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Understanding the complexities to cultivate holistic employee well-being in organizations

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Design for Well being,
Participatory design
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Systemic thinking
Co-design

In this paper, we intend to understand the complexities in design for well-being during crisis in an organizational context. We look to understand the various perspectives of well-being holistically and explore tools and processes required for the same from a systemic design perspective. We believe that this understanding can help us build robust product-service systems for employee well-being as well as take care of the different concerns of sustainability and resilience in the organization. Thus, facilitating design thinkers and designers to approach cultivating holistic employee well-being in their organizations.

The organizations of today function in complex scenarios of organizational plurality that involves diverse cultures, socio-political problems, as well as health and environmental concerns. The internal organizational product-service-systems not only intends to effectively empower and engage its employees but cater to their overall well-being to help them to perform better. However, these product-service-systems also desire sustainability and resilience to be viable for longer periods of time and adapt to disrupting scenarios like the current Covid-19 pandemic. Being well is a positive state and is desired by human beings both as individuals and as a group. However, during times of crisis, like the current Covid-19 pandemic, existing structures, both social and organizational, are shaken and their resilience is tested. With remote working seen as the future of workplaces, the aspects of holistic employee well-being have extended outward of the organizational boundaries. Before we start designing product-service-systems for enabling well-being at organizations, we first need to understand the change in aspects of employee well-being, and secondly, how best can it be inquired and analyzed to facilitate designers and design thinkers to approach design of products-service-systems.

The role of designers in organizations has evolved from creating products and services that benefit customers to promoting positive social-change and engage opportunities for people to engage in activities that cultivate well-being of all (Papanek, 1991; Dorst, 2015; Steen, 2016). The research on design for well-being is not new and has been long pursued by researchers and designers alike. Initial research by Ryff (1989) has identified several aspects that constitute well-being such as autonomy; environmental mastery; positive relationships with others; purpose in life; realisation of potential and self-acceptance. However, Dodge et. Al. (2012) argues that the concept of well-being is 'undeniably complex', and have formulated three key areas towards defining well-being: the idea of a set point for well-being, the inevitability of equilibrium, and fluctuating states between challenges and resources. One of the challenges that we encounter while designing for employee wellbeing is that wellbeing is that, it is subjective and changes from time to time even for the same person. This makes it highly difficult to have a "common" well-being goal. This also means that each individual has to self-evaluate and set his/her own well-being goals. The next challenge is about knowing the current state of employee well-being and approach towards classification of individuals based on their current state and future desires. This, however, requires continuous

measurement of their well-being states and a systemic mapping of resources and challenges (Psychological, social and physical) available to employees in the organization. Design of product-service-systems in such scenarios has the challenge to effectively use technology to continuously engage employees in order to analyze and understand trends and patterns in changes in wellbeing and the factors that affect them.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted several challenges in the design of effective products and services to monitor and facilitate employee well-being. Work-from-Home is new to many organizations and their employees. Employees have reported of several problems that has severely impacted their well-being like reduced motivation and guidance, blurred difference between professional and personal life, lack of socialization, improper time management, ineffective communications, overburdening workload etc. The sudden transition to remote working and unavailability of appropriate infrastructure has made it difficult for internal processes of the organization to function normally. Hence, there is a need for a wellbeing support system which should be efficient even when employees are not geographically present within the organization.

Several researches have established the enormous value of participatory approaches in developing holistic empathy and promoting well-being through design (Keinonen, 2013). Amidst the various approaches of co-creation and participatory design (Sanders, Brandt, & Binder, 2010; Sanders & Stappers, 2008), capability approaches (Steen, 2016) and value co-creation management (Frow et. Al., 2015), we highlight our systemic-design based approach to facilitate designers and design thinkers to effectively capture the perspectives of different organizational stakeholders, explore the various aspects of resilience and sustainability, and understand the complexities involved in design of products-service-systems that aims to cultivate employee well-being in the organization. We further reflect on the challenges and opportunities.

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