



Prioritising Mental and Physical Health

during the ongoing pandemic and WFH

Justin Timmer
In-house researcher

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MEASUREMEN

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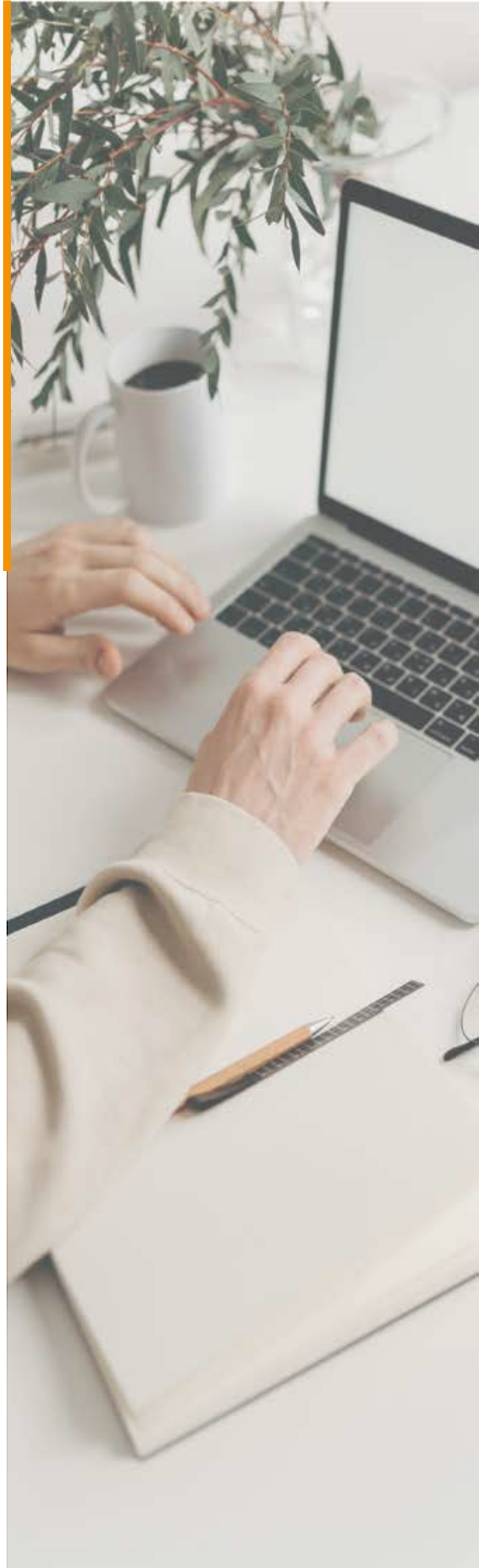
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An introduction into the mental and physical health during the ongoing pandemic and WFH

If someone would ask you how the pandemic has affected you, what would be your answer? I'm sure a long list will follow of big and small changes in your personal world. Across the past months, everybody experienced changes in their work activities, free-time, social relations, holidays, diet, exercise, (social) media consumption, etcetera. The flexibility that we needed to show due to all the restrictions and constraints, is immense. We had to reinvent ourselves when it comes to the use of space, the way we connect with people, and how we relate ourselves to our society. Our mental and physical health, or resilience, has been challenged thoroughly through all the continuous changes and uncertainties, driving (some of) us towards the dangerous edges of our capacities.

In the past months, workers across Europe have reported to be more physically (32%) and emotionally drained (23%) by work, while 29% reported being too exhausted to do household chores after work ([source](#)). All in all, we can conclude that the risks for burn-outs, depression and lay-offs are rising and rising ([source](#)). It is of utmost importance for organisations, to prevent people from feeling awful at home while sustaining effective organisational performance, indicating why maintaining productive and engaged employees, and saving a lot of costs on sick leaves, is beneficial for everyone now. This might be time to prioritise the health of employees and keep them resilient. We all want to be capable of navigating through the challenges of the pandemic together.

“The flexibility that we needed to show due to all the restrictions and constraints is immense.”



What is resilience?

