Wellness Assessment and Management During and After The COVID-19 Pandemic
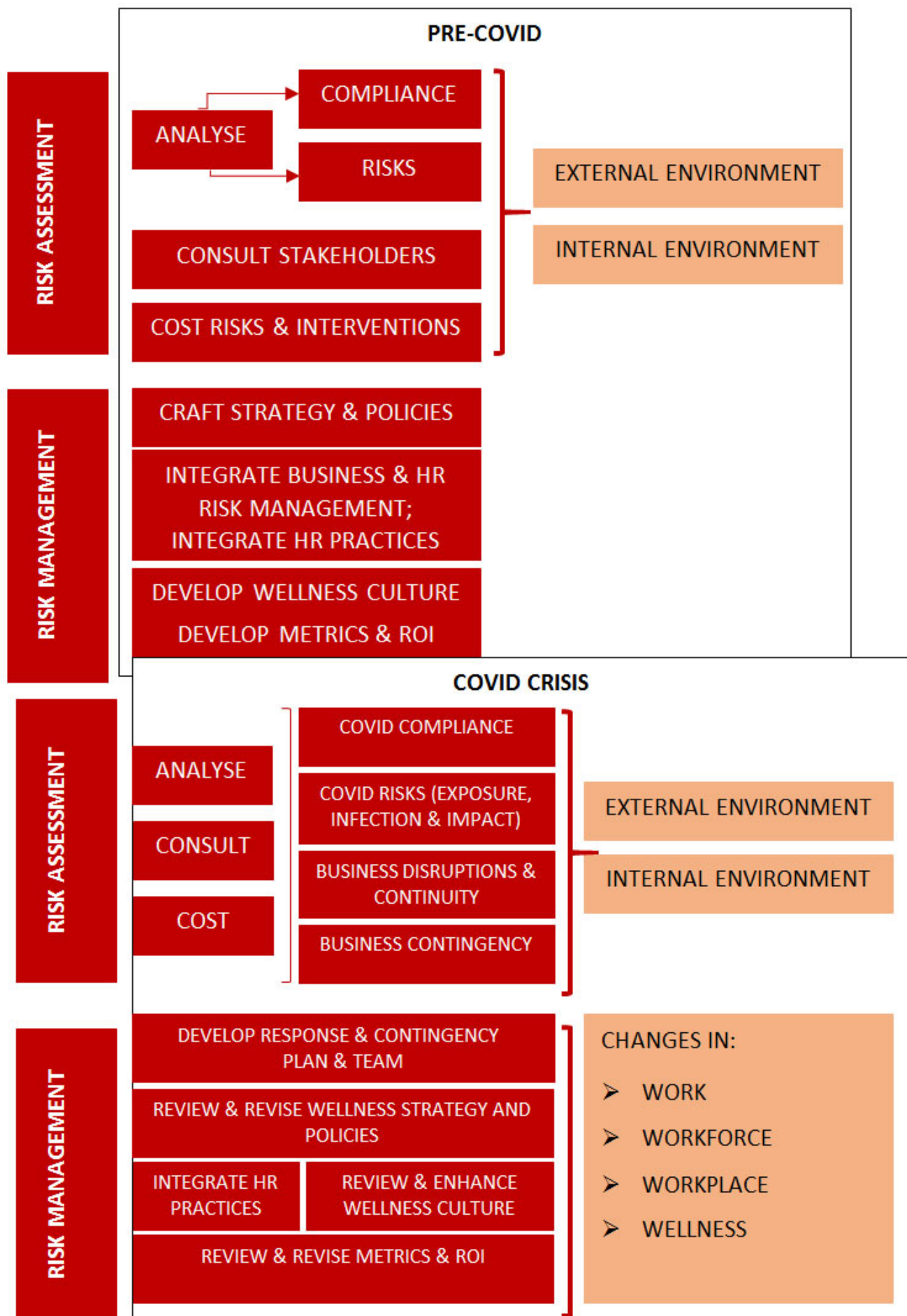

There are many concerns, locally and globally, regarding employee wellbeing in relation to the COVID pandemic and the organisational responses to it, such as the management of work, workforce, and workplace during and post the pandemic. This includes the preparation and management of the workforce and workplace in accordance with legislation, regulations, and scientific advice; the shift to remote and flexible working; and the adoption of digital technologies. The survey conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2020) is an illustration, for example, of the considerations on workplace technology.

