From Perception to Practice: HR Managers and the Challenge of Promoting Well-being at Work in Morocco

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Abstract

In the backdrop of heightened competitive labor markets and constant pursuit of productivity, the well-being at work becomes one of the integral building blocks as well as a strategic issue on the agenda for Human Resources Managers (HRMs), more notably concerning employee performance and retention. HR professionals increasingly are being conceptualized as co-partners and allies in organizational development strategy, with greater responsibility in creating healthy and inspiring work environments.

This study aims to further our understanding of how HRMs in Morocco perceive and respond to workplace well-being from the employer's perspective. Using a qualitative method through semi-structured interviews with HR professionals across different industrial sectors, the study examines the strategic role of HRMs in improving employee well-being and the challenges they face in the Moroccan context.

The study draws on an integrative theoretical model that combines Karasek and Theorell's Demand-Control-Support model, Ryff's Psychological Well-Being model, and Seligman's PERMA model. These models are applied in order to emphasize the multidimensional nature of well-being and to situate the Moroccan HRMs' practice and perception in context.

The study shows that work staff well-being is not merely a concern for employee contentment but also a performance driver, influencing employer reputation, staff retention, and company engagement.

By bridging theoretical accounts with field evidence, this research provides a contribution to managerial and academic thought. It emphasizes the necessity of a rational, culturally nuanced strategy for workplace well-being, positioning HRM at the center of mediating organizational requirements and individual aspirations in the evolving industrial environment of Morocco.

Keywords: Well-being at work, Moroccan context, organizational performance, employee engagement, HRM.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized and rapidly evolving working world, companies are faced with increasing pressure to remain competitive while maintaining sustainable growth and employee commitment. Across the globe, workplace well-being is an important issue in research and managerial discussions, driven by new challenges such as digitalization, mental health, knowledge retention, and evolving employee expectations (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Seligman, 2000; Warr, 2002; Eurofound, 2015). Internationally, organizations are recognizing that well-being among employees is no longer a peripheral concern but a strategic imperative for boosting productivity, innovation, and organizational resilience (Schaufeli, 2017; OECD, 2020).

With these developments, the Human Resources (HR) profession has expanded. HR no longer merely exists to carry out administrative or operations-focused tasks but is increasingly being asked to act as a strategic partner with the capacity to influence work cultures that allow people to thrive. HR roles today take on a central role in monitoring the extent of engagement, psychosocial risk management, and influencing policies that act to balance demands for performance against employee satisfaction and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Gallup, 2023).

In Morocco, the world of work is also undergoing a significant transformation, primarily because of the effects of globalization, technological revolutions, and a change in what workers expect from their employers. New human capital organizational forms are emerging, thereby making the HR function not only cater to these changes but also enhance group cohesion, record achievements, track individual and team performance, and enhance motivation. A key objective is to create an environment in which all employees can contribute to organizational performance and benefit from conditions that enable personal satisfaction and well-being.

At a national level, work well-being concerns have been of interest. The Haut-Commissariat au Plan (HCP) conducted a national survey in 2012 whose purpose was to study Moroccan citizens' perceptions and priorities for quality of life. Working conditions and job satisfaction were found to be significant indicators among the surveyed items, yielding rich data regarding the well-being of different parts of the population. There is, however, very little empirical research grounded on the managerial strategies and organizational initiatives promoting well-being in Moroccan enterprises.

Scholarly research on workplace well-being has been extensively conducted across a range of disciplinary traditions—psychological, sociological, and managerial (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Seligman, 2000; Keyes, 2002; Thévenet, 2009; Dagenais-Desmarais, 2010; Diener, 2009). Consensus on an integrated and operational definition of workplace well-being continues to be elusive (Richard, 2012; Eurofound, 2015). Such conceptual vagueness tends to manifest in disconnected practices within organizations, particularly among the emerging economies whose institutional and cultural environments are different from Western societies.

Here, our research seeks to analyze the specific case of Morocco by highlighting the attitudes and strategies of HR managers about workplace well-being. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How do Moroccan HR managers define and perceive workplace well-being?

- What are the practices and strategies employed to create a healthy work environment conducive to such well-being?

