

A Study of Employee Well-Being in the Kingdom of Bahrain

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ABSTRACT

Organisations are investing in employee well-being initiatives, as employees constitute the most important stakeholder group. Employee well-being requires a focused and concentrated approach. The main aim of this study was to assess the importance of employee well-being in organisations in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The study was based on the five domains of employee well-being model [1]. The five domains being the health domain, the work domain, the values/principles domain, the collective/social domain, and the personal growth domain. The study revealed that majority of the participating organisations were focusing more on factors related to physical health and physical safety of their employees than on mental health. Significant factors like pay and rewards, autonomy, job satisfaction, people management policies, professional management, workload distribution, and leadership need improvement when compared to factors like work-life balance, open and inclusive work environment. All these factors relate to the work domain. In the values/principles domain, more participating organisations had a clear mission and objectives, and were investing in training their managers and employees, whereas ethical standards, diversity and inclusion, cultural engagement, corporate governance, corporate social responsibility, dignity at work and mutual trust at the workplace, needs to be given more attention. Very few participating organisations have value-based leadership and a well-being strategy in place. Teamworking, dignity and respect at the workplace were evident in more participating organisations than factors like positive and healthy relationships, employee voice, supportive management style. All these factors contribute to the collective/social domain of employee well-being. In the personal growth domain, performance management and personal development plans, open and collaborative culture, and succession planning were prevalent in more participating organisations than effective utilisation of employees' skills, coaching and mentoring, resilience training, positive emotional relationships, financial well-being, challenging work, lifelong learning, access to training and creativity. Mid-career review was conspicuous by its absence in all participating organisations. The study reveals that employee well-being in organisations in the Kingdom of Bahrain needs more attention and focus than what is being accorded now.

Keywords: Health, work, value/principles, collective/social, personal growth, well-being domains

INTRODUCTION

The corporate world has slowly but surely been waking up to the concept of employee well-being and mental health. The various stages of industrialisation and corporate development, have witnessed employee well-being, being addressed in different ways. Employee well-being

has gained prominence in the present times. The dual effect of the pandemic and widespread digital transformation made it imperative for organisations to take a giant leap in this direction. The current situation has ushered in the need to holistically manage the well-being of employees. Providing employees with a fair workload, appropriate remuneration, positive interactions, healthy relationships and inclusive culture are some key contributors to employee well-being. The only investment worth making is in employee well-being initiatives, which would then be the point of departure for other investments to become worthwhile. The productivity and positivity emanating from employee well-being would benefit the corporate world, on all fronts.

AIM AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to assess employee well-being in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The study adapted the five domains of employee well-being developed by CIPD-UK namely, the health domain, the work domain, the values/principles domain, the collective/social domain, and the personal growth domain [2]. The scope of the study extends to a general assessment of the implementation of systems and prevalence of factors related to employee well-being in organisations. The five domains specifically deal with workplace factors, and do not cover family and societal factors contributing to employee well-being. The scope of this study does not classify industry-wise or organisation size-wise employee well-being analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study was collected from both the primary and secondary sources. Relevant websites, books, and articles formed the secondary sources. HR practitioners representing organisations in the Kingdom of Bahrain were the primary sources for data collection. The selection of HR practitioners was based on a convenience sample drawn from a list of business associates and HR network members. Of the 75 HR practitioners contacted, 63 of them participated in this study, thereby representing 63 organisations. The response rate was 84%. The combined employee strength in these 63 participating organisations was 28900 employees. A questionnaire was structured listing various factors based on the CIPD's five domains of employee well-being. Responses were elicited about the prevalence and implementation of various factors/systems related to each of the five domains of employee well-being, in their organisations. The questionnaire was administered during April-May 2021, through an online survey platform, and in some cases, through emails.

EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING AT WORKPLACE

"These days wellbeing in the workplace is a much broader issue. In health terms, as well as directly work-related health and safety, it's about improving the health levels of employees more generally. Employee wellbeing is about more than physiological or mental ill health – it's about optimising the health of all employees, not just reducing the numbers of staff who are diagnosed with medical conditions. Employee wellbeing also extends beyond health, and into happiness as well, and job satisfaction. But there are many factors affecting employees' wellbeing which can be influenced by the employer. Many of these factors centre around the job itself – does the employee have a degree of control over their work, clarity about their responsibilities, variety of tasks, training and support? Do their working hours give them sufficient rest or flexibility? Other factors controlled or influenced by the employer include the workplace environment, HR policies (including fairness and transparency over pay and promotion decisions) and relationships with colleagues. People spend a large proportion of

their life at work, and employers have the potential to have a significant impact on their employees' wellbeing with the factors above, but employers can also influence the wellbeing of their employees outside those workplace-controlled factors as well" [3].

"Workplace Wellbeing relates to all aspects of working life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment, to how workers feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work and work organization. Workers well-being is a key factor in determining an organisation's long-term effectiveness. Many studies show a direct link between productivity levels and the general health and well-being of the workforce. Enterprises and organizations are increasingly recognising the need to take the well-being of their workers seriously. The more progressive organizations are doing so because they appreciate that their most important resources are their human resources - their people. Other organizations are beginning to address well-being issues because it is becoming increasingly clear that many workplace problems draw from a lack of commitment to the needs of their workers. A lack of recognition on the need to promote workers well-being may give rise to workplace problems, such as stress, bullying, conflict, and mental health disorders. Potential solutions, such as leadership, communication and a focus on learning and development are essential for anyone committed to making the workplace a more decent and satisfying place" [4].

"Employers need to promote their health and wellbeing programme on an ongoing basis to encourage participation by employees. The evidence suggests that take-up of specific well-being initiatives such as employee assistance programmes (EAPs), counselling and physical fitness activities increases if the organisation has an effective communication and promotion strategy. An employer has many channels and potential events – including emails, pay slips, social media, the intranet, posters, and health and wellbeing days – at its disposal to boost awareness and interest on the part of staff. Some employers have a dedicated health and well-being microsite as part of their intranet where employees are signposted to the different initiatives and sources of support on offer. An employer will need to shape its communication strategy to suit the needs of its workforce and be creative in how it reaches some employee groups who may be less keen to participate in health and wellbeing activities. If the organisation involves employees in the design and implementation of its health and well-being programme from the outset, it is more likely to gain buy-in from them" [2].

"The people profession should guide the health and well-being agenda in organisations by ensuring that senior managers regard it as a priority and people managers are equipped to support people on a day-to-day basis. People professionals need to ensure that people practices are aligned with health and well-being priorities and that effective support pathways are in place. They should also have the strategic insight to understand the difference that good health and well-being can make to employee engagement and organisational success. As such, they can be powerful advocates of the business case for action. It's clear that employers are increasingly placing more responsibility on managers to support people's health and well-being, but this expectation is not always matched by adequate investment in their skills and capability. Managers should not be expected to be health experts, but they do need to recognise the value of health and well-being at work, be able to spot early warning signs of ill health, have the competence and confidence to have sensitive conversations, direct employees to appropriate sources of help, and actively promote attendance and well-being" [5].

“The five domains of well-being, namely, the health domain, the work domain, the values/principles domain, the collective/social domain, and the personal growth domain. are helpful in enabling organisations to think about what is required in creating a well-being-focused organisation, it also demonstrates that there are large overlaps between the domains and that there is a high level of interdependence between them. For example, good line management should be a feature that runs through many of the domains. The well-being model also highlights the core symbiotic relationship between the organisation and the individual – the effectiveness of every well-being domain, element and initiative will depend on the interaction of both actors” [2].

SURVEY FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The findings of the survey related to factors of the five domains of employee well-being are detailed under each heading and analysed accordingly.

