

# ROLE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN CURRENT TRENDS OF SUSTAINABLE HRM FOR EMPLOYEE MENTAL WELLNESS

## Abstract

In recent years new trend is setting in as mental wellness has been getting more attention as compared to the physical wellness which had been the pivotal focus of employee wellness programs. There are few crucial aspects to Wellness that needs to be identified beyond the mental and physical wellness. Looking at sustainability as the future of HRM, a new paradigm towards employee wellness, motivation and positivity as an important aspect for the efficient people management has been introduced to evaluate how the various tools of sustainable HRM creates an impact on organizational productivity. The main objectives of this research paper are to analyse the role of Learning and Development in bridging the gap by recognising the need of wellness solution for employee taking into consideration their emotional wellbeing. This conceptual paper analyses the effectiveness of Learning and Development in sustainable HR to encourage employee wellness initiatives. The research is based on reference from secondary sources like article, books, blogs to understand the issue regarding Sustainable Human Resource Management and Learning and Development. With strategic sustainable techniques proper Learning and Development plan can be effectively implemented for stress free work life balance. Organizations may make a positive contribution in maintaining the mental wellness boosting the positivity of employees that would be beneficial in contributing towards employee and organisational productivity. This research recommends that Sustainable HRM must incorporate initiatives and learning practices promoting positivity, mental wellness of employees in their

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organizations for employee development. For future research to understand the impact of Learning and Development in Sustainable HRM on other aspects of employee wellbeing like relationship, kindness, purpose, spirituality, philanthropy, financial wellness can reviewed that can add value to the employee wellness and productivity.

**Keywords:** Learning and Development; Sustainable HRM; Employee Productivity; Organisational Productivity; Mental Wellness.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is defined as a development that meets the need of present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs. Since last few decades it has been observed that sustainability is a concept that has been deeply rooted throughout the functions of management – Organisational Behaviour, Strategic Management, HR etc. To interface the sustainability expertise with the workforce setup demands HR skill sets that focuses on organisation culture. The HR is required to take up the role of a catalyst to integrate sustainability strategy with the employee life cycle. (Kramar 2013)[1] explained the linkage between HRM and sustainability that contributes towards a strong connection between human and social outcome giving a long term sustainable solution. HR is required to embed the concept of sustainability through the HR core functions of hiring to trainings. The performance indicators also rely on the sustainable parameters. HR functions play as important role in transformation and organisational effectiveness with sustainability tools as the fundamental factor.

In the beginning of 2020 when the world was hit by the Covid -19 employees were forced to cease to stop going to their workplace. The social factors impacted Employees mental health which affected the organisational productivity. The Human Resource Department and the Management were more concern about the with the health and wellness of their workforce. The About 48% workforce was asked to avail the facility of Work from Home. In upcoming days, the HR and the L&D has a task to make their workforce ready and updated to adapt the changing landscape. Organizations had to adapt a rigorous contracting, on boarding processes in place for their liquid workers and to keep the workforce mindful for being productive to be in line with the organisational goal.

As we talk about the performance indicators for employees and in turn for the organisation on a broader perspective, the employee health and wellbeing play an important role. (Grawitch, 2007; Grawitch, 2007) [2] conducted a study to determine a relationship between employee satisfaction and the practices that are followed at a workplace in regards to the work-life balance, health and safety related to the outcomes like employee wellness. Results of this study indicated that if organisation looks forward for employee's contribution in organisational development, then they are required to extend benefits towards healthy workplace programs. As per definition noted on (<https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com>, n.d.) – [3] “Health is a stage of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of any disease. A person is considered healthy if he is well adjusted to the environment in which he works.” According to the Joint I.L.O/W.H.O. Committee on Organisational Health, Industrial health is “the preservation and maintenance of physical, mental and social well-being of employees in all occupations”. Physical health of an employee relates to the energy levels at workplace which is a result of healthy lifestyle one leads such as regular workouts, sleeping well and eating well. Physical wellbeing is one key component that relates to whole-person health. When this area of health is addressed with right strategies then the employees tend to be energetic, happy, effectively engaged and much more productive. With this benefits as aim organisations have taken up the responsibilities in promoting physical wellbeing in employees. (Serxner et al. 2009)[4] the study to understand ‘Do Employee Health Programs Work?’ indicated that organisations usually understand relationship between employee health and financial success. Similarly, the organisations

