



Finding Your Fire

The Relationship Between
Well-being and Performance

2020 has been a year of unprecedented challenges.



Meanwhile, predictions for the new year have not conveyed the usual sense of optimism that often accompanies the hanging of a new calendar; we still have a tough road ahead. Some days, it's all we can do to get out of bed, and checking the mail is a real achievement. But our need and desire to perform has not become less important in the face of overwhelming stressors. If anything, the need to perform has become critical not only for driving results, but for experiencing a sense of fulfillment and purpose in trying times.

So how does one “find your fire” -- the intrinsic motivation to perform -- in the face of multiple, overwhelming stressors? The answer is simple, if not easy. Furthermore, igniting the will to succeed is critically important to people, teams and companies who have good work to do regardless of what the world throws at us.

In short, we have to be well to do well. If 2020 has cast any truth in sharp relief, it is the fact that fundamental, holistic well-being is the power source for human performance. But how do we get from here to there? Here are the highlights:

- Understand “role strain” and how thinking about “employee performance” in isolation is not a sustainable approach to well-being or performance.
- Recognize the difference between holistic well-being approaches and well-intentioned “interventions” focused on narrow slices of the well-being equation.
- Empower managers as frontline catalysts for positive change.
- The need for foundational, holistic well-being strategies is urgent; the time for elevating wellness to the highest level of organizational strategy and execution is now.



The Big Picture

This article, Finding Your Fire, is the final installment in a three-part Human Performance series about improving employee mental health and boosting resilience during the pandemic era. The three articles in the series are:

1. [Recovering from Crisis Fatigue](#)
2. [5 Tips to Embrace Uncertainty](#)
3. Finding Your Fire



Crisis Fatigue

In “[Recovering from Crisis Fatigue](#),” we highlight the multiple stages that we pass through on our way to recovery from events that are perceived as existential threats. “Generally speaking, the three stages of crisis fatigue may be described as emergency, regression and recovery.¹” Many companies and individuals are currently stuck in emergency or regression phases and need help charting a clear course to recovery.

Resilience

In “[5 Tips to Embrace Uncertainty](#),” we explore the role of resilience in accelerating recovery and as the cornerstone of effective change management. Sweeping changes in the way companies operate (and to the employee experience) are an inevitable response to the multiple crises we have faced throughout 2020. But in order to boost resilience across the entire workforce, companies must approach the implementation of holistic well-being with the same vigor and discipline they would traditional change management initiatives like major reorganizations, shifts in business models or international expansions. As a model for effective change management, we turned to Harvard Business School for advice².

1. <https://hbr.org/2020/05/if-you-feel-like-youre-regressing-youre-not-alone>
2. <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/change-management-process>



Human Performance

In this final installment, we focus on the connection between well-being and human performance. We are careful to distinguish human performance from employee performance because the science is conclusive that only holistic approaches to well-being that address all aspects of the human experience can both ignite productivity and sustain it across the multiple social roles we fulfill.

Only holistic approaches to well-being that address all aspects of the human experience can both ignite and sustain human performance. Aduro can help.

In sociology, a social role is defined as a set of expectations and norms associated with specific relationships or functions in society. For example, “employees” are expected to produce value for their company and the role comes along with certain norms that govern behaviors as mundane as punctuality and as complex as resilience. On the other hand, “parents” are expected to care for and nurture their children by exhibiting behavioral norms such as reliability and role modeling. These are only two examples of social roles that any one person may hold simultaneously. But in reality, most people have numerous roles that shift with different phases of life. The expectations and behavioral norms for each role may be different, but they all have one thing in common; people are judged and judge themselves based on their ability to deliver on the expectations associated with these roles.



Employee performance is a false construct because it only addresses the expectations and behavioral norms of a single social role in a vacuum. What happens when a person is meeting the expectations of one role, but at the expense of others? For example, what happens when an individual prioritizes work performance to a degree that makes it difficult or impossible to perform well as a parent, a partner or a community leader?

Unfortunately, the demands of multiple social roles often result in what sociologists and psychologists call “role strain” or “role conflict.”³ And when people feel like they are neglecting one role to meet the expectations of another, the negative impact on well-being can be dramatic and erode performance across all social roles.

3. <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-role-strain-in-sociology-4784018>



Role Strain During COVID-19



Consider for a moment the multiple social roles of the “working mother” in the context of the pandemic era. Many working mothers are currently experiencing significant role strain due to the demands of at least three critical social roles: (1) employee; (2) mother; and (3) educator. The expectations for success in these three roles (which are only a subset of all potential roles) lead to constant conflict, negotiation and trade-offs.

My boss scheduled a meeting at noon, but I also need to feed the kids and my daughter needs help logging in to her 12:30 Zoom class.

In the short-term, some women in this situation may prioritize work performance in order to provide financial security. But over time, the role strain can become too significant and the perceived neglect of other roles leads to negative well-being outcomes. As a direct result of this particular example of role strain, the labor force participation rates for women have dropped to levels not seen since the 1980s⁴.

The pandemic era has rendered the negative impact of role strain in sharp relief. But it has also highlighted the ineffectiveness of corporate wellness programs that are narrowly focused on the “employee” social role.

Such programs often deliver only short-term results because they do not offer support for the multiple interrelated aspects of life and frequently appear to be in direct conflict with performance management objectives, messages and programs.