This capacity of flexibly adapting towards changes is known as the new buzzword: resilience. Resilience can be seen as a holistic substitute for health that focuses more on your (flexible) relationship with your environment (source). From the cocktail of all the challenges you face these days, you need to find a path that makes you handle/solve these challenges. Whether this is through finding new (creative) strategies, or by using old strategies you've built already, the more paths you can take in the face of challenges, the more freedom and resilience you experience.

For example, if your computer breaks, you might have several strategies ready to solve that crisis, making you highly resilient. Yet accumulating constraints (like the lack of money, a curfew, or a small social network) limit your flexibility, reduce your number of solutions, and thus impair your resilience. Functioning within too many constraints (like in the current pandemic) makes people function improperly, increases the risk of burn-outs, and/or forces people to make big life decisions that avoid handling these challenges altogether.

However, on the contrary, too few constraints might also lead to instability and lack of attunement towards each other. Constraints are often imposed to guide group behaviour and are therefore useful to synchronise people and create things collectively (read COVID-19 regulations). Resilience is about finding that sweet spot between freedom and attunement towards each other.

The capacity of flexibly adapting towards changes is known as the new buzzword: "resilience"



Personal needs

The interesting- and difficult thing about resilience is that everything in your life contributes to you being resilient or not. All the factors in your life are working together, giving you an overall (mental and physical) flexibility, known as resilience. So, from the stress you experience from work, the struggles you face with the political policies, to that little pain in your lower back, it all accumulates and challenges you in some form or another. While, everything you do to rewind: your physical activity, food intake, and break behaviour also contributes to your resilience. This accumulation of factors, which differ for each person, makes resilience unique for each individual.

For example, for you running might reduce stress, while for others running can be a stressful activity. Moreover, studies show that the pandemic causes young people to struggle with the instability of their career, education, and social lives ([source](#)). While older people, on the other hand, might struggle with different challenges: like the risk of contracting COVID-19, taking care of their children, or running their company. Effectively supporting groups of people by improving their resilience, is therefore a challenging task. People need different things. There are indeed group trends, but it's definitely not the case that one size fits all.

All the factors in your life are working together, for example:



Stress



Political policies



Physical activity



Food intake

Work plays a strong role in people's life

We all know that work plays a strong role in people's lives and thus contributes a lot to people's resilience. It, therefore, makes sense to view resilience as a holistic concept. We spend about one-third of our week working, which explains why even the smallest improvements in our working life, can be quite impactful. Work improves resilience since it gives people benefits like an income, career development, and a social network that gives people more freedom. But work also constrains people, seeing that they have to do specific activities at set-times with specific people, for a large part of the week.

Freedom and constraints

Managers can push the right buttons in order to adjust the employee's resilience. Removing constraints gives employees more freedom. This could be done by providing flexible work hours or giving them more autonomy in performing the tasks and can lead to higher engagement, effort and more creativity ([source](#)). Providing constraints, on the other side, can bring structure and alignment. For example, organising team daily's and monthly evaluations can attune employees better with the companies and their colleagues, making them more connected.

Ways to give employees more freedom

- ✓ Flexible working hours
- ✓ Autonomy in performing task
- ✓ Fewer meetings
- ✓ Meetings on demand
- ✓ A platform to share ideas

Ways to give employees more freedom

- ✓ Scheduled meetings
- ✓ Daily updates
- ✓ Clear instructions
- ✓ Tight regulations
- ✓ Clear boundaries

Increasing potential

Freedom is a first step, but if employees don't have the right tools to use their potential, they might get lost and unmotivated. Managers can support employees in doing their work effectively by providing support structures. Support structures could be given through social support like coaching and training (HR- and Line manager) or support through facilities and tools (Facility manager). Offering support can be a delicate topic between the employer and employee. With today's remote working, the social interaction is limited and in many organisations, there is still a taboo on failure. For many employees, it's not easy to admit that they can't do their work properly and need support.

