



EMPLOYEE WELLNESS PROGRAMMES FOR IMPROVED PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Humans are compelled to work to have financial security, as well as to achieve purpose, fulfillment, and connections with other workers who realize lower-level workplace requirements like peer group affiliation, peer approval, and interpersonal engagement. Due to the rigorous nature of the office, there are several elements, like stress, covid-19, work pressure, etc., that may interfere with relationships, teamwork, and alliances between people. Employees may experience mental, emotional, and psychological problems because of this condition, which causes emotional stress that has an impact on their general health. These factors are incorporated into workplace employee wellness programmes (EWPs) as part of human resource management. Additionally, the EWP is linked to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, which calls for improved health and wellness. The article's goal is to examine obstacles to SDG 3 implementation and offer various organizational measures that must be put in place to guarantee workplace wellbeing for employees. The qualitative research methodology is used to gather pertinent data. The findings demonstrate that the successful implementation of EWP may help both employers and employees manage wellness to maintain levels of employee performance and, consequently, organizational productivity. The study offers policy recommendations considering the need for organizations and employees, both individually and collectively, to find ways to look after their health (physical wellness), behaviour (emotional and psychological wellness), and remain connected to themselves and the world. The study also offers ways to de-stress through exercise, yoga, prayer, meditation, online help groups, virtual consultations, etc. incorporating spiritual wellness.

Keywords: *Covid-19, employee wellness, South Africa, sustainable development goal 3.*

1. INTRODUCTION

A person's capacity to react to events at work and organizational factors both have an impact on employee wellness. According to Grobler, Joubert, and Van Niekerk (2014:54), the environment's impact on people and their abilities has a significant impact on employee health. Employee wellness, according to Purcell (2016), is known to concentrate more on the physical components of the job but incorporates both the physical and the less-discussed mental parts. This covers aspects of social and cultural diversity that influence the working environment. Therefore, the organizational culture must be accommodative of different cultures, values, and beliefs as well as welcoming employees from different ethnic groups. This acceptance also fits into the wellness expectations at work.

Employees spend most of their time at work, so they expect to be happy and welcoming. This aspect is incorporated in employee wellness that is defined as a person's level of happiness in all facets of their life, according to Bumhira, Musara & Nzonzo (2017), or the degree to which they are authentic, connected to others and the world, and find meaning in their work and lives (Johri & Misra, 2014, cited in Bumhira et al., 2017:223). The ability to be happy must follow employees from work to home and vice versa. This level of wellness will have a positive overall impact on employees, who will then always be content and productive. This feeling is supported by Spence (2020:12) who also stated that healthy workers are happier workers, and happy workers are engaged and productive workers, all of which are advantageous to the business. Additionally, it is also important to consider that employee-centric organizations are the only ones that can approach the concept of employee wellness from a holistic standpoint to fully understand it (Eatough, 2022:2). These organisations make investments in wellness initiatives to make sure that workers show up for work and don't miss time with their families. Employees may feel emotionally and psychologically satisfied by this warm and comfortable and welcoming environment. This may also support the Maslow's Need Hierarchy theory, which emphasizes that employees seek acceptance to satisfy their basic needs at work.

Activities and programmes aimed at enhancing employee health and wellbeing are included in employee wellness. The primary means by which an employer can assist staff in reducing burnout, fostering relationships, managing stress, and improving productivity is by placing a high priority on their well-being (Eatough, 2022:2). To fully comprehend the idea, it must be divided into three domains: social, mental, and physical. These domains are evaluated using various components, including emotional wellbeing, social wellbeing, cognitive wellbeing, physical fitness, physical comfort, physical nourishment, and environmental wellbeing (Makhanya, 2021: 52). Employees are starting to focus on various measures to look presentable in today's highly demanding and changing workplace, emphasizing on improving their professional appearances, enhancing communication skills, gaining computer competency, advancing educational qualifications, and registering for various courses linking to their portfolios to succeed and climb the ladder of success through merit. This has put a lot of pressure on employees to compete with one another and occasionally with themselves to stay ahead of the rat race. Because of how deeply this competitiveness is being ingrained, employees are carrying the stress from work home, which has a negative impact on their relationships and family lives. A quick-growing trend is having people spend time on their phones or computers posting updates about their accomplishments on social media sites, when they could have been spending that time telling their family members stories. Their energy levels are being depleted by this pressure-driven lifestyle, both consciously and unconsciously. Most employees are unaware of the long-term effects of such a technologically based lifestyle, and slowly their behavior and attitudes began to reflect this unhappiness. The EWP may help employees create a work-life balance schedule, and this awareness may help them regain happiness, lead balanced lives, and separate their personal and professional lives for overall wellness. It was therefore emphasized by Chapman (2016:15) that EWPs enable employees to take control of their physical, mental, and emotional health, ensuring that they are fully engaged and motivated, and fostering an effective workplace culture in which employees are fully present.