Health Domain of Employee Well-being [see Figure 1]

Mental health, physical safety, and physical health systems combinedly contribute to the health domain of employee well-being. The most widely implemented support system related to physical health was the health insurance protection which was provided by 83% of the participating organisations. Health promotions and health checks were done by 33% of them, with only 13% of them were giving physical disabilities support. Safe working practices were being followed by 67% of the participating organisations, while 47% of them trained their employees in personal safety training. Safety equipment was available in 43% of the participating organisations. It is evident that a larger number of the participating organisations were giving importance to physical health and safety of their employees. This could, most probably, be due to the compliance requirements and mandatory safety training/ equipment being an essential part of their operations. Only 7% of the participating organisations gave mental health and occupational health support to their employees. Stress management support was given by 10% of them. Employee assistance programmes were being advocated by only 8% of the participating organisations. Employee well-being is closely related to the stress they experience at workplace and does have an impact on their mental health. Occupational health support is equally important as the risks and hazards associated with any occupation is something which all organisations must pay attention to. Lack of support in these areas can cause immense stress and lead to job dissatisfaction. The participating organisations are taking care of the physical health and physical safety of their employees more than the mental health.

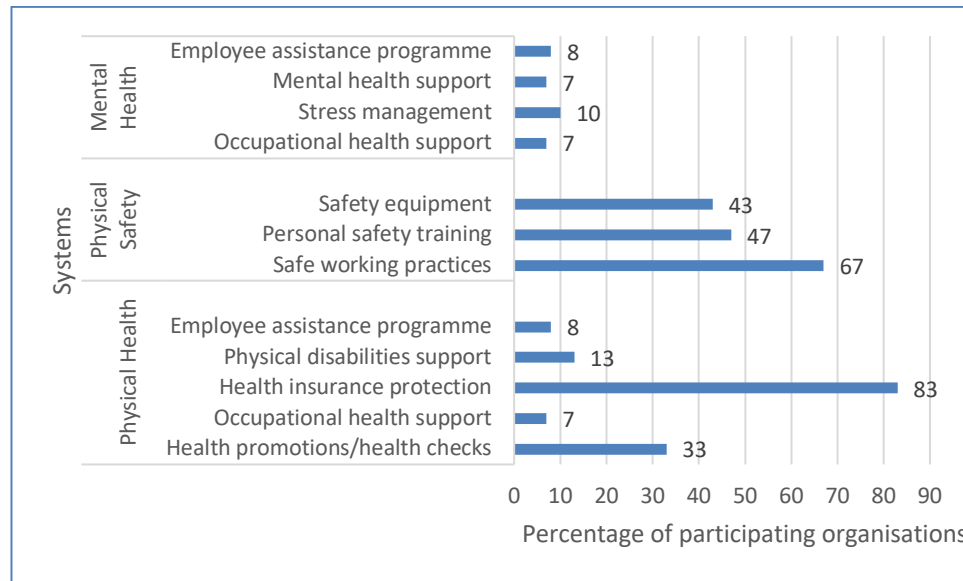


Figure 1: Health Domain of Employee Well-being

Work Domain of Employee Well-being [see Figure 2]

An open and inclusive work environment was prevalent in 45% of the participating organisations and 34% of them had ergonomically designed work areas/workstations. Both these factors contribute to the work environment. Good line management warrants more focus within these organisations as less than a quarter of them have professional line managers and a small number [17%] have effective people management policies. For factors pertaining to work demands of the work domain, work-life balance was being facilitated by 48% of the participating organisations. An important factor in this domain is the workload distribution which appears to be fair in only 28% of these organisations. A mere 10% of the participating organisations confirmed that their employees have job satisfaction. Factors like autonomy [14%] and an innovative culture [21%] were scored only by a few organisations. Effective leadership [29%], effective communication [31%], and employee participation and involvement [34%]; factors which are crucial to bring about effective change were not evident in two-thirds of the participating organisations. Organisations are going through tremendous changes, and not being able to effectively manage change may be counter-productive to employee well-being. The direct impact at the employee level, can be felt in the work performance, and at the organisation level, on the profitability-sustainability. Key components of pay and reward, like fair and transparent remuneration practices and non-financial recognition were being implemented in 14% and 12% of the participating organisations, respectively. This would have an adverse impact on the job satisfaction of employees, and the work domain of employee well-being in these organisations.

