Management of Personnel Health and Well-Being in the Context of Distance Employment

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Abstract. The purpose of the study is to identify the main problems of managing the health and well-being of personnel in the conditions of distance employment and to identify the ways to solve them. To achieve this goal, we defined the following main tasks: to identify the main factors of influence of distance employment on the health and well-being of personnel; to study the practices of management of health and well-being of personnel in organizations; to identify the areas of improvement for the programs of management of health and well-being of personnel. The main problems and the ways to solve them were described as a result of the analysis and generalization of research data from international and Russian consulting companies, expert opinions on the research topic, the experience of Russian companies in managing the health and well-being of personnel, and surveys.

Keywords: Distance employment · Health · Management · Personnel · Well-being

1 Introduction

In recent years, experts have considered the health and well-being of employees to be the main condition for increasing the productivity and labor efficiency of the personnel. There are several definitions of this concept in the literature. Within the framework of this article, we will use the definition of the World Health Organization, where health is understood not only as the absence of diseases but also as the state of physical, mental (emotional and intellectual), social and spiritual well-being [3]. It should be noted that the concept and essence of programs for managing the health and well-being of workers in organizations have undergone significant changes in recent years. Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century, the well-being programs were aimed mainly at ensuring the physical and mental well-being of employees. Now they include ensuring emotional, social, financial, and professional well-being.

According to Towers Watson consulting company, comprehensive programs for managing the health and well-being of workers should include three main blocks [12]. The first block should be aimed at preserving the health of workers (health screening, healthy lifestyle programs, sports activities, etc.); the second - at their financial well-being (financial literacy programs, financial advisory, savings management, etc.); the
third - at meeting the individual needs of the employee. Thus, the programs for managing the health and well-being of employees are aimed not only at creating optimal working conditions but also at the well-being "in the work itself", regardless of the form of employment.

According to the «Global Human Capital Trends - 2020» study by Deloitte consulting company, about 80% of respondents marked “well-being as a part of work” as one of the most important modern trends in personnel management [4]. The issues of managing the health and well-being of workers are particularly relevant in the context of distance employment.

2 Methodology

The methodological basis of the study is the methods of logical and comparative analysis, expert assessments, opinion poll, survey. In recent years, the problem of the well-being of workers has become the subject of both theoretical and empirical research. The paper analyzes the research results of international and Russian consulting companies, expert opinions, as well as the experience of Russian companies in managing the health and well-being of personnel. We have analyzed the impact of modern digital technologies on the health and well-being of employees, including the remote workers. The research work is based on the concepts and hypotheses presented in the works of Russian and foreign researchers, in particular, the concept of work and personal life balance, the concept of zero injuries, the concept of well-being, the concept of a digital workplace, the theory of generations, etc.

3 Results

The Russian practice of managing the health and well-being of personnel is traditionally aimed at creating safe working conditions, reduction of industrial injuries and occupational diseases. This is because, on the one hand, non-compliance with safety rules in production processes leads to a reduction in the number of employees due to injuries and occupational diseases, and, on the other hand, to a decrease in labor productivity and financial costs.

In recent years, the Russian Federation has developed more than one hundred regulatory documents on labor protection for various types of economic activity and types of work. A special assessment of working conditions has been introduced, and the Russian Ministry of Labor and Social Protection is constantly monitoring the application of labor protection legislation by organizations. All this helps to preserve the health of employees.

Many Russian companies implement health management technologies, which include not only regular medical examinations, vaccination of employees, and recreational activities, but also the study of medical risks for staff and the development of a plan of preventive measures. Large Russian organizations, such as Lukoil, Gazprom, Severstal, Sberbank, and others, have developed and implemented the employee well-being programs.
The benchmarking of the personnel well-being programs implementation has shown that the majority of Russian organizations are focused on maintaining the physical health of workers and reducing injuries and occupational diseases at work, while in foreign companies, the well-being programs are comprehensive and aimed at improving physical, emotional, and mental condition of the personnel [1].

In November 2019, the department of organizational development of the Russian State University for the Humanities conducted a study of the effectiveness of implementing the personnel well-being program in a large domestic commercial and industrial company for the production and sale of office and hotel furniture, which employs 956 people. The study was conducted by interviewing employees using a specially developed questionnaire on the level of satisfaction with the well-being program which has been implemented in the company since 2017.

Following the well-being program, each employee of the company within the planned budget (60 410 rubles), along with the standard social package (voluntary medical insurance, health and life insurance, compensation for the cost of sports activities, compensation for the cost of food, discounts on housing purchases) has the opportunity to participate in events and promotions aimed at increasing knowledge about maintaining health, anti-smoking and anti-obesity campaigns, etc.

For two years of implementing the well-being program in the company, the number of its participants increased from 75% to 88.9%, which indirectly confirms its effectiveness. At the same time, 77% of the participants of the well-being program noted that they were mostly satisfied with its content, however, 30% of the respondents indicated the need to expand the number and focus of events and actions. Also, more than 30% of respondents are not satisfied with the standardized character of the well-being program which does not take into account the state of health, marital status, and other individual characteristics of employees. Therefore, we can conclude that enhancing the effectiveness of well-being programs can be associated, on the one hand, with an integrated approach to its development, and on the other hand, with the individualization of the approach to each employee.

The problem of managing the health and well-being of workers is particularly relevant in the context of alternative forms of employment, including distance employment of workers. For example, according to the results of the PWC consulting company study involving 1,200 company executives and HR managers from 79 countries as respondents, the spread of distance employment is the most important condition for a company’s competitiveness in the labor market [9]. The forms of distance employment of workers have become widespread in the context of the pandemic associated with the spread of COVID-19.