Employee engagement is a happy, contented mindset that is focused on one's work and is characterized by vigor, dedication, and immersion. Engagement is referred to as a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state rather than a fleeting and specific one (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002; Giurge, & Bohns, 2020, cited in Duran & Sanchez, 2021:176). This affective-cognitive state is not focused on any specific object, event, person, or behaviour. Since these definitions incorporate into employee wellness the aspects of work-life balance, stress management, mental health, fitness, and nutrition; and view employee wellness as a holistic process involving the environment, personal psychological capital, and experiences, they were used in this study.

Organizations implement employee wellness programmes (EWPs), which are initiatives that employers provide for their employees in some capacity to focus on most issues related to their health. These are viewed as benefits to demonstrate to the workforce the organization's concern for them (Makhanya, 2021: 60). Martinez-Lemos (2015:21) defines an EWP as a collection of organizational, educational, and environmental wellness programmes implemented by organizations to assist employees in enhancing their health. On the other hand, according to Hiller, Fawell, Cann, and Shepard (2005:55), EWP refers to all strategies, action plans, and techniques used to improve employees' physical, emotional, and mental health to ensure a productive workforce. Additionally, EWP is essential in providing training on health and safety awareness and ensuring compliance by setting a good example of conduct (Hiller et al., 2005:55). No company is compelled to develop employee wellness plans or programmes (Haywood & Wright, 2019: 52), however, some organizations embrace the need of wellness at workplace, and may outsource their EWPs, while others provide and manage them themselves (Haywood & Wright, 2019: 52). Although one's physical and mental health are important components of their well-being, it's important to keep in mind that other factors, such as the employee's workload, working hours, and supervisor's behaviour, can also have an impact (Steinman, 2008, cited in Bumhira et al., 2017:222). Employee health, which has an impact on the entire organization, is crucial because organizational success is the sum of everyone's efforts within the organization, as well as the employees' wellness and the workplace environment (Field and Louw, 2012, cited in Bumhira et al., 2017:222). However, it is also crucial that HR maintains a record of work allocation and workload, measures against the established key performance areas (KPA) and makes



sure that the workload is evenly distributed at both horizontal and hierarchical levels. Subordinates can rate their supervisors' levels of communication, behaviour, and attitude through a performance appraisal that can be incorporated into a performance management system. As a result, the supervisors might be able to put aside their own prejudices and concentrate on achieving the KPAs as a group. Collegiality in this manner may contribute to wellness and increase employee and organizational productivity. To inform supervisors and subordinates about the Maslow Need Hierarchy theory and its implications at work that may improve employee wellness, workplace wellness, and prevent any forms of conflict and stress caused between supervisors and subordinates, the HR may organize workshops or departmental sessions. Therefore, it is appropriate to view stress management and conflict resolution as essential components of EWPs.

