Strategic Plan to Enhance Employee Wellbeing at Karen Women Empowerment Group

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Abstract

Humanitarian workers in Myanmar face unprecedented challenges as they navigate the complexities of a political crisis and ongoing conflict. These individuals endure significant physical and psychological harm due to the unstable environment, which is marked by civil unrest and limited access to vulnerable populations. This study aims to explore the employee well-being of the Karen Women Empowerment Group (KWEG) staff and to develop a long-term strategy to enhance their well-being through initiatives in Organizational Support, Leadership, and Effective Coping Mechanisms. The research has three main objectives: 1) To evaluate the current coping strategies and support systems available to employees that enhance the employee wellbeing at KWEG; 2) To gather employee insights on wellbeing support, current and preferred to enhance employee wellbeing at KWEG; and 3) to design strategies that enhance employee wellbeing based on the findings. The research questions, which focus on employee well-being at KWEG, were developed using the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) model. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants for the qualitative research, ensuring the inclusion of eight informants with relevant experiences or characteristics to address the research objectives effectively. Two virtual focus group discussions, each consisting of four participants, were conducted to gather in-depth insights and create a collaborative space for all informants to contribute meaningfully. The results reveal that KWEG staff envision a positive workplace culture, which can be achieved by promoting mutual respect, understanding, and support among colleagues. This culture should be complemented by supportive leadership that encourages employees to express their needs freely, fosters appreciation and trust, cultivates empathy, and implements effective coping strategies. Key strategies identified include flexible working hours, regular team outings, psychosocial counseling sessions, a reassurance policy for staff health, and the cultivation of a positive working environment.

Keywords: Employee Wellbeing, Organizational Support, Leadership, Effective Coping Mechanism.

Introduction

The concept of well-being is multifaceted, encompassing a person's physical, mental, emotional, and social characteristics. According to Warr (1994), well-being in this context refers to the overall quality of an employee's experience, including both psychological and physical dimensions. Employee well-being is a significant concern across various sectors, particularly in humanitarian organizations operating in politically and economically fragile countries such as Myanmar. It is widely recognized that the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of employees directly influences engagement, productivity, and overall organizational success.

The Karen Women Empowerment Group (KWEG) is a local non-profit organization dedicated to protecting women, children, and internally displaced persons living in conflict-prone areas of Kayin State, Myanmar. The organization operates with a staff of 14 and 50 volunteers across Kawkareik, Kyarinseikkyi, Hpa-an, and Hlaingbwe townships in Kayin State. Despite the ongoing deterioration of the conflict situation in Myanmar, KWEG remains committed to delivering humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable populations under highly stressful conditions. Since 2021, KWEG has faced significant challenges in retaining its employees and volunteers due to the absence of a systematic well-being approach and the prevailing political uncertainty, which has led to humanitarian workers being targeted in complex conflict settings (Comms APHEDA, 2024).

KWEG has been selected as the subject of this qualitative study because its staff members have expressed concerns about their well-being and sought psychosocial support from external organizations. To effectively address these concerns, KWEG is committed to creating a work environment in which well-being is prioritized. However, designing targeted and effective strategies requires a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and needs faced by its employees. Through direct interaction with staff members, this study aims to gain insight into their experiences, perspectives, and expectations, with a particular focus on leadership, organizational support, and healthy coping strategies.

Organizational Diagnosis

To evaluate the current situation, the researcher organized and conducted a virtual discussion with four senior staff members of KWEG, using a SWOT analysis to examine the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The research identified critical factors that could either support or hinder KWEG's progress and sustainability. This analysis offered thorough and useful insights into the state of the organization. The research theme was created in light of these findings in order to address important insights by leveraging strengths, resolving weaknesses, seizing opportunities, and reducing potential risks. The results of the organizational diagnostic are listed below, arranged, and discussed using the SWOT Analysis framework: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats framework.

A Swot analysis was conducted based on insights gathered from virtual discussions with senior staff members of KWEG. The key findings include:

Strengths

KWEG demonstrates organizational resilience and its support to staff wellbeing despite the challenges during difficult times. The company's proactive initiatives in well-being programs underscore its recognition of employee challenges and its commitment to addressing them. By dedicating focused efforts to alleviating employee stress and enhancing support systems, KWEG reflects a genuine concern for staff welfare. Additionally, the organization benefits from strong collaboration and mutual understanding among employees, fostering a cohesive and supportive work environment. Furthermore, the adaptability and resilience of its employees highlight their capacity to navigate challenges effectively, ensuring that KWEG remains robust and agile in the face of adversity.

Weaknesses

The organization faces several weaknesses that hinder its ability to fully support employee well-being. The current initiative, which is conducted once a year, is not sufficient to address the complex interplay of mental, emotional, and physical health challenges faced by staff, resulting in persistent issues such as anxiety and declining productivity. Additionally, the absence of a comprehensive, long-term strategy prevents KWEG from addressing the root causes of stress and burnout effectively. Employees have to bear over workload which led persistent issues such as anxiety, burnout, and declining productivity exacerbate stress levels, further straining both employees and organizational outcomes.