consider health and productivity as an important factor when it comes to controlling cost and improving productivity.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Analysis done by (Saxena 2021) [5] indicates impact of pandemic over the psychological wellness of employees by proposing a model, proposing the role of HRM in handling problem by introducing various organizational initiatives like building a strong emotional and psychological connect with their employees to overcome the existing unforeseen catastrophe situation, every individual across the globe is battling hard to overcome the challenges not only towards their physical health but in terms of mental wellness as well, while they are surrounded by various uncertainties. The current pandemic time has giving rise to various distresses like anxiety, depression, and mental burnout. A recent report (CIPD, 2021) [6] highlighted that employee wellbeing is hampered on account of the pandemic. A effectiveness of business is related to the effectiveness of its employees— if there is a lapse in employee welfare, then business outcomes is affected. As a result of employee being stressed, anxious or depressed owing to the factors linked with the work, then the work quality will affect, at the same time the employee will end up with increased absenteeism. Employees that are affected due to the problems may react as they might be treated differently or even ignore it from admitting. It is seen that attitudes, both in accepting and handling mental and emotional wellbeing challenges, need a different approach. However, there should be flexible policies while dealing with organisational culture while making sure that employee wellbeing levels can be improved. Article by (Kramar 2013) [7] Reviews the important features of SHRM, also describes the sustainability while developing a linkage between sustainability and Human Resource Management. The paper drafts the important features of sustainable HRM as organisational requirements. This theory presents the expected outcomes of existing practices in the terms of short and the long term sustainable HRM framework. (Development 2018) [8] Research analysed how key elements like recruitment, L&D, Performance management etc., as part of sustainable HRM exhibits and impact on the organizational performance under the scenario of organizations setup. A comprehensive literature review (Randev 2019) [9] of available literature related to S-HRM shares a deeper understanding of sustainability. It also highlights the evolution of Sustainable HRM and its impact on employees, HR managers and the organisations. The review also establishes that the organisational success as role of HR practices. The high performance work setup and the policies for employee well-being eliminate harm to the employees while increasing the benefits of sustainable of organisation and employee well- being. While sharing details about the features of sustainable HRM (Stankevičiute and Savanevičiene 2018) [10] from an array of activities connecting sustainability and HRM confirms the fundamentals of corporate sustainability. The paper states some of the key characteristics of sustainable HRM as employee development profitability. "Architecture of Happiness" (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade 2005) [11] explains happiness as phenomena of positivity, satisfaction, and motivation composing together to drive human well-being, It strongly supports the thought sustainable well- being to be recognised as important factor resulting happiness. A quasi-experiment (Mills et al. 2007) [12] determined the results that a well grafted health promotion program leads to improving in employee's health as well as the performance asserting ROI. (Schultz et al. 2015) [13] A high perceived competencies and motivational work culture related employee well-being with effective practice of mindfulness resulting into assertive work conditions . (Qaisar, Mariam, & Ahmad) [14] study

indicates the thought that organization that failing taking measures towards employee wellness are less productive. Optimization of employee health results in improved employee engagement.

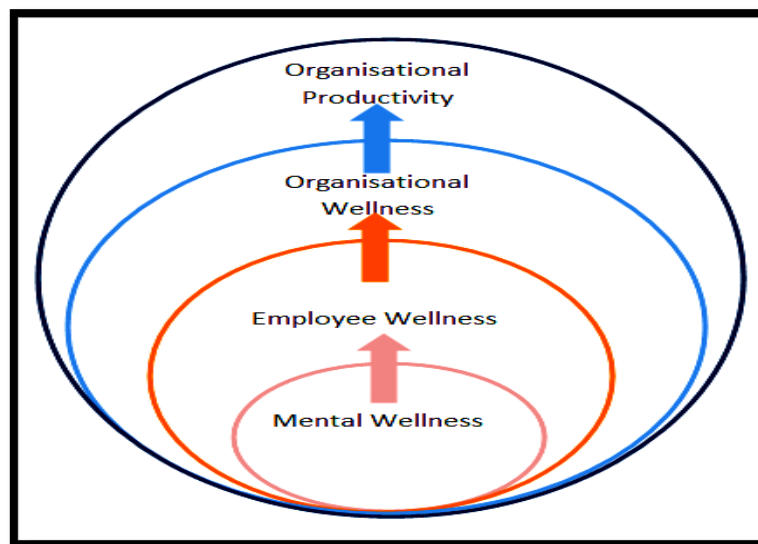
### **III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