Through an exploratory qualitative study, this study contributes to the enrichment of the theoretical foundations of workplace well-being while offering empirical evidence specific to the Moroccan context. The following sections offer a comprehensive literature review, the conceptual and methodological framework, the study context, and the main findings, culminating in a managerial model that includes the HR perspective on workplace well-being.

I. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF WORKPLACE WELL-BEING

1.1. History and Emergence of the Concept

The idea of well-being has philosophical and historical roots going back to Ancient Greece, where the most important philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, and the Stoics pondered over the conditions of a good life (eudaimonia). Aristotle, in particular, championed an idea of well-being that transcended hedonic enjoyment, with an invitation to actualize human potential for virtue, meaning, and rational activity. This view established the foundation of what was later called eudaimonic well-being, contrary to the more hedonic conception focusing on the pursuit of pleasure and pain avoidance.

The concept evolved over the centuries under various influences, particularly in philosophy, medicine, sociology, and psychology. In modern times, the other major watershed was achieved with the advent of positive psychology, initiated by Martin Seligman in the late 1990s. This new

psychology shifted the focus away from pathology and dysfunction to those elements that make individuals and communities thrive. Seligman's PERMA model (2011) set out five constituent elements of well-being: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment—a multidimensional and comprehensive approach.

There are two prevailing theoretical traditions to well-being in the literature:

- Hedonism conceives of well-being as the accumulation of pleasant experiences and the diminishment of pain. It tends to be operationalized through subjective well-being (SWB), including life satisfaction and positive to negative affect ratio (Diener et al., 1999). It emphasizes the here-and-now affective state and is widely used in psychological measures and questionnaires.

- Eudaimonism, however, emphasizes authenticity, self-realization, and personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993). According to this view, well-being is not merely the result of momentary pleasures but the result of striving for meaningful goals and living following one's values and abilities. This orientation is highly correlated with psychological well-being (PWB) according to Carol Ryff (1989), which consists of six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

The linkage of work with well-being only began to take form later, particularly with the advent of industrialization and modern labor systems. Baudelot and Gollac (2002) describe how the notion of work as a source of well-being (or ill-being) gained prominence during the 18th century when work was being researched not only as a productive activity but as a social and psychological one as well.

In the 20th century, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, the concept of work-life quality encompassed job satisfaction, motivation, and mental health dimensions. Scholars such as Dejours (1993), Thévenet (2010, 2011), Bourion & Person (2010), and Montaclair (2010) later concentrated on the psychosocial hazards of work. These articles emphasized organizational restructuring, intensified work, and nonrecognition as causing stress, burnout, and disengagement following the reversal of so-called work positivity to well-being.

More recently, the importance of workplace well-being has been appreciated even more against the backdrop of digital transformation, generational transformation, and post-COVID redescription of workplaces. With business organizations struggling to balance performance needs

with human sustainability, well-being is now a strategic asset and closely linked to engagement, innovation, and employer branding.

1.2. Theoretical Contributions to the Concept of Workplace Well-being

The table below highlights some of the pioneers who have significantly influenced and shaped modern notions of workplace well-being:

Table 1: Summary of Theoretical Contributions to "Workplace Well-being"

Author	Theoretical Contribution
Elton Mayo (1932)	Mayo was the originator of the motivation theory, stemming from the "Hawthorne Studies," which highlighted the importance of social and psychological factors in work performance. His work demonstrated that interpersonal relationships and social recognition have a significant impact on employee productivity and well-being.
Abraham Maslow (1954)	Maslow is known for his hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow, individuals first seek to satisfy physiological and safety needs before achieving levels of social, esteem, and self-fulfillment needs. This theory has influenced how organizations design work environments that support employees' personal and professional development.
Frederick Herzberg (1959)	Herzberg developed the two-factor theory (motivation-hygiene). According to Herzberg, some factors, such as recognition and accomplishment, are intrinsically motivating, while others, such as working conditions and salary, can prevent dissatisfaction but do not motivate by themselves. This theory led to a better understanding of the elements contributing to workplace well-being.
Douglas McGregor (1960)	McGregor proposed Theory X and Theory Y, which describe two management styles. Theory X is based on a pessimistic view of employee motivation, while Theory Y offers a more optimistic view, suggesting that employees are naturally motivated and seek to achieve self-fulfillment in their work. The latter theory encouraged more participative and individual-centered management practices.