Opportunities

It has several opportunities to strengthen its approach to employee well-being and enhance organizational performance. The organization's willingness to collaborate with employees to gather insights and co-design tailored well-being strategies ensures that initiatives align with staff needs and preferences. By forging partnerships with mental health and wellness organizations, KWEG can offer affordable, accessible, and subsidized support services, further demonstrating its commitment to employee welfare. Additionally, implementing initiatives such as flexible working hours, remote work options, and additional leave can help reduce workplace stress and foster a healthier work-life balance, creating a more supportive and productive environment for employees.

Threats

Persistent political, economic, and social instability continues to exacerbate employee stress levels and amplify well-being challenges. Rising rates of burnout and absenteeism may contribute to increased employee turnover, directly impacting organizational performance and stability. Additionally, neglecting employee well-being concerns risks further declines in productivity, morale, and overall workplace engagement. Moreover, insufficient action in addressing these issues could harm KWEG's reputation as a responsible and caring employer,

making it more difficult to attract and retain top talent in an increasingly competitive labor market. These challenges not only strain employees but also negatively impact organizational outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

KWEG faces significant challenges in addressing employee well-being. Despite its proactive efforts and collaborative workplace culture, the organization struggles with limited financial resources and the absence of comprehensive, long-term coping strategies to address the complex mental, emotional, and physical health issues faced by employees. Persistent problems such as anxiety, burnout, and declining productivity exacerbate stress levels, placing additional strain on both employees and organizational outcomes. Furthermore, the lack of leadership development training impedes the creation of a positive work environment.

External threats, including political and economic instability, intensify these challenges, while increasing risks of burnout and absenteeism contribute to higher employee turnover. Failure to effectively address these concerns could lead to diminished workplace engagement, lower morale, and a tarnished reputation as a responsible employer, thereby jeopardizing KWEG's ability to attract and retain talent. Without immediate action to implement sustainable well-being solutions, these issues are likely to worsen, undermining both employee welfare and the organization's long-term success. This study aims to provide strategic recommendations to enhance employee well-being at KWEG by thoroughly analyzing these factors and assessing their impact on the organization.

Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the current coping strategies and support systems available to employees that enhance the employee wellbeing at KWEG.

2. To gather employee insights on wellbeing initiatives to enhance employee wellbeing at KWEG.

3. To design strategies that enhance employee well-being based on the findings.

Research Questions

1. What support systems or coping mechanisms are currently used to enhance the wellbeing of KWEG employees?

2. What types of well-being initiatives and support do employees prefer to enhance their wellbeing at KWEG?

3. What strategies can be developed through organizational support, leadership and effective coping mechanism to effectively address the mental, emotional, and physical well-being challenges faced by employees at KWEG, based on qualitative insights into their experiences and needs?

Significance of the Study

In today's workplace, employee well-being is a critical factor that cannot be overlooked. Employers must prioritize initiatives that enhance well-being to foster employee satisfaction and long-term loyalty to the organization. The significance of employee well-being,

highlighted as a major concern by KWEG's employees, is the primary reason for selecting the organization as the focus of this study. As is widely acknowledged, organizations that invest in their employees' well-being gain a significant competitive advantage in today's highly competitive business environment. The ultimate goal of this research is to position KWEG as an employer of choice by cultivating an environment that empowers, supports, and values its employees, ultimately leading to organizational success. Furthermore, the collaboration between the researcher and KWEG staff will mutually benefit both parties by expanding knowledge and fostering a deeper understanding of employee well-being.

Scope and Limitation

To improve employee well-being in Myanmar, this study at the Karen Women Empowerment Group (KWEG) focuses on four key areas: leadership, organizational support, effective coping mechanisms, and employee well-being. Although the findings provide valuable insights, the particular sociopolitical and economic context of Myanmar may limit the generalizability of these results. The reliance on virtual video conferencing for data collection, due to the absence of face-to-face interaction, may also affect the quality of insights. Additionally, this study does not account for potential changes to national laws or regulations, which could influence the results. Despite these limitations, the research offers a focused analysis of the challenges and opportunities for enhancing employee well-being within KWEG.

Literature Review

Employee Wellbeing

Employee well-being is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond the absence of illness to include job satisfaction, contentment, and a sense of fulfillment. In addition, workplace experiences significantly impact personal life, as employees spend a large portion of their time at work and often bring job-related stress home (Danna & Griffin, 1999)

De Simone (2014) emphasizes that poor employee well-being negatively affects both individuals and organizations, leading to lower productivity, poor decision-making, and increased absenteeism. Conversely, maintaining work-life balance through flexible work arrangements can reduce stress and enhance overall quality of life (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Sirgy (2012) define well-being as overall life satisfaction, encompassing both work and personal domains. Warr (2007) expands on this by describing it as a multidimensional construct shaped by emotional, psychological, and physical health, influenced by job satisfaction, stress levels, and personal growth opportunities. In addition, Bakker and Demerouti (2008) highlight the link between work engagement and well-being, noting that engaged employees experience greater fulfillment, which leads to improved organizational performance. Kayastha, J. (2018) discusses how prioritizing employee well-being can reduce costs associated with absenteeism and workplace accidents, ultimately enhancing productivity and profitability.