In the context of the introduction of additional preventive measures and sanitary standards by the authorities, a large number of Russian organizations employees were transferred to a remote working regime. According to experts, 2020 has become “the world’s largest experiment in distance working”.

Employers and HR specialists face new challenges in organizing effective work of personnel and in managing the health and well-being of the workers. It should be noted that Russian organizations have accumulated a certain experience in managing workers in remote employment conditions. For example, the remote work format was quite widespread in marketing, PR, IT, accounting, etc. At the same time, experience has
proven that in the context of the mass transition of workers to the remote mode of work, many organizations were not ready for effective personnel management, as well as for ensuring the well-being of their employees.

First, in the mode of stationary work in the office, a special assessment of the working conditions of employees is carried out and their workplaces are supplied with professional technical equipment and licensed software, while in the conditions of distance employment, the employees often use the equipment available in their houses. In March 2020 the Mail.ru Group company surveyed 12464 employees transferred to the remote mode of work. The results of a survey showed that most of them used personal equipment (one or more technical facilities at the same time): smartphone (62%), computer (51%), tablet (10%). The most common services used for work were email (91%), messengers (62%), and video call services (23%) [7]. The diversity of the equipment, its insufficient power, and low-speed Internet are often the reason for increasing the complexity of the work performed.

Second, the organization of the workspace and the workplace itself in most cases does not meet sanitary and hygienic standards and requirements, which negatively affects the health of workers.

Third, in the context of distance employment, the balance between work and personal life is often upset. On the one hand, employees can independently plan their work and rest hours, and on the other hand, they have become “available” to their managers almost 24 h a day. These conditions increase the intensity of labor, the amount of work, and the requirements on such personal qualities of employees as reliability, organization, concentration, etc. [8]. The information load and constant contact with the employer lead to “burnout” of employees, lower involvement and productivity [10].

Fourth, remuneration systems depending on the achievement of goals or the implementation of KPI have become widely used in management practice. To ensure financial well-being, employees increase their working hours, perform more job duties, etc. This leads to increased competition between employees, as well as the emergence of workaholics. Workaholism causes a high level of emotional stress, professional burnout, the appearance of chronic fatigue syndrome, and the imbalance of work and personal life.

Fifth, in the conditions of distance employment, the communication of employers with their colleagues is limited, which can lead to a deterioration in their psychological well-being [5].

All this leads to a deterioration in physical health, increased levels of stress, depression, etc. It should be noted that the well-being of employees in the context of distance employment depends not only on the efforts of the employer but also on the formation of “self-management” competencies which include the ability of personnel to manage their energy, resources, time, emotional intelligence.
4 Discussion

The specifics of organizing work in distance employment conditions make it necessary to transform the health and well-being management of personnel in companies. According to the results of the study conducted by the authors, the main factors of workers’ health and well-being deterioration in distance employment conditions are the imperfect organization of the workspace and workplace, non-compliance of working conditions with sanitary and hygienic standards, upset work-personal life balance, limited communication.

Managing the health and well-being of personnel in distance employment requires joint development and implementation of programs by both the employer and the employee. The employer should provide the employee with a virtual workplace. It is advisable to organize the workplace of an employee working in a remote format following the “Digital workplace” concept according to which the employee is a consumer of the necessary “content and services here and now” [11]. In this case, it is advisable to determine the standard composition of the virtual digital workplace for each position. It is worthwhile to include a training and development module, as well as a knowledge base in the digital workplace to ensure the professional well-being of the employees, i.e. the possibilities of their development, career advancement, and professional self-realization.

In the process of practical implementation of personnel well-being programs, specialized services and tools should be used. For example, the use of fitness trackers allows to track the level of activity of the employee and give recommendations on its adjustment. The Welltory service allows measuring the level of stress and energy of the employee based on the analysis of data from 200 fitness applications and gadgets. The Waterbalance app reminds to drink water. The Lifeaddwiser mobile app evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the employee and develops personalized recommendations for improving productivity, etc.

The employee needs to master the skills of using tools that allow enhancing the work effectiveness and formation of digital, professional and social competencies [2]. Thus, in the conditions of distance employment, there is a trend of “shifting focus from paternalistic care for employees to partnerships” when employees share responsibility for their development and well-being with the employer [6].

5 Conclusion

One of the main trends in personnel management in modern conditions is ensuring the health and well-being of personnel. This led to the development and implementation of corresponding management programs in modern companies. The effectiveness of the personnel health and well-being management programs can be ensured only if there is an integrated approach to their development and implementation. Personnel health and well-being management programs should be aimed at ensuring physical, financial, social, emotional and professional well-being. Along with ensuring physical and financial well-being, the management of emotional (ability to adapt to constantly changing conditions) and professional (self-realization in the profession, career
advancement, development) well-being is of particular importance in the conditions of
distance employment.

Another way to improve the effectiveness of personnel health and well-being
management programs is an individual approach to their development and imple-
mentation, i.e., taking into account the needs and individual characteristics of each
employee. Therefore, the first step in developing the personnel health and well-being
management programs should be to assess the level of well-being of employees and
their needs [6]. The specific features of distance work organization make it necessary to
improve programs for managing the personnel health and well-being using modern
digital tools. The development and implementation of the personnel health and well-
being management programs in organizations can ensure the balance of work and
personal life of employees, increase their engagement and satisfaction, and contribute
to the accumulation of experience through the use of new methods of work.

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