

What Workplace Wellbeing Means To The Future of Work

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**By Raymond Lew**

With Malaysia making significant progress in vaccinating its population, the country is progressing to reopen its economy safely and transition to co-living with the COVID-19 virus.

As organisations ramp up its business activities and solidify return-to-office plans, employers realise they are facing a new set of challenges – where some employees prefer to work-from-office, while some opt to working remotely.

The emergence of hybrid work arrangement, touted to be the future of work, is forcing employers to reflect on their priorities and work culture. More importantly, it calls for a rethink of workplace wellbeing and how companies could sustain its workforce wellbeing – both physically and mentally.

The key to making the hybrid arrangement work is to not attempt a one-size-fits-all approach – companies need to assess what works best for its people.

The overall strategy must be rooted on employee flexibility and empowerment. Besides, organisations should not delay their investment in updating talent policies, investing in digital technology as well as learning and development programmes, to help its people adapt to the new way of working.

The future of work will revolve around Flexibility and Choice. It's important for employers to show trust and care to empower its people to optimise their work and personal goals as what we have been practicing it across our organisation.

Making Holistic Workplace Wellbeing a C-suite Priority

But that is not the only thing that has changed.

We are seeing more companies acknowledging employee wellbeing as critical in ensuring business resilience and productivity.

Today, employee wellbeing has expanded beyond physical health to include mental resilience, financial security, and overall work culture and purpose. Forward-looking organisations are investing in new employee wellness programmes to help its people develop holistic wellness – physically, mentally and financially.

More than a year into the new normal, some employees may still carry unaddressed mental burdens to work premises. It is important for employers to take real actions to foster an open culture to remove the stigma on mental health, and help people stay engaged.

A study by University Malaya found a consistent increase in the prevalence of depressive, anxiety and stress symptoms throughout the different phases of Movement Control Orders (MCO) launched since the onset of the pandemic.

The financial and insurance industry has been one of the industries that has adapted quickly to new ways working centered on in employees' physical and mental wellbeing. Sun Life Malaysia was part of this group as we pivoted quickly to introduce various initiatives to make it easier for our people to navigate the impacts of the pandemic and to build an inclusive work culture and healthy teams. This includes:

- Active listening through regular survey to create an open environment for our people to engage and communicate
- Equipping our teams with the right technology and tools for an equitable work experience – be it from home or office. 100% of employees are now equipped with the right equipment and tools to work safely at home
- Training and engagement activities in the form of webinars, virtual team hug sessions, live workout sessions with experts and educational content, to promote holistic wellness
- An Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to offer counselling sessions relating to stress management, personal issues, and even career development advice
- Various COVID-19 support measures to ensure their financial and overall wellbeing – including hardship and meals allowance, broadband subsidy, festive allowances, care packs, vaccination leaves and more.

It is my hope that Malaysian employers will increase their efforts in empowering its people to be the best they can be – physically, mentally and financially. To me, an organisation is only as good as its people. Having a healthy and engaged workforce is a key predictor to long-term organisational resilience.

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