

Managers' Strategies to Support Employee Well-Being in Remote Work Environment

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Abstract. In today's dynamic environment, employees' well-being at work has become a matter of concern not only to employees, business but also to scholars. Workplace well-being relates to how employees feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work and of course work organisation. Over the past few years in businesses environment numbers of remote workers had increased, thus this change leads to the need for theory and research on how managers can support employees' well-being in remote work environments. The analysis of the scientific literature allowed to detect aspects of employees' well-being, reveal managers' strategies related to supporting well-being at remote work. Based on the obtained results and scientific literature review, the conceptual model of managers' strategies to support employees' well-being in remote work environments is presented.

Keywords: *employees' well-being, remote work-related well-being, managers' support for remote employees.*

Introduction

Relevance of the article

The work environment is dynamic and ever-changing, driven by the convergence of three major forces: technological evolution has made the world a "global village", advances in technological infrastructures have led to a rise in remote work (Soroui, 2021), making it easy for companies to acquire, hire, and retain talent from anywhere in the world; economic challenges (e.g. COVID 19 pandemic) continue to serve business, a never-ending thread of surprises, finally, Generation Z entry into the labour market has ignited one of the most transformative changes in modern business history because, unlike Generation Y, new entrants are more than ever prioritising greater job flexibility and have unique features. The solution to all the changes that emerge is the adoption of flexible work culture and methods that support remote work. As authors Chatterjee et al. (2022) state, an employee who arranges to work away from the normally allocated place of work by using digital technology can be construed as working remotely. Remote employee well-being, as the object of research, is also a relatively new phenomenon in the field of remote work environments, thus the theory and research of strategies to support employees' well-being in remote work environments are relevant topics in management science.

Level of problem investigation

From a management perspective, as Wieneke et al. (2019) say, implementing employee well-being activities can be beneficial for employees as well as for the performance of the organisation. Ensuring that an organisation has a culture to support the remote workforce is critical to the success of all workplace well-being (Dimoff, & Kelloway, 2019; Newman, & Ford, 2021). Although employees need the tools to do their jobs and the feeling that someone cares about them and their progress at work, it is more challenging to achieve that in a remote environment where tech support, leader feedback, and collaborating team members are far away (Newman, & Ford, 2021). Thus, it is important to reveal which manager strategies in scientific literature could deepen knowledge on supporting remote employees' well-being. However, not many studies have theorised or modelled managers' strategies to support employees' well-being in remote work environments. Also, the increased presence of remote employees in the activities of organisations poses additional challenges, in this context, the scientific problem question arose.

Scientific problem

How do managers support remote employees' well-being?

Object of the article is managers' strategies for supporting remote employees' well-being.

Aim of the article is to investigate and determine the managers' strategies to support employees' well-being in remote work environment.

Objectives of the article:

1. To analyse the scientific literature and disclose managers' strategies that help maintain employee well-being in remote work environment.
2. To introduce a conceptual model of managers' strategies for supporting remote employees' well-being.

Methods of the article: analysis of literature sources, synthesis, comparative data analysis, systematisation, and generalisation.

1. The conceptualisation of managers' strategies to support employees' well-being in the remote work environment

Considering employees working remotely it is seen that the line between work and life is disappearing. Remote work is understood by many as work when the employee works outside the physical office of the company. Traditional work is based on linking an employee's time to work tasks and location. It is divided into employees gathered in a central location, which allows managers to coordinate activities and communication. In contrast, a remote work environment refers to coordinating and operating outside the traditional office (Mulki et al., 2009), from working from home, a coffee shop, or working from another country. A remote worker can be defined as an employee who, using digital technologies, agrees to work outside the normal workplace (Chatterjee et al., 2022). Organisations need to prioritise remote employee well-being and managers should give support in various ways to maintain work-related well-being. Author Lomas (2019) describes well-being as 'a state of successful performance across work-related contexts integrating physical, cognitive and social-emotional function'. Author Lomas (2019) states that scholars are beginning to appreciate the wide range of work-related 'drivers' of well-being better, those 'drivers' being the ways in which work may promote or hinder employees' well-being. His work (Lomas, 2019) provided a multidimensional overview of these drivers, psychological drivers (deploying strengths, managing emotions, aligning purpose, and personal and professional development), physical drivers (health and safety, workload and scheduling, and job content and control) and socio-cultural drivers (relationships, leadership, values, and reward and recognition).