These mounting concerns require a systematic and integrated approach, from the assessment to the management of employee wellbeing. This can be a daunting task for organisations given the complexities entailed and as they confront multifaceted challenges and crises. To make this a manageable task one can begin to identify the key dimensions and a structure or framework to address the various dimensions. For example, one could draw up a process flow and guideline. In this regard the SABPP HR Risk Management and Wellness Standards can be instructive. The below process flow and questionnaire is an illustration based on these Standards.

Process Flow

The figures below provide illustrative process flows that outline a possible end-to-end risk and wellness management process – from risk assessment, management to monitoring and evaluation. The first figure maps the process pre-COVID and the second the process for the COVID crisis and thereafter.

PRE-COVID

RISK ASSESSMENT

ANALYSE
- COMPLIANCE
- RISKS

CONSULT STAKEHOLDERS

COST RISKS & INTERVENTIONS

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

RISK MANAGEMENT

CRAFT STRATEGY & POLICIES

INTEGRATE BUSINESS & HR RISK MANAGEMENT; INTEGRATE HR PRACTICES

DEVELOP WELLNESS CULTURE

DEVELOP METRICS & ROI

COVID CRISIS

RISK ASSESSMENT

ANALYSE

CONSULT

COST

- COVID COMPLIANCE
- COVID RISKS (EXPOSURE, INFECTION & IMPACT)
- BUSINESS DISRUPTIONS & CONTINUITY
- BUSINESS CONTINGENCY

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

RISK MANAGEMENT

DEVELOP RESPONSE & CONTINGENCY PLAN & TEAM

REVIEW & REVISE WELLNESS STRATEGY AND POLICIES

INTEGRATE HR PRACTICES

REVIEW & ENHANCE WELLNESS CULTURE

REVIEW & REVISE METRICS & ROI

CHANGES IN:
- ➤ WORK
- ➤ WORKFORCE
- ➤ WORKPLACE
- ➤ WELLNESS

Questionnaire

The below questionnaire unpacks the above process flow. It provides an illustrative step-by-step process for addressing the various dimensions of wellness and to undertake the risk assessment, management, and monitoring and evaluation.

| Undertake a wellness risk assessment | Has the organisation conducted a wellness analysis and risk assessment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic? | No | • 1) Conduct an analysis of key wellness dimensions (see below) and risks in the internal and external environment. Identify the key factors and levers in these environments that impact or could impact on the dimensions. The traditional levers of wellness are the structures, capacities, and resources in the internal and external environments for:
　- a) Occupational health and safety
　　■ regulatory ecosystem (of legislation, institutions, policies and programmes)
　　■ compliance monitoring and management in the external and internal environments
　　■ prevention, management and enhancement in the external and internal environments

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　- b) Physical health and wellbeing
　　■ medical screening, prevention and awareness campaigns
　　■ facilitating behaviour change and habits for healthy living and the provision of facilities such as gyms
　　■ management of acute and chronic conditions or disorders, injury and disability
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　- c) Mental health and wellbeing
　　■ psychological screening, prevention and awareness campaigns
　　■ developing individual, team and organisational resilience
　　■ promoting flexible work practices where applicable, and facilitating management buy-in, behaviour change and habits for work-life balance
　　■ monitoring levels of stress, potential burn-out and disengagement within the organisation
　　■ management of stress, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, injury, disability, other clinical disorders, and risk-taking behaviours
　　■ dedicated interventions and coaching programmes for the wellbeing and vitality of executive and senior management teams

