Your Employee's Wellbeing Might Mean More Than You Think

A good job portfolio, remuneration and benefits don't necessarily mean your employee's needs are met.

One of the key priorities of any employer is to keep employees engaged and motivated. Whether in small startups or large conglomerates, the same formula holds true: Employee engagement equals emotional commitment and hard work. Employees are more productive and perform better when they are happy and get along well with their co-workers.

Jonathan (*not his real name) holds a managerial position in his company. In comparison to peers his age, Jonathan is doing well – he takes home a considerably high salary, enjoys generous company benefits and is rarely required to work overtime. Despite this, Jonathan dreads going to work every morning. He rarely interacts with his colleagues, whom he feels are unfriendly and distant, making for an altogether unpleasant work environment. In recent months, his bosses have commented on his increasingly poor performance at work.

Jonathan's situation is not at all unusual. In Singapore, according to a survey conducted by Gallup Inc. in 2012, three in four workers feel that they are unmotivated and sleepwalking through their work day. In contrast, less than one in ten workers surveyed are motivated at

work, that is, to feel passionate and committed to their work.[1] These results should be a cause of concern for employers, given the imperative to retain talent in this tight labour market.

In recent years, more organisations have started focusing on meeting employee wellbeing needs to further their efforts at employee engagement. Another survey titled "The Economics of Wellbeing, 2010", by Gallup Inc.[2] found that a workforce's wellbeing directly affects an organisation's bottom line. Five interconnected core dimensions were identified: Career Wellbeing, Social Wellbeing, Community Wellbeing, Physical Wellbeing and Financial Wellbeing. Results demonstrate that an employee's career, social and community wellbeing has an impact on the organisation's productivity.

> **Career Wellbeing:** how you occupy your time and liking what you do each day
> **Social Wellbeing:** having strong relationships and love in your life
> **Financial Wellbeing:** effectively managing your economic life to reduce stress and insecurity
> **Physical Wellbeing:** having good health and enough energy to get things done on a daily basis
> **Community Wellbeing:** the sense of engagement and involvement you have with the area where you live

Out of the 1,479 people surveyed, results show that the higher an employee's career wellbeing, the more likely he is to experience greater interest in his work, remain healthy and be less-prone to stress. An employee with higher social wellbeing is likely to have stronger relationships and friendships in the office. By asking if they had a 'best friend at work', Gallup discovered that employees with quality friendships at their workplaces are seven times more likely to be engaged in their work. In fact, social wellbeing is closely linked with career wellbeing: 49 percent of those who experienced healthy relationships with colleagues thrived in their careers. A colleague's wellbeing impacts on the individual's wellbeing; having a colleague, friend or even friend's friend who is thriving makes it twice as likely for the individual themselves to be thriving in the wellbeing department.

Findings from the "Happiness and Productivity" experiment conducted by University of Warwick Business School economists in 2012, a leading authority on the relationship

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[1] "S'pore staff 'not engaged' at work", The Straits Times, Dec 6, 2013.
[2] Tom Rath & Jim Harter. "The Economics of Wellbeing", Gallup, Inc. 2010.
(http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/126908/Economics-Wellbeing.aspx)

between economics and mental health, are consistent with Gallup's survey.[3] The experiment results revealed a consistent pattern in human performance, that happier employees are 12% more productive and unhappy employees, 10% less productive.

Indeed, employers and the management have a role to play in creating such a working environment. Looking after the social wellbeing and happiness at the workplace of employees may seem trivial, but in the corporate world, this can translate to long-term productivity gains and a competitive advantage. When an employee's wellbeing is not met, the organisation's cost of retaining the employee can potentially increase as a result of lower productivity and work quality, employee absenteeism and morale. So what can organisations do to foster a working environment that allows employees to thrive?

Inclusiveness at the Workplace to Engage Employees
Fostering a culture of inclusiveness is one way organisations can demonstrate care for employees' wellbeing and increase their job satisfaction. To achieve this, it is essential for the organisation to put in place policies and good practices that support the implementation of such programmes such as establishing core values, leadership endorsement, individual responsibility and effective communication channels within the organisational framework. These can align the organisation's policies and processes, towards building an inclusive and harmonious culture.

- Establishing core values
  Core values can provide the framework for an organisation's policies, processes and programmes. They can also be adopted as guiding principles that outline the desired attributes/ behaviour of employees. Examples of core values like respect, trust, inclusiveness, harmony, understanding, cooperation, resilience, fairness, unity, empathy, care and concern amongst employees can be incorporated into organisations' mission statements or employee code of conduct.

- Leadership endorsement
  Employers and management play a critical role in spearheading and ensuring consistency of HR policies and initiatives. When employees know that their employers and supervisors genuinely respect and care about their interests, they are more likely to do likewise and be motivated to contribute at work.

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[3] Andrew Oswald, Eugenio Proto & Daniel Sgroi. "Happiness and Productivity", University of Warwick, 2012. (http://www.andrewoswald.com/docs/6MayOsProtoSgroi2012.pdf)

- Individual responsibility

  Everyone has a responsibility to adopt and apply the organisation's core values at work. In order to achieve a harmonious work environment where there is mutual respect and acceptance of one another, each and every individual has to attempt to understand the cultures and practices of fellow colleagues.

- Established communication channels

  Having an established channel for employees to surface their issues and concerns can help avoid escalation of tension and conflict. This open communication system maintains overall harmony at the workplace, with good working relationships and high employee morale.

As with any organisation, the most effective changes are those that are supported by employers and the management, leveraging on existing organisational platforms and initiatives. Here are some simple activities that organisations can consider organising, to engage employees and build an open and inclusive work environment:

- Eating together

  Set aside a day to have a meal, maybe breakfast or lunch with employees. Through the informal and lighthearted setting, get to know more about the happenings in the office and their personal lives.

- Ice breakers at meetings

  Ice breakers are useful to help relieve tensions in the office and also improve teamwork. An example of a simple ice breaker is "Find 10 Things in Common". The aim of this game is to find ten common things among all present colleagues (no mention of body parts, clothing and work are allowed). This broad sharing of interests helps them to get to know each other better.

- Dialogue sessions

  Employers can connect with their employees in person (either personally or through their line managers) by setting aside dedicated time for sharing sessions. These sessions provide employers and HR the opportunity to engage employees, provide guidance on their career development and also motivate them to continue excelling in their work.

- Have fun together outside the office
Sometimes employees need to take a break from their hectic work schedules and deadlines, and not talk about work! Some possible team bonding activities organisations can consider are amazing race challenges, nature walks and dance sessions that encourage communication and build shared experiences.

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