

Intrapersonal skills as a proactive way to personal sustainability by Dr. Helena Lass

♥ 7



The very nature of our globally competitive world has seen the way we work, the organisations we work for, work relations and employment patterns completely transformed. However, this transformation has also seen a significant increase in work related stress, considerably increased the burnout risk, paving the way to depression. Whilst there are the glaringly obvious financial and personal costs to an individual, it's businesses and workplaces that are often at the forefront of the mental health epidemic.

A mentally healthy workplace is one that protects and promotes mental wellness. For those experiencing stress, burnout and depression, workplaces can empower people to seek help, not only benefitting the individual, but also the organisation, as well as the wider community.

A Global Epidemic

Fatigue, boredom, lack of engagement, absenteeism and presentism, are all symptoms of internal mental malfunctioning. As any HR manager or team leader well knows, stress, burnout and depression can deeply affect team dynamics and individual mental health. The consequent loss of revenue can have major and devastating impacts on profit margins and economies.

This is reflected in Evans-Lacko, S. & Knapp, M.'s scientific paper from 2016 entitled, **'Global patterns of workplace productivity for people with depression: absenteeism and presenteeism costs across eight diverse countries'**. The paper saw data collected from almost 8,000 employees spanning eight countries, including South Africa. The overall picture of the survey revealed that workplace depression collectively cost the eight countries a combined total of almost US\$250 billion (some 3.4 trillion ZAR).

For the South African economy this translates to US\$14.8 billion (201.1 billion ZAR) in losses due to non-existent productivity when at work (presenteeism), and absenteeism as a result of people not showing up at work because of illness costing the economy US\$2.2 billion (29.9 billion ZAR). The study also saw 5.9 percent of the collective South Africa workforce having had more than 21 consecutive days off from work because of depression. In the study, South Africa ranked highest out of the eight surveyed countries in terms of percentage of GDP lost to presenteeism, with 4.2 percent.

There is unfortunately a similar story around the world.

The U.S economy lost US\$84.7 billion (or 0.5% of U.S. GDP) due to non-existent productivity, whilst the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) also found that CA\$50 billion was lost. Whilst down under it is estimated that untreated mental health conditions cost Australian workplaces approximately AU\$10.9 billion per year. This comprises of \$4.7 billion in absenteeism, \$6.1 billion in presenteeism and \$146 million in compensation claims.

In the United Kingdom the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health's has conducted the only comparative study in this field. Their 2006/07 report entitled, **'Mental health at work: developing the business case'**, found that the overall cost to UK employers of stress, anxiety and depression amounted to £1,035 (18,605 ZAR) per employee per year. Interestingly, ten years on, in their report, *'The business costs ten years on'* 2016/17 report showed that the same overall costs increased to £1,300 (23,375 ZAR) per employee per year, reflecting a significant 25.6 percent rise over a ten-year period. Absenteeism increased to £395 (7,102 ZAR) (up 17.9 percent), 'presenteeism' rose to £790 (14,204 ZAR), (a 30.5 percent increase); and £115 (2,067 ZAR) for staff turnover (up some 21 percent).

Considering all these figures, we can only assume that the next ten years will see a similar trend continue. Can we really afford to just ignore this problem?

New Approach – Proactive Mental Wellness

Lifetime prevalence of depression in South Africa stands at 9.7% of the total population, affecting 4.5 million South African employees. Those affected are likely to keep working during an episode of depression, impacting their productivity and performance at work. According to Evans-Lacko, S. & Knapp, M.'s paper, South Africa ranked fifth in terms of employees least likely to tell their employers about their depression through fear of losing their jobs.

Due to the nature of office work, we can presume that the proportions of demand placed upon employees are approximately 10 percent physical and 90 percent mental. However, employees who do such mental work are rarely offered skills on how to protect their mental health properly.

In my own scientific paper entitled *'Developing Intra-Personal Skills as a Proactive Way to Personal Sustainability – The Preventative Side of the Mental Health Equation'*, I put forward the need for a proactive approach to mental health, which can be particularly applicable to the workplace environments.

My paper looks to outline the importance of my new proactive approach to mental health that everyone should actively strive towards. I also encourage to shift the focus away from external reactive problem-solving approaches, (the commonplace solutions of today such as medical leave, prescription drugs and psychiatric therapy), towards a more proactive education on the mental wellness. This approach sees people who are still well learn new skills to prevent further escalation of negative states into potential illness.

Intra-personal Skills formulate the cornerstone of Self-Leadership

Early proactive intervention in the form of structured awareness based intrapersonal skills education increases quality of life and decreases the chances of stress, burnout, depression, anxiety etc. All of which, as we have seen, are set to become epidemic in their proportions in the future.

The term intrapersonal, *'intra'* meaning inside, separates our inner functions and processes from the physiological functions of the body. Learning intrapersonal skills opens up other skills; much like learning to read; when we learn to read, many other skills and competencies can be developed. In this sense intrapersonal skills form the foundation of any successful career yet are lacking in workplaces and the wider business world due to their absence in current educational curriculum.

Mental Wellness Gym

When mental wellness is considered in a proactive approach, it can be likened to going to the gym. We all know that going to the gym is good for our physical health and overall wellbeing. Workplaces therefore need 'mental wellness gyms' where employees can train their knowledge-tools and practice directing their own inner functions whenever they need to.

There is strong and repeated evidence that intra-personal events have a direct effect on the function and structure of the brain and therefore skills to direct these events can lead to changes in wiring and neurotransmitter activity in the human brain.

Until people are educated to exercise methods of conscious control over their emotional activation, it is only a matter of time before the destructive automatic emotional-mental complexes get triggered and initiate a cascade of problematic events, including irrational or destructive behaviour. When people learn and realise how their inner domain functions, a more sustainable way of handling, as well as preventing problems can emerge.

Dr. Helena Lass – Psychiatrist specialising in Mental Wellness and founder of Wellness Orbit, helena.lass@consciousinitiative.com

Search

Memberships

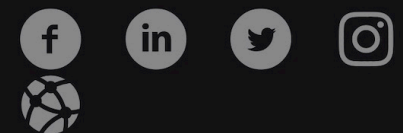
[Become a member](#)

- ▶ Upgrade your membership
- ▶ Commissioners of oaths

About us

- ▶ Our Board
- ▶ Our Strategy
- ▶ Professional body

Get in touch



+27 11 045 5400

Email: info@sabpp.co.za

Fax: +27 11 482 4830

Physical Address: Willowbrook House, 1st floor Constantia Office Park 14th Avenue & Hendrik Potgieter Street Weltevredenpark Roodepoort 1715

