

The workplace as a micro-environment for creating a well-being economy

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Authors and contributors



Anne Cabot-Alletzhauser



Shelley van der Westhuizen



Riaan Singh



Malcolm Ray



Myrna Sachs



Anton Engelbrecht



Jessica Matthysen



Amanda Khoza



Sibongile Vilakazi



Rudie Shepherd



Ryan Knipe

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The first section focuses on how we can create the well-being workplace. Building up to this well-being workplace demands that we pull back the multiple layers of social dynamics that exist within the workplace to test if all is well. Meeting the multiple challenges of transformation, diversity and inclusion, and social coherence poses tremendous complexity. Here, we identify what we believe the industry hasn't covered adequately in previous discussions or models of well-being (See *Benefits Barometers* 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017).

Workplace well-being is a concept that has begun to gain traction with both employers and financial services providers. The section on financial well-being suggests that, because of a range of potential design flaws, many of these programmes may not deliver the kind of outcomes individuals need. It's time we start doing a more thorough job of monitoring their impact.

Something that will make a critical difference here is enhancing the onboarding experience of a new employee so that well-being becomes an integral part of the agreement with employees, ensuring they can maintain ongoing productivity.

More importantly, if well-being programmes can move beyond simply solving for individual welfare and potentially build up to the well-being workplace, then we can create the direct linkages of the well-being economy with the workplace, community and then, finally, the individual that their families.

The third segment on creating a well-being workplace starts with a range of preventative interventions that allow employers to be more proactive when it comes to managing the everyday work and personal crises that can derail employee productivity. Because none of these 'small disturbances' really points to significant or systemic issues, we tend to underestimate the significant role they could play in creating a 'first line of defence' to emotional well-being.

The article on mental health in the workplace adds to the growing body of work on well-being in the workplace by tackling the thorny issue of mental health. Why is this such a 'no-go zone' for employers, and how we can go significantly beyond the current reliance on medical aid schemes, employee engagement programmes and disability insurance to deliver a viable support system? A 'postcard' from an employee reminds us of another sensitive 'no-go' area: grief in the workplace.

Diversity, gender equality and transformation are introduced by a 'postcard' from an employee which reminds us that if employers approach culture from an inauthentic or insincere place, employees will cynically see these efforts as little more than tick-box exercises. These three articles discuss issues that are fundamental to creating a well-being workplace that supports the broader societal imperatives for South Africa:

how employers can set the standard for diversity and inclusion, gender equality and transformation through a culture that is both relatable and effective. The narrative here is less about emphasising why these factors are important – they are fundamental to all South African companies – and more about why so little traction has been gained when these initiatives are addressed separately.

Engagement is another core area for a well-being workplace: how the workplace becomes a continuous learning environment where skills development for the workplace of the future are a paramount focus.

Finally, in the last article, we use the challenge of skills development to illustrate how an integrated process can not only provide far greater efficiencies in terms of funding and administration, but also ensure that employers, employees and policymakers all get what they need out of such incentivised programmes. Structured optimally, these programmes can also significantly contribute to an employer’s enterprise development and procurement policy initiatives.