The importance of these programmes was made clear by the fact that in the state where we were dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, one example of an employee health and wellness programme was offering a vaccination clinic within the workplace so that employees can feel more valued, or something as simple as health screenings (Duran & Sanchez, 2021:176), and this could still be in operation during the post-Covid period. Since they are customized to a company's goals, wellness programmes have no right or wrong options. The same may be true in the public sector if employees attend and are willing to engage in such programmes (Duran & Sanchez, 2021: 176–180). Workers are feeling a great deal of uncertainty because of the Covid-19 health crisis. Additionally, many businesses began prioritizing employee psychological needs lower to compensate for business losses brought on by lockdowns (Kumar, 2021, cited in Duran & Sanchez, 2021:176), which is endangering employee engagement and wellbeing. However, for a company to remain healthy during a pandemic, organizational agility and resilience are needed, and this calls for skilled and resilient employees, making employee engagement crucial (Kumar, 2021; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; cited in Duran & Sanchez, 2021:176). Covid-19 has imparted invaluable lessons on the value of life. The value of employees has been recognized by organizations, and during the pandemic, steps were taken to meet their needs for safety. To maintain social distance, employees were either working from home or were given permission to work alone for a set number of hours following the lockdown phase. This arrangement had also produced two distinct thought-based groups, one of which felt comfortable working from home, particularly women who could manage family responsibilities and were content to spend time with their kids and spouses. Due to the loss of human interaction, the other group experienced emotional and psychological depression, which had an impact on their mental health as well. Through EWP analysis, organizations may consider the beneficial effects of the arrangements taken during pandemic to assist employees. HR may then plan for these benefits by allowing employees to work flexible hours, online or remotely, or by reducing working days or hours, as permitted and in line with organizational policies. But this arrangement is still up for debate, and not all sectors can benefit from it. Future research on organizations adjusting their policies to accommodate flexible work schedules could be useful for practitioners, other employers, and workers.

The article uses programme theory-driven evaluation as the study's theoretical foundation. In their 2012 study, 'A theory-driven evaluation of a wellness initiative', Field and Louw provide justification for the strategy by highlighting the dual goals of programme theory-driven evaluation. The program theory is first gleaned from the program's stakeholders, and then the evaluator determines whether this theory is tenable and sensible. Accordingly, the main goals of theory evaluation are to comprehend the nature of the program, including its purpose and design (Donaldson & Gooler, 2003, cited in Field & Louw, 2012:2), and then to assess the model's consistency with prior empirical data and social science research to determine its plausibility (Reynolds, 1998, cited in Field & Louw, 2012:2). In other words, conducting a theory evaluation would inform the evaluator and stakeholders as to whether the program could be expected to achieve its objectives, according to Field and Louw (2012:2).

The article examines EWPs in the context of South Africa and emphasizes the significance of what was seen during Covid-19. Due to the significant impact some of the measures had on employee wellness and performance, they can now be maintained during the post-Covid period.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a qualitative research approach. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005 cited in Greýling, 2014:18; and adapted by Nhlapo, 2020:23) state, the open-ended nature of the qualitative research project leads to a perpetual resistance against attempts to impose a single, ‘umbrella’ paradigm over the entire project. Denzin and Lincoln (2005 cited in Greýling, 2014:18; Nhlapo, 2020:23-24) further explain that qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary, and sometimes counter-disciplinary field, it crosscuts the humanities, social sciences and physical sciences and is many things simultaneously. In this study, the qualitative research is considered significant as it ‘seeks to develop an in-depth understanding [and] views social phenomena holistically’ (in Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020:33; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2021:1; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023:2061).

The information is compiled using literature review that, is a summative description of what had been published on a given subject matter (Dudovskiy, 2021:1; Mudavanhu, 2017:190; cited in Soga, 2022:50). A literature review forms part of the process of answering research questions, in addition to identifying critical arguments and gaps that justify further enquiry (Snyder, 2019:363; cited in Soga, 2022:50). The secondary sources used to compile literature for review include books, journal articles, newspaper articles, etc. on the topics related to EWP, SDG3, employee wellness and performance.

The information was analysed using conceptual analysis, that according to Furner (2006; and Nhlapo, 2020, in Makhubu, 2021:10; cited in Jansen & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023:1982) is a technique that treats concepts as classes of objects, events, properties, or relationships. The technique involves precisely defining the meaning of a given concept by identifying and specifying the conditions under which any entity or phenomenon is (or could be) classified under the concept in question.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The article explores some of the significant discussions as stated below.

