



# How Employee Wellness Drives Team Engagement and Organisational Growth in the Post-COVID Era

## Background

### The Pandemic as an Accelerator

The global pandemic has served as a wake-up call for businesses to re-evaluate their approach to employee wellness. The **unprecedented challenges of remote work, social isolation, economic uncertainty, and burnout have affected workers' mental health**, leading to decreased productivity and performance. Companies are realising that simply providing perks such as ping-pong tables, yoga sessions, gym stipends, and healthy meals is not enough to address the root cause of burnout. As noted by organisational psychologist Adam Grant, these measures are merely band-aid solutions, not a cure.

## HR & Organisational Trends in 2023

The global pandemic has accelerated the focus on employee wellness, both for companies that already had initiatives in place and for those that previously did not prioritise it. With the rise of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) and Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) strategies, promoting and supporting mental health and wellness in the workplace is becoming a key priority. This shift is bringing employee wellness to the forefront of the corporate agenda.

It is essential to understand what employee wellness means. Employee wellness is a holistic approach to health and well-being that encompasses physical, mental, emotional, and social health. It is not just about the absence

of illness; but it's also about the presence of physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

In the post-COVID era, **companies are realising that their employees' well-being is not just a "nice-to-have", but a critical component of their business success.** A study by the Harvard Business Review found that organisations that

prioritise employee wellness have higher levels of employee engagement and lower rates of absenteeism and turnover. Furthermore, a well-informed employee with access to the tools and resources they need to be healthy and happy is more likely to be productive, motivated, and engaged.



## **CFOs, CHROs and others in the management level are taking notice and investing in employee wellness initiatives because they do not see employee wellness as a luxury, but because they recognise the positive return on investment (ROI).**

Leading corporations in the technology, banking, and financial sectors, such as Standard Chartered, PWC, Meta, and JP Morgan Chase & Co., are pioneers in promoting and implementing employee wellness programmes. Some companies even have a dedicated Chief Wellness Officer or Head of Wellness to develop and execute wellness strategies for their employees.

Some may view the investment in employee wellness initiatives by large and multinational companies as simply a result of their financial resources and ability to provide added benefits for employee engagement. Others see it as a response to the fast-paced and high-pressure work culture that these industry leaders must address through such initiatives.

A more significant reason for their emphasis on employee wellness is the ROI - every dollar spent on these initiatives can result in a corresponding increase in profits.

### i. A Competitive Edge in the Talent War of Recruitment & Retention

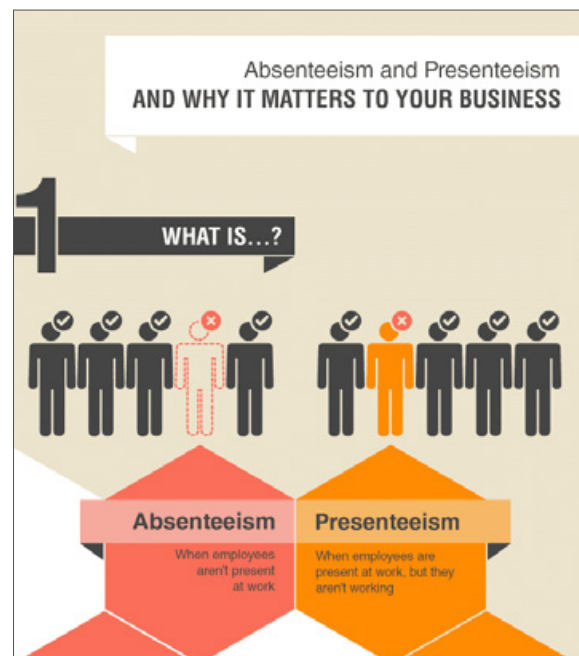
The job market has become candidate-driven, and HR professionals are facing difficulties in attracting and retaining top talent. The American Psychological Association's 2022 Work and Well-being Survey found that **81% of individuals, with 30% stating strongly, believe that an employer's support for mental health will be an important factor in their job search.** In light of these findings, companies should re-evaluate their mental health initiatives as a means to attract and retain employees.