(<https://www.understood.org/>, n.d.) [15] A report called “Mental Health: A Workforce Crisis” was released by The American Heart Association’s CEO Roundtable in regards with the relation between physical and mental health. This report recommended that organisations should provide comprehensive programs for addressing issues related mental health. The reported also commented on such programs are cost effective. By supporting employee mental health organisations are benefited by increased productivity, increased retention, decreased health issues. From a recent study by WHO surfaced out the fact that the count of people suffering from depression more is than 300 million globally. The count for people diagnosed with anxiety is 260 million. The study also provided the statistics for people living with both conditions too. The loss of global economy in productivity is \$1 trillion annually. Employees face many risk factors at the workplace including mental health due to poor health and safety policies; lack of emotional support; Stress due to working conditions; ambiguous roles, tasks and objectives, and; excessive workload. Some other ricks employees faces are poor interpersonal relations; physical and psychological bullying; harassment. Statistics that are available on employee mental health are an eye opener. In a study (Vindegaard and Benros 2020) [16] conducted on 43 employees indicated that only two studies evaluated patients with confirmed COVID-19 infection, whereas 41 evaluated the indirect effect of the pandemic. In (Vindegaard and Benros 2020) [16] studies conducted it was increased depression/depressive symptoms, psychological distress, anxiety and poor sleep quality was recorded in employees. Whereas the results in the studies that was conducted over general public, recorded lower psychological wellbeing and higher scores of anxiety and depression compared to before COVID-19. Research evaluating the direct neuropsychiatric consequences and the indirect effects on mental health is highly needed to improve treatment, mental health care planning and for preventive measures during potential subsequent pandemics. Organisations that ignore employee’s physical and mental wellbeing often eventually suffer loss of productivity. This is a result of low happiness, demotivation, low performance, poor organisational culture, high iteration rate, all adding to a bad and unhealthy organisational culture. The HR is the department which has a key role in the organization to understand, identify, select, hire and train a prospective manpower. Hence it can be stated that HR is the key resource of an organization that focuses on employee productivity and measures to enhance the standards. They also safeguard the organisation from issues that hampers its growth and sustainability. HR also is at forefront in educating or implementing the employee welfare programs for the well-being of both, the employee and the organization. HR also facilitates the organization to practice sustainable business solutions as it moves to a faster-growing environment. Some of the key roles of a HR are: recruitment, compensation benefits, statutory compliance, L&D, employee welfare. The HR department also assists organisations nurture their core values and ethics. Apart from the mandatory role the HR also takes up responsibilities that adds up value to the organization. These responsibilities are: prudent care of the employees, upscale employee skills, improve innovation at workplace, improve competitiveness, career development, these factors make entire HR complete and key asset in the organisation which focuses on organisational growth while implementing sustainable solutions. On reviewing these facts, it is required that

employee mental wellbeing needs to be improved with optimisation of emotional wellbeing and physical wellbeing that plays a key role in increasing productivity while motivating employee, increasing employee engagement with accelerated positivity.

#### IV. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

This paper proposes a model to identify the factors influencing Employee's Mental Wellness that leads to the overall organisational wellness in broader terms that adds up to the organisational productivity. The employee mental wellness depends on his emotional wellbeing, Physical Wellbeing. Employee's Mental Wellbeing which needs to be focused by HR to take efforts improving through effective utilisation of sustainable solutions through L&D strategies to derive favourable results that builds up the motivation, positivity, mindfulness. For having a productive work environment, the most crucial factor that has to be taken care from the employees' point of view the employee wellbeing. Corporates have taken steps to build a healthy workforce by offering healthcare programs. It is equally important that along with a disease free the workforce should also be mentally healthy. The PROWELLS theory is (<https://www.innovativeworkplaceinstitute.org/>, n.d.) [17] is a comprehensive workplace analytics that does and assessment of the organisational performance relatively with employee health and wellbeing.



