

## **REINVENTING THE FUTURE OF WORK AND BUSINESS: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The post-Covid world is fraught with severe repercussions particularly psychological where human beings have been severely impacted both on the personal and professional fronts. We are staring at a mental health crisis which can be extremely debilitating in the long run and extremely detrimental to the growth of our economy. As we look at a new work culture emerging from a pandemic-stricken ambience we realize that it has undergone multifarious upheavals which as professionals in varied fields we are trying to come to terms with. Still combating the ravages wrought by this disease we are trying to rebuild our economy and also create an open dialogue through which we can negotiate the well-being of the employees in different fields who have continued to work throughout the pandemic. There has been trauma coupled with fear, anxiety, depression and angst which employees have tried to grapple with, cope with and ultimately find a solution to. The key to survival lies in the fact that the employers along with their employees need to develop a culture which will focus on self-care and collective psychological well-being. An attitude towards a holistic wellness and welfare of the workforce might be the solution to the problem.

Today we are looking at a world which is already trying to limp back to the “new normal” status with optimism and alacrity so that they can minimize the visible after effects of this pandemic. But what about those which are invisible? This paper is going to focus on the psychological impacts of this pandemic and the tentative emotions of apprehension and uncertainty which challenge our employees as they prepare to tackle the unseen challenges of a post-Covid world. It will also focus on strategies which can be implemented to ensure that this transition is seamless so that an environment of productivity, empowerment and care is created and enforced.

## **Introduction**

The post-Covid world is fraught with severe repercussions particularly psychological where human beings have been severely impacted both on the personal and professional fronts. We are staring at a mental health crisis, which can be extremely debilitating in the long run and extremely detrimental to the growth of our economy. The pandemic has ravaged our sense of selfhood and created cultural trauma narratives in which entire nations have shared feelings of grief and distress and engaged in acts of trying to come to terms with the 'new normal'. Nations and economies are staring at a bleak future as they have been attenuated and need to accustom themselves to this health crisis of incomparable magnitude. The infection has led to millions of deaths, crippling health care systems and plaguing business owners with no respite in view. The year of Covid- 19 will remain forever etched in our memories more so as organizations are trying to develop a culture which will focus on self-care and collective psychological well-being. Still combating the ravages wrought by this disease, employers and business owners are trying to rebuild our economy and also create an open dialogue through which we can negotiate the well-being of the employees in different fields who have continued to work throughout the pandemic. Organizations are being forced to think about the impending reality where a Darwinian universe has been created focussed on the survival of the fittest. To survive and thrive in

this new reality and to re-imagine and renegotiate the varied delivery models coupled with stratagems to measure and maintain productivity in a highly remote ambience is the order of the day. The challenges are multifarious, and the leaders have to make critical choices to create a future-focused workplace where crisis management will adequately prepare the workforce to explore, map and restructure this unparalleled dilemma which is closely associated with navigating the future of work and workplace related scenarios. Today we are looking at a world which is already trying to limp back to the "new normal" status with optimism and alacrity so that they can minimize the visible after effects of this pandemic. But what about those which are invisible?

This paper is going to focus on the psychological impacts of this pandemic and the tentative emotions of apprehension and uncertainty which challenge our employees as they prepare to tackle the unseen challenges of a post-Covid world. It will also focus on strategies which can be implemented to ensure that this transition is seamless so that an environment of productivity, empowerment and care is created and enforced.

## **Review of Literature**

Kurtz, J. Roger (Ed.). *Trauma and Literature*, 2018: This provides an overview of the genesis and growth of literary trauma theory recording the evolution of the concept of trauma

in relation to literary studies. It helps to focus on how psychological trauma generated through various situations can be dealt with in an effective way.

Edkins, Jenny. *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 2003: This explores how we remember traumatic events such as wars, famines, genocides and terrorism and question how it affects our mental health and the ways we can deal with them. It focusses on diagnosing the post-traumatic stress and the act of bearing witness.

The McKinsey Company Report, 2020 talks about the strategies which can be implemented by the leaders of a company to ensure that the economic activities of the company are successfully and safely relaunched. The Deloitte Company Report, 2020 focusses on the various aspects of Covid-19 and how it has impacted the functioning of a company during this global pandemic. It also talks about the steps and strategies that a company should take so that the workforce can return to their work environment in a safe and secure manner.