Robert Karasek (1979)	Karasek developed the Job Demand-Control Model, which examines the impact of job demands and autonomy on work stress. According to this model, high levels of demands combined with low autonomy can lead to high stress, while stimulating but controllable work can promote well-being.

« Source: Authors »

1.3. Dimensions of Workplace Well-being

1. **Physical Health and Well-being:** Involves the work environment, ergonomics, and initiatives that promote physical and mental health (e.g., wellness programs, sports facilities).

2. **Psychological Well-being and Personal Experience:** Focuses on subjective aspects such as leisure, social and emotional life, and cultural or spiritual environments.

3. **Social and Professional Well-being:** Centers on the quality of interactions among employees, recognition of efforts and achievements, and career development opportunities.

Theoretical Models:

1. **Karasek and Thorell's Model (1990):**

    o **Demand:** Workload and job requirements.

    o **Control:** Decision latitude and autonomy.

    o **Support:** Social support from colleagues and supervisors.

2. **Ryff's Psychological Well-being Model (1989):**

    o **Dimensions:** Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, Self-Acceptance.

3. **Seligman's PERMA Model (2012):**

    o **Components:** Positive Emotions, Engagement, Positive Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishments.

1.4. Study Approach

- Model Integration: The study incorporates Karasek and Thorell's Model, Ryff's Psychological Well-being Model, and Seligman's PERMA Model to offer a comprehensive view of workplace well-being.

- •Focus: It investigates the perception of job demands, employee autonomy, social support, and how practices are applied to establish a positive work environment by HR managers in Morocco.

- Purpose: To expand the theoretical base for workplace well-being by taking into account cultural diversities and perspectives, particularly in a Moroccan context, which is likely to be underrepresented in studies aimed at Western environments.

1.5. Integrative Research Approach

Our study aims to examine HR managers' knowledge about workplace well-being and employee well-being on HR practice and policy. We will be using an integrative model of research, combining several theoretical perspectives to generate a profound understanding of complex phenomena. This approach will synthesize all three models' perspectives to present a balanced picture of workplace well-being.

II.   MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Methodological Choice: Qualitative Study

It is a qualitative exploratory research with an interpretative purpose. It will address our research problem by filling in the research gap of existing studies in which the HR manager's perspective is not included. It aims to expand the database of workplace well-being from the perspective of HR managers. Miles and Huberman (2003) write that "Qualitative research provides rich, well-founded descriptions and explanations of processes embedded in the local context."

We used semi-structured interviews as the data collection method because it is "one of the most frequently applied qualitative techniques in management sciences" (Romelaer, 2005). To collect data efficiently, we designed an interview guide (see Appendix) to define the limits of our research and collect broad and in-depth data.

Rousel and Wacheux (2005) define this tool as "a technique of interviewing whereby the researcher guides the respondent to provide lots of, detailed, and good-quality information on the subject of the research, with minimal influence and thus ensuring the absence of bias, bringing scientific rigor.".

2.2. Presentation of the Population and Sample

As previously mentioned, our study aims to understand the perceptions of HR managers regarding workplace well-being across different industry sectors. To achieve this, all interviewees were part of HR teams at various hierarchical levels from diverse economic sectors. This approach helps to define their perspectives, ranging from operational to strategic levels, ensuring a range of views on workplace well-being.

The table below summarizes the characteristics of the interviewees:

Table N°2: Characteristics of the Chosen Sample

Respondent	Position	Years of Experience	Company Size	Industry Sector
P1	Human Resources Director (HRD)	18 years	300 employees	Automotive Industry
P2	Human Resources Manager (HRM)	15 years	Group of companies (Over 1000 employees)	Hospitality Sector
P3	HR Department Head	8 years	900 employees	Offshoring
P4	Human Resources Manager (HRM)	6 years	100 employees	Services
P5	HR Development Manager	5 years	250 employees	Transport and Logistics
P6	HR Manager	4 years	100 employees	Healthcare
P7	HR Manager	5 years	350 employees	GC, Telecom, Sanitation
P8	HR Development Manager	4 years	200 employees	Aerospace Industry
P9	HR Officer	3 years	150 employees	Construction
P10	HR Coordinator	2 years	89 employees	Services