Managers are in a key position to create a mentally healthy workplace for the staff they supervise (Gayed et al., 2019), thus supporting employees' well-being in the workplace. In attention to workplace support of employee mental health authors Dimoff, & Kelloway (2019) emphasise that most managers hesitate to provide support to employees struggling with mental health problems because they are among the most costly and common health issues affecting employees across industries and occupations throughout the developed world. In the literature, it is also highlighted that top managers defined as CEOs, CFOs and members of boards of directors decide to what degree their organisation offers and supports employees' work-life arrangements (Been et al., 2017). Thus top managers are likely to support work-life arrangements when there are few financial consequences for the organisation and when the arrangements are likely to contribute to employee commitment (Dimoff, & Kelloway, 2019; Been et al., 2017). In other words, top management has an influence on managers' support for employees' work-related well-being.

The technological resources are needed to support the team members at home (Newman, & Ford, 2021). Authors Saura, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Zegarra Saldaña (2022) examined various aspects of remote work well-being and found out that remote workers' adoption of new technologies is an opportunity to achieve a more efficient work routine, use of new digital platforms allows employees to move outside the city; therefore, adoption of new technologies can be considered as an opportunity promoting the well-being and health of employees. However, authors Luqman et al. (2021) suggest that the all-over use of technologies at work produces negative consequences for employees' well-being, creativity, and general productivity. Management should take caution introducing and implementing new technologies in the remote work environment, like authors Zahoor et al. (2022) suggest, it could be harmful to employees psychological state in the long run. The availability of employee support initiatives and organisational work-life balance strategies can help with the negative effect of technology use on psychological well-being (Zahoor et al., 2022).

Other authors like Büchler, Hoeven, & Zoonen (2020) state that constant connectivity is negatively related to employees' well-being due to the inability to disengage from work, also constant connectivity reduces psychological detachment, while psychological detachment is positively related to well-being. Thus, constant connectivity can be used to promote a recovery climate in which employees are able to disconnect from work after hours, thus helping to stimulate employee well-being (Büchler, Hoeven, & Zoonen, 2020; Luqman et al., 2021). However, managers should not emphasise the over-use of technology without taking into consideration that it is likely to compromise employee well-being by increasing their exhaustion (Luqman et al., 2021; Saura, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Zegarra Saldaña, 2022). Despite challenges in this constant connectivity, the remote work environment in the aspect of well-being helped to emerge different approaches to improve the health of remote workers, from online daily live workouts, questions and answers, weekly live well-being chats with health professionals and so on (Jeske, 2022). This can suggest that despite the negative aspect of the remote work environment's constant connectivity, the environment can enable to emerge the accessibility of health promotion initiatives to remote workers.

