

Chapter 9

Appraising the Future of Employee Health and Wellness Programmes in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Wellness Programmes

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ABSTRACT

Employee wellness is an important aspect of human resource management system that has to be considered in the various phases of industrial revolution. It should be noted that during the industrial revolutions work has been transformed from handmade methods to machines. Work productivity improved, yet at the same time the number for those required for manual labour slightly reduced. In each of the revolutions the need to maintain employees remained significant. Therefore, it becomes imperative in the 4th industrial revolution even though managed heavily by machinery and technology to continue with employee wellness for effective productivity within organisations going forward. This chapter will deal with the employee wellness as a strategy that deals with enabling employee welfare. A healthy workforce enhances employee wellness.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of rapid transformation whereby human resource is challenged by substantial changes particularly in the matters concerning jobs and workforce (Rasca, 2017), employees experience difficulties in balancing work and personal day-to-day life. Employees' inability to succeed in balancing their work

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and family duties has resulted in an increased number of stress-related ill-health in organisations (Ethel, Ziska & Sulaiman, 2016). Globally, the well-being of workers is important for the survival and advancement of any organisation (Zheng, Zhu, Zhao & Zhang, 2015). Hence, the wellness of employees is of immense concern to all stakeholders in the workplace.

Most of the issues impacting employee health and wellness stem from the stress of balancing work and family stressors to achieve meaningful work-life balance (WLB). Though scholars have argued that WLB is a personal matter (Kim, 2014), the challenges arising from its imbalance have both personal and organisational implications. On the personal level, where there is work-life imbalance, employees manifest stress, depression, anxiety, and panic attacks, among many other physiological and psychological challenges. While on the organisational level, absenteeism, poor performance, frequent sick leave and cost of managing it, as well as other attendant costs take their own tolls on organisational outcomes. Because of these, employers have been providing employees with benefits that should help them to meet their needs.

For instance, some companies provide cover for maternity expenses incurred by their employees who have just given birth, while government organisations are compelled by law in some countries, for example South Africa (Abe, Fields & Abe, 2016), to adopt employee health and wellness programmes (EHWP) which provide strategies to address domain-related stressors. Employees tend to perform their duties and tasks well within a workplace when their needs and expectations are met. On the other hand, conflicts tend to arise when employees' needs and expectations are not met within a workplace. Research shows that conflict between family duties and work demands arises because some facets of work and family demands are irreconcilable (Adame, Capliure & Miquel, 2016).

In the context of the foregoing, this chapter focuses on the future of work and employee health and well-being to understand whether the traditional wellness programmes adopted by organisations will still be relevant in addressing employee wellness issues in the fourth industrial revolution where the workplace is facing unprecedented and rapid transformations in new technologies.

The previous industrial revolutions came with a lot of benefits as well as challenges to the socio-economic status of the people who experienced the transformations (Rabeh-Morror & Saeed, 2017). For example, in the first industrial revolution, Great Britain led the revolution by discovering the steam engine which transformed the communication and transportation sector, led to the creation of many jobs and facilitated the movements of people and goods from one place to another (White, 2009)

The second industrial revolution witnessed the introduction of mass production in the form of division of labour and it was powered by the discovery of electrical energy. In the early seventies, the third industrial revolution emerged with the introduction of electronics and information technology which witnessed the discovery of types of machinery that would allow production to take place with little or even without human work (Taalbi, 2019).

The fourth industrial revolution currently being experienced is built on cyber-physical production systems {Forum, 2015 #24}{Forum, 2015 #24}(Hirschi, 2018). In the fourth industrial revolution, systems are being transformed rather than specific products or services. Cyber-physical systems means combined communications, information technology, internet of things (IOT), sensor networks, and internet communication infrastructure (IP). It has also brought with it intelligent real-time processing and event management (CPUs), implanted software for logic, 3D/4D printing, artificial intelligence or advanced robotics (AI) which can perform any jobs like humans, automated operations, and management of system activities.

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