« Source: Authors »

2.3. Structure of the Interview Guide

To carry out our study effectively, a series of interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via

telephone, or via video call. The average duration of each interview was between 30 and 45 minutes. With the interviewees' consent, we recorded the interviews to facilitate transcription, which was then done exhaustively and thoroughly before being subjected to content analysis. Our interview guide was designed following three phases:

- Introductory Phase: Crucial for establishing a climate of trust (Gavard-Perret et al., 2008). Before starting the questions, we provided a brief overview of the study, mentioning its purpose and importance.

- Development Phase: This phase includes a set of varied open-ended questions focused on the subject related to the interviewee's area of expertise. This phase may encompass several sub-themes (Gavard-Perret et al., 2008).

- Conclusion Phase: Dedicated to summarizing the main ideas expressed by the respondent and asking if it aligns with their views (Gavard-Perret et al., 2008).

The table below outlines the dominant themes and associated items used in the interview guide:

Table N°3: Themes of the Interview Guide

Theme	Objective
General Information	- Role, tenure, company size
General Perception of Well-being in the Company	-Interviewee's personal definition -Subjective perception -Components of well-being at work - Individual experience
Factors of Well-being at Work	-Internal policies - Programs implemented for employee well-being and their effectiveness -Work-life balance -Career development -Salary - Working conditions
Challenges and Opportunities	-Interviewee's perception of limits, difficulties, and opportunities related to enhancing well-being in the company

Monitoring and Evaluation	- Indicators used by the interviewee to assess well-being in the company - Programs in place
Future Perspectives	-Interviewee's expectations regarding strategies to enhance employee well-being: - Career development policies - Development strategy - Stability - Retention

« Source : Authors »

III. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed by thematic content analysis cross-comparatively. This analytical process allowed us to achieve convergences, divergences, and recurring patterns in the discourse of the HR managers from industrial companies based in Morocco. Four primary themes were identified from the corpus, which structure our presentation of findings :

- Factors of Well-being at Work

- Monitoring and Evaluation of Well-being at Work

- Initiatives and Challenges Related to the Concept

3.1. Definition of Well-being at Work According to Experts

The HR specialists interviewed largely share a multi-dimensional understanding of work well-being, connecting it with a good work environment, a respectful and healthy organizational climate, and durable job satisfaction. Well-being is, from their perspective, both subjective as associated with a sense of comfort and motivation, and objective as related to measurable conditions at work, such as workload, ergonomics, and work relationships.

However, the term "well-being at work" is often used synonymously with terms such as "motivation," "engagement," or even "happiness at work," demonstrating a certain conceptual vagueness. This is consistent with what was reported by Richard (2012) as a disagreement on the

definition of well-being at work. Despite this, the HR managers mostly agree on its positive influence on employee retention, productivity, and employer brand.

Theoretically, this definition encompasses the most prevalent axes of the Demand-Control-Support model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) and, most importantly, the importance of demands on the job, autonomy, and social support. The Ryff model (Ryff, 1989) is also consistent with the emphasis on autonomy, positive interpersonal relations, and meaning at work. On the other hand, Seligman's PERMA model (2011) is realized in HR managers' desires to build positive emotion, meaning, and accomplishment at work, even as their references to these principles are implicit or intuitive.

3.2. Factors of Well-being at Work According to Experts

The second emergent theme concerns the determinants of work well-being from the point of view of HR professionals. Several internal and external factors were mentioned. They are:

- Material factors: fair and motivating pay, social benefits (health insurance, bonuses), and pleasant working conditions;
- Psychosocial factors: appreciation, career development opportunities, managerial support, and psychological safety;
- Organizational culture: team spirit, respect, fairness, and open communication.

These determinants articulate an integrative perspective beyond the conventional economic approaches and reflect a forward-thinking internalization of models such as Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000), where competence, autonomy, and relatedness are the key motivational drivers. Interviewees also emphasized the growing importance of mental health, particularly post-COVID, and towards a shift away from purely physical and financial well-being, and to emotional and psychological factors.

