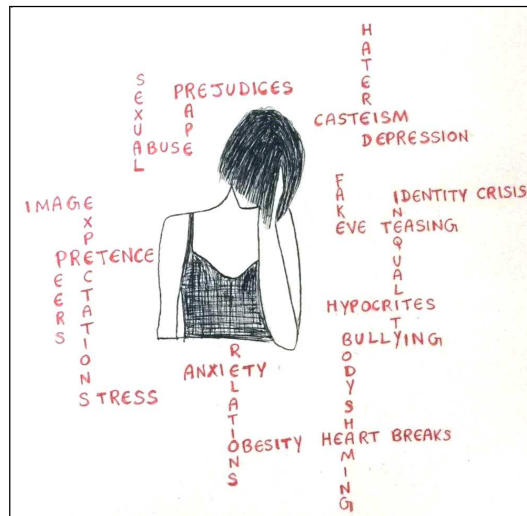


Modern Social Life and Mental Health

D.M. Pestonjee*
Taronish Pastakia**

Indian society today is a society in transition. The ago-old misconception that the Indian economy is predominantly rural is now eroding away. It is true that one's village culture, community, caste and familial ties still majorly impact the average Indian's way of life. However, due to both the 'push' and 'pull' forces of migration, the former, over time, have become more and more amalgamated with urbane and metropolitan influences stemming from, among others, the mass proliferation of white collar jobs and the explosion of



* **The author** is the GSPL Chair Professor at the School of Petroleum Management (SPM), Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

** The co-author is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychology, St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

social media platforms. This hybridisation of schemas often causes cognitive dissonance for said individual in multiple facets of his/her personal and/or professional life.

Since industry and service sector jobs are majorly concentrated in urban areas of the country, this individual now has an entirely new set of psycho-social adjustment problems to deal with. Another reason for why the work-life of India is drastically different from that of other countries is that organisations in India, at least the well-established ones, often have two to three generations working simultaneously, which combined with the rapidly growing average life-expectancy; thanks to cheap quality public health-care, which is estimated to increase to four to five generations in the near future. The major problem to be expected by future, and even to an extent, current HR managers, is that multiple generations profess dramatically different superegos and/or value-systems.

First, we have the ‘Baby Boomers’ born approximately between 1946 and 1964. Then we have the ‘Gen-X’ born between 1965 and 1985, followed by the ‘Gen-Y’ aka the ‘Millennials’ born between 1986 to 1996, and lastly, the ‘Gen-Z’ born post 1996. Although the consensus on the specificity of these generational demarcations is somewhat disputed, there is no doubt about the vast chasm of value-systems from the Gen-Z to the Baby Boomers and everyone in between, which makes the office-space a ripe platform for intra-organisational disputes resulting from lack of group conformity and group cohesion on one end of the spectrum to groupthink on the other. In orthodox Indian cultures wherein merely questioning elders or raising doubts is still considered akin to insulting them.

To prevent these and other expected issues for HR personnel, it becomes vital for the Gen-X and the Baby Boomers to attempt to understand the value-systems of the Gen-Y and Gen-Z, for instance, their crucial need for technology in any relationship formation or maintenance, the insecurity which may often stem from that, their ardent passion towards their profession as opposed to merely looking at a job as a means of livelihood, their ability to multi-task with agility, etc. In return, it also becomes necessary for the spontaneous and speed-loving Gens-Y and Z to try and understand the historical and cultural backdrop of the formative years of the Gen-X and the Baby Boomers in order to then comprehend the reasons behind their reluctance to adapt to new technologies, their seemingly orthodox views and stereotypes about various aspects of the emerging Indian society, etc. This in turn might encourage them to give due credence to their wealth of experiential knowledge amassed and accumulated over the years which combined with the agility of their youth, can really enrich the experiences of

group endeavor for all parties involved.

It is well understood among mental health professionals that when said maladaptive behaviour, social or otherwise, becomes chronic in both duration as well as severity, temporary 'states' of mind turn cross into the territory of relatively permanent 'traits' of cognition and behaviour. Before you know it, an employee may well be beyond the reach of his/her HR managers' skill and expertise, and specialists may need to be called on to assist. This is where the crux of the problem lies today, because according to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the country needs 11,500 psychiatrists but has merely 3500 at present. Among non-medical personnel, this dearth is even more acute. In a country where one student commits suicide every hour, according to National Crime Records Bureau, 2015, the entire mental health workforce, comprising of psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, mental health social workers, psychiatric nurses, occupational therapists, etc. stands at roughly 7000, while the actual bare minimum requirement is estimated to be around 54,750 (Slave, 2016).