Furthermore, employees increasingly view their work as a source of happiness, fulfillment, and social connection. A focus on well-being benefits both individuals and organizations, creating a thriving workforce and a culture of growth over strain (Grant et al.,

2007).

These definitions and studies collectively illustrate that employee well-being is a dynamic and holistic construct. It encompasses not just only physical and emotional but also job satisfaction, engagement, and work-life balance. Understanding these key definitions helped the researcher and the organization when creating strategies that promote a positive work environment, ensuring both employee fulfillment and organizational success.

Organizational Support

Employee perceptions of how much their company values their contributions and cares about their well-being are shaped by organizational support, which is crucial in creating great workplace outcomes. Organizational support was initially defined by Eisenberger et al. (1986) as workers' overall impression of the organization's concern for their well-being, highlighting the significance of both practical and emotional assistance. This view has a significant impact on employee happiness, engagement, and loyalty in general. Organizations that adopt supportive practices, like wellness initiatives or flexible work schedules, for example, greatly increase employees' sense of support, which in turn increases their loyalty to the organization (Kossek et al., 2011).

The notion that employees evaluate how well their company provides a supportive work environment, guarantees equitable treatment, and shows sincere concern for their professional growth and well-being is at the heart of the organizational support concept (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Increased employee engagement, better morale, and less burnout are all reliably linked to higher levels of perceived organizational support (POS). Saks (2006) pointed out that POS creates psychological safety, enabling workers to express themselves freely without worrying about unfavorable consequences, while Chiang and Hsieh (2012) discovered that supportive work environments encourage positive emotional states and lessen the negative effects of workplace stress.

Moreover, organizational support directly influences retention. Employees who feel valued and recognized are less inclined to seek alternative employment opportunities, demonstrating higher levels of loyalty and commitment to their organization (Allen et al., 2003). Shore and Shore (1995) further emphasized that fair treatment, assistance during challenging times, and acknowledgment of employee efforts are integral to strengthening employee dedication. Similarly, Whitener (2001) described organizational support as the manifestation of the organization's commitment to its employees through transparent communication, equitable treatment, and recognition of contributions.

The benefits of organizational support extend beyond retention and engagement, positively impacting employees' psychological well-being. Aggarwal-Gupta et al. (2010) observed that when organizations provide fair treatment, recognition, and necessary resources, employees experience improved mental health and reduced stress, fostering a positive work environment. To solidify these outcomes, organizations can adopt various strategies, such as professional development opportunities, wellness programs, and flexible work policies (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). For instance, Wayne et al. (1997) argued that such initiatives not only enhance employee wellbeing but also reinforce the organization's commitment to its

workforce.

Leadership

Employee well-being is greatly impacted by leadership styles, which also shape the workplace and have an impact on employees' emotional and mental well-being. Several studies and meta-analyses emphasize how important leadership is in promoting or impeding worker well-being. In particular, there is a lot of evidence linking transformational leadership to improved employee well-being.

Transformational leaders, characterized by their ability to inspire, provide support, and recognize employees' efforts, create environments that promote job satisfaction and reduce stress (Arnold, 2017). These leaders frequently use techniques like intellectual stimulation and personalized attention, which promote psychological safety and engagement and ultimately improve employee well-being (Nielsen et al., 2017).

Similarly, leadership styles such as leader-member exchange (LMX) and relationship-oriented leadership have been positively correlated with employee well-being. According to Kuoppala et al. (2008), and Montano et al. (2017), these strategies place a high emphasis on fostering strong interpersonal ties between leaders and employees, guaranteeing equitable treatment, and attending to individual needs. By cultivating trust and maintaining open communication, these leadership styles create supportive environments that enhance employees' emotional security and morale (Kelloway et al., 2012).

On the other hand, destructive leadership styles, such as abusive supervision and authoritarian management, are detrimental to employee well-being. Toxic leadership behaviors, characterized by manipulation, excessive control, or verbal abuse, contribute to heightened stress, increased stress, and turnover intentions (Montano et al., 2017; Tepper, 2000). It has also been demonstrated that micromanagement, in which managers closely monitor and supervise workers' performance, inhibits creativity, lowers morale, and has a detrimental effect on psychological health (Amabile et al., 2004). Job satisfaction and general mental health are negatively impacted by toxic leadership, as employees frequently report feeling underappreciated and unsupported (Brun & Dugas, 2008).

Perceptions of organizational support, which is crucial for employee well-being, are also influenced by leadership. Supportive leaders who demonstrate empathy, provide regular feedback, and recognize employee contributions, foster an environment of trust and emotional security. Recognizing staff accomplishments on a regular basis improves motivation, lowers stress levels, and raises morale (Brun & Dugas, 2008). Furthermore, leaders that place a high priority on psychological safety allow staff members to express worries and take chances without worrying about the consequences, which promotes mental health and enhances team performance (Edmondson, 1999).

Effective Coping Mechanism

In Myanmar, traditional community structures and social networks serve as vital resources for supporting individuals experiencing distress. Psychosocial interventions,

including counseling and support groups, have been identified as effective in addressing emotional well-being by focusing on restoring normalcy, providing emotional support, and developing coping strategies (Tol et al., 2011). However, the integration of culturally appropriate practices into these interventions is critical in the Myanmar context. Mindfulness and meditation, deeply rooted in local traditions, have demonstrated efficacy in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression by enhancing emotional regulation and stress reduction (Khoury et al., 2013).