A major driver of this conflict is the low strategic priority often assigned to wellness programs relative to other talent initiatives. The end result is that employees hear a mixed message.

The pandemic has only highlighted the ineffectiveness of one-dimensional corporate wellness programs.

“We care about well-being, but we care more that you hit your performance goals.”

The good news is that more companies are responding to the direct relationship between well-being and performance by rapidly elevating the strategic significance of corporate wellness programs and bringing other initiatives (such as performance management, learning and employee engagement) into strategic alignment.

People have to be well to do well.

4. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-the-pandemic-could-force-a-generation-of-mothers-out-of-the-workforce/>



Holistic Well-being and Human Performance

Companies and individuals alike are increasingly aware that a holistic approach to well-being is the power source for human performance across all the roles and functions we fulfill in our daily lives. An employee cannot be expected to maintain high standards of performance if attention and care are not provided for all the dimensions that impact well-being across multiple social roles. If a person is physically well but suffers mentally, they cannot be expected to perform. By the same token, if a person is using all their resources to maintain performance at work they may be forced to neglect other social roles. And eventually their work performance will suffer as a result.

A holistic approach to well-being focuses on “humans” rather than “employees.” We may all have different social roles, but we are all human beings. Employee performance cannot be seen as something only loosely related to human performance; it must be viewed as an outcome of human performance. And the primary driver of human performance is comprehensive well-being rooted in all six interrelated aspects of life:



Companies who put employees in the position of sacrificing relationships and community (for example) in pursuit of better employee performance are trapped in a paradox. Relationships and community are critical to human flourishing, and people cannot perform well at work for sustained periods of time if their needs in other aspects of life are not met. And the same is true for programs that narrowly focus on one or two aspects of life as opposed to those that are built with a holistic scope. Steps and meditation are important tools in a well-being toolbox, but they are not sufficient to address all the drivers of well-being and human performance.

True well-being is achieved holistically. That's why Aduro supports your employees in all six interrelated aspects of life.



The Manager's Role

The “manager” has been frequently maligned in contemporary business literature as a vestigial remnant of a bygone corporate era. In the rush for agility and flatness, many companies have openly questioned the role that managers play in achieving company objectives. Are they the primary source of bureaucracy and inefficiency or the vanguard of innovation? Of course, neither extreme perspective is true. But in companies who organize around holistic well-being and human performance, managers are the primary catalyst for beneficial wellness outcomes.

Only the manager has the right combination of visibility and authority to both spot opportunities for employee support and to do something about them. An executive may have significant authority, but very little visibility into the experience of individual team members. While team members have the most visibility into the lives of their fellow teammates, they don't have the perceived authority (conferred by position) to intervene.

In a previous article, we emphasized the importance of elevating well-being to the level of a major change management initiative. Here we are more specific that managers are the key to successfully activating and cementing gains in well-being and human performance through demonstrating care, modeling desirable behaviors and serving their team as a coach.

Aduro equips managers with the resources they need to model, coach and care.



To fulfill this significant coaching role for their team, managers need to be supported. Companies cannot expect managers to provide mental health counseling or personal financial guidance (for example). They can, however, be trained to lead by listening, engaging, asking and providing. But when managers listen to the individuals on their team, and when they engage with complex issues and when they ask the important, caring questions ... if they are not able to provide real solutions, then the potential value of great leadership and management is dramatically diminished. It is incumbent upon companies to provide managers with access to professional resources and solutions for well-being.



Putting it All Together

We are not living in normal times. But many of the issues that we face during the pandemic era are not new. Rather, they have only become more visible and urgent. If there is a silver lining to our current circumstances, perhaps it is the tremendous opportunity to change for the better. As our traditional patterns of everyday life have been disrupted, insignificant priorities have melted away and our focus on enduring and substantive improvements has intensified. That's a very positive environment for company improvement, social change and human innovation.

We hope these articles comprising our three-part Human Performance series have made a compelling case for the role of holistic well-being in boosting human performance. To summarize the main points of the series:

- The combination of a global pandemic, social unrest and economic uncertainty has led to widespread “crisis fatigue” and significant declines in well-being
- Companies can help individuals and organizations recover from crisis fatigue by cultivating resilience
- Building organizational resilience requires companies to elevate the strategic significance of holistic well-being to the same level as any major business transformation initiative
- Managers are key to activating and sustaining well-being, but must be supported with real resources
- It is critical that corporate well-being initiatives address all six interrelated aspects of life
- Companies must demonstrate care and provide support for multiple social roles, not just the employee social role
- A strong foundation of well-being in all aspects of life is the primary power source for human performance



Aduro Has the Solution

In times like these, we at Aduro feel an elevated sense of urgency to provide solutions to companies and people in need. Your employees are becoming unhealthy, disconnected and overwhelmed. Aduro is built from the ground up to help people achieve and sustain well-being even in the most challenging circumstances.

Crisis fatigue is real, and recovery is essential for the health and prosperity of both individuals and enterprises.

But as these crises fade, the focus on a holistic approach to well-being must not fade with it. One defining characteristic of a crisis is our innate human desire and ability to not only rebuild, but to innovate. So, we call on businesses and leaders to examine the role of employee well-being in the current environment, but also as a pillar of future innovation, resilience and prosperity.

**Don't wait. People need your help now.
And Aduro is ready to support you.**



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