



Recommendations to Support Workplace Wellness Using the EMPower CARE Scorecard

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Introduction

The contemporary multigenerational workplace is undergoing rapid transformations driven by technological advancements, evolving employee expectations, and global challenges. Amidst these changes, career optimism emerges as a pivotal factor influencing employee satisfaction, engagement, and overall well-being. The 2023 Career Optimism Index® highlights significant gaps between employee perceptions and employer offerings, emphasizing the need for actionable solutions. With a focus on workplace wellness, in this paper, the authors developed and introduce the EMPower Care Scorecard concept as a comprehensive framework to address these disparities and cultivate a positive work environment.

The workforce is an intricate fabric of aspirations, challenges, and evolving dynamics. The COI (2023) offers a snapshot of this landscape, highlighting a significant disconnect between employee perceptions and workplace realities. According to the COI (2023), 27% of American workers report feeling disempowered in their current roles. On the other hand, employer loyalty is indicated in the sentiment shared by 68%, who cite a willingness to reconsider leaving their jobs if specific workplace elements were adjusted (COI, 2023). An underlying disconnect can be found in the significant gap between employees' perceptions of what employers do to support them and the support the employers believe they provide (COI, 2023). Amidst these challenges, there is a silver lining, as 80% of workers remain hopeful about their future career trajectories. This juxtaposition of workplace dissatisfaction with inherent career optimism presents both a challenge and an opportunity for organizations. It underscores the pressing need to address workplace dissatisfaction while leveraging employees' optimism. In doing so, organizations can create environments where employees feel empowered and are aligned with the company's broader vision and goals.

The Role of Technology in Employee Empowerment

Technology is pivotal in the modern workplace, influencing employee empowerment and well-being. Daniloaia and Bohalteanu (2019) explored the influence of technology on the empowerment process at work, highlighting the potential benefits and challenges it brings to the workplace. While technology, such as AI-driven tools and collaborative platforms, can enhance efficiency and interconnectedness, it is essential to ensure that it empowers employees rather than overshadows their roles. Possessing information is a crucial form of power for any organization (Daniloaia & Bohalteanu, 2019) but, it is important to balance the need for using technology to benefit the organization while considering the well-being of employees (Corvite et al., 2023).

The dual-edged nature of technological integration makes it necessary to examine how these tools are incorporated into the workplace. While IT can be a powerful tool for employee empowerment, providing them with the information and tools they need to make informed decisions and work more efficiently, organizations can also use it to control (Daniloaia & Bohalteanu, 2019). Nonetheless, technology can be leveraged as a first step towards enhancing employee well-being by utilizing Emotional Artificial Intelligence (EAI). These technologies rely on facial recognition, voice analysis, and other biometric data for possible early detection of trends that indicate the compromised psychological well-being of an employee. As posited by a Corvite et al. (2023), EAI can assess employees' mental health at a group and individual level, diagnose mental illnesses, and identify those needing support.

Technology Considerations

Despite this, ethical considerations in technology use accentuate its potential to enhance or impede human collaboration and agency in the workplace. Chromjakova et al. (2021)

underscored the importance of ethical considerations as technology should be designed and implemented to augment human capabilities, foster collaboration, and promote a sense of agency among employees. Organizations must strike a balance, ensuring that technological integrations amplify employee roles and contribute positively to their well-being, but this can only be achieved within a clear and strategic framework. Giving employees the authority to make decisions and accept responsibility is part of empowerment. An empowered individual feels their work is significant and appreciated (Daniloaia & Bohalteanu, 2019) and is more likely to be motivated, committed, and innovative (Abualoush et al., 2018). In addition, the integration of knowledge management was perceived to have a tangible effect on the empowerment of employees when implemented together.

Knowledge management, employee empowerment, and technology integration can enhance worker autonomy, making them active contributors who can influence outcomes and take initiative. Abualoush et al. (2018) explored the intermediary role of employees' empowerment between knowledge management, information systems, and employee performance and concluded that empowered employees, equipped with the right knowledge and tools, are more likely to perform efficiently. Additionally, when combined with employee empowerment, knowledge management and information systems can enhance performance. With this in mind, these systems must be designed with the user in mind, ensuring they are intuitive, user-friendly, and genuinely empower the employee rather than complicate their tasks.