Social competition, a fear of being laid-off, or simple ego-issues still play a big role in organisations and can even lead to depression and anxiety-disorders themselves ([source](#)). Discussing and being open about these issues comes from two sides. Employees should be able to tell what kind of support they would desire and whether they need more freedom or desire constraints. Yet transparency is just as well needed from the managers-side. A lack of trust in the intentions of management causes a fear of the consequences of being open about their issues. The concept of "[Employee flourishing](#)" looks at the issue from a positive perspective and assumes high motivation which is constrained by certain factors (causing failure and demotivation). Without these constraints, humans can flourish and live up to their potential. So questions from this perspective could be in the lines of: "which factors limit your potential?"

Ranging support across the personal lives

These support structures can also range across the borders from the office to the personal lives of people. Providing financial support for daycare or ergonomic chairs for the home workplace, are feasible options to make employees flourish and to increase their resilience. However, here we enter a delicate terrain between working life and personal life. Due to remote working, work dissolves more into the personal lives of people, making it more difficult to discuss.

For one employee, supporting employees in providing an ergonomic computer desk can be perceived as invading their personal life, while for the other, supporting employees in finding structure in their day can be perceived as welcoming support. One could organise support solely focused on the wellbeing of their employees. Wellbeing is also a general construct that ranges across the personal and the working life but is (eventually) useful for both the employee and employer. In our last whitepaper about employee experience, we argued that a focus on wellbeing, in general, provides a healthy business case and can increase productivity, engagement and retention.



Circular Workflow Model

To summarise and visualise the material, we created a model (see image 1 below). To start, we state that each employee has a relationship with their organisation. Through the work tasks, the employee contributes to his organisation. The management, the physical workspace, and the personal factors support or constrain the flourishing of the employee within their work tasks. From this interaction, the organisation gives support/feedback towards the employee in the form of well-being (deduced by the PERMAH factors of wellbeing). An employee can find meaning, accomplishments, relationships, positive emotions, engagement, and health, from doing their work (indirectly or directly). Satisfaction with these returns makes the employee work again, building upon the dynamic relationship between the employee and its organisation, making work flow circular.

Personal factors on the other hand (such as a home situation) can influence the well-being of the employee as well. This is an area where organisational support can range across personal lives to sustain the circular workflow.