Not just human resources, but even financial resources allocated towards mental health in the country barely scratch the surface. At present, India spends around 0.06% of its health budget on mental health. This percentage is even less than what Bangladesh (approx. 0.44%) spends on mental health. In contrast, most developed nations spend over 4% of their budgets on mental-health research, infrastructure, frameworks and talent pool according to a 2011 World Health Organisation (WHO) report (Slave, 2016).

Legislative action however, in recent years has been quite promising. The long awaited Mental Health Amendment Bill was finally passed by both Houses of the Indian Parliament and signed into law by the President of India. Although many of its provisions have not yet been implemented in full, some of the most crucial highlights of the Act are as follows:

1. The act of 'Attempted Suicide' (previously under Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code) has now been decriminalised.
2. The use of Electro-convulsive Therapy (ECT) on minors for any treatment whatsoever has been strictly banned.
3. For adults, ECT use and administration has been restricted to emergency cases only. Moreover, the use of anesthesia and muscle relaxants has now been mandated.
4. Patients suffering from mental disorders have now been given relatively more medical power of attorney depending on the type and severity of the disorder. They can now take decisions about their health and

treatment with little interference from vested interests looking to exploit their predicament.

5. Insurers are now bound to make provisions for the treatment of mental illnesses at par with physical ones.
6. Provisions for regulation and registration of mental health institutions have been provided although yet not fully implemented as a mainstream administrative process.
7. A special provision for the establishment of a ‘Mental Health Review Board’ to act as a regulatory body has also been provided although its implementation is still pending.
8. New guidelines for law enforcement personnel for behaving with the mentally ill have been provided, although training workshops and programmes for the same has been conducted in very few districts, and barely at the grassroots level where it is most required.

Our organisations today are in totally different shapes than those of the last century; but one thing has not changed, i.e. human beings still need organisations to earn their livelihoods and satisfy social needs. People could be part of organisations as employees, partners or entrepreneurs, but they do need organisations to survive.

The modern world of work has to take cognizance of the following important characteristics of organizations (Pestonjee & Pandey, 2013):

1. **Uncertainty:** The external environment of future organizations will be full of uncertainty and extremely volatile. Traditional approaches of developing strategies will not be effective anymore, and managers will need to think differently for new business models relevant for different markets across the globe.
2. **Complexity:** Future organisations shall be more complex systems than ever before. They would be designed around multiple business processes/ models and would aim to target different markets in different regions. There could be numerous inter-dependent sub-systems working with numerous external systems. Both external and internal boundaries will become blurred and permeable. Though organisations will be flatter, but ambiguity and multiplicity of organisational roles of individuals and departments/work groups/teams will be making organisational systems more complex.
3. **Speed:** For future organisations, time could be perhaps the most precious resource to control. High uncertainty and complexity will

force organisations to shorten their long-term plan and they will need to work at a fast pace to achieve their targets. Organisations need to review and revise their goals, objectives and plans very frequently. Strategies designed today may not remain effective by the time they are implemented.

4. **Technology:** Efficient technology will be the key to success for future organisations and it has to be continuously evolving, real-time, relevant and innovative. New technologies shall drastically bring down costs and make decisions-making more efficient. Only organisations investing in R&D for technology innovation will be able to survive and achieve excellence. Organisations need to invest more money on developing and using clean technologies for achieving energy efficiency, causing less damage to the environment, and making human life better.
5. **Virtual Workspace:** In the present century, geography and physics both need to be reinterpreted. Distances have shrunk and the term “global” has acquired a new significance. Work teams can be far apart and may focus on achieving their goals while operating in different geographical locales with different time-zones. Up until the recent past, when we talked of “teams” we thought of individuals who are in close proximity with each other, but not anymore. Future organisations will have more virtual space than physical ones. Organisations could be hiring highly competent and talented professionals across the globe to achieve their targets. New communication technologies i.e. cloud computing will make the virtual workspace more cost effective in comparison to traditional physical workspaces. Most of the core business processes would be conducted online by several virtual teams together.
6. **Hyper-Specialisation:** As future organisations will be more adaptive to their environments, many jobs which are dominating today’s job market will be extinct in the future or could only be of archival value. Future organisations will be driven by hyper-specialised jobs which could be extremely complex but designed around very specific processes or outputs. Hyper-specialised jobs will demand multiplicity of tasks, skills and knowledge of special domains. They shall achieve improvements in quality, speed and cost. Possibly a future hyper-specialised job would merge many interrelated jobs of today and eliminate them in the future.
7. **Cultural Diversity:** Since the workspace is becoming “virtual”, a necessary concomitant is diversity of cultures within a given team. The geographical spread of the organisation and various operations which

they perform at multiple locations imply cultural diversity. Organisations need to frame culturally sensitive HR policies.

