

Employee Well-Being and its Potential Link With Human Knowledge Risks

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Abstract: Employee well-being is an essential component of any organisation. Conscious companies make every effort to create a healthy work environment. The well-being of employees and their overall emotional, physical and economic health is affected by various internal and external factors. When employees feel well, they tend to perform better. Therefore, the impact of employee well-being on the organisation is a fact and has been proven in many studies. People with a high level of well-being have greater self-confidence and self-esteem, which means that they are not afraid to look for new solutions and innovations. They are also generally more committed to their work and more dedicated to the organisation's goals (Kim, 2021). Finally, they are more productive, which affects the whole performance of the company. Despite the high importance of employee well-being for the success of organisations, little is known about how this well-being might influence human knowledge risks appearing in organisations. The article aims to present the potential link between employee well-being and human knowledge risks. The paper presents theoretical insights related to employee well-being, as well as human knowledge risks. This study has allowed us to identify the potential link between employee well-being and human knowledge risks, which brings several implications for organisations. The ability to create conditions by managers to increase the well-being of their employees might be useful, in the trial of minimising human knowledge risks in organisations. The study is of theoretical character, and thus its findings should be further examined in practise research studies. The study provides useful information for managers and owners of organisations in need of dealing with various human knowledge risks threatening their organizations. The paper is enriched with a number of sample solutions that they may apply to increase the well-being of their employees and, therefore, mitigate those risks. The paper lays the ground for a better understanding of human knowledge risks and its relationship with employee well-being. As such, the paper offers food for thought for researchers dealing with the topic of human knowledge risks and human resource management, in general.

Keywords: Human knowledge risks, Employee well-being, Knowledge management

1. Introduction

Anxiety, depression, fatigue, aches, and pains are among the many symptoms of deteriorated mental and physical health and poor employee well-being – both possible causes of lower productivity and poorer organisational performance (Rasool *et al.*, 2021). To reduce the severity of such phenomena, employers are fond of declaring that they support and care about the well-being of their employees. In reality, many organisations simply do not have a dedicated well-being strategy. Providing a medical package or a low-cost membership to a fitness club is not enough; these are only partial short-term measures. Companies must focus on a holistic strategy so that workplace well-being becomes part of their organisational culture (Nicholson, 2022). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2022) in their study identified that focussing on employee well-being brings a number of benefits. It is a healthy organisational culture that fosters inclusion, better employee morale and participation, and a better work-life balance. According to Grawitch, Gottschalk, and Munz (2006), "fostering a work culture that is mindful of the importance of work-life balance, employee growth and development, health and safety, and employee participation can be the key to achieving sustainable employee well-being and organisational performance". Therefore, caring for employee well-being should not be an "add-on," it should be a part of the company's core operation and the centre of the business model. Healthy and happy employees cope better with their workload, build positive relationships with co-workers, are more creative, and achieve better results (Nicholson, 2022). People with a high level of well-being have greater self-confidence and self-esteem, which means that they are not afraid to look for new solutions and innovations. They are also usually more committed to their work and more dedicated to the organisation's goals (Kim, 2021).

Despite the high importance of employee well-being for the success of organisations, little is known about how this well-being might influence human knowledge risks appearing in organizations. Knowledge risks are a term used to describe a measure of the likelihood and severity of the negative impact of any knowledge-related activity that may negatively affect the functioning of an organisation (Durst and Zieba, 2019). Human knowledge risks originate from human behaviors and therefore are influenced by various personal, social, cultural, and psychological factors (Durst and Zieba, 2019). Knowledge risks are associated with negative consequences for

organisations; therefore, it is fundamental to effectively identify and reduce or eliminate all reasons causing them. There is a clear need for rigorous research on the topic of employee well-being and its influence on human knowledge risks. To fill this knowledge gap, this paper aims to present the potential link between employee well-being and human knowledge risks.

The paper develops in the following way. The second part presents the concept of employee well-being. In the third section, human knowledge risks are described. In the fourth section, potential links between employee well-being and human knowledge risks are presented together with potential ways of overcoming them described. The last section concludes the paper.

