

BOOK REVIEW - Improving Mental Health in the Workplace



This collection of chapters from people eminent in the South African field of mental health in the workplace is essential reading for HR practitioners and could serve as a handbook to implementation of the newly launched revised People Practices and Governance Standard on Employee Wellness.

Written and published during the COVID pandemic, reference is made throughout the book to the pandemic and issues arising from it. Even though we are now, thankfully, in recovery mode (we hope), the discussion on issues highlighted by the pandemic is still important and useful. It is clear that the pandemic has left many people emotionally scarred, and has contributed to the exacerbation of incipient mental health problems, which now manifest in problems at work.

The book is structured in three parts: Understanding the current context and what has given rise to this increasing concern; Mental health is not an island: Wellbeing is holistic and has multiple dimensions; and Coping mechanisms: Towards a way forward with mental health.

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH

in the Workplace



Edited by

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Foreword by Bonang Mohale



The book contains multiple levels of discussion, from basic psycho/social theories (of stress, as one example); to case studies of implementing mental health improvement programmes in organisations; to practical guidelines on how to develop policies and design programmes.

Some particular parts which caught my eye included:

discussion on burnout (now in the International Classification of Diseases - ICD-11 as an 'occupational phenomenon', not a medical condition);

the inclusion of psychosocial hazard identification and risk management in global standards as ISO 45003;

a set of guiding principles for workplace mental health programmes and a step-by-step guide to implementation;

SA data on manifestation of mental health disorders in the workplace showing anxiety disorders with about double the prevalence of depressive disorders;

trauma and fatigue as defining features of the post-pandemic context (which also left me reflecting on

how these must also be features of our on-going socio-political-economic situation on South Africa);
a comprehensive discussion on toxicity in the workplace - the sources of toxicity; the role of personality
in creating toxicity; and how to mitigate and manage to risk of toxicity;
the effects of sexual harassment, racism and incompatibility on mental health;
guidelines for dealing with depression and anxiety;
a discussion on 'dis-traction' and 'dis-ease' and how the phenomenon of 'always on' social media
negatively impacts well-being;
the multiple dimensions of well-being;
a comprehensive discussion of mental health and financial well-being;
creating resilience and psychological safety.

A thread throughout the book is the critical role of leaders at all levels in avoiding mental health harm
and supporting mental health and well-being in the workplace.

BOOK REVIEW - Improving Mental Health in the Workplace, edited by Navlika Ratangee, KR, 2021