- 8. Communication:** To manage uncertainty and complexity effectively, in the era of mergers, acquisitions and alliances, organisations will need to design better internal and external communication strategies with various stakeholders. Collaborative inter-organisational relationships will be a strong determinant of success.

Over and above these macro-level factors, organisations will also need to focus on issues like work-life balance, gender issues, social support issues and emotional issues for improving the quality of life and well-being of individuals. Some of these issues are highlighted below:

- 1. Gender Issues:** The composition of the working population has been subject to change during the past few decades. Increasing proportions of women employees in the workforce across industries and occupational sections has raised the need for special attention to address gender issues at workplaces. Organisations need to be more “sensitive” toward gender issues in their policy, especially with regard to sexual harassment, fair career opportunities to competent professionals irrespective of gender, and the fair treatment of women employees at work and their performance.
- 2. The Work-Life Balance:** The social fabric of society is under tremendous tension and has started showing the signs of “wear and tear”. With better qualified, younger professionals entering the employment markets combined with concepts of gender equality, things are going to be tough for future managers. Gender roles are probably going to be the most important issue of concern for society in general and organisations in particular. And as we can all see, the IQ is having a toll on the EQ.
- 3. The Changing Legal Environment:** Organisations need to work under the respective legal frameworks of the countries where they operate. At the macro-level, legal issues are potential sources of stress for organisations as social systems. Stress in a social system percolates to individuals who are members of the system. As a sovereign country, we have our own Constitution to govern our destinies. It is fascinating to see how the Constitutional provisions have been modified time and again to suit the external realities, e.g. UN policies, international business laws, etc. In the future, we have to align our regulations and laws with international legal norms, e.g. labour laws, intellectual

property rights, cyber laws and international climate change agreements, to name a few.

4. **Social Structure and Support Systems:** It has been a social aphorism that the worst of stress can be managed with the best support system! Not anymore. Our support systems, like the traditional family bonds are getting weaker by the day. The Gen-Y and Gen-Z do not believe in staying with the same organisation long enough to develop socially meaningful relationships as support-systems. As a consequence, the chances of break-ups and break-downs increase manifold.
5. **Mental Health Issues:** With so much changing so fast, we cannot think of the “poor individual” going unscathed during organisational turmoil. Naturally, mental health issues are becoming more and more pronounced as the century progresses. A study reported in WHO, conducted for the NCMH (National Care Of Medical Health), states that at least 6.5% per cent of the Indian population suffers from a form of serious mental disorder, with no discernible rural-urban differences. Though there are effective measures and treatments, there is an extreme shortage of mental health workers like psychologists, psychiatrists, and doctors.

As reported latest in 2014, it was as low as “one in 100,000 people”. The average suicide rate in India is 10.9 for every lakh people and the majority of people who commit suicide are below 44 years of age. There is a strong argument in the contention that “stress audits” especially in the organisational context, are actually represented by the interface between HRM practitioners and clinical psychologists.

“Health is too serious a matter to be left to the mercy of the physicians!”

There is now a paradigm shift from organisation-oriented performance focus to maintain work-life balance and achieving well-being. Earlier research was done with the focus that stress (or distress) is not good for an individual and organisational performance. Hence, we should try to prevent and reduce it, so that organisational performance does not suffer. Most of the stress theories which have been generated in the West, like burnout model, cybernetics theory, have focused on implementing control over the work environment in order to increase overall productivity. Now however, organisations need to shift their focus from productivity to employee happiness and work-life balance if they wish to achieve excellence in the long run.

There is also an ever-increasing emphasis on spirituality and Indian philosophies, e.g. Buddhism. There are some attempts to establish empirical evidence of testing effectiveness of spiritually-focused stress management

techniques in the workplace. We need more inter-disciplinary research in which neuroscientists, clinical and social psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists and philosophers can work together to make human life better.

This research however, should be focused on the scientific inquiry of reality, and not mere confirmation of preconceived assumptions; and it must be relevant to today's society and humanity.

Based on the findings that such researches throw up, the question then remains that can or should organisations build in metrics for their employees' mental health into their regular performance scorecards? Along with their regular financial audit, should the 'stress audit' as mentioned previously, be given equal, if not more weightage in the annual reports of the organisations in question?

Assuming these metrics do the intended job, organisations will also need to look at establishing "social circles" to create an inorganic social structure that reduces chances of depression among all members.

Moreover, technology has enabled the establishment of more and more "connected societies" with disconnected people. This technology however, is not optimally utilised currently, especially in the domain of organisational stress audit and management.

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies have already helped expand the conventional workspaces. For the majority of workplaces, working online and interacting with digital technologies both inside and outside of the office walls have become both a necessity and a norm. This impersonal form of interaction nonetheless continues to be an issue for employees. Can Virtual Reality help businesses overcome the impersonality of online communication?

