



THE DECADEAL EVOLUTION OF EMPLOYEE WELLBEING: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THEORETICAL SHIFTS, REMOTE WORK DYNAMICS, AND STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (2015–2025)

¹NARESH BALKRISHNA SALVI, Research Scholar, Amrutvahini Institute of Management and Business Administration, Sangamner, Maharashtra
Email ID: nareshsalvi2@rediffmail.com

²Dr. NITIN SOPAN BHAND, Associate Professor, Amrutvahini Institute of Management and Business Administration, Sangamner, Maharashtra

Abstract

Employee wellbeing has transitioned from a localized, benefit-centric Human Resource (HR) initiative to a core pillar of corporate strategy and organizational sustainability. This paper examines the critical evolution of employee wellbeing over the decade spanning 2015 to 2025. Grounded in established frameworks, including the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. Another very important concept Employee Experience and Employee wellbeing has been explained in this research paper. Finally, the paper investigates how contemporary organizational challenges—such as digital multitasking, cognitive overload, and modern employee experience (EX) models—interplay with worker health and organizational performance, concluding with strategic recommendations for future-proofing workplaces.

Keywords: Employee wellbeing, globalization, multinational companies, mental health, stress, technology, digitalization

Introduction

It is the responsibility of the management to take care of employees who are working with them in their organization. Human Resource department is responsible to take care of employees working in the organization. Since the inception of industry, employees were provided with basic needs such as water and rest breaks. Companies were providing these basic facilities since long time. The time has changed and globalization concept has been adopted by many countries. Because of adoption of globalization many multinational companies have expanded globally and established their manufacturing plants and Research & Development centres in many other countries. These multinational companies have adopted best employee wellbeing practices of these different countries which could improve employees-wellbeing. Further these multinational companies have extended best employees-wellbeing practices to their all-other companies across the world. Employers have identified that there is a relation between role stress and occupational employee-wellbeing (Ethem Duygulua, Nurcan Hakan Ciraklara, Ediz Guripekb, Demet Bagiranb, 2013)

Employment in multinational companies have enlighten the life of the employees. All the employees were started getting employee-wellbeing facilities other than employee-wellbeing traditional facilities. Companies have started providing canteen facilities, employee transport facility and meditation centres. Many multinational companies have started providing medical assistance, gym & indoor games. These employee-wellbeing activities have significantly enhanced employee focus and operational engagement across our workforce. This approach has significantly strengthened employee alignment and emotional connection to the company, and this has

continued till 2015. Employer happiness at workplace could happen through employee-wellbeing therefore it is required to focus more on employee-wellbeing (Liu Rufeng, Zhang Nav, Zhu, Jianqiang, 2023)

After that company have started adopting advanced technologies. These companies have made employees to work with advanced technology. Employee have also acquired knowledge of advanced technology with little resistance. However, after acquiring the advanced technology, employees mental stress has been increased, and employees have started losing their cognitive control. Companies have noticed this thing and thought off to deal with this issue in a different way. Intension of the company was to make employee to accept the advanced technology and aid in reducing cognitive stress at work.

As a first stage of it, employer have started off with employee wellbeing activities and first thing they did is 'arranged awareness session on how to release stress for managers and supervisors. This has started since 2014 in the industry. In addition to this, employers have shown flexibility to provide additional leaves for releasing mental stress. Some employers have increased the frequency of medical check-up of their employees. This shows companies have made their employees capable in practical life.

World is now moving to digitalization, and employee must have pulse of their health in their hand therefore some multinational companies has distributed smart watches to their employees. At the same time some companies have started organizing session on mental health. Employees work in three shifts in rotation, and this has impacted in good way on health of the employees. Companies have understood this and therefore started organizing session on diet

management. This has helped employees to understand importance of sufficient and right food, sufficient sleep etc. Especially in Pharmaceutical & Chemical sector, employee needs very high work attention as they work with very highly flammable and hazardous chemical and gases. In such working place, there are high chances of having high mental stress and physical stress. Therefore, companies have started off with new concept call 'Blameless Fatigue Reporting'. This has worked very nicely in companies and reduced the incidents which were happening due to high fatigue.