Although these solutions are available, individuals are often discouraged from seeking help due to the cultural stigma associated with mental health conditions. Culturally sensitive methods that honor and consider regional customs and beliefs are necessary to address these issues (Kohrt & Hruschka, 2010). Strong community links and support networks offer both practical help and emotional comfort, promoting resilience, which is another important way that social support helps lessen the impacts of trauma (Hobfoll et al., 2007). One new approach to enhancing wellbeing is resilience training, which gives people the tools they need to handle stress and hardship. Reduced burnout, increased job satisfaction, and improved general well-being are some of the results of these programs, which place an emphasis on psychological flexibility, emotional regulation, and positive thinking (Robertson et al., 2015).

Coping mechanisms are another important factor in promoting psychological resilience. Effective coping strategies, whether problem-focused (e.g., actively addressing the source of stress) or emotion-focused (e.g., managing emotional responses), are associated with improved psychological outcomes (Carver et al., 1989). These mechanisms enable individuals to regulate their emotional and behavioral responses adaptively, thereby enhancing their ability to achieve desired outcomes or reduce harm (Compas et al., 2001). Studies conducted in the workplace also emphasize the importance of social coping mechanisms like talking to coworkers about their experiences. For example, speaking with coworkers is a popular and useful coping strategy, according to Craun and Bourke (2014).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was developed based on the results of previous research and the organizational diagnosis. Four key components of the concept are employee wellbeing, organizational support, leadership, and effective coping mechanisms.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

Developed by the Researcher

Research Methodology

Research Instrument

The researcher used the Appreciative Inquiry process, which includes the stages of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny, to carefully design the qualitative interview instrument for gathering data on aspects of Organizational Support, Leadership, and Effective Coping Mechanisms to enhance employee well-being.

According to Patton (2002), a thorough exploration of people's experiences, opinions, sentiments, and knowledge is made possible by open-ended questions and probing remarks. The virtual interviews consisted of two focus groups, each with four participants, and a total of nine open-ended questions which were validated by three IOC experts from Assumption University Thailand. These inquiries were designed to identify KWEG's current procedures and provide comprehensive insights into employee welfare. By aligning the questions with the phases of the AI model, the researcher ensured that the participants' profiles, experiences, objectives, and viewpoints were thoroughly and methodically examined. This approach provided a strong framework for analyzing the factors that influence employee well-being at KWEG.

Population and Sampling

In this study, the selection of 8 participants out of 14 for this qualitative research is based on the principle of data saturation, which ensures that sufficient depth of information is obtained without unnecessary redundancy. Qualitative research prioritizes rich, detailed insights over large sample sizes, and studies have shown that smaller, well-selected samples can provide meaningful and comprehensive findings (Guest et al., 2006). The criteria for selecting the informants included: 1) Informants were chosen based on their professional roles within the organization that directly relate to the study's area of interest. 2) Priority was given to individuals with significant experience in the organization, as their tenure allowed them to provide a comprehensive understanding of organizational processes, challenges, and dynamics. 3) Informants who were actively involved in key activities or projects were selected, as their engagement provided valuable information on operational practices and outcomes.4) Selected individuals demonstrated their willingness to participate in the research and were available to provide thoughtful and detailed responses during data collection. 5) Efforts were made to

ensure that the informants represented different departments or functions within KWEG, providing a diverse range of perspectives and minimizing potential biases.

Data Collection

As part of the data collection process, two virtual focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with a total of eight participants, divided into two groups of four. Pre-prepared questionnaires were used, and each session lasted approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. The interviews were held virtually on the Google Meet platform, and participants were given prior notice of the interview questions to allow for adequate preparation. The interviews were conducted in the Myanmar language, and the responses were later translated into English for analysis. At the beginning of each session, participants were thanked for their time and participation. The researcher provided an overview of the study, outlining its background, objectives, and assurance of confidentiality to ensure a safe and open discussion environment. The participants represented diverse roles and responsibilities at KWEG, including both employees and management personnel, ensuring a comprehensive and well-rounded perspective on employee well-being. This diversity facilitated a rich discussion encompassing various organizational levels and experiences.

The discussions were meticulously planned to ensure that all aspects of the study's objectives were addressed. Open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to share in-depth insights, personal anecdotes, and unique perspectives that might otherwise have been overlooked. This approach fostered an environment of openness and inclusivity, allowing participants to express their views candidly.

With the participants' consent, the online FGDs were recorded using a mobile recorder, enabling a thorough review of the discussions during the analysis phase. This ensured that no critical details or nuances were missed, contributing to the robustness of the research findings.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was conducted by the researcher, along with two additional coders, who were Master of Management in Organizational Development (MMOD) graduates. They independently analyzed the raw interview data and categorized it into themes. This process facilitated the identification of recurring themes, verified the findings, and minimized potential biases, thereby strengthening the credibility and robustness of the research.