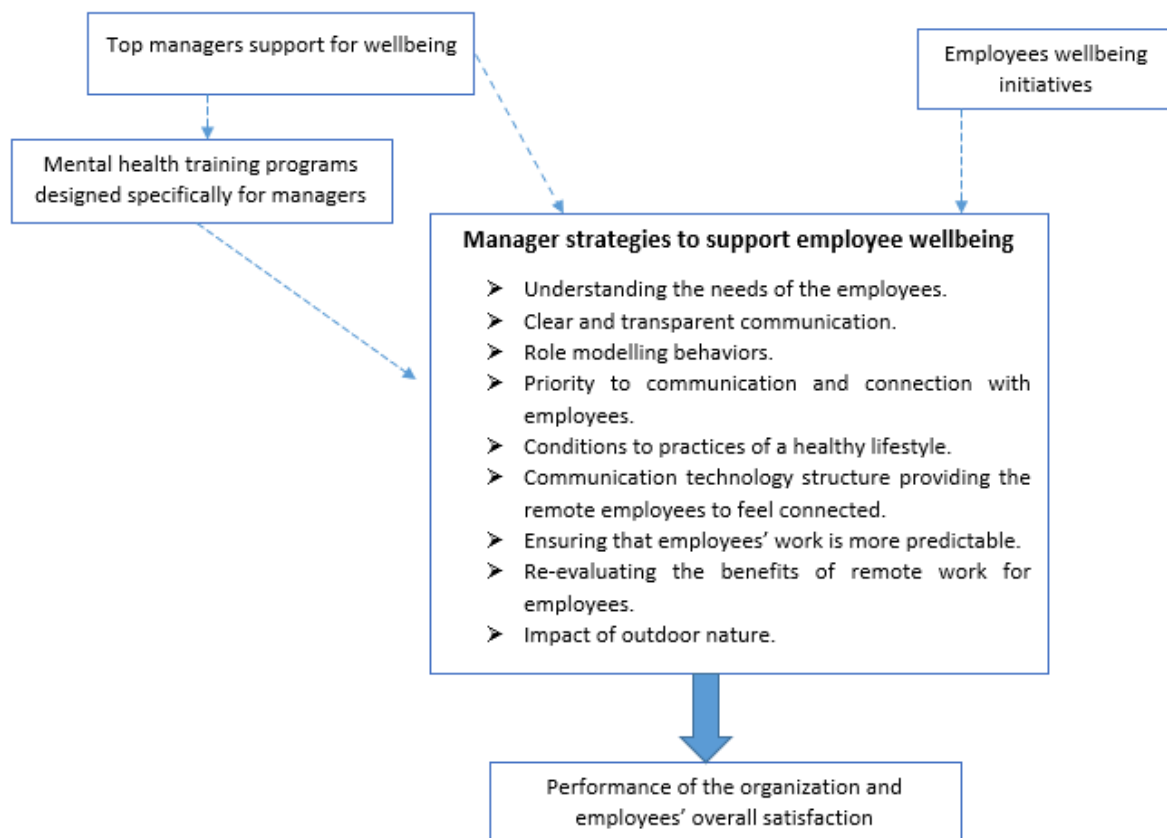
Some researchers like Sinclair et al. (2021) have highlighted the support of leadership to remote employees. Firstly, leaders must understand the needs of the worker and provide clear and transparent communication, secondly communication technology structure should provide the remote workforce to feel connected and, thirdly, leaders' communication and connection with employees must be a priority in order to inspire and foster growth and commitment (Sinclair et al., 2021). Authors Newman, & Ford (2021) have also expressed similar thoughts in stating that responsiveness is very important, providing necessary information to a team member, a leader's timely response also sends a strong message of respect to a distant employee, showing that the leader is paying attention and doing whatever is possible to support that member and the team. Authors Lanctot, & Duxbury (2021) also state this by emphasising that ensuring that employees' work is more predictable by simply keeping employees more in the loop on the goings on of the organisation, for example, could help reduce the number of unexpected important and urgent emails as it gives employees the opportunity to work proactively rather than reactively, also providing clarity at the workgroup level with respect to expectations regarding email use (e.g., response time, who should be copied, after hours use of email). Views about managers' behaviours also have been expressed by author Jeske (2022), suggesting that the role of managers in supporting relationship building during meetings and other interactions to increase bonding between people can play an important role in setting up opportunities that allow employees to exchange experiences, learn from one another and promote well-being by fostering a sense of belonging and team cohesion. Another opinion related to employees' well-being support strategy in remote work was acknowledged by Saura, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Zegarra Saldaña (2022), stating that managers should re-evaluate the benefits of remote work for employees in the medium and long term, in addition, new forms of work-life balance must be found to identify stress as a priority and to ensure that remote employees' comfort and effectiveness are not affected. Researchers Sadick, & Kamardeen (2020) states that impact of outdoor nature on well-being strongly supports physical access to maximise well-being benefits for office workers, thus possibly also for remote worker.

One additional view by authors Dimoff, & Kelloway (2019) suggests investing in mental health training programs designed specifically for supervisors, managers, and senior leaders in order to create a safe and mentally healthy workplace environment, this would help managers to recognise the warning signs of struggling employees, and to provide employees with appropriate support and access to organisational resources. Another opinion states that organisations must create the conditions for employees to practice a healthy lifestyle by doing so, as Wieneke et al. (2019) highlighted, employee well-being initiatives have the potential not only to improve personal health behaviours but to impact teamwork, trust, and respect within a work team. Authors Wieneke et al. (2019) were trying to evaluate the potential impact of a workplace well-being champion (self-identified employees who value health and wellness), as the results it is stated, that employees who value health and wellness is beneficial to organisation and could be replicated with appropriate investment in other organisations.

Literature analysis discloses that remote work well-being consists of psychological aspects, physical aspects, and sociocultural aspects. Those aspects can be promoted through the adoption of new technologies, although managers should take into consideration that too many technologies usage can compromise employee well-being by increasing their exhaustion and leading to constant connectivity. Strategies in the scientific literature regarding managers' support to remote employee well-being are described in ensuring organisational culture to support the remote workforce. The support is implemented in the practice of a healthy lifestyle, employee well-being initiatives, mental health training programs designed specifically for supervisors, managers, and senior leaders, top managers' support for well-being, managers understanding the needs of the employees, demonstrating role modelling behaviours, providing clear and transparent communication, technology structure for communication should provide the remote employees to feel connected, ensuring that work is more predictable, re-evaluating the benefits of remote work for employees, positioning impact of outdoor nature.