Virtual and augmented reality will become an \$80 billion market by 2025, predicts a new report conducted by the world-recognised investment bank Goldman Sachs. To put this in perspective, this is roughly the size of the desktop PC market today. Is this realistic? Well, opposed to the adoption of smart-phones and tablets it is expected that the adoption of virtual and augmented reality technologies will be slower. On the other hand, the report noted, "*as the technology advances, price points decline and an entire new marketplace of applications hits the market, we believe VR/AR has the potential to spawn a multibillion-dollar industry, and possibly be as game-changing as the advent of PC*".

How can virtual reality be relevant for and add value to workplaces and business overall, is the burning question in the minds of today's OB and HR

managers. Imagine being miles away from your colleagues or customers, yet feeling that you are physically inhabiting the same meeting room and office space. Virtual reality can help catalyze that experience. As soon as you strap on the headset and noise-cancelling headphones you can immediately enter a collaborative and immersive virtual environment.

Sensors implemented in for example Oculus Rift pick up and translate body language and other types of non-verbal communication that you would miss with traditional teleconferencing or Skype. Language barriers can also be washed away, as these applications hold the capability of translating in real time.

In a time where a major part of our interactions are happening online, people feel more and more isolated as no contact can measure up with personal contact. In remote offices, it is harder to get employees to maintain focus, and a continuous isolation from their colleagues can lead to both a less productive and less cohesive team.

And this is exactly why virtual reality holds an enormous potential for strengthening inter-organisational collaboration. In some cases, virtual reality has already made an impact on training. Taking NASA as an example; thanks to virtual reality, they can make sure that the people they send into space have some amount of experience in becoming detached from their shuttle and have to use a backpack to navigate their way back or performing complicated tasks in zero gravity. Virtual Reality enables NASA to simulate all these situations.

However, you do not need to train for being an astronaut before virtual reality can make a huge difference in the workplace. Customer service training, as an example, requires teaching employees how to impact, retain and understand customer satisfaction as well as the use of greetings, body language, appropriate tone of voice and even the best way to deal with customer complaints.

These skill sets can be quite difficult to hone if the learning is hypothetical. With virtual reality however, employers are able to simulate real-life situations which exposes employees to situations such as the handling of consumer complaint, dissatisfaction or how to turn an unhappy customer into a happy one. Also, consider how medical professionals can receive the best training possible using these virtual reality devices, without the need for less realistic simulations or even human testing.

The workforce today consists of a large number of Millennials. This generation seeks a high degree of flexibility, mobility and in general a great emphasis on work-life balance. Therefore, for this generation a company's culture makes up one of the biggest considerations when evaluating and considering a new employer.

Here, virtual reality can enable the HR department in multiple ways. First, virtual reality applications can enable employees to get as much mobility and flexibility as they desire; by virtually accessing the office space. Thereby, virtual reality gives employees the autonomy in terms of when, where and how they work.

Second, what about using virtual reality to help potential candidates take more informed decisions? In that context, this technology can be used for showing a day in the life of an employee at the employer's organisation and experiencing a tour of the company offices. Facilitating this can in the end benefit the human resource departments that both can increase retention rates and decrease employee turnover.

All in all there lies a huge potential in using virtual reality among businesses. That being said, the adoption will be slow as the devices are still connected to high costs and it will take time to create personalised applications that fit the uniqueness of each business.

However, as more and more work tends to be virtual, and to some extent also remote, and as training, with ever-changing consumer demands, will become more complex – more businesses will be curious to explore how virtual reality can be adopted to improve organisational business processes.

Today's workforce is increasingly diverse in terms of personal characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation. In turn, it's found that a well-managed diverse workforce will both reduce costs and generate greater profit.

Some more issues of mental health resulting from modern social life are listed below:

1. Psychopharmacological Issues (The Rise of Substance Abuse)
2. Economic Delinquency (Frauds & Scams)
3. Breakdown of Family Ties
4. Suicides
5. Truancy/Absenteeism
6. Workplace Bullying
7. Sexual Harassment [Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013]

Conclusion

Many years ago, the author had proposed a concept called the 3-H Approach in the field of Organisational Behaviour. In a nutshell, the field of OB/HR has

evolved from the simple task of managing labour relations i.e. 'Hands' and taking care of the financial needs of employees, to managing 'Heads' and taking care of their cognitive needs as well. Recent trends suggest a new paradigm shift towards managing their emotional well-being as well or 'Hearts'.

The field of mental health just like many other branches of behavioural science, has also evolved from merely being a management of patients (Hands) to focusing on treating their minds/brains (Heads), and is moving towards addressing issues of emotional and spiritual well-being as well (Hearts).

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