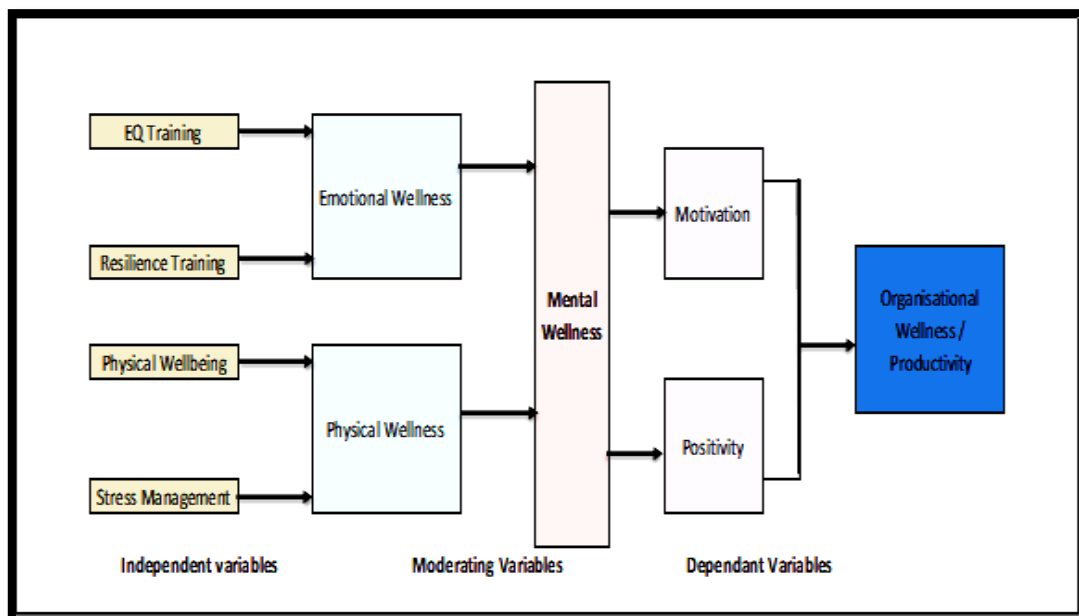
**Figure 1: Model Indicating Factors that Impacts the Organisational Wellness and in-Turn the Organisational Productivity**

It speaks about health and wellbeing factors that are measurable and exhibits proof of being influential to contribute towards organizational performance. Employee wellness can be fragmented into eight dimensions of wellness viz: emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, social and spiritual wellness. Keeping these factors in mind organisations need to work on the strategies of HRM while categorically roping in the sustainability tools for designing and delivering wellness strategy that will work towards uplifting the mental health of employees. This is when the human resource should step in to identify both the company as well as the employee's needs and facilitate them with the required resource for developing competencies adding value in brand building of the

organisation and employee’s wellbeing. This not only builds the brand of the organization but helps in the growth and wellbeing of the organization as well as the employee. The fig. 1 indicates that Mental Wellness leads in betterment of

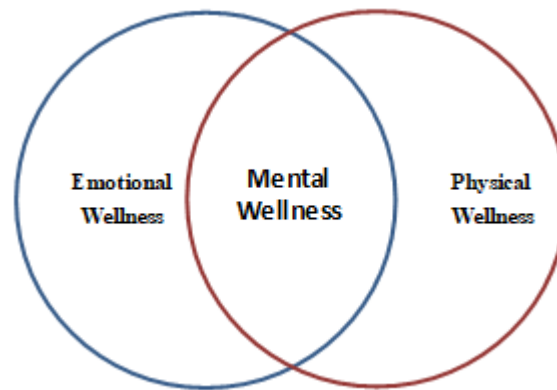
Based on this theory a conceptual model, ref fig. 2, has been framed that indicates the correlation between variables that creates an impact on the mental wellness and subsequently on the organisational productivity.