There is another very important concept called 'Clean-Room' which is in practice in Pharmaceutical and Chemical sector companies. This Clean-Room concept has reduced the employee stress which happens when they are using the pharmaceutical related safety equipments. Many companies have adopted a concept of Advanced Fatigue Risk Management System. In Indian Context, Employee wellness programmes may play a vital role in managing cognitive stress which occurs during working at workplace. Overall, this is the scenario of employee wellbeing in industry evolution. If we compare the current decade (2015-2025) with latest two decades (1990-2010), we will be able to confidently say that companies have started focusing on mental health of the employees very rigorously.

Literature Review

In a fast-changing and fast-paced global workplace, maintaining competitive advantage is paramount to success. Consequently, identifying ways of sustaining employee wellbeing has become increasingly important to a range of stakeholders, both within the context of work and beyond (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017). Prior to 2015, employee wellbeing (EWB) was frequently viewed as a secondary concern, represented by siloed

wellness programs, gymnasium stipends, or basic employee assistance programs. Human Resources plays vital role in employee wellbeing management in the organization. The responsibilities of planning, executing, ensuring effectiveness of employee wellbeing belongs to Human Resource.

However, the decade from 2015 to 2025 witnessed a fundamental re-evaluation of employee wellbeing. Driven by rising rates of occupational burnout, a widespread shift toward knowledge-work economies, and unprecedented disruptions in work arrangements, Employee Wellbeing has matured into a multi-dimensional construct. It is now understood to encompass an individual's psychological, physical, and social environment at work (Molek-Winiarska et al., 2024). Poor wellbeing is no longer dismissed as a personal struggle; instead, it is recognized as a systemic risk that leads to adverse effects on organizational performance, retention, and overall productivity (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017).

Employee Wellbeing traditionally was limited with employee work safety at workplace. Providing necessary safety equipment and creating awareness on safety was one of the employee wellbeing factors before 2015. Organizing awareness sessions on employee physical fitness was another employee wellbeing. In addition to above, arranging awareness sessions on side effects of over smoking and how to reduce weight were the some of the employee wellbeing activities were happening before 2015.

Some of the companies were running the health check-up camps in the premises. Employees identified with any disease were assisted with medication. However, all these were traditional employee's wellbeing activities and does not impact on morale of the employee. Employee job satisfaction, driven by fair

compensation, supportive working conditions, and growth opportunities, is a foundational element for performance in a competitive, globalized market. In the pharmaceutical sector, a healthy, collaborative environment is crucial for motivating staff and maximizing organizational productivity (Dr. Bikrant Kesari, Rajkumar Soni, 2017). To systematically analyse the changes of the past decade, we must ground our investigation in robust theoretical models that define the inputs and outcomes of worker health. The name of the model is Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model.

A foundational framework for understanding Employee Wellbeing is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which categorizes occupational conditions into "demands" (aspects requiring sustained physical or psychological effort) and "resources" (aspects functional in achieving work goals, reducing demands, or stimulating personal growth). Job resources operate across four distinct levels:

1. Individual level: Personal traits like resilience and self-efficacy.
2. Group level: Team dynamics and social support.
3. Leader-related level: Perceived supervisor support and constructive leadership styles.
4. Organizational level: Structural factors such as compensation, role clarity, and job security.

During the 2015–2025 period, the application of the JD-R model adapted to rising digital workflows. While job resources traditionally focused on physical tools and face-to-face feedback, the definition of resource adequacy evolved to include digital support systems and technology-enabled autonomy.

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and Job Autonomy

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory posits that individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect valuable resources (such as energy, status, and time). When job demands are high, personal resources drain rapidly, leading to burnout. Within this framework, job autonomy—the degree of freedom and independence employees have in scheduling and executing their tasks—acts as a primary protective resource. High job autonomy serves as a compensatory mechanism, shielding employees from cognitive overload and job stress, thereby enhancing workplace wellbeing. Over the past decade, enabling autonomy transitioned from a motivational technique to a crucial defence mechanism against digital exhaustion.

The Decadal Shift: Timeline of Evolution (2015–2025)

The trajectory of Employee Wellbeing over the past ten years can be analysed in three distinct eras.