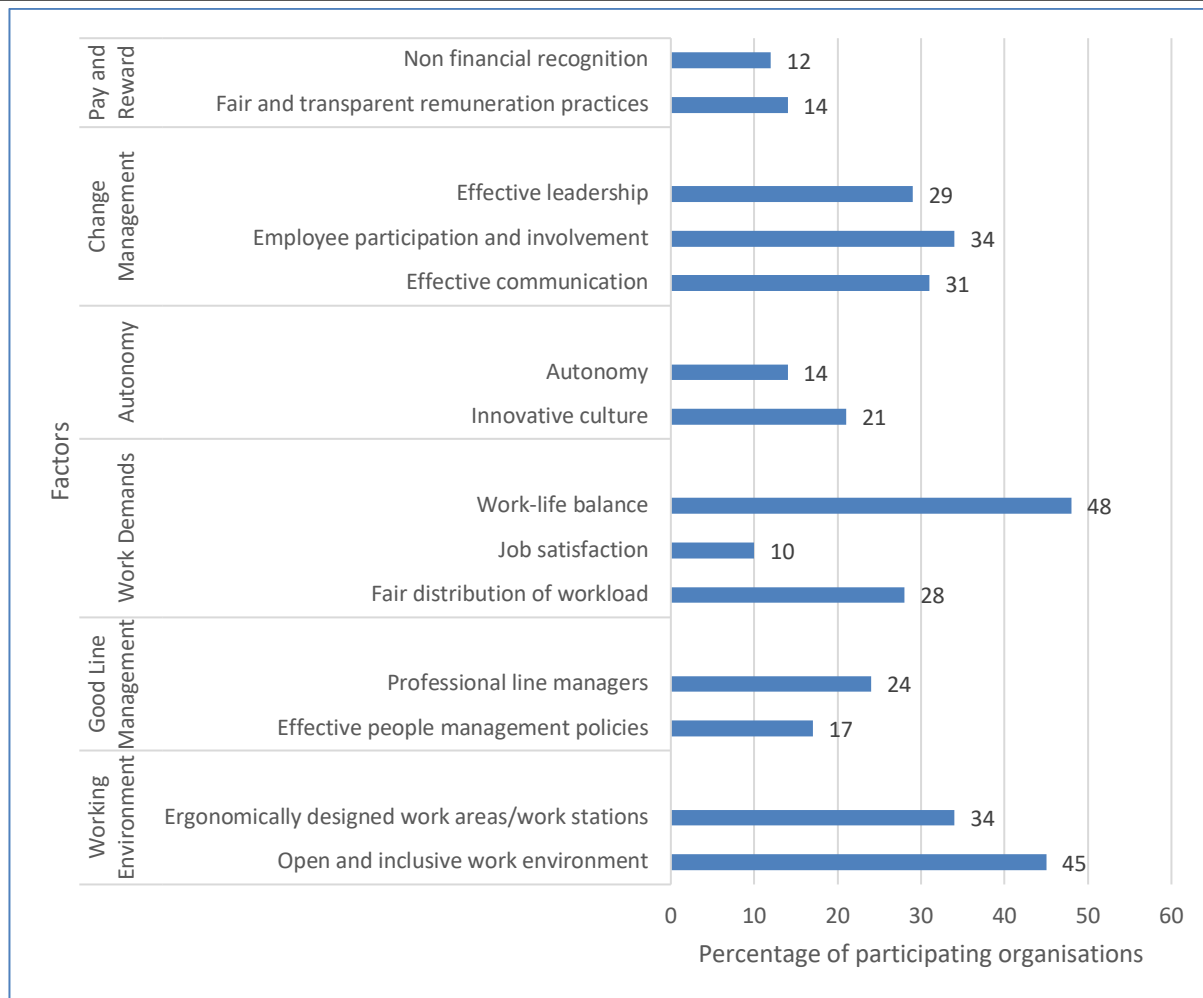


Figure 2: Work Domain of Employee Well-being

Values/Principles Domain of Employee Well-being [see Figure 3]

Among the factors listed for the values/principles domain, majority of the participating organisations [55%] had a clear mission and objectives, whereas only 13% had a health and well-being strategy in place. Having value-based leadership in their organisations was affirmed by 16% of them and corporate governance by 26%. Mutual trust was experienced by employees in 23% of the participating organisations. All these factors contribute to the overall leadership in these organisations. Ethical standards were being upheld by 29% of the organisations, whereas, dignity at work was being encouraged by 26% of them, and a similar percentage were undertaking corporate social responsibility initiatives. All these factors define the ethical standards of these organisations. As regards diversity, 29% of the participating organisations had diversity and inclusion, 19% exhibited cultural engagement, and 42% invested in training both their managers and employees alike. The two factors of having a well-being strategy and value-based leadership in organisations paves the way for the consolidation of other factors of this domain, and the other four domains of the employee well-being model. The cruciality of these factors cannot be more emphasised.