As organizations navigate the complexities of the free agent labor market and its link to career optimism and employee wellness, the pandemic further underscored the necessity for adaptive and resilient mentorship frameworks to withstand the pressures of unforeseen challenges. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the landscape of mentorship has undergone

a significant transformation, necessitating a shift towards e-mentorship models that accommodate remote interactions (Lasater et al., 2021). This transition presents unique challenges, such as the absence of non-verbal communication cues and the need for more time to establish trust and rapport in virtual settings (Content, 2021). However, it also offers opportunities for utilizing technology to create a workplace environment that better supports employee needs and increases career optimism.

Empowering E-mentorships

Integrating technology can also influence the workforce mentorship process. In the digital age, e-mentorship is pivotal in closing the mentorship divide, particularly for women and underrepresented minorities (URMs) who may struggle to find mentors with similar shared experiences (Stuckey et al., 2019). Nonetheless, research underscores the positive impact of mentorship on career optimism, suggesting that mentor-mentee relationships can significantly boost confidence and professional outlook (Katerina, 2019; Marsan et al., 2022; Norris & Herrewynen, 2023). E-mentorship, facilitated by digital platforms, allows for intentionally pairing mentors and mentees based on shared experiences, not just professional credentials. This approach can be empowering, offering relatable role models and fostering a sense of connection (Lasater et al., 2021). By leveraging technology to facilitate compassionate and empathetic relationships, e-mentorship provides a supportive network that can mitigate feelings of isolation and enhance career optimism.

Furthermore, the strategic use of technology in e-mentorship bridges the gap in access to guidance and support and signals an employer's commitment to employee well-being. This dual approach to technology as a tool for empowerment and wellness can foster a culture of acceptance and innovation, encouraging employees to embrace technological integration across

their job functions. Promoting career optimism through such strategic initiatives facilitates positive career shocks (Ahmad & Nasir, 2023), where unexpected opportunities can emerge from a supportive work environment, reinforcing the importance of organizational support in sustainable career development.

Career Shocks

Career shocks are unexpected events that positively or negatively influence a career trajectory and can support or hinder career optimism. Positive career shocks, such as unexpected job offers or promotions, can significantly enhance career optimism by affirming career direction and self-efficacy (Lin et al., 2022). Conversely, negative shocks require resilience and support to overcome, yet they can also contribute to a stronger sense of career optimism if navigated successfully (Ahmad & Nasir, 2023). Organizational support systems that provide resources and mentorship can mitigate the adverse effects of negative shocks and enhance the positive ones, fostering an environment conducive to sustainable career development and well-being.

EMPower CARE Scorecard

Considering the importance of organizational support and worker empowerment on career optimism, the authors created and are proposing a strategic framework to guide employers in developing a culture that leverages workers' desire to stay with their current employers if conditions change while also becoming more appealing to those who expressed an intention to leave. The EMPower CARE scorecard was developed by the authors based on research focused practices, supporting strategies, and is a combined approach to identify evidence of 11 critical elements with three guidelines in each area. Evaluating workplace wellness using the EMPower CARE scorecard tool may contribute to identifying areas to start, stop, and continue when considering the holistic use of well-being resources. Ultimately, the EMPower CARE Scorecard

is envisioned as an adaptable tool with a flexible framework that allows for customization commensurate with the organization's needs. By implementing specific KPIs (Key Performance Indicators), organizations can quantitatively measure their progress, gaining insights into the effectiveness of their wellness initiatives.

Ultimately, the goal of the proposed solution includes integrating proactive practices to help address the gap with perceptions of the employer support available and what employees believe is provided (COI, 2023). The EMPower CARE Scorecard, focusing on authentic and empowering workplace practices, provides a strategic framework to assess and enhance programs designed to increase employee wellness. Organizations can promote holistic development and well-being by incorporating a more intentional process aligned with identifiable matrices in keeping with a commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment.

The scorecard's comprehensive approach captures the necessity for empathetic engagement, resourceful mentorship, and authentic leadership to increase career optimism and safeguard employers from the negative consequences of a free agent labor market. It leverages the 68% of employees who express interest in staying with their current employers if conditions change (COI, 2023). The strategic approach of the scorecard also addresses the 56% who said they do not have a mentor, 34% of which cited this as a hindrance to career advancement, and 42% who do not have an advocate (COI, 2023) because the elements are designed to be dynamically adapted to the social capital resource and networking needs of employees. This proactive stance on employee development aligns with the scorecard's principles, advocating for a responsive and resilient workplace in the face of career volatility.

