influence employee and public sentiment, often magnifying issues and escalating perceptions well before the facts are fully known.
- **Credibility of Third-Party Voices:** External influencers and platforms appear neutral and trustworthy, making their narratives more persuasive and more damaging.
- **Trigger for Adverse Action:** Negative online narratives can lead to product boycotts, public pressure, and even activation of state or regulatory machinery.
- **Barrier to Growth and Productivity:** Prolonged digital controversies distract leadership, demotivate employees, and hinder organizational focus and performance.
- **Creator of Panic and Uncertainty:** Unverified or misleading content spreads fear, anxiety, and insecurity among employees and their families.
- **Erosion of Industrial Harmony:** Weakens trust, disrupts dialogue, and damages the long-standing fabric of harmonious Industrial Relations.

The cumulative effect is long-term damage to trust, morale, and organizational stability.

For example - A striking example is the widespread misunderstanding surrounding the **Codes on Wages**, it was quickly interpreted as wage reductions or loss of benefits. Messages circulated claiming "take-home pay will reduce" or "allowances will vanish," triggering anxiety across the country. In reality, the codes aim

for broader good by consolidating 29 archaic laws into four modern ones, expanding social security to gig/platform/unorganized workers, providing gratuity after just 1 year for fixed-term employees, mandating appointment letters/timely wages, improving dispute resolution and boosting formalization, employment and coverage to the organised sector.

Similarly, periodic chatter around the **8th Pay Commission**, often unsupported by any official notification, spreads rapidly across platforms. Expectations get inflated, rumours become demands, and disappointment sets in when reality does not match digital speculation. What may be intended as light-hearted may be interpreted through countless lenses - some empathetic, some critical, and some completely removed from the original intent.



The Way Forward

But when social media activity crosses beyond permissible limits, appropriate remedies may be adopted depending on the nature and gravity of the offence. The objective should not be suppression, but responsible correction and protection of trust.

- **Gauging the Reach and Damage** - In today's digital landscape, emotions often outpace evidence. A

One social media post can cascade across platforms in moments, shaping perceptions well before an organization even realizes a concern has surfaced.

Role of Social Media Listening Tools

In this environment, social media listening tools become critical. They help gauge both the reach of narratives and their potential impact. These tools analyse online sentiment, identify emerging trends, track sensitive keywords, and decode the emotional intensity behind conversations.

Enabling Timely and Informed Action

By functioning as early-warning systems, platforms such as Brandwatch, Talkwalker, Sprout Social, and Hootsuite Insights enable organizations and unions to understand what is being said, how widely it is spreading, and how deeply it is being felt. This insight allows for timely, informed intervention—shifting responses from reactive firefighting to proactive engagement.

- **Offering an Effective Counter-Narratives** - There is an old English proverb: “Rumour travels faster than truth. In today’s world, this has become even more true, as information spreads rapidly through echo chambers, where opinions reinforce themselves. To counter misinformation effectively, organisations must respond quickly, with credible facts and figures and communicate across multiple platforms to break the cycle of repeated false narratives.

Organizations must proactively communicate through more than one medium—circulars, internal platforms, social media handles, FAQs and trusted third-party voices—to neutralize damaging narratives. Social listening sharpens this response by highlighting employee anxieties, misunderstandings and resistance in real time, enabling leadership to respond with clarity, empathy and facts.

The objective is not to silence dissent, but to ensure that facts travel as fast—and as far—as rumours.

- **Resorting to Legal Recourse** - While engagement and communication should always be the first response, there are instances where social media activity crosses the line from opinion to harm. In such cases, legal remedies are available.

In India, an employer may approach the police if an employee uses social media to post false or malicious content intended to harm the reputation of the organization or its officials. Such acts amount to defamation and are punishable under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023,

which also covers companies and associations. Genuine criticism or dissatisfaction expressed without malice is protected under free speech.

When online content causes reputational or financial harm without constituting a criminal offence, organisations may pursue civil remedies, including injunctions for removal of defamatory material. Court orders for such removal are enforceable against social media platforms under the IT Intermediary Rules, 2021.