### **Case studies of Psychological disorders**

Abhishek Das, Manager, KPMG, talks about how he had to get his father treated for cancer during the lockdown period. His father resides in Odisha and he had to shift base to his native place from Gurugram and had to continue his 'work from home' too. He opines that as his job profile included interacting with clients on

their home turf he faced a tough time as virtual negotiations did not yield the desired result always as clients demanded physical interactions once the lockdown was relaxed. He faced sleepless nights and stress related disorders which led to binge eating and increased weight gain. It also made him feel worthless and ready to quit his job too. At times he felt he was facing a burnout and wanted to pursue some other vocation in his life. He was desperately searching for alternatives and was surrounded by a feeling of despondency and demotivation. In fact he had applied for a long leave from his company which was not granted on the grounds that he was already in his hometown and they needed him for some major projects which they were into talks with in Odisha. This further reinforced his mental illbeing and contributed to his psychological upheaval.

Dr. Sohini Singh, Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Biotechnology, also talks about the global pandemic and how it increased her uncertainty about her skill set and forced her to attune herself to the virtual world as part of the 'work from home' mandate. Saddled with two young children and living in a joint family it was quite difficult for her to manage her online classes and other household activities. She worked for long hours with no respite, preparing her lectures and performing household chores. She also had lots of stress as she could not reconcile her professional commitments with her personal requirements. She felt unworthy and hopeless and started

losing her confidence. She couldn't groom herself properly and that made her feel ill-prepared for the online platform. Besides that she felt she was not being a good mother because she was staying at home but not being able to focus on her children. She had labelled herself a failure and was ready to quit as her feeling of adequacy was destroyed by the uncertainty and challenges of her new identity.

Anindya Sanyal, Principal Consultant, Tata Consultancy Services, talks about the responsibility that comes with his position and how he had to shift base from London to India during the raging pandemic owing to ill-health of his father whom he lost subsequently. He had been unable to complete his project in London and so he had to keep on working at it in India. His worklife changed overnight with him trying to match London timings in India. He had to work late hours in the night and that affected his health. Less hours of sleep affected him mentally as he was perpetually in a bad mood and screamed and shouted at the smallest opportunity. His relationship with his family members suffered and almost reached a point of no return. He had to undergo counselling sessions at his therapist to restore some normalcy to the situation. He suffered from stress related disorders and was perpetually unhappy. His bouts of melancholia further pushed him into a traumatic state and he started displaying clinical symptoms of depression. He lost weight as he lost his appetite too and his hobbies took a backseat. He lost interest in all those activities which

relaxed him earlier. He was in fact thinking of quitting his job and taking a long break.

### **Understanding The Psychological Turmoil of the Employees**

Kick-starting the economy has led to a paradigm shift to virtual operations and digital platforms have mushroomed in varied sectors like education, healthcare, retail, and the like. It has generated employment, but it has destroyed millions of jobs too, leaving the public grappling with the question of their survival amidst an aura of insecurity and instability. This challenge of establishing the 'work from home' normal has redefined functional roles and created a global crisis unmatched in scale and impact. The physical repercussions of the pandemic will be dealt with eventually and innovative skill development will become an integral process in the restoration of normalcy in the new emerging reality. However, there has been trauma coupled with fear, anxiety, depression, and angst which employees have tried to grapple with, cope with and ultimately find a solution to. The quality of life has been compromised and a planned and coordinated approach might be the resolution of this trauma inflicted on the psyche of the individuals. They are unable to fathom this trauma as each of this is a singular experience and needs to be resolved uniquely. The violence of this psychological upheaval can lead to severe repercussions ranging from a loss of identity to a seclusion in a world of hurt and pain. It can disturb

or disrupt the very notion of existence and shatter the illusory temporal world of adequacy and well-being. Silencing this state of being unwell can lead to a troubled status of traumatic memory which might compromise and negate the efficiency and capability of the employees in the long run and ultimately affect the productivity of the company. Companies will fundamentally require rethinking their policies to accommodate the changed and affected mindset of their employees. Relegating the application of psychological theories to analyze the changed approach of the employees has been the prerogative of analysts where the masses affected give rise to a collective memory and identity. Jenny Edkins opines that the existence and welfare of an individual's life depends to a large extent on his surroundings-his family, kith and kin, ideals, and political community. She says that "existence relies not only on our personal survival as individual beings but also, in a very profound sense, on the continuance of the social order that gives our existence meaning and dignity: family, friends, political community, beliefs. If that order betrays us in some way, we may survive in the sense of continuing to live as physical beings, but the meaning of our existence is changed" (Trauma and the Memory of Politics, 4) The global pandemic has subverted the norms of existence and the individuals find it very difficult to exorcise the shock and surprise at having the norms of the social order changed and challenged. Providing succor, help, hope and faith to the

employees should be the outlook of any major business area as well as smaller companies too. The world of the employees is fraught with an incredulity and instability coupled with an incapability to normalize situations which are constantly spinning out of their control. Looking and investing in the psychological wellbeing of its employees will prove to be a major response by organizations in times of this crisis. Employers need to exercise hope and caution in the right amounts to ensure adequate motivation and reassurance to the employees. Health and safety stipulations should be in place to effectively tackle the crisis-hit disruptions. Revitalization of the world economy will occur if the global health system recovers quickly along with resilience and if we can capitalize on effectively defined and innovative organizational activities. The associated social, economic, and mental health shocks are varied, and a psychological readiness and alacrity is essential to enable individuals and organizations to build resilience and coping strategies.