Demographic Profile of the Informants in this Study

Table 1

Job Levels of Informants from KWEG

No.	Job levels of informants	Number of informants	Percentage
1	Area Manager	1	12.5%
2	Project Coordinator	2	25%

3	Field Officer	3	37.5%
4	Monitoring and Evaluation Assistance	1	12.5%
5	Admin staff	1	12.5%
	Total	8	100%

Table 1 provides an overview of the job levels of the informants from KWEG, detailing their roles and the number of participants in each category. Data shows that 37.5% were field officers, 25 % were project coordinators, and 12.5% were Area Manager, Monitoring and Evaluation Assistance and Admin staff.

Table 2

Age Bracket of Informants from KWEG

No.	Age	Number of informants	Percentage
1	20-30	4	50%
2	30-40	4	50%
	Total	8	100%

Table 2 presents the age brackets of the informants from KWEG, categorizing them into two groups: 20–30 years and 30–40 years, with an equal number of participants in each age range.

Table 3

Years of Service of Informants from KWEG

No.	Year of Service	Number of informants	Percentage
1	1 to 3 years	3	37.5%
2	5 to 8 years	4	50%
3	12 years	1	12.5%
	Total	8	100%

Table 3 outlines the years of service of the informants from KWEG, divided into three categories: 1–3 years (37.5%), 5–8 years (50%) and 12 years (12.5%), highlighting the range of experience among the participants. The data shows that the majority of informants fall under second category.

Table 4

Education Level of Informants from KWEG

No.	Level of Education	Number of informants	Percentage
1	Attending Bachelor Degree	1	12.5%
2	Bachelor Degree	6	75%
3	Master's degree Graduate	1	12.5%
	Total	8	100%

Table 4 summarizes the education levels of the informants from KWEG, categorizing them as attending a bachelor's degree, holding a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree graduate. Data indicate that 75% majority of participants have completed a bachelor's degree.

Results and Discussion

Research Objective I: To explore the aspects that contribute to employee wellbeing.
Discovery Phase Questions:

In the phase of discovery, the researcher utilized open-ended questions to gather valuable data, identify patterns, relationships, or gaps for the staff wellbeing at KWEG.
Table 5

Common Themes on Discovery Questions

Interview Question	Common Themes based on three coders

1. Can you describe a time when your well-being was prioritized at KWEG?
  a. What specific actions or factors made that experience stand out?
  b. How did it impact your engagement and productivity?
2. What aspects of your role influence your well-being the most—positively or negatively?
	- supportive leadership, Empathy and encouragement, Work life balance, consistent wellbeing initiative
	- Open and Clear communication, Supportive team boost positive impact, External factors affecting wellbeing

3. Can you share a positive experience where you felt supported emotionally at work?	- Open communication, Flexible working hours, supportive leadership, financial consideration
a. How did leadership contribute to this support?	- appreciation and recognition, supportive leadership, emotional support, open communication.
b. What coping mechanisms or strategies helped you navigate challenges?	- mindful adaptation, breathing and meditation, work life balance, self-calming and reflection.

Employee Wellbeing (Discovery)

The employees at the Karen Women Empowerment Group frequently felt that their well-being was prioritized when supportive leadership demonstrated empathy, encouragement, gratitude, and acknowledgment. For example, when team members collaborate effectively and communicate openly, it creates a positive atmosphere and a sense of belonging that boosts morale. Work-life balance and consistent wellness measures, such as wellness programs or flexible scheduling, are crucial for fostering a supportive work environment. However, challenges such as excessive workloads, external factors like security and safety concerns, and burnout negatively impact employees' well-being.

Organizational Support (Discovery)

According to the respondents, a culture of open communication and mutual respect is often the foundation of positive emotional support in the workplace. Flexible work schedules and a focus on work-life balance contribute to employees feeling valued, while simultaneously reducing stress and demonstrating the organization's respect for their personal and professional

needs. Collaboration among colleagues, coupled with supportive leadership that actively listens and provides encouragement, fosters a strong sense of community. Additionally, financial considerations—such as fair compensation and timely assistance during personal challenges—along with the implementation of staff well-being policies and guidelines, further strengthen this supportive environment.

Leadership (Discovery)

Respondents at the organization highly value leaders who have the ability to provide emotional support and recognize the contributions of their team, transforming challenges into opportunities for growth. They respect leaders who communicate openly and express sincere gratitude. Furthermore, they believe that leadership is crucial in fostering an atmosphere where people feel appreciated and are inspired to perform well, which, in turn, enhances employee wellness and job satisfaction.

Effective Coping Mechanism (Discovery)

During challenging times, the respondents use strategies such as mindful adaptation that enable them to stay flexible and focused, allowing them to navigate stress with a positive outlook. They practice meditation and breathing exercises, which have a relaxing effect that helps focus thoughts and reduce anxiety. While techniques like self-calming and reflection promote self-awareness and emotional control, a focus on work-life balance ensures they can recharge and maintain their overall psychological well-being.

Research Objective II. To gather employee insights on wellbeing initiatives to enhance employee wellbeing at KWEG.

Dream Stage

During the Dream phase, the researcher-led conversations allowed employees to articulate their aspirations for well-being support and initiatives. By identifying potential growth opportunities and insights from their perspective, this collaborative dreaming is expected to create a shared vision that could ultimately enhance employee well-being.