- **Strict adherence to a well-defined Social Media Policy:** Where such a policy does not exist, it must be framed without delay. Wide circulation and clear communication of the policy help establish boundaries and expectations, reducing ambiguity and misuse. Policy helps align individual expression with organizational values and enables fair and consistent handling of issues. Ultimately, it shifts the approach from reactive damage control to proactive governance—protecting both the organization and its employees.
- **Effective communication with the internal stakeholders can also be one of the remedies**

-As the saying goes, “Where communication is weak, rumours rule—and trust pays the price”. Silence fuels speculation, while timely and transparent communication builds confidence. Strong communication channels ensure concerns are addressed before confusion takes root, protecting both reputation and employee trust. Communication, therefore, must serve to illuminate truth rather than distort it, and every word—spoken or digital—must be guided by purpose, clarity, and ethical responsibility.

Conclusion

In recent years, the nature of industrial relations in the country has undergone a visible shift, with social media amplifying grassroots voices and altering traditional power dynamics—necessitating far more proactive and responsive engagement strategies. Organizations must therefore invest in robust social listening mechanisms and well-defined crisis response frameworks, even as policymakers strengthen oversight through digital audits. While social media undoubtedly introduces volatility into industrial relations, it can also serve as a channel for fair and balanced resolution—provided openness and engagement are chosen over denial or suppression. In the contemporary digital public sphere, silence amid escalating public outrage often only compounds mistrust rather than containing it.

One poorly handled post or unchecked controversy can ignite a chain reaction that affects everything from job applications to employee morale.

In the end, every ripple starts small but can become a wave.

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Engineering a culture of trust



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Abstract

With over three decades of leadership across some of the world's most respected automotive brands, Mr. Hardeep Singh Brar brings a rare blend of strategic depth, cultural fluency and people-centric leadership to his role as President & CEO of BMW Group India.

A mechanical engineering graduate from Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology and an alumnus of Harvard Business School's Senior Executive Leadership Program, Mr. Brar's career has spanned some of the most iconic names in the industry, including Maruti Suzuki, Volkswagen Passenger Cars, General Motors, Nissan Motor, Great Wall Motor Company and Kia India — where he most recently served as Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing. Under his stewardship, BMW's vision in India is not just about performance and product excellence but about driving culture, people capability and organisational resilience in a landscape defined by rapid change.

In conversation with Mr. Mohit Goel and Ms. Naveli Singh.

In September 2025, Mr. Brar took charge as the President and Chief Executive Officer of BMW Group India, stepping into the leadership of one of the most dynamic markets for the luxury automotive segment, and tasked with guiding the company through shifting consumer expectations, technological innovation and strategic growth

Before we speak about leadership in organisations, let us begin with the person behind the role. What early influences, at home or in life, quietly shaped the leader you have become?

I was fortunate to grow up with three very different role models at home. My grandfather led through inspiration. My father, though busy, quietly observed and tracked my overall progress. My mother, a schoolteacher, was very hands-on, especially in my early years, making sure I stayed disciplined and finished what I started.

Each of them represented a different leadership style. Had my influences been uniform, my perspective may have been singular. Instead, by gathering fragments from each – like motivation, trust and discipline, I built a more nuanced internal compass. That blend helped

me become more balanced, more understanding of people, and more adaptable as a leader.

In many ways, that diversity at home prepared me for the diversity I would later encounter in the corporate world.

You have led across geographies, companies and cultures. How has this global journey shaped the way you express leadership today?

I have been fortunate that my career has been a masterclass in cultural translation, shaped by leadership roles within the precision of Japanese giants like Suzuki and Nissan, the industrial scale of General Motors, the rapid-fire ambition of China's Great Wall Motor, and the storied engineering legacies of Volkswagen, Kia and now BMW. Global leadership has taught me that authority is a language spoken in many dialects. I have seen first-hand how the exact same behaviour can be decoded in polar opposite ways. For instance, in some parts of the world, being expressive is mistaken for arrogance, while in others, being quiet is read as uncertainty. In some cultures, hierarchy is revered and in others, openness defines credibility.

Ultimately, I have learned that effective leadership isn't measured by the intent of the speaker, but by the resonance of the message. To lead across borders, you must do more than just communicate. You must calibrate and every challenge issued and every word spoken must be tuned to the cultural frequency of the room.

Looking back, what has been the most important shift in how you personally lead people today compared to earlier in your career?