2. Employee Well-Being

Over the years, scientists have offered many definitions of employee well-being. The debate and divergence of opinion regarding the key factors that contribute to employee well-being indicate its multifaceted character. Page and Vella-Brodrick (2009) describe three elements that make up employee well-being: subjective well-being, defined as overall satisfaction with life; workplace well-being and; psychological well-being, which includes autonomy, self-acceptance, or purpose in life. In this sense, employee well-being is largely dependent on factors beyond the work space. Similarly, the Gallup Institute (2022) - the oldest polling institute in the world - has singled out five elements that affect employee well-being, i.e., social, financial, physical, and community well-being. We enjoy physical well-being when we feel strong, have the energy to do things, and do not feel pain or discomfort. Financial well-being means that we are satisfied with our earnings, we feel good and security, and it allows us to plan for the future. Professional well-being is achieved when we are satisfied with what we do and with the relationships, we have at work. Social well-being is about relationships with society and acting for the benefit of others.

On the other hand, Guest and Conway (2004) argue that six aspects construct employee well-being. All of them encompass the employee's working sphere and are manageable within the organisation. These are adequate workload, employee control over work, good working relationships, team inclusion, a clearly defined role, and a sense of involvement in change decisions. Similarly, the PERMA model of well-being identifies five building blocks to consider: positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and achievement (Seligman, 2011). However, Donaldson, Heshmati, Lee, and Donaldson (2021) expanded this framework by adding relevant components - building blocks for work-related well-being. The PERMA + 4 framework also includes elements of physical health, mindset, work environment, and Economic Security elements, which makes the model fit better into the organisational context.

Juniper (2011) defines employee well-being as "that part of the overall wellbeing that they perceive to be primarily determined by work and can be influenced by workplace interventions". This definition eliminates external factors and thus distinguishes between overall employee well-being and simply employee well-being. This definition has its opponents, because life situations and personal issues affect employees. On the other hand, employers do not have control over what happens after hours. The most important thing is to take responsibility for what they can do for their employees (Waida, 2021). When discussing employee well-being, one needs to remember that apart from some universal factors influencing this well-being, like access to sports facilities or green areas, helping to take care of the physical health of employees, there could also be some factors that might be specific for each individual, for example, the possibility to discuss topics on the forum might for some be a positive factor influencing well-being, while for some others it might be the factor decreasing this well-being due to stress generation. This makes the discussion of the well-being of employees even more complex.

Moreover, many factors have influenced the working conditions and therefore the well-being of employees, over the last several decades. Among those factors, there is the process of globalisation, developments in technology, high competition, work intensification, diversity of the workforce, increased share of women in the workforce, and blurring of boundaries between work and family (Kalliath and Kalliath, 2012). All these factors have posed some challenges related to working conditions and the well-being of employees. For example, blurred boundaries between work and family have contributed to burnout among employees. Similarly, advances in technology have changed the work environment, forcing many employees to work remotely and be available 24/7. Taking into account the fact that people spend a considerable part of their lives at work (between a quarter to a third of waking life) (Grawitch, Gottschalk, and Munz, 2006), it is not surprising that changes in their work environment might have a significant influence on their health and well-being, as well as on job and organisational performance (Kalliath and Kalliath, 2012). At the same time, more and more employees seek a good working environment, paying attention not only to their salaries but also to the atmosphere at work or the

possibility of maintaining a work-life balance. 'The new generation of office workers has been shaped by a hybrid and remote culture, and values the balance far more than generations that preceded it' (Pandey, 202).

There are several healthy workplace practises, namely: work-life balance, employee growth & development, health & safety recognition, and employee participation. Employee well-being can be constituted by general physical health, general mental health, job satisfaction, employee morale, stress, motivation, organisational organisational commitment, and climate (Grawitch, Gottschalk, and Munz, 2006). Even if employers do not have the power to influence all these areas to the most extent, they can still influence some of these factors, for example by creating a supportive culture to reduce the stress at work and increase organisational commitment or by offering alternative work arrangements to reduce work-family conflicts.

3. Risks of Human Knowledge

Knowledge risks are still a new topic in the literature. According to the definition provided above, 'Knowledge risk is a measure of the probability and severity of adverse effects of any activity that engages or is related somehow to knowledge that can affect the functioning of an organisation at any level' (Durst and Zieba, 2019,p.2). Knowledge risks can be of different types and categories, and there are various consequences and ways of handling them. One of the categories is a category of human knowledge risks, which can be defined as 'connected with an individual's personal, social, cultural, and psychological factors and thus the management of human resources' (Durst and Zieba, 2019). Among the risks of human knowledge, one can list knowledge hiding, knowledge hoarding, unlearning, the forgetting or missing/inadequate competencies of the organizational members.