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　- d) Financial wellbeing
　　■ financial awareness campaigns
　　■ developing and enhancing financial literacy and planning skills
　　■ management and provision of benefits and safety nets such as medical aid, retirement funding, extended sick leave, disability, loss of income and other social protection
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　- e) High risk factors
　　■ identification and management of high-risk groups (due to risk exposure in the workplace and nature of work done), syndromes (such as HIV/AIDS, comorbidities and chronic disorders) and factors (such as individual risk behaviours)

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　- f) Productivity factors
　　■ monitoring and developing programmes to address the balance of productivity, workload and employee physical and mental health
　　■ monitoring and managing absenteeism and sick leave usage
　　■ monitoring and advising on the use and management of flexible work and remote work practices
• 2) Identify the ways and extent the coronavirus and COVID-19 impacts on the wellness dimensions
• 3) Identify the changes in work, workplace and workforce and the general and COVID-specific wellness risks associated with these changes, and compile a risk register
• 4) Align and integrate the wellness risk register with the HR Risk Management and Business Risk Management registers and strategies |
| | | Yes | • 1) Identify the ways the coronavirus and COVID-19 is impacting and can impact on the wellness dimensions
• 2) Identify the scope and extent of the impact on the wellness dimensions
• 3) Identify the wellness risks COVID-19 poses to work, workplace and workers, and update the risk register
• 4) Re-evaluate and realign the HR Risk Management and Business Risk Management registers and strategies |

| Dimensions of wellness | Consult with stakeholders to examine the above dimensions and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the organisation's responses to it and the changes in work and workplace, will have on these dimensions:
• **Physical**: The practice of healthy behaviours and habits in relation to physical activity, nutrition, sleep, and relaxation; the use of preventive screening; and actively monitoring and managing chronic conditions
  - Screening at entry, exit and for high risk groups
  - Institute mandatory hygiene protocols
  - Provision for testing for suspected infection in collaboration with service providers or medical aid
  - Providing information and guidelines for staff to self-monitor and report symptoms
  - Institute formal reporting channels, resources or mechanisms
  - Link to existing healthy living campaigns and behavioural change programmes
High risk groups
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  - Identify and manage high risks groups with comorbidities, immune suppression and other relevant factors
• **Mental and emotional**: Developing the capacity to self-regulate, thrive and fully experience the diverse range of human emotions
  - Provide psychological support, counselling and referral systems
  - Provide programmes to develop resilience and to adapt to flexible and remote work where necessary
  - Provide guidelines on how to structure working from home and balance work and life demands and time conflicts
  - Provide interventions and resources to identify, manage and seek help with stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, substance abuse, and risk-taking behaviours
  - Provide specific programmes for managers to identify their difficulties with coping with and managing the uncertainty and challenging economic environment
High risk groups
•
  - Identify and manage high risks individuals or groups for stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, substance abuse and risk-taking behaviours
• **Environmental**: Contributing to safe, healthy and sustainable environments to work and live in
  - Occupational Health and Safety Act
  - COVID regulations, including those for the workplace, provision of protective and other equipment, number of workforce present, and hours of work
  - Company occupational health and safety policies, and COVID-specific policy or updates
  - Entry and exit controls, sanitisation, and exposure and infection risk management
  - Internal movement controls and physical distancing management
  - Internal configuration of offices, social areas, canteen, production and plant for physical distancing and exposure and infection risk management
  - Quarantine area for managing potential infections or staff members showing signs of COVID-19
  - Business continuity and contingency plans for quarantining sections of offices, social areas, production and plant where exposure/infection risk present or suspected
  - Provision of information, signs, guides, sanitizers, personal protective equipment, and other necessary resources
High risk groups
•
  - Identify and manage high risk groups for exposure and infection risk during work and at the workplace
  - Identify and manage high risks groups with comorbidities, immune suppression and other relevant factors
• **Financial**: Developing awareness, knowledge and skills for financial planning and decisions
  - Ensure communication on organisation's decisions regarding salaries (including reduced time or retrenchments), benefits, and sick leave for self-isolation and quarantine
  - Provide guidelines, support and resources for financial planning
• **Occupational**: Developing personal satisfaction and enrichment from work and the workplace
  - Monitor and manage online and offline time periods
  - Monitor and manage absenteeism due to ill health or infection and sick leave usage patterns within business functions and units
  - Monitor use of flexible and remote work through surveys, provision of support services, employee engagement assessments, and manager evaluations
  - Monitor and manage the impact on staff that are unable to continue to work from home or remotely
• **Social**: Developing a sense of belonging, having a well-developed support system, and connecting to and contributing towards more diverse and inclusive communities
  - Develop awareness campaigns and interventions on inclusion in virtual meetings
  - Develop campaigns for social engagement and bonding using virtual, chat or other available platforms
  - Develop and facilitate support systems in teams