### **Measures to Restore the Psychological cataclysm**

The following measures can be undertaken to ensure that employees have a psychological boost up and their mental health issues are dealt with in an appropriate manner.

i. We need to collectively bounce back and the courage, willingness, and the desire to achieve normalcy, rebuild our confidence should help

us to accommodate the trauma that has unnerved us in the face of the raging global pandemic. So, plans should be designed keeping in mind the psychosomatic wellbeing of the employees. The pause button had been pressed. To restart a solid framework for action needs to be defined which would require a proactive intervention of the leaders who should be capable of taking risks in this highly volatile environment. The focus should be on designing a framework which will accommodate the well-being of the employees on all fronts and pay attention to minute details which perturb them. Taking an example from the education sector it can be said that online classes was the need of the hour. Teachers and students underwent this transition in a fluid manner. But as educators are returning to campus life and students would be following suit too the management needs to understand and identify the insecurities, they are handling. They have already made a smooth transition to the virtual world and the classrooms have been redefined. The enthusiasm and zest of a physical classroom had been reduced to cold and clinical world of an online class. The raw and palpable emotion of a student-teacher interaction had been reduced to a staccato rhythm and the monotonous delivery of an artificial voice over a virtual platform. The world is still under the aegis of this disease and for a teacher the fear of contamination as well as conducting a physical and a virtual class simultaneously can be a challenge. Besides, they are used to several online platforms and

collaborative tools. Totally doing away with them like the days before the pandemic might make them feel handicapped. So, their fears should be allayed, and time and space should be allowed to them so that they can make this transition gracefully. Designing of course- works, assessment schedules and delivery patterns had undergone a sea change. To restore it to its original status might not be possible so some hand holding might be required at various stages for both the students as well as the teachers.

ii. Employees are in a kind of limbo. They are uncertain about their future and their return to work holds several challenges. Besides the time spent at 'working from home' has raised questions about their productivity and their requirement. Processes have been automated and this has led to indiscriminate slashing of workforce. A general air of demotivation and depression pervades the mindset of the employees. Online seminars and informal get-togethers can help assuage the fear of the employees to a great extent. It can also lead to appraisal of their performances from peer groups which can be followed by appreciation of their contribution even in these troubled times. An example from the corporate sector where we are talking about higher management whose evaluation is based on his ability to generate revenue will be an appropriate example to substantiate this statement. The employee whose productivity has been restricted because he has not been able to make a sales pitch or procure a bid had to

rely on the virtual world to increase his contact base or to negotiate such contracts. It had confined his economic credibility to the company and had also restricted his skillset to mere conversations and negotiations on online platforms. It had destroyed the vibrancy of a monetary negotiation as well as the adrenaline rush that accompanies a kill. It had challenged his charisma which was an intrinsic component of his personality which allowed him to create a niche for himself. It had changed his equation with the processes and methods he had believed in. the pandemic had made him resort to online devices and approaches which took ages to master and even longer to bear fruit. It had made the employee doubt his ability and the employer his performance. A return to the previous setup will be tedious keeping in mind several restrictions which are still imposed on the mass as quarantine and restrictive measures.

iii. Frequency of motivational speeches and incentives like 'Employee of the Month' or 'Star Performer' could be introduced to lift the employees from their state of despondency and reluctance and cheer them up so that they are eager to achieve that status and consequently contribute more for the welfare of the organization. The general mood that prevails in an organization is not one of alacrity and spontaneity. To err is fine, to fail is not fatal but to lose the courage to continue would be detrimental to their success should be the motto for their survival. Organizations should

help employees achieve meaningful milestones as this will help to establish how confident and committed the employees are. Interaction between employees of different branches or separate departments of the organization should be ensured to allow free flow of information which will further enhance the morale of the employees. Businesses should allow their employees to maintain a sense of purpose and possibility. Competitions can be held amongst employees where they can be asked to come up with new ideas as to how they can motivate their peer groups. These ideas can be implemented, and the best idea can be rewarded too. This will renew confidence of the employees and assure them about their productivity and the concern of the employers about their welfare and well-being.

iv. To ensure the mental comfort of the employees the businesses should allow them to embrace the future of work culture. The workforce has learnt to complete tasks remotely using digital communication and collaboration tools. The decline in the requirement of repetitive and manual tasks and a surge in the need for analytical and technical support requires a substantial investment in upgrading the skills of the existing workforce. Along with that it is essential that the employers understand the required mindset shift that is necessary to accommodate this adjustment. The workforce is navigating uncertainties and they are wary of the implications that this pandemic has subjected them too. Trust in the intention of

the employers needs to be embedded in them to enable a healthy mind-frame to negotiate the challenges that they are facing in this inhospitable environment.