Table 6

Common Themes on Dream Questions

Question	Common Themes
4. Imagine KWEG three years from now, where employee well-being is fully integrated into the workplace culture. What does this environment look and feel like to you?	- Feeling valued - Positive working environment, - motivation and productivity - Capacity building
a. What forms of organizational support would enhance well-being?	Flexible working hours, insurance policy, Regular break, Feedback mechanism, Positive working environment,
b. Leadership practices that prioritize employee well-being.	Open communication, mutual respect and understanding, Supportive Leadership with empathy.
c. Effective coping mechanisms integrated into the culture.	Wellbeing activity, (Yoga session, outing), open communication, supportive colleagues and positive working environment.

Employee Wellbeing - In the Dream stage of Employee Wellbeing, employees envision a workplace where well-being is at the heart of the culture, creating an environment that feels empowering and inspiring. They desire a work culture where employees feel valued, with their contributions recognized and appreciated, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose. A workplace that radiates cheerfulness and provides a helpful environment increases motivation and productivity, while opportunities for capacity building are abundant, enabling individuals to grow both personally and professionally. Respondents believe that having this type of thriving environment not only strengthens the organization's success but also ensures that employees flourish, balancing their work and well-being harmoniously.

Organizational Support - Three years from now, respondents envision a workplace that prioritizes employee well-being and integrates it into its core values through comprehensive organizational support. An organization with a flexible working hours policy that allows employees to balance their personal and professional responsibilities. Regular breaks ensure mental and physical rejuvenation, boosting productivity and morale. They seek a workplace where employees are empowered to share their concerns and ideas, including robust feedback mechanisms that foster open communication. As humanitarian workers in a conflict zone, they desire an organization that offers a comprehensive insurance policy, providing financial security and reassurance, ensuring employees and their families feel supported in times of need. Finally, they emphasize the importance of a consistent well-being program, including physical wellness activities such as yoga sessions, Zumba dance, and support for mental health counseling. This is complemented by a consistently positive working environment, where every team member feels appreciated, supported, and inspired to excel.

Leadership - In the Dream stage of leadership, respondents acknowledged that leaders are among the main contributors to their well-being in the workplace. They envision a leadership approach that fully supports employee well-being through open communication, mutual respect, and empathy. Leaders who create a safe space where employees feel comfortable sharing ideas and concerns are appreciated by the employees which not only help improve the wellbeing but also job satisfaction. Many respondents stated that they imagine a workplace where mutual respect is the foundation of all interactions, ensuring every team member feels valued and included. Empathetic leadership will place a high value on understanding each person's needs and providing support and encouragement to promote a happier, healthier, and more engaged workforce.

Effective Coping Mechanism - In the Dream stage of Effective Coping Mechanisms, respondents highlighted four key elements: consistent wellness activities, open communication, supportive coworkers, and a positive work environment. Regarding wellness activity suggestions, they emphasized regular wellness practices, such as yoga sessions and outdoor team outings. Another aspect of effective coping mechanisms is open communication, which fosters a culture of trust and ensures employees feel comfortable sharing their concerns and receiving support. Having supportive colleagues creates a collaborative and caring atmosphere where everyone is encouraged to uplift one another. Additionally, when combined with a

positive work environment, these mechanisms enable employees to manage stress, maintain balance, and thrive both personally and professionally.

Research Objective III. To design the strategies that enhance employee wellbeing through organizational support, leadership and effective coping mechanism.
Design Stage

In the Design phase, the researcher created a question that covers all key factors—Organizational Support, Leadership, and Effective Coping Mechanisms—toward Employee Well-being to help employees translate their vision into a practical organizational strategy. By facilitating brainstorming sessions, employees collaborate to develop ideas that align with their ideal workplace, focusing on their preferences, teamwork, and fostering a culture of gratitude. This inclusive approach ensures that new policies and programs meet employees' expectations, leading to a clear, actionable roadmap that enhances worker engagement and satisfaction.

Table 7

Common Themes on Design Questions

Question	Common Themes
5. What well-being initiatives or tools would make you feel most valued and supported at KWEG? - Examples: counseling services, mental health workshops, flexible work options, etc. 6. How would you prioritize these initiatives based on their impact on your well-being and performance?	1. Flexible work arrangement, 2. Mental Health Support 3. Supportive Leadership 4. Wellbeing program

In the Design stage, four key themes emerged: flexible work arrangements, a mental health support program, supportive leadership, and a holistic well-being program that includes physical, mental, and emotional health. The prioritized initiatives, in terms of enhancing employee well-being at KWEG, are listed in the order above. The respondents envision a workplace that enhances their well-being through a comprehensive design strategy integrating organizational support, leadership, and effective coping mechanisms. A workplace that offers remote work options and adaptable schedules helps employees achieve a better work-life balance, reducing stress and enhancing productivity. Counseling services and regular workshops would provide crucial resources for employees to navigate personal and professional challenges during difficult times. Leaders are expected to demonstrate empathy, open communication, and guidance to foster a culture of trust and respect. They indicated that overall well-being would be enhanced by a program that integrates physical, mental, and emotional health initiatives, such as team-building exercises, mindfulness classes, and fitness activities. By prioritizing these initiatives based on how they directly affect employee well-being and outcomes, KWEG may establish a nurturing workplace where employees feel appreciated, empowered, and motivated for success.
Destiny Stage

The Destiny phase of Appreciative Inquiry focuses on sustaining the initiatives developed during the Design phase by implementing programs, policies, and structures that prioritize professional preferences, teamwork, and a culture of appreciation. By actively participating in this process, employees take ownership of the projects, ensuring that the improvements align with their evolving needs.

