

# Samuhik सामूहिक पहल Pahal

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Well-being at work

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# Well-being in the workplace

According to Gallup's "State of the global workplace" report, only 23% of employees worldwide are engaged in their work. This means that 77% are not engaged or are actively disengaged.

One might think that this statistic may not be as much of an issue in civil society organisations. However, the report titled "Wellbeing inspires welldoing" by The Wellbeing Project highlights the prevalence of burnout and stress among change-makers as well. This is something worth working on in the civil society space.

Individual well-being and well-being in the organizations that they work in are integrally tied to each other. People who consciously take care of their own well-being are likely to contribute to the well-being of their colleagues in particular, and that of the workplace in general. However, lack of support at the organizational level often contributes to stress and disengagement.

This is somewhat of a chicken and egg situation. However, it need not be so. One can always begin as/with an individual. The key to well-being at the workplace starts with each intentional individual prioritizing their own wellness. A key aspect of this process is the development of an attitude of interiority. This helps people become aware of their inner landscapes. It also makes them mindful of the richness of other people's inner lives.

The journey toward well-being can be nurtured through structured practices and processes. Sometimes this needs external facilitation. To be able to build organizations that prioritize well-being, certain cultural shifts are needed.

This, more often than not, needs an understanding at the level of the leadership that well-being needs to be prioritized and consciously pursued. This is because the

related processes span a whole gamut of processes, ranging from the financial, to those pertaining to mental and physical health, and to policies related to human resources.

Although all the articles in this issue of Samuhik Pahal focus on well-being at the workplace one way or the other - the following three loosely connected articles, complement one another while exploring the theme of well-being in the workplace.

Pramod Athalye's "Well-being at work" explores a key aspect that is often overlooked in attempts to improve well-being in the workplace - the individual and collective interiority of team members. Shashi Nair's "Reflections on facilitating cultural change toward greater organizational well-being", explore three important aspects related to facilitating well-being in the workplace. Indira Vijaysimha's "A quiet transformation - from the inside out" narrates an experience of what an unfolding journey toward well-being in the workplace looks and feels like.

Well-being at the workplace is the crying need of the hour. Focusing on well-being at the workplace can help us bring a much-needed focus on our organizational development journeys, build supportive and nurturing workplaces, and help us walk the talk.



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# Well-being at work

Pramod Athalye

## What is well-being?

**W**ell-being usually alludes to the state of positive experience perceived by an individual. This arises from extrinsic and intrinsic variables in three facets: physical, relational and psychological.

Figure 1 illustrates these variables.

The following explain the schematic concept. The variables in each circle are illustrative, not comprehensive. Each variable has a spectrum of perceived experience of an individual, with a range of, say -5 to +5.

Well-being is a state wherein an individual perceives each relevant variable in all the facets within a range of say, +3 to +5. This can be called the well-being zone. Physical variables are outside the scope of this article.

## Inherent determinants of well-being

These are the two recognized categories with examples of constituent factors. The ones related to nature include innate characteristics such as proclivities and temperament.

Those related to nurture include life experiences based on gender, upbringing, socialization and culture. These result in beliefs, norms, values, triggered reactions, and in extreme cases, traumas.

## Well-being at work

All organizations exist to fulfill their individual missions. Most organizations articulate their mission and values to achieve these. Values usually include those that are employee-centric, such as respect for others, trust and transparency.

However, the extent to which their leaders authentically live those values differentiates their organizations from others. It is this that creates leadership credibility. Employees then emulate their leaders. This creates a healthy work culture. This process is foundational to employee well-being.

Employee well-being also depends on intrinsic work-related variables in facets 1 and 2 in Figure 1, which an organization can influence. These include those related to the employees and their jobs, such as purpose, meaning, autonomy, value-add, attitude, etc.