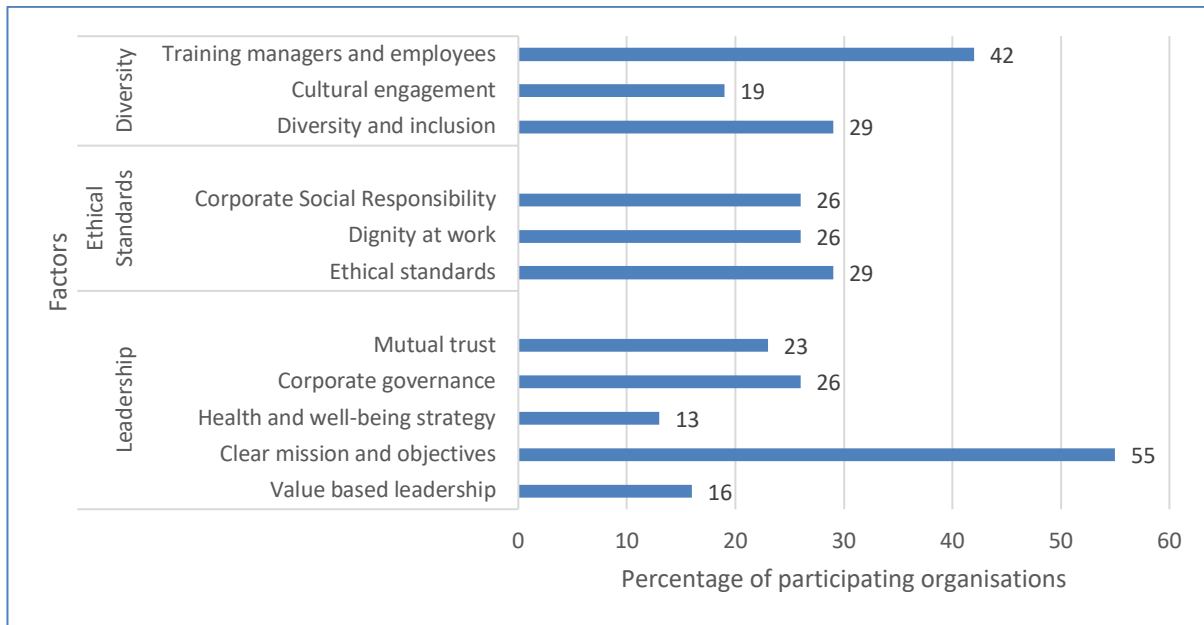


Figure 3: Values/Principles Domain of Employee Well-being

Collective/Social Domain of Employee Well-being [see Figure 4]

The factors of collective/social domain of employee well-being depicted in Figure 4 indicate that teamworking was prevalent in majority of the organisations [63%] and an environment of dignity and respect in 47% of them. Only 30% of the organisations had positive and healthy relationships, and an even lesser number [27%] had a supportive management at their workplace. These factors which collectively create positive relationships in organisations were not prevalent in all the participating organisations. Employee voice by way of a two-way communication, consultation, general dialogue and involvement in decision making was being facilitated by only 30% of the participating organisations. Employee well-being in this domain is linked to positive and healthy relationships and having a voice in decision making. In totality, an environment of dignity and respect was indicated by a higher number of participating organisations [47%] as against dignity of work related to the values/principles domain which was opted by 26% [see Figure 3]. Dignity at work associated with lesser percentage of participating organisations could, be attributed to individual experiences based on job roles, teamworking, and reporting line managers' input/style.