Table 8

Common Themes on Destiny Questions

Question	Common Themes
1. What strategies or practices would you recommend for KWEG to sustain employee well-being in the long term? 2. How can employees play an active role in shaping and maintaining these well-being practices?	Training and development, effective communication including feedback mechanism, budget allocation for sustainable well-being programs, Participatory employee engagement.

In the Destiny stage, employees shared that KWEG should focus on an integrated approach that combines training, effective communication, resource allocation, and employee involvement, which will co-create long-term employee well-being and organizational success. Training and development programs can empower employees and leaders with tools to manage stress, improve productivity, and foster a positive work environment. Establishing clear and open communication channels, including a structured feedback mechanism, will ensure employees feel heard and that well-being initiatives are tailored to their evolving needs. Allocating a dedicated budget for sustainable programs, such as regular wellness activities, mental health support, and work-life balance initiatives, will ensure the longevity of these efforts. Employee participation will help integrate well-being into the company culture. Examples of this include creating well-being committees or asking staff members to co-create and evaluate initiatives.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the interviews revealed three primary factors that significantly contribute to employee well-being at KWEG: Organizational Support, Leadership, and Effective Coping Mechanisms. These elements were found to interact dynamically, collectively shaping the well-being of employees within the organization.

Organizational Support emerged as a fundamental pillar of employee well-being. Participants highlighted the importance of resources, policies, and practices designed to meet their needs and foster a supportive workplace environment. Employees who felt adequately supported by the organization reported higher job satisfaction, reduced stress levels, and

increased engagement. Key examples of support included accessible mental health resources, flexibility in work schedules, financial support in case of emergencies, and opportunities for skill development. These provisions reinforced employees' sense of value and belonging, contributing to a positive workplace culture.

Leadership was identified as another crucial determinant of well-being. Informants pointed to leadership behaviors that modeled empathy, decisiveness, and fairness as critical in building a positive workplace culture. Managers who actively sought feedback, acknowledged employees' contributions, and demonstrated a genuine concern for their teams' welfare were particularly valued. For instance, one participant shared how their manager's open-door policy and consistent encouragement during a demanding project period helped alleviate stress and boosted team morale.

Additionally, the findings underscored the role of Effective Coping Mechanisms in managing work-related stress. Employees who employed mindfulness techniques, sought peer support, and engaged in stress-relieving activities reported better overall well-being. Organizational efforts to encourage these practices, such as promoting work-life balance and creating peer networks, further amplified their effectiveness.

The interplay between these factors highlighted the holistic nature of employee well-being. While effective coping strategies enable staff members to face obstacles with greater resilience, organizational support and leadership provide the structural and cultural cornerstones.

These findings underscore the need for KWEG to prioritize investments in organizational support systems and leadership development programs while fostering a workplace culture that encourages effective coping strategies. Such a comprehensive approach can ensure sustainable improvements in employee well-being, driving both individual and organizational success.

The findings align with the study, which explores the effects of empowering leadership and perceived organizational support on employee psychological well-being and performance in the post-pandemic retail sector. The study reveals that while empowering leadership does not directly enhance performance, it plays a crucial role in significantly improving employee well-being (Kuang et al., 2023).

Secondly, the study explores how ethical leadership can enhance employee well-being within the hospitality sector. The research highlights the critical role of perceived organizational support (POS) as a mediator in this relationship. The findings suggest that by prioritizing ethical leadership and fostering a supportive organizational environment, hospitality organizations can cultivate a positive workplace culture that enhances employee well-being and drives organizational success (Cheng et al., 2022).

The study by Wang (2024) examines how different workplace factors influence the psychological well-being of teachers. The research analyzes the relationships between workload, organizational support, work engagement, and well-being. The author suggests that schools should focus on increasing organizational support and fostering work engagement to improve teachers' psychological well-being, which will help reduce the negative effects of high workloads, leading to healthier, more productive teachers.

According to the study, insights were gathered on how sales representatives in the case company perceive well-being at work, workplace health promotion, and employee productivity. The aim was also to investigate if and how the employer can support employee productivity through workplace health promotion. The results indicate that employees who experience well-being at work feel that the employer is concerned for their well-being and recognize the employer's efforts, with frequent references to affiliation and leadership factors (Hagelstam, 2017).

Furthermore, the findings are supported by research from Slack (2020), who explores the impact of exposure to traumatic material on forensic science professionals. The article suggests that organizational support, resilience-building practices, and mental health resources can be vital in mitigating the impacts of trauma. Additionally, the study which examined how different coping mechanisms affect young adults' well-being, highlighted the importance of promoting effective coping strategies for enhancing psychological well-being in young adults (Mayordomo-Rodríguez et al., 2015).