3.1 EMPLOYEE WELLNESS IS LINKED TO EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

The relationship between employee wellness and performance suggests that when employee wellness increases, so does employee performance. To put it another way, greater employee happiness is associated with greater morale, which results in increased output (Strauss, 1968:2, also refer to Jack, 2023:2). Employee wellness includes all aspects of wellbeing, including physical, mental, financial, spiritual, and social wellness. Employee happiness drives productivity (Strauss, 1968:2, also refer to Jack, 2023:2). Amstrong (2014) asserts that the goal of all human resource management is to help the organization and its employees perform at a high level. This goal is accomplished with the aid of HR specialists, who work to enhance organizational capability, or the organization's ability to perform well and thus achieve its goals and collaborate with line managers to meet performance targets (Amstrong, 2014:43). According to Stajkovic and Luthans (2020:76), employees who are in good health and are content with their lives work much better as a result. Employees can perform their best work and take part in organizational meetings when they are physically, psychologically, and spiritually fit. It was supported with a statement that a style of life geared toward achieving optimal health and well-being is what Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2000: 252, referenced in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2017:146) refer to as the wellness concept. The same notion was carried by Bloom and Canning (2018:23), who stated that EWPs support employees who are having performance issues. Employee success is influenced by both internal and external factors, including personality, work environment, abilities, education, and rewards. Employee wellness fosters positive work motivation, cohesion among coworkers, and a sense of roundedness among employees, according to Bloom and Canning (2018:23). It was emphasized by Bloom and Canning (2018:23) that when workers are inspired and grounded, performance is enhanced and teamwork results. EWPs seek to improve both the general health and performance of employees. Additionally, according to the authors (Myers et al., 2000: 252, cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2017:146), wellness is a holistic approach in which the mind, body, and spirit are purposefully interwoven with the aim of enjoying life more completely. They list six components of wellness: social, occupational, emotional, intellectual, and physical. All these factors are crucial and interrelated (Yukon Government, 2014). In a similar vein, Dr. Bill Hettler, co-founder of the National Wellness Institute (NWI), outlines a



six-dimensional wellness model that takes occupational, physical, social, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional wellness into account (National Wellness Institute, 1976, cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2017:146–147). The aim is to provide holistic wellness to employees for improved performance and productivity.

3.2 EMPLOYEE WELLNESS IS LINKED TO SDG 3

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were introduced at the 2012 Rio de Janeiro United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. The purpose of this conference was to develop a set of global goals that would address the pressing environmental, political, and economic issues facing the entire world (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016:7). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were adopted in 2000 to combat the humiliation of poverty, are replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNDP, 2016:7). There are five key areas of concern, also known as the 5 P's, which stand for 'People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships', according to a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly and cited in Morton, Pencheon, and Squires (2017). Beyond that, the objectives aimed to offer a critically needed framework that would be politically and scientifically supported by all communities (Morton et al., 2017: 82). The SDG 3 is related to the 'People' component because it aims to enhance employee wellness in workplaces. The goal of SDG 3 is to promote wellbeing and good health. By implementing comprehensive, research-based strategies, the goal is to assist organisations in creating a diverse wellbeing culture that fosters good health both at work and elsewhere (Community Business, 2023:1).

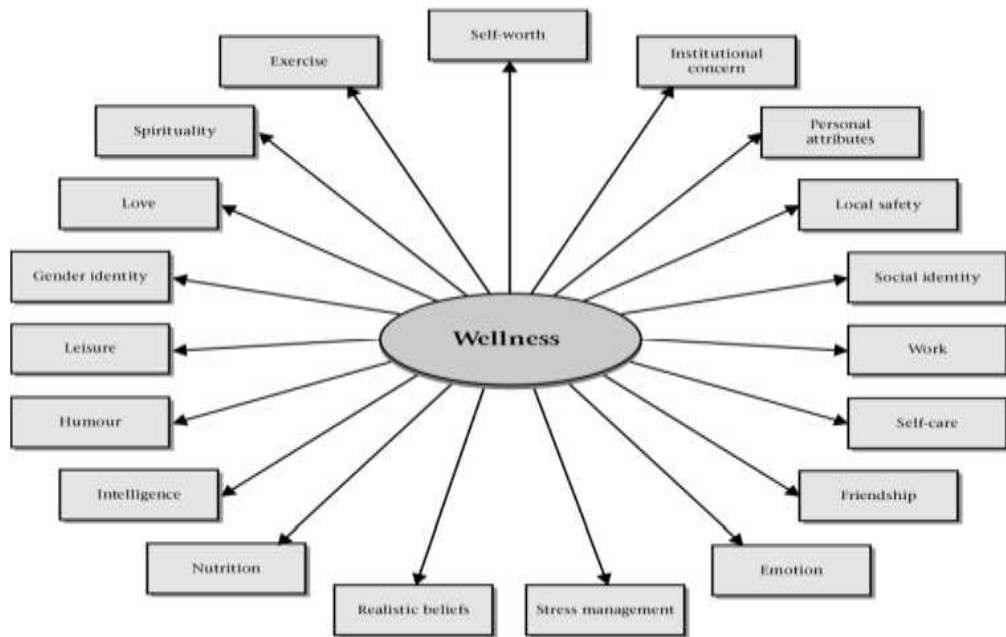
3.3 EMPLOYEE WELLNESS PROGRAMMES ARE LINKED TO EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Lower employee performance may result from a variety of factors. These elements may include stress, work demands, professional pressure, family obligations, and workplace dynamics, to name a few. The reasons may also include a lack of human resource practices, ineffective workplace behavioural and human relations strategies, low morale, low esteem, unsuitable work hours, a lack of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors, etc. Although the factors may differ from one organization to another, their prevalence may have a negative impact on employee performance. To improve their wellbeing and increase their productivity at work, strategic role players at lower organizational hierarchical levels and subordinates may receive help from the EWPs. Wein (2019:30) added that wellness programmes, which encourage employee loyalty, also help with employee retention. Allen (2020:13) asserts that productive employees are more likely to eat well and exercise frequently. In turn, they are happier and more productive.