Earlier in my career, I was intensely focused on content and detail. I wanted to push the agenda, drive the subject, solve every problem. Over time, I realized something far more powerful: Leadership is not only about empowering people but also about lighting a fire in them. When people feel heard, trusted and connected to their leader, they don't need to be pushed. They begin to move on their own.

Today, I see leadership as an act of belief, the act to believing in people so strongly that they begin to believe in themselves.

In your view, what really brings out the best in people at work and how does emotional intelligence play a role in that?

I believe in a simple truth. Everyone who walks into an organization wants to matter. Nobody comes to work hoping to fail. When you start with that belief, everything changes.

If you are always searching for what is wrong, you

drain energy from the system. But if you trust people, you release energy. Of course, not everyone needs the same style of leadership. Some people are highly self-driven and you simply need to motivate and support them. Others may have rough edges and need coaching. Some may even require more structured guidance.

We often obsess over numbers and execution. Yet it is the softer skills like empathy, patience, and the ability to listen that unlocks real performance. I think, as individuals, we need to work on our inner self. Once you master your inner self, your outer world begins to fall into place.

I have seen this time and again that under some leaders, people feel constrained and underperform. But the same people flourish under others. The difference is rarely competence but their emotional climate.

In high-stakes industries like Automotive and Oil & Gas, leaders must balance safety with innovation. For a brand like BMW which stands for innovation and performance, how do you ensure that people feel safe to experiment?

Trust is the bridge between safety and innovation. When people do not feel trusted, they play safe. They avoid risk. And an organization that avoids risk slowly stops growing.

When people are trusted, mistakes will happen, but so will breakthroughs. What matters is intent. Was someone careless, or were they courageous? Culture helps you tell the difference.

A culture that allows people to fail fast, learn and improve creates extraordinary commitment. People go the extra mile when they know they will not be punished for trying. When culture is right, many of the organization's problems quietly disappear.

How did your experience at Harvard Business School leadership program shape the way you think about leadership and decision making?

The biggest lesson was perspective. Sitting with people from different functions, industries and countries, I realized how narrow my own viewpoint could possibly be. Though, the same problem looked completely different from another person's eyes.

That experience trained me to think not as a function, but as an organization. It reminded me that leadership is not about having all the answers but about being open to better questions. The case studies, covering both successes and failures, further reinforced that learning. And beyond that, the alumni network continues to be a powerful source of insight.

Today's workplace brings together multiple generations with very different expectations. How do you build a culture where all of them feel aligned, valued and engaged?

We understand that the younger generation is very clear about what they want. Purpose and content matter deeply to them. Unlike earlier generations, who often worked things out regardless of whether they enjoyed it, today's workforce wants meaning.

At BMW, we give people flexibility. We trust people to be responsible. Our culture is highly collaborative, and that collaboration is reinforced even in how people are evaluated. Leadership here is about how you work with others, not just what you deliver.

Even our appraisal system reflects this philosophy. People are evaluated not only on performance, which is assessed by their manager, but also on leadership—how they work with others across the organization. This leadership dimension is shaped by feedback from multiple stakeholders who interact with them, ensuring that success is not defined solely by individual achievement, but also by how effectively one contributes to the collective.

Over time, people learn a delicate but powerful skill, how to say no to work without offending people. That ability to be rational, respectful and clear is what makes teams truly effective.

BMW is often described as having a very strong and uniform culture. How do people truly absorb and live this culture once they join?

Our belief is that talent shines brightest when it stands on values.

Culture is not taught, it is felt. Our values live in everyday behaviour. New people learn not from manuals, but from moments. From how people speak, listen and decide.

A strong culture takes years to build, but when it takes root, it becomes unstoppable. At BMW, it is not one leader who defines it, it is everyone.

What do you believe enables people to stay healthy, motivated and resilient in demanding work environments?

We believe openness is the greatest wellness policy. Anyone can walk into my office or speak to HR or leadership. There is no hierarchy in access. Stress often arises when people feel trapped, when they don't know where to take their concerns. At BMW, people always have somewhere to go without fear.

We choose trust over pressure, and motivation over monitoring. When people feel safe, they bring their

best selves to work.

In the end, what stays with an organization is not just what it achieves, but what people felt while achieving it. When the culture is right, everything else begins to fall into place.