Employers can contribute to workforce optimism by empowering workers with elements represented within the EMPOWER CARE Scorecard. Focusing further on workplace wellness offers opportunities to connect personal factors that drive optimism including resilience, fulfillment, and adapting while working through career challenges (COI, 2023). Additional benefits include increased productivity and better employee engagement while developing a culture focused on organizational wellness (Bhaidkar, 2022). When considering continuing challenges, nurturing workplace wellness is increasingly important to help employees feel fulfilled, empowered, and prioritize work-life balance. For instance, the 2023 Career Optimism Index® study highlights the struggle with mental health with 47% of respondents experiencing burnout (stress, frustration, anxiety, boredom, isolation) at work, which has worsened in the past year for half of those individuals and 74% feeling stressed about their job/career. While workers are hopeful about their future careers, employers can take a proactive role to establish a framework for supporting a culture of optimism.

EMPOWER Elements

Leaders can empower employees by focusing on embracing empathy, inspiring meaningful motivation, providing purpose, offering ongoing support, being willing to engage and reinforce resources. The following recommendations for leaders to support workplace wellness may contribute to discovering ways to go beyond regular reminders about resources. Leaders should strive towards embrace *empathy* by understanding and sharing the feelings of their team members. Implementing feedback systems, regularly checking in on, and creating a culture to empower employees to discuss mental health challenges represent actions to take. When cultivating an organizational culture focus, leaders are instrumental in influencing while providing positive and supportive actions regarding the value of workplace wellness

(Hammerback et al., 2021). Leaders can create a work environment where employees find meaningful *motivation*. Defining clear roles and responsibilities, celebrating accomplishments, and emphasizing each employee's impact on the organizational mission include intentional strategies to apply. Leaders are instrumental in helping employees understand the *purpose* behind their work including how it contributes to the larger organization and societal goals. Consistent communication, team meetings, and personal development plans can contribute to achieving this goal.

Moreover, leaders should commit to providing *ongoing* and holistic support for their employees. Constantly reviewing wellness programs for potential updates and conducting frequent mental health training and awareness sessions, while continuously engaging with employees about their wellness to reflect an ongoing commitment to successful support. Leaders must be *willing* to make necessary changes based on employee feedback, demonstrating a responsive approach to their needs. Reviewing workplace policies, implementing flexible work hours, or improving the physical work environment are activities to consider. Leaders should *engage* with their teams personally, creating team building and bonding opportunities. Activities like team outings, virtual coffee breaks, or "watercooler walks" can promote a sense of belonging, community, and mutual support. Lastly, leaders can *reinforce* and prioritize work-life balance with a focus on well-being and self-care. Ensuring employees prioritize a healthy work-life balance may help to decrease the 20% who noted a lack of accessibility while increasing the 39% of Americans exploring mental health resources to assist with work-related stress (COI, 2023). Leading by example to reiterate the vital role of self-care and wellness resources is important to this process.

CARE Components

Building on the EMPOWER elements, the CARE components provide the second part of the scorecard wherein leaders are compassionate, authentic, resourceful, and empowering. Leaders reflect a *compassionate* approach by being flexible, displaying trust, while recognizing employees may have personal commitments along with challenges. Implementing flexible work hours and promoting a culture of trust where employees can communicate their needs openly helps to demonstrate compassion. Leaders can create an *authentic* environment where employees feel comfortable to be themselves. To that end, the role of authenticity with well-being at work was emphasized in a study by Ménard and Brunet (2011) demonstrating a positive association. Embracing a genuine interest in connecting with team members can contribute to encouraging authenticity in others. An intentional idea includes incorporating "wellness walks" to foster an authentic, informal, and relaxed setting for creating connections with workplace colleagues.

Leaders should embrace a *resourceful* approach by providing reminders and sharing support services that employees can use to maintain their mental health. An integral initiative includes offering information about wellness programs, mental health days, counseling services, or online resources and toolkits. For instance, Baicker (2021) highlighted how wellness workdays are valuable in promoting the importance of healthy behaviors. Leaders may consider hosting a "Wisdom Wednesdays" regular event where wellness resources are reinforced and discussed. Leaders can apply *empowering* efforts by involving employees in decision-making, setting specific expectations, and establishing attainable goals, while providing opportunities for personal and career development. Including mentorship programs, professional development courses, and purposeful planning sessions represent empowering examples to support employee growth. The empowering elements reflect the following sentiment from mental health advocate, Rosalynn Carter "A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people

where they don't necessarily want to go, but ought to be." Ultimately, the EMPower scorecard guidelines (empathy, inspiring meaningful motivation, providing purpose, offering ongoing support, being willing to engage and reinforce resources) are embedded throughout the CARE components with recommendations reflected in Table 1.