Nevertheless, despite this realization, systematic and strategic use of best practices for well-being is spotty, inclined to be restricted by budgetary considerations or management training in psychosocial risk prevention.

3.3. Initiatives to Implement and Challenges

When questioned about concrete actions to improve workplace well-being, HR managers mentioned several initiatives: promoting **work-life balance** (flexible hours, hybrid work options),

offering **psychological support** (coaching, listening spaces), encouraging **internal mobility and training**, and investing in **team-building activities**.

However, the **implementation of these initiatives is often hindered** by structural and cultural obstacles. These include:

- A traditional managerial mindset that prioritizes short-term performance over employee well-being;
- Financial constraints in industrial sectors that operate on tight margins;
- Resistance to change from both middle management and employees;
- Lack of reliable data on psychosocial indicators.

These challenges mirror a mismatch between theoretical abstraction and practical reality. Moreover, models such as PERMA or Ryff's model of psychological well-being barely ever consider hierarchical conflict or group processes that are typical in industrial environments. HR managers, therefore, support more localized models, adapted to the distinctive socio-economic and cultural features of Moroccan industry.

3.4. Monitoring and Evaluation of Well-being at Work

In terms of evaluation tools, HR professionals rely mostly on quantitative indicators such as absenteeism, turnover, or results of annual performance reviews. Some companies have tried to install "social barometers" or satisfaction surveys to gather more qualitative data. The rarity and lack of action plans following these surveys restrict their strategic importance.

In addition, the digitalization of HR monitoring software is still in its infancy in most of the organizations that were interviewed. There exists a recognized need for more responsive real-time systems to measure well-being and to take early warning signs of disengagement or psychosocial hazards.

This shows a disconnect between talk about the importance of well-being and the resources actually allocated to study and address it, a result which would be in line with Danna & Griffin's (1999) observation of a disconnect between talk and action in managing organizational health.

CONCLUSION

Perception of workplace well-being by Human Resources Managers (HRMs) serves as a strategic cornerstones for organizational policy development and the attainment of a sustainable workplace.

As constructors of in-house procedures and a linkage between strategic objectives and human resources, HRMs find themselves at the core of enhancing, developing, and implementing well-being in organizations. Their well-being constructions significantly influence not only the types of intervention employed but also organizational culture concerning employee experience and engagement.

Newer HRMs are likely to adopt a more holistic understanding of well-being, moving beyond traditional focus on physical health to include mental, emotional, and relational well-being. This wider perspective is in alignment with more contemporary theoretical models such as Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Model and Seligman's PERMA model, in which self-realization, meaning, good relationships, and achievement are center stage. This way, well-being is no longer a "soft" HR initiative, but instead a driver of performance and loyalty lever, directly influenced and influencing employer branding and organizational competitiveness.

Yet, HRMs are bound by numerous limitations to the full achievement of this vision. They include budgetary limitations, difficulty in demonstrating ROI (return on investment) on well-being interventions, and sometimes non-cooperation from the top management. Moreover, heterogeneity of employee expectations due to generational, cultural, and situational factors impedes the development of one-size-fits-all interventions. This confirms the necessity for a more individualized, inclusive, and participative approach to well-being initiatives.

To overcome such challenges, placing employees at the forefront of co-construction is essential. Listening actively through occasional employee surveys, focus groups, or individual interviews allows for sensing real needs, desires, and frustrations. Setting up well-being committees consisting of HR staff, employee representatives, and line managers can offer a more democratic, participatory form of decision-making and program evaluation.

Additionally, HRMs are turning to digital solutions to enable the roll-out and monitoring of well-being programs. Solutions that offer tailored dashboards, connections to mental health professionals, virtual coaching sessions, and journey tracking tools empower employees and provide instant feedback. These solutions allow for a data-based approach to well-being, enabling HRMs to measure impact, adjust interventions, and make a business case to leaders.

Briefly, the experience and management of well-being by HRMs must shift to a strategic,

inclusive, and evidence-based practice. By incorporating employee voice, leveraging technology, and connecting well-being to organizational goals, HRMs can craft workplaces that are both people-centric and performance-driven. This double aim—caring and productivity—is apparently the new horizon of HR practice in the contemporary workplace.

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