Knowledge hiding can be defined as 'an intentional attempt to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person' (Connelly *et al.*, 2012). In such a situation, an employee is asked about something or for something (e.g. help with the tool/software, etc.), but he or she decides to keep the knowledge or skill to himself or herself. Knowledge hoarding takes place in a situation when knowledge is not shared, but it has not been asked for by anyone; therefore, the effect is the same as in the case of knowledge hiding, but knowledge hoarding does not have to be intentional, even if its consequences can also be serious (lack of available knowledge needed for the functioning of the organisations). Another human knowledge risk, unlearning, can be defined as deliberate forgetting of knowledge, activities, routines, etc. Unlearning can be to some extent useful and necessary, for example, when new knowledge is needed to be introduced in an organisation, but in some cases, it can lead to negative consequences, when something potentially needed is unlearned. Another related risk is forgetting. It takes place when accidentally or intentionally employees forget certain knowledge and this knowledge is no longer available for their or organisational purpose. It can potentially have severe negative consequences when important knowledge is forgotten and an organisation in the future will need to gain it again, for example, by purchasing it from the outside. The last type of human knowledge risk is missing/inadequate competencies of organisational members. It can happen that employees do not have adequate competencies to handle the tasks or analyse and interpret available knowledge and, as a consequence, make an improper decision. Another example of a risky situation is when an organisation loses a business opportunity because its members are not able to notice it or properly use it for organizational benefit.

The authors of this paper believe that those risks of human knowledge risks might be related to the well-being of employees, and this link between those two concepts will be described in the following section.

4. The Potential Link Between Employee Well-Being and Human Knowledge Risks

Taking into account the characteristics of human knowledge risks and well-being of employees, one can expect a link between these concepts for several reasons. For example, human knowledge risks are related to the human behaviour and this behaviour can be influenced by the well-being of employees. For example, if an employee feels down, stressed, or overworked, he or she might not be willing to share their knowledge, and they can manifest knowledge hiding behaviour (which is one of human knowledge risk). Another example: if an employee is in a bad financial situation, he or she might not be devoted fully to working in an organisation, contributing with their full potential. They may, for example, unlearn some knowledge to make place for the practises helping them to improve their financial situation and not necessarily to help in organisational performance.

To provide a clearer understanding of the potential relationship between employee well-being and human knowledge risks, the following table has been prepared. It outlines the various elements and aspects of employee well-being based on the PERMA+4 (Donaldson, van Zyl and Donaldson, 2022). The PERMA+4

framework has been the subject of empirical investigation and its usefulness has been evidenced (Donaldson *et al.*, 2021). The table also presents human knowledge risks as a consequence when these 9 elements of employee well-being are lacking. Finally, possible strategies to overcome these risks are presented.

Elements/aspects of employee well-being (PERMA+4)	Human knowledge risks as a consequence of the lack of the element of employee well-being	Potential ways of overcoming human knowledge risks
Positive emotions	Knowledge hiding & hoarding	Appreciating an employee through all financial and non-financial incentives is essential, this shows employees how much the organisation values them. In addition, providing a path for advancement, supporting, and listening to the employee's needs is a fantastic approach to maintaining good vibes and sustaining positive emotions. Such solutions increase the chances that an employee will be happy on the workplace. Positive emotions in the workplace will reduce motivations for negative knowledge-related activities. It may even increase the desire to share knowledge and participate in additional initiatives or projects.
Engagement	Knowledge hiding & hoarding	Employees should participate in a variety of events, such as training sessions, learning days, team building exercises, office parties, and many more. An employee who feels required and involved in his work is more dedicated to the company and its objectives. Additionally, one is probably less inclined to hoard or hide knowledge.
Relationship	Knowledge hiding & hoarding	An organisational culture that does not create fierce competition between team members is essential. Employers must make every effort to integrate employees in order to format relationships between them. The mutual benefit relationship with others is characterised by sharing knowledge and support in daily life.
Meaning	Knowledge hiding & hoarding	The experience of being connected to something greater than yourself or serving a greater purpose is crucial. Employers need to show employees that their work is significant, that it matters, and serves a larger purpose. An employee's sense that he or she is fulfilling a mission, and its success depends partly on him or her, will reduce the risk of selfish behaviours like hiding or hoarding knowledge.