Table 1

CARE Components and Recommendations

| Components | Recommendations |
|---------------|--|
| Compassionate | Flexibility Trust |
| Authentic | Connections Wellness Walks |
| Resourceful | Resource Refreshers Wisdom Wednesday |
| Empowering | Development Opportunities Purposeful Planning |

EMPower Care Scorecard Guidance

Using the EMPower Care scorecard in action provides a balanced opportunity to evaluate efforts and professional levels of progress for workplace wellness. Leaders can assign one point for each of the 33 recommendations presented in Table 2, with higher scores representing greater levels of workplace wellness. The score ranges represent workplace wellness actions within three key areas of foundational (1-11), progressive (12-22), and advanced (23-33). The foundational area highlights the current activities with opportunities to build on the framework and integrate additional practices for further impact on workplace wellness. The progressive category suggests an active approach to including influential, developed, and proficient wellness support. The advanced area reflects above and beyond actions to continually strengthen wellness within the workplace. When evaluating each score range, leaders can consider strategies, resources, and activities to move toward the next category. Striving for advanced ranges may offer opportunities

for leaders to prioritize progress on workplace wellness for employees. Even at the advanced level, the guiding goal consists of engaging in continuous quality actions. Importantly, the success of the EMPOWER CARE Scorecard relies on a continuous feedback loop and iterative improvement.

Table 2

EMPOWER CARE Scorecard

| EMPOWER Elements | Guidelines | Score |
|------------------|--|-------|
| Empathy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Comfortable environment for mental health discussions ★ Evidence of systems to collect employee feedback to act on ★ Regular check-ins on employees' mental health | |
| Motivation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Clear roles and responsibilities for employees + Recognition and rewards system in place + Emphasis on the impact of roles on the overall mission | |
| Purpose | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Communication about the purpose of work ★ Regular team meetings ★ Personal development plans for all employees | |
| Ongoing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Continual review and update of wellness programs + Regular mental health training sessions + Ongoing engagement on wellness | |
| Willing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Responsiveness to employee feedback ★ Flexible workplace policies ★ Suitable physical work environment | |
| Engage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Regular team building activities + Casual interaction opportunities (e.g., virtual coffee breaks) + Efforts to promote community and mutual support | |
| Reinforce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Prioritize work-life balance ★ Reiterate resources for self-care ★ Integrate intentional workplace wellness reminders | |
| CARE Components | Guidelines | Score |
| Compassionate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☺ Flexible work hours policy ☺ Evidence of a trust-based work culture ☺ Consideration for personal commitments and challenges | |
| Authentic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Efforts to create connections ✓ Encouragement of authenticity in employees ✓ Embrace an authentic collaborative community | |
| Resourceful | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☺ Wellness programs offered ☺ Mental health days or services available ☺ Regular dissemination of wellness resource | |
| Empowering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Employee involvement in decision-making ✓ Clear and attainable goal setting ✓ Opportunities for growth and career development | |

Conclusion

A dynamic approach is encouraged where organizations regularly reassess and adapt their strategies based on evolving workplace trends and employee feedback. This ongoing process keeps the scorecard relevant and aligns it with the ever-changing landscape of workplace wellness. The EMPower CARE Scorecard represents more than a measurement tool and serves as a pathway towards a more empowered, healthy, and optimistic workplace culture.

Intentionally implementing proactive practices can foster an authentic environment where career optimism is nurtured, and employee well-being is placed at the forefront of organizational priorities. The EMPower Care Scorecard provides valuable context for understanding the dual nature of technology – as both an enabler and a potential barrier to empowerment. Incorporating a focus on knowledge management and user-centric information systems within the EMPower Care Scorecard can further promote a culture of empowerment and drive positive outcomes in employee well-being. Leveraging E-mentorships nurtures career optimism and aligns with the EMPower CARE Scorecard's emphasis on authentic and empowering workplace practices. The way organizations support their employees through career shocks also reflects the EMPower CARE Scorecard's principles, which emphasize the need for empathetic, meaningful, and empowering practices to positively impact the gaps between employee perceptions and employer offerings identified within the COI (2023).

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