### ii. The Economic Cost of Occupational Stress

Leaders and HR professionals often question how to measure the impact and cost of mental

health issues among employees to secure budget for employee wellness initiatives.

A study conducted by Siu, Cooper, Roll & Lo (2020) in Hong Kong was the first of its kind to estimate the costs of occupational stress. The costs were calculated by combining the costs of absenteeism, presenteeism, and medical expenses. Job stressors such as the work/home interface, job insecurity, and high workload caused an annual economic cost of \$70 million to \$110 million due to absenteeism. Presenteeism, mainly caused by job insecurity, interpersonal conflict, high workload, and organisational constraints, had an annual cost of \$270 million. Medical expenses associated with occupational stress were \$520 million, bringing the total annual cost of occupational stress to approximately \$1 billion, which is a significant figure.



**Absenteeism:** Workplace absenteeism refers to time taken off work due to illness or mental health issues.  
**Presenteeism:** Presenteeism refers to the lost productivity that occurs when employees are not fully functioning in the workplace because of an illness, injury, or other condition.



## How Corporations Get Their Employees' Mental Health Covered

### 1. Outsourcing of Employee Wellness Support to Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) Provider

Corporations often turn to EAP providers for employee wellness and mental health support. However, the effectiveness of these programmes is often questioned due to their low utilisation rate. This can be due to a lack of employee awareness or the cultural stigma surrounding mental health support in some Asian societies, which leads to underutilisation of the EAP services.

To ensure more effective and sustained employee wellness efforts, companies can opt for a holistic and proactive wellness solution.

### 2. Active Psychoeducation

To promote lasting change, companies are increasingly turning to health professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, dietitians, and physiotherapists to provide employees with informative health talks and mindfulness sessions. While these one-off events are a step in

the right direction, they often lack the interaction and reflection needed to create meaningful behavioural change.

To effectively equip employees with the knowledge and skills they need to maintain their mental and physical health, companies should consider implementing a comprehensive psycho-education programme. Rather than just a single health talk, **a series of workshops that cover the various aspects of mental, emotional, behavioural, and cognitive functioning can be offered to employees on a continuous basis.**

### 3. Digitalised Mental Health Support

In the wake of digitalisation, the APAC market is experiencing a revolution in mental health support with the rise of digital mental health apps like Intellect, Thoughtfull, and Neurum. These apps take a proactive approach, offering a highly accessible platform with features like **self-paced learning paths, emergency sessions, and one-on-one counselling or behavioural coaching.** This innovative solution addresses the

challenges of traditional Employee Assistance Programmes, such as low utilisation rates, stigmatisation, and a lack of motivation to seek help. It facilitates help-seeking behaviours, promotes mental illness prevention, and offers a more comprehensive solution compared to one-off health talks.

#### **4. Mental Health Safety Net – Mental Health First Aider**

Organisational change is key to fully leveraging employee wellness initiatives. Rather than solely focusing on individual support, **companies should aim to create a psychological safety net within their workplace.** This can be achieved by having employees trained as certified mental health first aiders, similar to having certified first aiders for physical emergencies. Mental Health First Aid is a widely trusted and evidence-based programme, with over 60,000 licensed instructors across 26 countries. Companies like PwC and Standard Chartered have embraced this initiative, equipping their leaders and staff with mental health first aid training and fostering a workplace culture where mental health is openly discussed with reduced stigma and increased understanding.

The post-COVID era has brought the importance of employee wellness into sharp focus. Employees and organisations face increasing challenges as the market continues to face uncertainty and change. To support their mental well-being, emotional performance, and productivity, organisational leaders must prioritise employee wellness and create a culture that values mental health.

**Companies that prioritise employee wellness will find that their employees are more engaged, motivated, and productive, which will drive team engagement and organisational growth.** With the right tools, resources, and support, companies can create a culture of well-being that promotes employee health and well-being and helps employees thrive in the post-COVID world.

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