2. Conceptual model of managers' strategies to support employees' well-being in the remote work environment

Based on the insights of the literature analysis presented in the paper, the conceptual model of managers' strategies to support employees' well-being in remote work environments is presented (Fig. 1).



Source: created by the author.

Fig. 1. Managers' strategies to support employees' well-being in the remote work environment

It is important to mention that external factors can implement managers' strategies to support employees' well-being in remote work environments. Firstly, top management can implement the managers' role in maintaining work-related well-being a) if they have financial consequences for the company (Dimoff, & Kelloway, 2019; Been et al., 2017), the top management make a decision on which strategies could be carried out; b) top management can support managers by providing

opportunities to mental health training programs, in accordance creating a safe and mentally healthy workplace environment (Dimoff, & Kelloway, 2019). Secondly, employees also could implement manager strategies by suggesting various well-being initiatives (Wieneke et al., 2019), thus helping carry out employees initiatives suitable for specific team or group, in a way helping the manager.

The result of the literature analysis provides a clearer understanding of well-being in remote working environments as well as managers' supportive strategies. The conceptual model (Fig. 1) represents managers' strategies to support employees' well-being such as:

- *understand the needs of the employee;*
- *provide clear and transparent communication*, as Sinclair et al. (2021) states providing clarity at the workgroup level with respect to expectations regarding email use (e.g., response time, who should be copied, after-hours use of email);
- *role modelling behaviours, such as expressing gratitude, sharing experiences and disclosing struggle*, as suggested by Jeske (2022), can help remote workers build stronger relationships and enable them to exchange strategies on how to cope with certain challenges;
- several authors like Sinclair et al. (2021), Newman, & Ford (2021) share the view that *communication and connection with employees* must be a priority in order to inspire and foster growth and commitment a leader's timely response also sends a strong message to a distant employee of respect, showing that the leader is paying attention and doing whatever is possible to support that member and the team;
- *conditions for employees to practice a healthy lifestyle*: from online daily live workouts, answers question sessions, weekly live well-being chats with health professionals (Jeske, 2022);
- *communication technology structure should provide the remote workforce to feel connected;*
- *ensuring that employees' work is more predictable*, as Lanctot, & Duxbury (2021) suggest by simply keeping employees more in the loop on the goings on of the organisation, for example, could help reduce the number of unexpected important and urgent emails as it gives employees the opportunity to work proactively rather than reactively;
- *re-evaluate the benefits of remote work for employees in the medium and long term*, in addition, new forms of work-life balance must be found to identify stress as a priority and to ensure that remote employees' comfort and effectiveness are not affected (Saura, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Zegarra Saldaña, 2022);
- *impact of outdoor nature* on well-being as Sadick, & Kamardeen (2020) state, strongly supports physical access to maximise well-being benefits for employees.

To sum up, managers play a critical role in maintaining employee well-being, the remote work environment is no exception. However, managers are not fully aware of the positive but also the negative impact they had on their teams in remote work environment (Jeske, 2022). By supporting employee well-being managers have the potential to improve workers' well-being, but also to impact teamwork, trust, and other aspect of the team they manage. Managers' strategies can be beneficial not only to the team but as well to an organisation, as improving the performance of the organisation and overall employees satisfaction. Although a remote work environment can oppose additional challenges for its distinguished connectivity, the knowledge of how to maintain remote employees' well-being is critical, since more hybrid work forms are adopted widely in the world, thus understanding traditional and remote work spaces' attributes, and ensuring that organisation has a culture to support workforce well-being is critical to the success of all workplace.

Conclusions

1. The analysis of the scientific literature led to a clearer understanding of remote workplace well-being and how remote working space can support or, on the contrary not support the space for employee well-being. The analysis showed in literature existing and suggested strategies for managers on how to maintain remote employees' well-being, as also how other factors can have an impact on the manager's role to carry out those strategies. The analysis

helped to conceptualise managers' strategies to support employees' well-being in remote work environment.

2. Literature analysis results allowed to formulate a conceptual model of managers' strategies to support employees' well-being in remote work environment. The model shows not only managers' strategies but also includes external factors which implement well-being maintenance in remote work environments, like top management and employees. The model is useful for managers that seek knowledge of how properly support remote employees' well-being.

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