Global corporations like Apple, Facebook, and Google provide amazing wellness benefits to their staff in the form of top-notch wellness facilities that offer on-site laundry services, wholesome meals, nap areas, and massages, among other things, at no cost (Zhang, 2018, cited in Makhanya, 2021:29). The instances demonstrate how employees could gain significant advantages that would help them perform better and help them deal with challenges at work (Makhanya, 2021:29).

The article uses the 'holistic wellness model' as a strategy that ensures employee performance in a balanced, happy, and fulfilling environment, see Figure 1.

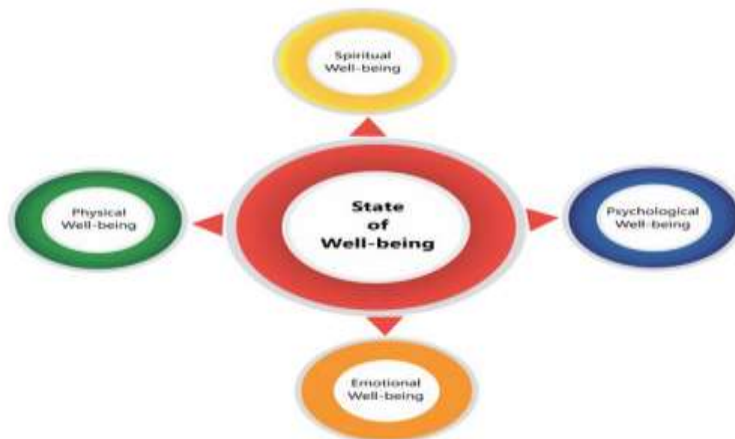
Figure 1: Holistic Wellness Model



Source: Adapted from Els, and de la Rey, 2006, cited in Dube, 2020:22

The holistic wellness model contributes to the study by giving an in-depth comprehension of the idea of wellness in the workplace; and it involves a variety of components of the construct of wellness (Dube, 2020:22). The components cover all aspects of wellness, such as: physical wellness (self-care, nutrition, exercise); emotional wellness (personal attributes, friendship, emotion, love, intelligence), psychological wellness (self-worth, social identity, humour); occupational wellness (local safety, work, stress management, realistic beliefs, leisure, gender identity), spiritual wellness (spirituality). The model may assist employees to achieve wellness at all levels, as per the PERMA theory, shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: The PERMA model



Source: Dube, 2020:27.

The achievement of all aspects of wellness may assist employees to realise PERMA that is positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Dube, 2020:27). The logic of the figure is supported by studies conducted by Vyas-Doorgapersad and Surujlal in 2014 and 2015. According to studies, organizations can also think of alternative strategies to reduce employee



stress and boost workplace productivity. A study by Vyas-Doorgapersad and Surujlal (2014) investigates how to include yoga and meditation in workplace spiritual wellness programmes. Authors used the work of Ban and Tomescu (2008: 239, cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad & Surujlal, 2014:268) who stated that the term 'wellness' is typically used to refer to a harmonious state of mind, body, and spirit that produces a sense of general wellbeing. Since Halbert Dunn first used the term 'high-level wellness' in the 1950s, based on a series of lectures at a Unitarian Universalist Church in Arlington, Virginia, in the United States, it has been used in relation to alternative medicines. Based on this understanding authors Vyas-Doorgapersad & Surujlal (2014:268) emphasized the need of yoga and meditation highlighting that the goals of yogic paths are to bring about balance within and between the body, mind, and soul; to improve inner strength; to lessen stress; to encourage self-healing; and to improve concentration, focus, remove bad behaviour patterns, develop clarity in thinking, and remove negative thought patterns. These essential benefits are crucial for both men and women who deal with the pressures of work along with physical, emotional, and psychological stresses.