Getting back to work after remaining cooped up for the entire period of the pandemic has raised questions about experiencing this confinement as an ordeal which has wrought havoc with the mental health of the employees. This has generated concerns which can lead to shattering of a coherent sense of self. This experience of a psychological setback can disallow the mind to assimilate and integrate the experience into a coherent structure. It is thus necessary to reinstate a logic or meaning and a distinct route for all. The organization should also be able to ascertain and map well-being at the workplace and perceive signals of fragility. A fellow feeling combined with a transparency and empathy that developed during the period of lockdown should be sustained to perpetuate the camaraderie. Predominating the psyche of the individuals is the pain that is associated with their loss of a normal way of life and their inability to correct that loss and restore normalcy to the situation. Employees in all sectors have made gallant and valiant exertions to acclimatize themselves and handle the escalating novel demands against constricted and restrictive targets. Orchestrating this colossal and stupendous adjustment to remote labor for employees has been taxing and cumbersome to some extent. Categorizing the reasons for the

psychological upheavals of the employees would lead us to confront our roles in the production and experience of the mental unrest. In fact, coming to terms with a 'new normal' redefining the characteristics of a professional life leads to the violation of the existing and familiar frames of reference. It generates innate tensions and some unanswered issues contest and upset the employees' ability to comprehend and explicate this inner turmoil in the modern world. A severe psychological setback or upheaval can be the result of a global pandemic and it can lead to an altered identity. Jenny Edkins says "...We become who we are by finding our place within the social order and family structures into which we are born" (Trauma and the Memory of Politics 11) Research shows that catastrophic and colossal events like a war, tsunami, earthquake, genocides can have a dire implication on a community. Reconstructing, evaluating, and recreating the palimpsest of human sorrow and woe have never focused on the fractured and sporadic psychological impact that is linked to theories of subjectivity and identity formation. The interaction of the individual with his communal culture is intrinsic to the formation of his identity and the manifestation of the identity crisis after an intense trauma suffered. The fragmentation of consciousness can destabilize the happiness in one's life as this is linked to a set of social indicators amongst which a man's professional life is very significant. Alteration of the stability and the known ambience of the professional world can lead to the

individual craving for the restoration of that sense of security in his life.

**Conclusion:** It is the duty of every organization, business setup and their leaders to design and devise methods which will restore normalcy in the lives of their employees, motivate and encourage them, give them a morale boost up and help them to increase their productivity. People generally abhor talking about their mental health as they feel that they are going to be ostracized in society and they would be demeaned and labelled as losers. But it should be kept in mind that an employee can benefit his employer only if his comprehensive outlook towards life is positive and it

is reinforced with a sense of adequacy in his abilities. The employee needs to keep himself optimistic and fire himself with a zeal and a keen sense of achievement. He should exude a sense of calmness and alertness coupled with a sense of responsibility towards his organization. He should understand that, however minimal his contribution might be towards the development and progress of his organization, yet it cannot be ignored because each employee has a well-defined role and in an important cog in the wheels of his company. The cohesiveness and unified effort of all the employees will lead the organization forward which will ultimately lead to the advancement of the economy.

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# EMPLOYEE AND WORK ENGAGEMENT: AN ANSWER TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE HANDLOOM INDUSTRY IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

Handloom has been a vintage industry. Its roots can be dated back to the early stages of human civilization. Over time the handloom sector has endured various challenges and setbacks. Some of the major challenges faced have been due to the advancement of technological know-how and mechanizing of the production process. Lack of modernization, migration of workers to other fields have been some of the other problems faced by this industry. All these problems have left a huge impact on the workforce or employees engaged in this industry and hence the problems have become graver. On the other hand, employee engagement and work engagement, in particular, have been recognized to influence the work performance of the employees as well as the overall performance of the organization. With this paper, we will try and understand how work engagement and employee engagement can aid the handloom industry to tackle its problems.

**Keywords:** Employee Engagement, Work engagement, Organizational Performance, Handloom Industry, Textile Industry