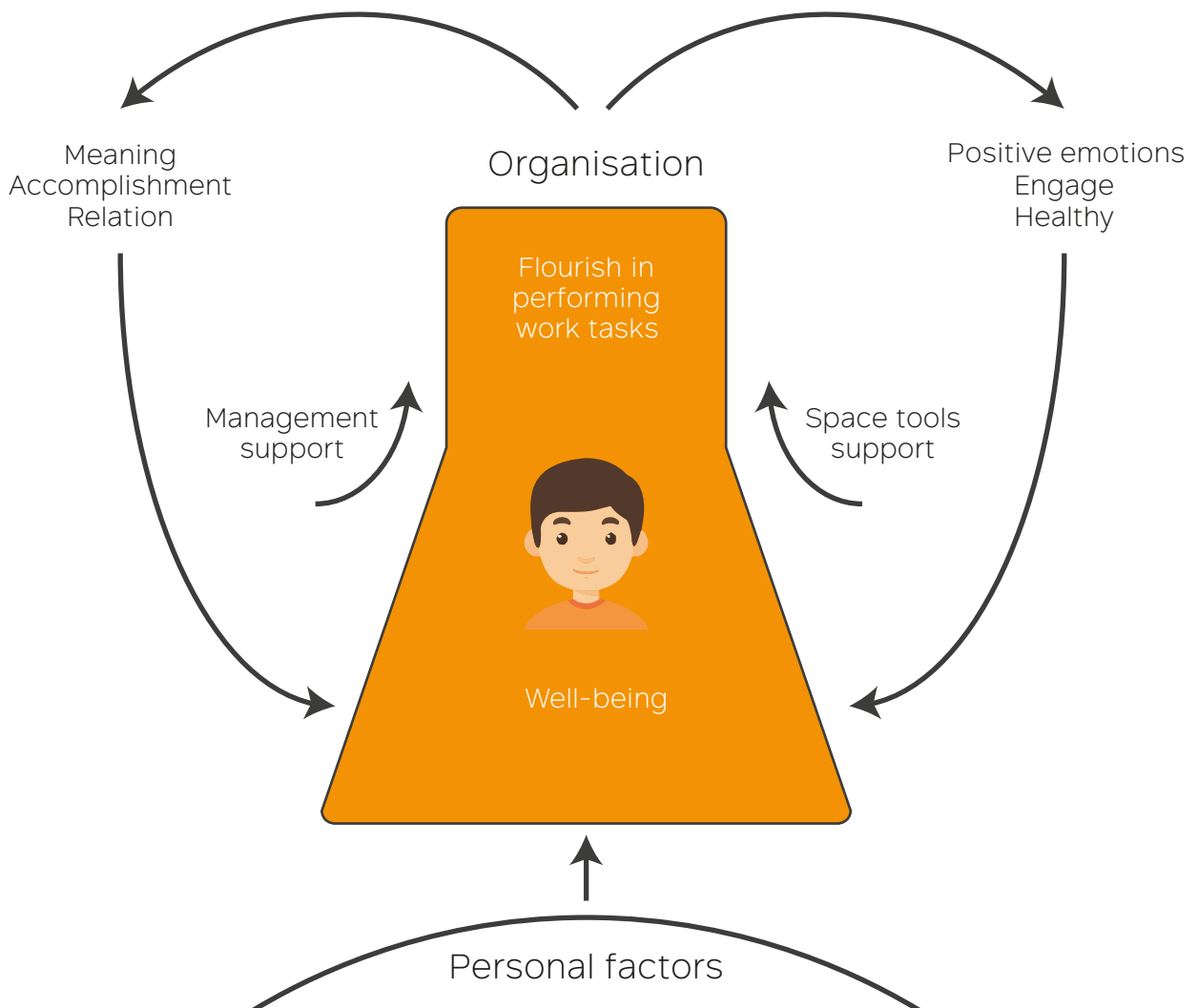


Image 1. Circular Workflow Model

How to get things going

Understanding the personal needs, which constraints are at play, and which support structures (facilities or social support) could improve resilience and the flourishing of each employee is a tedious job. Although resilience is unique for everyone, offering personal support through personal interviews and personal tools can be quite demanding in time and costs. Alternatively, one could offer every employee a platform in the form of a survey-app to share their personal needs from a holistic perspective, which can provide useful information for organisation-wide issues that constrain many employees within the organisation. Aspects like the lack of flexibility and responsibility, are often determined by the company-culture and thus shared across employees. While through (the required GDPR) anonymity, personal issues can be easily shared, giving useful insights that can be acted upon through an anonymous support-path (like offering group workshops about supervising children while working from home).



Habital

Habital is an application that offers surveys, designed to measure and understand the wellbeing of employees in support of their flourishing and resilience. It contains modules which monitor health, performance and satisfaction experienced by employees. With powerful dashboards, you can find actionable insights specific to your organisation and employees. Are you interested in supporting your employees' resilience, or do you have a desire to witness them flourish at your workplace?

[Read more here](#)

Conclusion

All and all, it's clear that the recent developments on societal and personal levels challenge our resilience. Work is one huge impacting area that contributes to the accumulating risks for psychological issues. For managers, this is the right moment to support employees in their journey of sustaining their resilience, keeping them flexible and adaptive. But in order to offer effective support, open communication and transparency from both sides is important to accommodate personal- and organizational needs. Only then we can navigate through this demanding pandemic together.



Key takeaways

- ✓ Employees struggle to get through the challenges of the pandemic in many aspects of their lives.
- ✓ Resilience is the capacity of flexibly adapting and navigating through these challenges.
- ✓ Managers are able to adjust constraining and supportive factors that improve resilience and make employees flourish.
- ✓ Personal needs differ between employees and might reach across the personal spheres, being open and transparent is important to provide the right support and get the most benefits.

Measuremen

Measuremen is founded in 2005 in the Netherlands. Currently we are operating in more than 40 countries worldwide. Our goal is to improve work-life balance worldwide by measuring the occupancy, use and performance of workplaces to offer insight to help managers build or improve their workplace strategy. If you want to implement a workplace strategy or need to revamp your current workplace strategy, visit our website or get in touch with us.



info@measuremen.io
www.measuremen.io