The Pre-Pandemic Era (2015–2019): Physical Perks and Early Flexibility

At the beginning of this decade, the global conversation on Employee Wellbeing was dominated by physical wellness and early adaptations to digital working environments. Organizations increasingly recognized that structural and organizational change in modern workplaces required HR practices to actively cultivate wellness to avoid performance drop-offs (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017).

Initiatives in this period focused heavily on workplace ergonomics, health screenings, and early iterations of flexible working hours. However, Employee Wellbeing was still mostly perceived as an office-centric concept. Remote work was a

rare benefit reserved for specific roles rather than a systemic operating model.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 catalysed an immediate, massive shift to remote work (work-from-home, or WFH) and virtual collaboration. This transition acted as a double-edged sword for Employee Wellbeing. On one hand, employees benefited from increased autonomy, the elimination of stressful daily commutes, and greater control over their immediate environments. On the other hand, the abrupt and involuntary nature of this transition introduced severe psychological hazards. Research identified critical remote work realities that directly impacted the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 catalysed an immediate, massive shift to remote work (work-from-home, or WFH) and virtual collaboration.

This transition acted as a double-edged sword for Employee Wellbeing, including, Without the physical separation of the office, work increasingly encroached on private life, leaving employees struggling to psychologically detach from their jobs. A lack of spontaneous face-to-face interactions reduced employees' sense of belonging and heightened anxiety, compounding the risk of mental fatigue and burnout. Managers accustomed to collocated oversight struggled to direct teams in virtual spaces, often overcompensating with micro-management or failing to offer emotional and structural support (Schmitt J, 2024).

By 2023, the focus shifted from crisis-mode remote working to structured hybrid work configurations. This era marked a consolidation of virtual work, placing an explicit focus on "digital wellbeing. "Rather than treating Employee Wellbeing as a series of standalone health programs, modern HR practitioners integrated wellbeing directly into the concept of Employee Experience (EX) (Molek-Winiarska et 2024). Under this

model, Employee Wellbeing is understood to be co-dependent with the overarching cultural, physical, and technological ecosystem of the organization. As organizations entered 2025, several structural challenges emerged as primary determinants of Employee Wellbeing.

"Digital Presenteeism" and Multitasking

With the maturation of communication suites (e.g., Slack, Microsoft Teams, Zoom), the expectation of constant availability became a prominent stressor. This phenomenon, known as digital presenteeism, requires employees to show continuous online activity and respond instantly to messages. Furthermore, digital multitasking—simultaneously managing communication channels while executing deep analytical work—regularly exceeds cognitive processing limits. When job autonomy is lacking, this perpetual state of high cognitive load trigger's role overload and acute job-related anxiety.

The Blur between Employee Experience (EX) and Wellbeing

Recent organizational studies show that while HR practitioners theoretically distinguish between Employee Experience (the holistic journey of an employee) and Employee Wellbeing (their health status), the operational boundaries between them are highly blurred in practice (Molek-Winiarska et al., 2024). Most modern EX investments are targeted toward, Vocational skill development, Physical workplace safety, providing comfortable, adaptive working conditions (Molek-Winiarska et al., 2024). This indicates that contemporary organizations are increasingly addressing Employee Wellbeing by modifying structural elements of the job itself, rather than trying to cure symptoms of burnout after they occur.

The Critical Role of Leadership in a Remote/Hybrid Landscape

As the physical office became decentralized, the direct manager emerged as the most critical determinant of Employee Wellbeing. Leadership styles must adapt to address the psychological challenges of hybrid working. Virtual leadership behaviour is no longer evaluated solely on task completion, but on how effectively a leader maintains the relational and psychological resources of their remote subordinates (P Saismita Priyadarshinee, Koshore Kumar Das, 2021).

Objectives

1. Critically evaluate status of employee wellbeing during the decade (2015-2025).
2. Understand the major shift in wellbeing at workplace
3. Recommend the changes with respect to employee wellbeing which are in line with current employee demand.