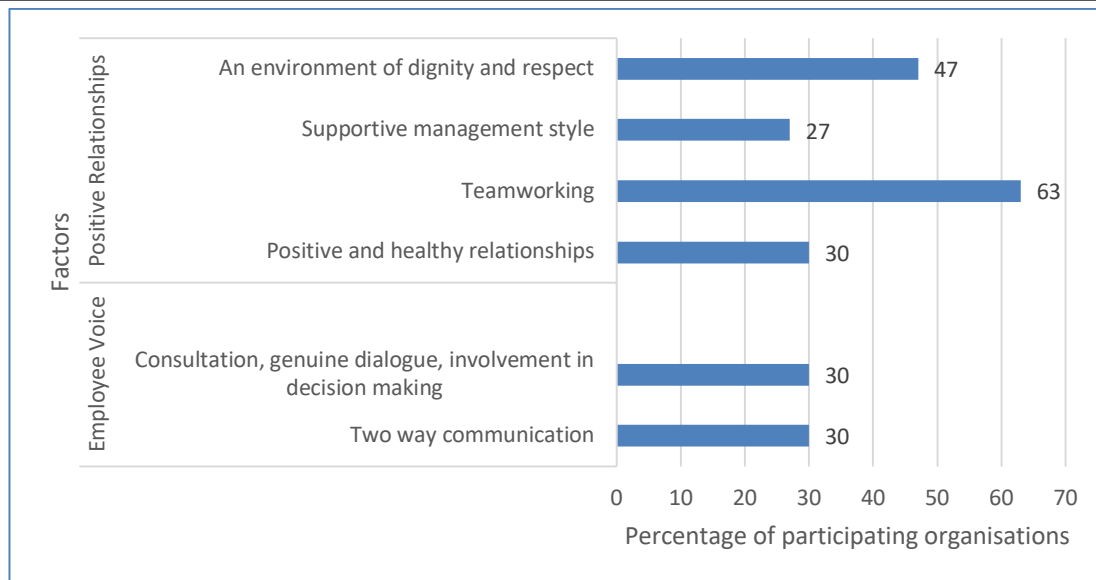


Figure 4: Collective/Social Domain of Employee Well-being

Personal Growth Domain of Employee Well-being [see Figure 5]

Of the factors related to the personal growth domain listed in Figure 5, performance management and personal development plans were being implemented by 50% and succession planning by 33% of the participating organisations. Employees need to have well-established career paths and progression plans in place, an area in which these organisations could do better. This could be due to the lack of coaching and mentoring, which was being done in only 17% of the organisations, and with less than a quarter of the participating organisations [23%] effectively utilising the skills of their employees. More intense and widespread coaching and mentoring would be able to address other factors related to this domain. Innovative and creative workshops were being conducted by 17 % of the participating organisations and 37% of them had an open and collaborative culture, contributing to the creativity levels in these organisations. Only 3% of the participating organisations had personal resilience training, and 13% of them had positive emotional relationships and financial well-being. These three equally important factors were not being well-supported by most organisations, thereby impacting the emotional aspect of this domain. None of the organisations had a mid-career review, which is important for the personal and ongoing growth of employees; as is lifelong learning, access to training, and challenging work which was being encouraged by only 20% and 30% of the organisations, respectively.