Vyas-Doorgapersad & Surujlal advanced their study in 2015 stressing more on spiritual wellness. Due to lack of clarity, individual biases, and a variety of religious beliefs, the concept of spirituality at work is not a demanding theme and thus has not been empirically explored. Accordingly, the authors define spirituality and spiritual wellness as a way of life that involves finding meaning, bringing purpose to one's life, and leading a balanced lifestyle (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Surujlal, 2015:6686). To harmonize body, mind, and soul, to have meaningful conversations with clarity of thought, to create a unified focus, and to get rid of bad habits and attitudes, one should pursue a spiritual wellness path. These essential advantages are crucial for both men and women who experience stress at work. Thus, the study proposes the utilization of complementary and alternative therapies for workplace wellness in the employment sector from a gender perspective, highlighting the importance of these therapies for increased productivity. Yoga, meditation, acupuncture, energy healing, aromatherapy, essential oil therapy, reiki, ayurvedic medicine, homeopathy, light healing, sound healing, and color healing are a few examples of alternative therapies (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Surujlal, 2015:6686). The aspect of incorporating spiritual wellness in EWP is a matter of further discussion.

4. CONCLUSION

The health and wellness of the workforce is of utmost importance to the organization. As a result, when defining employee wellness, organizations concentrated primarily on health, wellness dimensions, and beneficial work influences. EWP seeks to advance employee performance and wellness. On the other hand, employee performance is directly impacted by employee wellness. Employee wellness programmes can help organizations retain healthy workers by preparing their workforce to successfully navigate changes and challenges in both their personal and professional lives. Organizations must monitor employee wellness programmes to effectively manage employee wellness in their workplaces. Employers must organize workshops, utilize surveys on which workers can provide opinions/feedback and be able to list the physical, emotional, and mental health difficulties they are experiencing, hampering their work performance. By doing this, it can be determined how many workers are affected by negative wellness issues and plan one-on-one discussion sessions, collective awareness campaigns that will help employees perform better at work. Organizations may outsource personal trainers, psychologists, life coaches, health and wellness coaches, life strategists who will be able to offer counseling to employees and assist them to cope up with wellness challenges, and help them to unravel strategies to cope, de-stress, and be productive again. Organizations must also educate their employees about wellness and encourage them to participate in wellness sessions and events. If these steps are taken, there is a chance that employees will feel content, safe, and valued, and their work may become more performance-based, as emphasized by Eatough (2022:3) in figure 3.

Figure 3: The outcome of EWP at workplace



Employees that are happy and healthy can be higher in productivity, engage better, avoid leaving work hence have lower turnover, and create better organization culture. The outcome of the EWPs at the workplace is to have employees that are happy and healthy. This level of positive wellness may result in increased productivity through improved employee performance.

5. AREA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), which was founded in 1935, have a long-shared history. The first programs were known as Occupational Alcoholism Programmes (OAPs) and were designed to assist families dealing with alcohol-related issues like absenteeism, declining performance, and the consequent impairment of the labor force (Dickman & Challenger, 2003:80). Employee Enhancement Programmes (EEPs), which focused on stress management, holistic health ideas, and issues like smoking, overeating, and overworking, replaced the previous approach to employee health and wellness in the 1980s (Dickman & Challenger, 2003). It was in 1986 that South Africa increasingly acknowledged the EAP (Pillay & Terblanche, 2012:231). Thereafter various legislative frameworks were introduced to ensure the implementation of EWPs in organisations. Some of the significant ones are the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996; Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993; Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995; and Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998. Organisations have also adopted various EWP measures to ensure all aspects of employee wellness in the workplace. The implementation status of these frameworks and measures will form part of future publications whereby the status quo will be assessed in a country-specific context.

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