Recommendations

Implications for the Organization: Strategic Directions based on the results of the study. The findings emphasize the urgent need for KWEG to foster a culture in which employee well-being is embedded as a fundamental organizational value. The study underscores the significance of integrating employee well-being into KWEG's strategic priorities. This integration should involve the implementation of targeted initiatives aimed at strengthening organizational support, promoting leadership development, and establishing effective coping mechanisms. The strategic plan below (12 months implementation plan) is recommended for KWEG to enhance the wellbeing of its employees.

Strategic Plan for Enhancing Employee Wellbeing at KWEG

The strategic plan for enhancing employee well-being at KWEG is centered around four primary objectives. First, it seeks to strengthen organizational support by implementing policies and providing resources that ensure employees feel valued and supported. Second, the plan emphasizes the development of leaders who are empathetic, equitable, and decisive, fostering a positive workplace culture. Third, it advocates for the promotion of effective coping mechanisms by equipping employees with the tools and opportunities necessary to manage stress and cultivate resilience. Finally, the plan integrates various aspects of employee well-being—including physical, mental, and emotional health—recognizing their importance to an individual's overall quality of life. This comprehensive approach is designed to cultivate a supportive and thriving work environment for all employees.

Strategic Initiatives

Based on the study's findings, which emphasize the importance of Organizational Support, Leadership, and Effective Coping Mechanisms in promoting the well-being of KWEG's staff, the following strategic initiatives have been developed to enhance employee well-being. These initiatives focus on four key areas:

1. Organizational Support: Provide mental health resources, flexible work options, financial aid, and recognition programs to create a supportive workplace.

2. Leadership Development: Train leaders in empathy, communication, and decision-making, supported by feedback systems and open-door policies.

3. Coping Mechanisms: Promote work-life balance, peer support networks, and stress-relief programs like mindfulness and fitness activities.

4. Well-being Culture: Integrate well-being culture that covers mental, physical and emotional of an individual. Highlight well-being through communication campaigns, train well-being champions, and continuously improve based on feedback.

Strategic Plan Implementation Timeline (12 months)

This strategic plan for enhancing employee well-being at KWEG unfolds across five key phases.

Phase 1 (Months 1-3): KWEG should focus on identifying employee needs through surveys and raising awareness of the well-being strategy via targeted communication campaigns.

Phase 2 (Months 4-6): In this phase, the organization should strengthen its support systems by launching mental health resources, offering flexible work arrangements, implementing recognition programs, and providing skill development opportunities.

Phase 3 (Months 7–9): The focus here should be on leadership development, achieved through workshops, 360-degree evaluations, and recognizing leaders who actively promote employee well-being.

Phase 4 (Months 10-12): KWEG should foster effective coping mechanisms by introducing peer support networks, stress-relief initiatives, and mindfulness workshops.

Phase 5: The final phase involves ensuring the ongoing evaluation and sustainability of the initiatives by monitoring progress through key performance indicators (KPIs) and refining strategies based on employee feedback.

This phased approach provides a structured pathway for cultivating a supportive and resilient workplace culture. To assess the effectiveness of these initiatives, KWEG should track employee well-being using periodic surveys, absenteeism rates, turnover rates, and qualitative feedback. These KPIs will provide measurable insights into program impact and areas for improvement while cultivating its set goal in terms of enhancing the employee wellbeing. By integrating these recommendations into its operational framework, KWEG can not only address current well-being challenges but also position itself as an organization that prioritizes the holistic growth of its employees.

Conclusion

Employees of humanitarian organizations work in demanding environments where stress and serious accidents are common occurrences. This qualitative study explores the factors that contribute to employee well-being of the Karen Women Empowerment Group (KWEG) in Myanmar. As indicated in the findings, the organization faces challenges related to work-life balance, political unpredictability, and limited resources, despite its efforts to promote well-being initiatives.

The study highlights the need for a holistic approach to employee well-being, which

includes empathetic and supportive leadership, flexible work-hour policies, mental health support, well-being activities that address physical, mental, and emotional health, and reassurance policies. Additionally, a culture of open communication and trust fosters a positive atmosphere, enhancing employee satisfaction and directly improving overall well-being.

In conclusion, the study offers practical recommendations for KWEG and similar organizations to enhance employee well-being by promoting organizational support, leadership development, and coping mechanisms to manage challenges in an uncertain environment.

Limitations

This study was limited by its focus on a small, purposive sample of participants from a single organization. While this approach provided in-depth insights, the findings cannot be generalized to other contexts or populations. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced bias, as participants might have provided socially desirable responses. Future research could address these limitations by employing larger, more diverse samples and incorporating quantitative methods to validate the results.

Recommendations for future study

Building on the findings of this study, future research should explore how the recommended strategies specifically impact employee well-being and satisfaction in other organizations, particularly within the context of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Myanmar. Further investigation would provide valuable insights into how the practical application of these recommendations influences long-term employee satisfaction, organizational success, and overall effectiveness in similar settings. This research could help determine the broader applicability of the findings and offer guidance for NGOs seeking to improve employee well-being in challenging environments.

Additionally, there is room to explore how unique environmental factors, such as working in conflict zones, influence the feasibility and effectiveness of well-being strategies. Research could also investigate how different demographics (e.g., gender, age, job roles) experience well-being challenges and how solutions can be tailored accordingly.

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