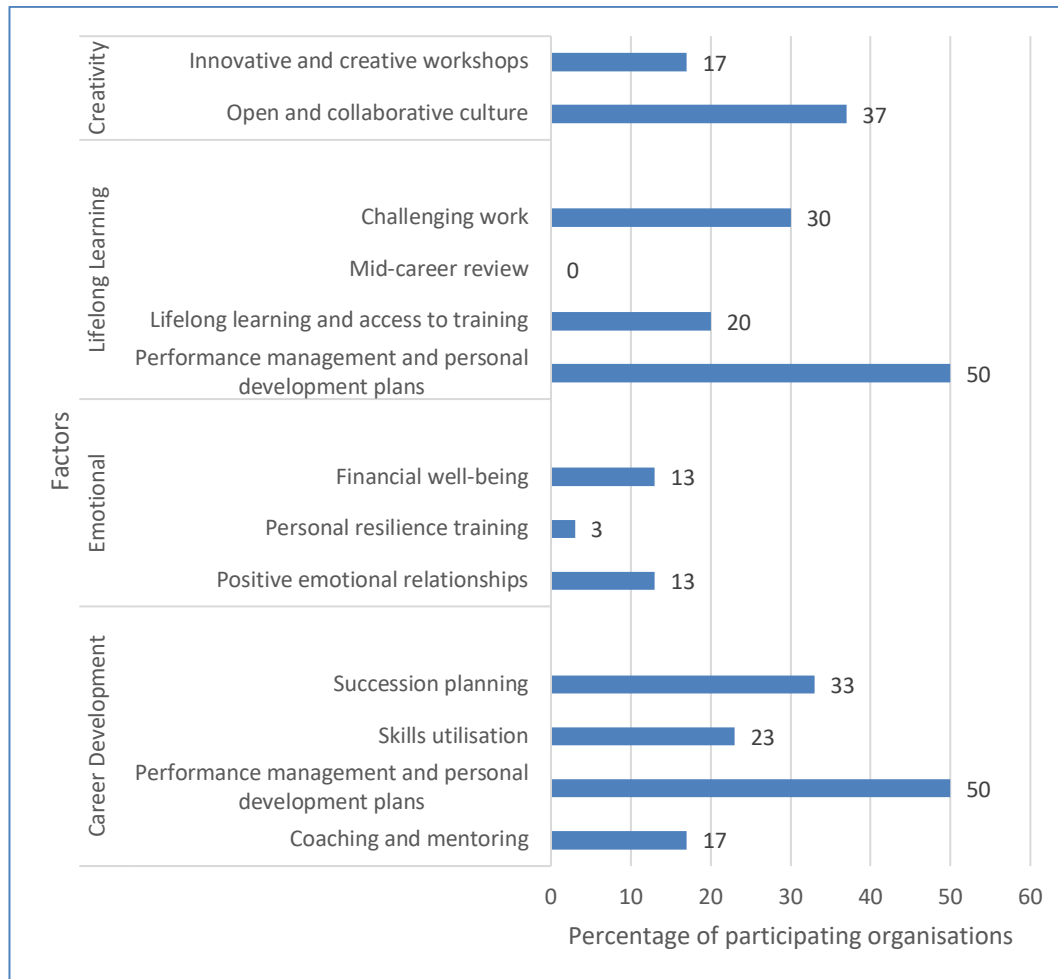


Figure 5: Personal Growth Domain of Employee Well-being

CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions that can be drawn from this study are that the participating organisations have not scored high on any of the five domains of employee well-being. For the health domain, majority of the organisations, were more favourable towards factors related to physical health and physical safety of their employees than mental health. The commitment to these factors could be linked to the compliance requirement from the legal and operational point of view. Mental health and organisational health support factors need to be embraced by more organisations, as these factors contribute to employee well-being in the health domain. In the work domain, organisations need to improve significantly in factors like pay and rewards, giving autonomy to employees, job satisfaction, effective people management policies, professional management, workload distribution, and leadership, as compared to factors like work-life balance, open and inclusive work environment. For the values/principles domain, more organisations had a clear mission and objectives, and were investing in training their managers and employees. Fewer organisations were having diversity and inclusion, cultural engagement, corporate governance, corporate social responsibility, dignity at work, mutual trust and were implementing ethical standards at the workplace. Majority of the participating organisations lacked value-based leadership and a well-being strategy.

In the collective/social domain of employee well-being, teamworking was prevalent in more organisations, followed by an overall environment of dignity and respect. However, only a few organisations were mindful of factors like positive and healthy relationships, employee voice, having a supportive management style in their workplace. In the personal growth domain, more organisations were implementing performance management and personal development plans, had an open and collaborative culture, and succession planning. Effective utilisation of employees' skills, coaching and mentoring are factors that lacked commitment from these organisations. Few participating organisations believed in resilience training, positive emotional relationships and financial well-being. Challenging work, lifelong learning, access to training and creativity were also not widely evident. There was total disregard for a mid-career review, as it was non-existent in all participating organisations.

It can be concluded that employee well-being in the participating organisations in the Kingdom of Bahrain needs to be dealt with as a top priority rather than an option. The need of the day is in establishing systems, culture creation and development, having the leadership mindset that would give the right impetus to employee well-being.

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