1. EQ and resilience have an impact on emotional wellness.
2. Physical wellbeing, managing stress and being mindful have impact physical wellness.
3. The result of better emotional and physical wellbeing has impact on employee mental health.
4. Mental Wellness has a direct impact on motivation and positivity.
5. Mental Wellness has significance impact on the organisational productivity.



**Figure 2: Linear Model Indicating the Correlation between Variables**

1. **Mental wellness:** Mental wellbeing of an individual is about the thoughts, feelings and the ability to cope with the day-to-day life challenges. Individuals’ experiences challenges at workplace that cause them feel stressed, demotivated, fatigue, anxiety. These factors affect their performance and hinders the productivity. It’s essential that individuals understand and manage these feelings to be able to: feel confident, motivated, positive, improved interpersonal relation, have a sense of purpose, work productively, manage stresses. The fig 3 indicates the factors that influence the Mental Wellness of individuals is the – **Emotional Wellbeing and Physical Wellbeing**. While managing these influencing factors affecting the employees and the organisation in return, the HR should strategically utilise the sustainable solutions to improve quality of Mental Well-being that results in benefiting the employee productivity and organisational growth. There are also factors that influence our mental wellbeing, which we can control.



**Figure 3: Model Indicating Emotional Wellness and Physical Wellness has a Direct Impact on the Mental Wellness of Employee**

**2. Emotional wellbeing:** When employees are stressed, burdened with work pressure, demotivated, drained out then their productivity is affected. Major factors affecting the workplace well-being includes too much screen time, mental stress, anxiety, poor physical health, lack of physical fitness, or improper work-life balance. Employee Emotional well-being is suffered. (positivepsychology.com, n.d.) [18] “It is very important to understand that emotional intelligence is not the opposite of intelligence, it is not the triumph of heart over the head – it is the unique intersection of both.” David Caruso. Usually the L&D Department of an organisation concentrates focuses solely on the skill development of the employees as per the need to get their job done; however, another important part of L&D along with skill development is a holistic development of the employees’ behavioural aspect at workplace. All L&D strategies should focus on developing employee’s well-being primarily to creates a long term, productive relationship with the organisation. Sustainable solutions that help uplifting of Emotional Wellbeing of the employees that L&D drives the employees to follow trainings on managing their:

- Emotional quotient
- Resilience.

**3. Emotional quotient training:** A person with high emotional quotient can accurately identify his own emotions and that of the others too. This ability to utilize emotions helps them in proactive thinking and problem-solving and manage teams. Emotional intelligence training comprises of knowledge and skills that are essential to understand the emotions of individuals. The emotional quotient of employee can be improved by giving insights of self-awareness and self-management. Training to improve emotional wellness, at individual level, focuses of developing and - Motivation, Confidence, Productivity, Commitment, Empathy, Communication skills, interpersonal skills. On the professional level the trainings are given to improve – develop emotional skills, understand the real-life techniques, leaders mastering the act of expressing their emotions on their subordinates, learning the techniques to react and respond to situations. Self-assessment and periodic feedbacks help the individuals to review and build a strong emotional wellness base.



- 4. Resilience training:** Resilience is the individual's ability to adapt well and recover from stress, trauma, tragedy. Less resilience behaviour leads to develop difficulties in handling stress resulting in anxiety and depression. One to one coaching with employees can reduce workplace stress and anxiety to increase their resilience. Individuals can be facilitated to develop resilience by learning to train one's attention on more-positive, reducing the negative thoughts, focus on meaningful aspects of life. Resilience training, focusing on emotional, cognitive, mental, physical and spiritual areas, results beneficial in boosting employee productivity and retention.
- 5. Physical wellbeing:** Physical Fitness Improving physical wellbeing means not only to be disease free, it's the efforts that an individual take to remain active, energetic, maintain a healthy lifestyle and vitality to function with ease. Sustainable HR needs to focus of office ergonomics and physical fitness of the employees to make sure there is no discomfit at the workplace which may lead to health issues and also promote importance of physical fitness among the employees to have active workforce by focusing on:

  - Physical Fitness
  - Stress Management
- 6. Physical fitness training:** The concept of physical wellbeing does not only encompass physical activity, but also eating habits, sleep patterns. With these elements, L&D team should aim to educate employees and equip them with the knowledge and skills required to develop healthy habits. Hence, L&D has to take lead in educating employees on challenges associated with sitting for longer hours, explain benefits of standing up and taking short walks around for a few minutes in the day at workplace, doing some simple stretches, taking stairs instead of lift, keep the activity level of employees that adds value to the physical fitness at workplace. To inculcate healthy eating habit in employee's provisions to pick a snack with high nutrition value to help them get required nutrients for the day, options to be made available to choose a healthy nutrient rich snack. This will help keeping employees' energy levels high and minds alert. L&D should share information and recommend employees to get quality sleep for minimum of 7 hours during the night that will help reduce sleep deprivation and fatigue keeping fitness levels of employees high for productive engagement at workplace. L&D should share tips for quality sleep at night - limiting time spent on laptops or mobiles and avoiding consumption of tea or coffee closer to bedtime. Physical activity, healthy eating habits, and getting quality sleep are essential factors to achieving a high level of physical wellbeing of employees.
- 7. Stress management:** Stress is defined as bodily or mental unrest that we caused due to physical, chemical, or emotional factors that may result in causing disease. Stress management is a technique the primarily aims at controlling stress levels of individuals, especially chronic stress, with the aim of improving day to day functioning. Mild Stress are always beneficial in producing results. Stress cannot be completely removed from our lives completely as stress is a part of normal life. It is also not advisable to do so. Instead, individuals need to master the art of managing stress by learning relaxation techniques along with some other techniques to manage stress so that one can have control over stress and minimise its effects on physical and mental wellbeing. L&D of the

organisations can take steps in promoting the stress management techniques. L&D can support employees to learn their roles and responsibilities in the organisational setup helping employees become more confident and capable in performing their roles. L&D can strategically promote culture knowledge sharing sessions to support employees learn the technique of managing stress and working towards a low-stress organisational culture.

## **V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The conceptual model reviews, fig 2, indicates factors that contribute towards the mental wellness of employees and recommends the efforts taken by L&D by effective implementation of sustainable HR tools. L&D interventions for self-awareness and self-management results in working on emotional wellness of employees. With the ability of controlling emotions, the employee experiences motivated, confident, committed. With coaching for resilience management employees are well equipped to give attention on more-positive thought while reducing the negative ones and focus on meaningful aspects of life. A strong cohesive team enables understand each other's emotions and maintains the group motivation and team creativity and productivity. Effective engagement of employees through ergonomics training encourages active participation in the ergonomics process offering work life convenience at the workplace that promotes productivity. Employees who are following a healthy lifestyle with effective engagement in in physical activity, healthy eating habits, and getting enough sleep achieve a high level of physical wellbeing thus being assertive and productive. Strategically managing stress helps employees to be more confident and capable in performing their roles in the low-stress organisational culture which supports employee and organisational growth. Practicing mindfulness regularly by employees promotes practicing gratitude, empathy, flow of the assertive thoughts, mindful eating. On a broader perspective the mental wellness of employee's wellness gets enriched resulting into a highly motivated, positive, engaged and productive. The overall effect of improved employee wellness results remarkably on the organisational wellness and its productivity. The correlation among the variables identified in this conceptual model showing dependant, independent variables can be tested through an empirical study wherein a detail questionnaire can be used as tool for data collection from a suitable population for further analysis and hypothesis testing.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

The present conceptual model focused on Employee Mental Wellness and measures to optimise Emotional wellbeing and Physical Wellbeing that plays a key role in increasing productivity while motivating employee, increasing employee engagement with accelerated positivity. It has been observed that with intervention of Learning and Development in implementing sustainable HR to provide solutions to overcome the behavioural challenges faced by employees to get a stress free productive working culture. The improvement in emotional and physical wellness results in boosting the moral, motivation and productivity of the employees a making them a high performing workforce. With the satisfied performance the employee is well engaged, committed, productive and contributing to the organisational development. The scope for future research is to understand the impact of Learning and Development in Sustainable HRM on other aspects of employee wellbeing like relationship, kindness, purpose, spirituality, philanthropy, financial wellness can be reviewed that can add value to the employee wellness and productivity.

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