Research Methodology

The study is primarily depended on secondary data as there was no primary research conducted. Extensive research was conducted to identify articles from various database such as Scholar Google, research gate etc. Since the research was based on earlier published research papers therefore used literature review research methodology. All previous published research papers have been taken from various industries for review. Since the topic is related to pharmaceutical companies therefore few research papers considered for study from pharmaceutical industry. Critically evaluated all the employee wellbeing concepts which are mentioned in research papers. The motivation of this research paper is to

explore the current state of employee wellbeing and how it affects employees working in the organization.

Finding

After going through the various research papers and references books it has observed that employee wellbeing has revolutionized over a period. Early days of industrialization were more company centric. Businesses were running by keeping companies profit in eyes. However, time has changed, employment has increased proportionately and employees have started asking more employee wellbeing as they were facing the problems of stress during their employment tenure with company. The change was very tough for organisations because during this period conflicts have increased between companies and employees. Later, employers have understood that this is need of time to improve the mental health of the employees. Employees will be more productive if their mental health is taken care off through employee wellbeing. Further, in mid of second decade of 21st century, time has changed completely and organizations have adopted employee wellbeing activities as mainstream of employee welfare. All the wellbeing activities were started happening as per need of the time. This has made employees more productive and peaceful at workplace. The relationship between employer and employee have been improved drastically.

Recommendations

To build a sustainable framework for employee wellbeing, contemporary organizations should adopt an integrated, evidence-based strategy.

1. Systemic Job Redesign and align wellbeing to it: Instead of relying on individual coping mechanisms, organizations should redesign jobs to

balance cognitive demands. This includes maximizing job autonomy to help employees manage digital multitasking workloads. Arrange appropriate wellbeing activities to Job Design to reduce mental stress.

2. Standardization of employee wellbeing: Instead of limiting the employee wellbeing to specific job role and function, delimit it to every job role and every function. This will increase the employee productivity horizontally up to the demand of the organization.
3. Structured Leadership Training: Train supervisors to transition from traditional oversight to virtual, supportive leadership. This training must focus on identifying early signs of burnout remotely, maintaining psychological safety, and fostering cohesive virtual networks.
4. Employee Wellbeing is a shield of organization's growth therefore allocated fixed budget for employee wellbeing. This will improve reputation of the organization in the industry.

Conclusion

The decade from 2015 to 2025 brought about a profound shift in how we understand and manage employee wellbeing. Propelled by the urgent realities of remote work and the relentless integration of digital technologies, Employee Wellbeing transitioned from a peripheral HR concern to a strategic imperative. Theoretical insights highlight that sustaining Employee Wellbeing is not merely an ethical obligation, but a structural necessity for organizational resilience. By utilizing job autonomy as a protective buffer, training leaders to navigate hybrid dynamics, and aligning workplace initiatives with broader employee experiences, contemporary

organizations can cultivate a healthy, high-performing, and resilient workforce.

Reference

1. Kowalski, T. H. P., & Loretto, W. (2017). Well-being and HRM in the changing workplace. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(16), 2229–2255.
2. Molek-Winiarska, D., Beres, A., & Drzewiecki, J. (2024). Employee experience and well-being at work – from theoretical considerations to practical investigations. *Health Psychology Report*.
3. Dr. Bikrant Kesari, Rajkumar Soni, (2017), A Review on Employee Job Satisfaction in Indian Pharmaceutical Sector” (Interdisciplinary Research for Sustainable Development)
4. Schmitt, J (2024), Employee Wellbeing and the remote leader – A Systematic Literature Review
5. Ethem Duygulua, Nurcan Hakan Ciraklara, Ediz Guripekb, Demet Bagiranb, 2013, The effect of role stress on the employee's well-being: a study in the pharmaceutical companies in the city of Izmir
6. Liu Rufeng, Zhang Nan, Zhu Jianqiang, 2023, Impact of Employee-Wellbeing On organizational performance in workplace.
7. Jaquina Galbert, 2022, Diversity in the workplace essentials.
8. Dr. Geetika Patnaik, 2021, Positive Psychology for improved mental Health and well-being.
9. Jim Clifton, Jim Harter Wellbeing at work – How to build Resilient and thriving teams.

10. Saishmita Priyadarshinee, Kishore Kumar Das, 2021, Workforce Diversity and Employee Performance