Elements/aspects of employee well-being (PERMA+4)	Human knowledge risks as a consequence of the lack of the element of employee well-being	Potential ways of overcoming human knowledge risks
Accomplishment	Knowledge hiding & hoarding	Providing employees with a sense of competence in a given area of interest and setting achievable goals that are later met by them is an excellent method to overcome human knowledge risks. Employees with a sense of accomplishment will not fear for their position in the company, thus they will not treat knowledge as their only advantage over their colleagues. It will certainly reduce the motives for negative knowledge-related actions.
Physical Health	Forgetting	Providing access to sports facilities and green areas can support employees' physical health. Providing medical packages and regular testing packages is another way of overcoming the knowledge risk which is forgetting.
Mindset	Knowledge hiding & hoarding, missing/inadequate competences	Having a growth mindset and a belief in one's skills and abilities can potentially reduce knowledge risks. Any initiatives taken by the company to support employees' growth mindsets like learning and development opportunities can have a significant impact on positive individual and organisational outcomes.
Work Environment	Knowledge hiding & hoarding	It is worthwhile to provide a comfortable, safe, and stimulating physical workplace. It directly affects with whom and how people connect and interact at work, since knowledge sharing involves social exchange; the physical workplace matters a lot.
Economic Security	Knowledge hiding & hoarding	Ensuring financial/economic security, and providing training for employees in financial literacy and financial planning can make unhealthy competition, including motives to retain knowledge, lessened.

Source: Own elaboration.

As can be seen in the table above, the most common human knowledge risk associated with various aspects of employee well-being is knowledge hiding and hoarding. These risks to knowledge can appear in case of a lack of positive emotions, engagement, lack of relationship, or meaning. It can also result from lack of economic security. In the event of lack of physical health, employees might forget important organizational practises and things. Last but not least, a lack of a growth mindset may result in employees not only lacking the necessary abilities or competencies but also being unable to absorb them. These considerations expand on the current theory with additional potential factors that may cause knowledge hiding or hoarding. Anand and Hassan (2019) identified person-related factors that lead to knowledge hiding behaviour. These include personality, emotional intelligence, bad intentions, revenge, seeking power, and expecting something in return. However, impaired



well-being or the absence of some elements of employee well-being, for example, negative emotions, lack of growth mindset, relationships, and no meaning, were not considered as potential factors leading to knowledge concealment.

Employees with overall low levels of well-being are potentially more vulnerable to human-knowledge risks. Deteriorated well-being or self-esteem can make employees less engaged at work, less motivated, and manifest certain negative knowledge-related phenomena, such as knowledge hiding or hoarding, forgetting, or missing competencies. Employees with negative emotions, no relationships, and no meaning of accomplishment are more likely to hide or hoard knowledge. Furthermore, a poor work environment, economic insecurity, or poor mindset can also exacerbate human knowledge risks.

As a consequence of impaired employee well-being, organisations may be more vulnerable to knowledge loss. Employees who are stressed, overloaded with work and in a depressed mood are more likely to leave their jobs. Increased turnover can cause a company not only to lose talent but also key knowledge.

Although this paper discusses only the aspect of human knowledge risks, it is also worth mentioning the potential link between employee well-being and other types of knowledge risks. For example, some technical knowledge risks can be more probable due to the reduced well-being of the employees. Deteriorated employee well-being can also contribute to greater vulnerability to cybercrime, which brings many negative consequences, including those related to knowledge such as spillover. People are still the weakest link when it comes to cybersecurity. That is why your well-being matters; when their mood is worse and their concentration drops, it is easier to make simple mistakes, such as opening a suspicious link.

5. Conclusions

To conclude, employee well-being is an important factor in the analysis of human-knowledge risks that can face. Until now, there have been no studies in the literature that present the potential impact of employee well-being on human knowledge risks and knowledge risks in general. This paper offers a significant step in understanding the link between well-being and knowledge risks such as hoarding, hiding, unlearning, and others. Furthermore, human knowledge risks as a consequence of the lack of the element of employee well-being and the potential ways of overcoming them have been presented. The contribution made in this paper can be best appreciated by practitioners who are dealing with human resources management and knowledge threats to their organisation. Furthermore, the paper offers insights that are worth pondering by researchers who deal with the topic of knowledge management, knowledge risks, and human resources management in general.

As this area is still in its infancy, this study has only laid theoretical grounds for future analysis. Being of a theoretical character, this paper has limitations. First of all, it is not based on a systematic literature review; to the best knowledge of the authors, there are no studies so far examining employee well-being and its relation with knowledge risks. Therefore, a systematic review of the literature would not deliver any outcomes. Second, as a theoretical study, it cannot deliver ready solutions to organisations; however, it can serve as food for thought for managers and owners of organisations. To overcome the limitations of the theoretical character of the study, a pilot study will be conducted in the near future, dealing with the examination of employee well-being and its influence on knowledge risks in organisations. Future research could also investigate whether employees who experience higher levels of well-being are more likely to participate in knowledge-sharing and collaboration.

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