• **Intellectual**: Enabling the pursuit of knowledge, skill development, and curiosity and innovation
  - Develop or enhance existing programmes for mindfulness and structured times for reflection
  - Develop structured times and facilitation for disengaging from crisis mode and regain perspective on the short, medium and long-term planning for the organisation
• **Spiritual**: Developing and enhancing a sense of purpose and meaning in life
  - Develop programmes of appreciation and facilitate sense and meaning-making during challenging times
  - Provide programmes for grieving the loss of family, friends and peers
  - Provide programmes for grieving the loss of the familiar, routine and structure in work, family and personal lives |

Formulate or revise the wellness philosophy, strategy and policy	• 5) Develop a COVID-19 response and contingency plan and team and update these as the crisis and context evolves
	• 6) Design and deliver appropriate awareness campaigns for the COVID-19 pandemic and crisis for the different levels of the organisation
	• 7) Develop ownership of the revised wellness philosophy, strategy and policies by both employer and employee
	• 8) Clarify the objectives of the COVID-19 wellness strategy at the different levels of the organisation for the eight dimensions (see below)
	• 9) Clearly define the COVID-19 wellness programmes and interventions at the different levels and for the eight dimensions, balancing positive and negative aspects of wellbeing. Consider the above-mentioned traditional levers and factors in relation to the changes in work, workforce and the workplace; how these can be innovated; and how the other dimensions of wellness can be added:
	  - a) Occupational health and safety
	  - b) Physical health and wellbeing
	  - c) Mental health and wellbeing
	  - d) Financial wellbeing
	  - e) High risk groups
	  - f) Productivity factors
	• 10) Clearly state the boundaries of the COVID-19 wellness programmes and interventions

Communication and engagement	• 11) Ensure continuous communication and engagement with staff on the evolving pandemic, the organisation's responses and its response and contingency plan and team • 12) Manage the information flow to staff and balance the positive and negative aspects of managing through the COVID-19 crisis
Organisational adaptive capacity and resilience	• 13) As the organisation responds to the immediate needs and priorities, plan and design programmes to develop the organisation's adaptive capacity and resilience • 14) Stress-test the organisation's response and contingency plan • 15) Address how management needs to shift how they manage virtual and on-site teams • 16) Develop programmes and interventions for remote teams to be productive and balance work, family and life demands and time conflicts • 17) Develop support programmes for staff in quarantine and/or diagnosed with COVID-19 • 18) Develop support programmes for management to adapt and change work and management practices as required
Link with EVP	• 19) Check how the response and contingency plan, including wellness strategy and policies, is aligned with and enhances the employee value proposition • 20) Design and conduct appropriate surveys
Metrics	• 21) Design and develop metrics to monitor and evaluate wellness programmes and interventions • 22) Develop/maintain wellness records or data

The above process flows and questionnaire illustrate the complexity of the task at hand as well as how it can be undertaken in a systematic and integrated approach. The HR practitioner needs to ensure that the HR practices are integrated and work in consonance to realise the strategic, tactical and contingency objectives of the organisation and serve the EVP and the needs of the employees.

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