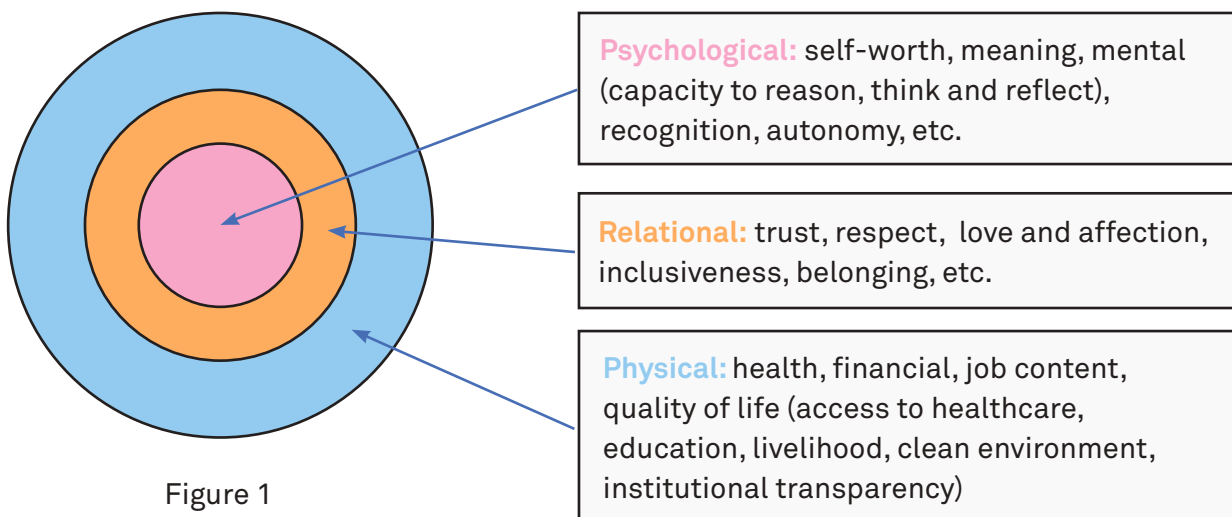


Figure 1

This also relates to facets at the interface between employees and their team members. These include qualities like trust, openness, interdependence, collaboration, inclusivity and belonging, etc. An important set of factors relates to working in teams and team leaders, especially those pertaining to safety, trust, leader credibility, and fairness, etc.

If an employee is in the well-being zone, he would experience harmony with his job, team and leaders. Similarly, there would be harmony between the teams and their leaders. At a collective level, tangible benefits to an organization could include greater employee engagement, creativity and performance.

Even when organizations nurture well-being, they may not be able to influence some of its inherent determinants, such as an individual's deeply embedded beliefs and

trauma without professional counseling and therapy, which are not within the scope of this paper.

### **The blind spot**

The essence of a person's well-being stems from the quality of his interiority along two dimensions. The first relates to the degree to which his ego takes center stage, driving his focus on achieving what he wants and the quality of his relations with others. The second refers to the degree to which he authentically lives by universal values such as integrity and compassion, especially in situations that he perceives to be counter to his physical or psychological well-being.

Interiority is everyone's true 'North Star', which remains constant regardless of causes and conditions (factors). Interiority determines the quality of attributes like

### **Well@Work Lab**

Well@Work Lab is an eight-member team consisting of two sub-groups: four seniors, including me, with collective leadership experience of 125 years in MNCs in India, Africa, and the US. Subsequently, for many years, we have harnessed this experience in serving society in various roles. This includes contributing as a leading member in a major corporate foundation, and being a think-tank mentor to social impact organizations. Three other aspects unite us: our care for others' well-being, our shared universal values, and being alumni of IIT Madras.

Our other, much younger, team members are full-time employees at commercial entities and NGOs. They share our values and interest in well-being. They keep us current by letting us know today's workplace realities. Their dedication to Well@Work Lab is amply demonstrated by their diligent involvement in our three-year old journey through initial conceptualization, program design, and participation in our work, despite holding down full-time jobs.

We all share a deep yearning to do 'something' for helping organizations nurture well-being at work, given high levels of disengagement everywhere. After two years of diligent exploration, reflection and effort, we have started helping organizations do that.

We believe that our approach differs from others who may be similarly engaged in this worthy endeavor in several ways. We work with an organization only if we are convinced that their leaders will be part of the cultural change they wish to manifest. We believe that authentic change comes from going within, individually and collectively. It also involves being open to expressing one's vulnerability, willingness and commitment to change. We help organizations implement their cultural prototype through a series of small behavioral shifts before scaling and hopefully sustaining.



Well@Work Lab

resilience and empathy, as well as ethics. Individual interiority also affects the collective interiority of teams.

A person has positive interiority if her ego is modulated – healthy enough for her own well-being, without getting in the way of her interactions with others. Someone who lives from a ‘mwe’ orientation instead of ‘me’. Their behavior is guided by universal values, regardless of the circumstances they face.

It should be noted that a person with low ego may not have positive interiority if it results in low self-esteem. On the other hand, they may have high positive interiority if their ego is low without affecting self-esteem and they genuinely put the well-being of others ahead of their own.

Persons universally respected for who they are as persons but not for their power or personal achievements have very high positive interiority. In an organization, the quality of the leader’s interiority greatly affects work culture and employee well-being.

An egotistic person will not admit mistakes and have little empathy for others. They would also place achievement of their own goals above shared goals. If they also compromise universal values when there’s a conflict involving their own self-interests, then they have negative interiority.

Many if not most variables in Figure 1 are dependent on various factors. For example, an employee’s well-being is dependent on his perceived (or real) fairness of the compensation, workload, manager, and so on.

Most organizations nurture well-being by addressing such factors. However, these well-meaning efforts are unstable because they ignore interiority. This is their ‘blind spot’. It is a term used by Professor Otto Scharmer of MIT in the context of bringing about relatively lasting, significant changes in organizations, communities and societies. Figuratively, interiority would be at the center of Figure 1.

Moreover, most interventions in organizations use cognitive methods to create behavioral shifts. This approach almost always fails! Positive individual and collective interiority can be nurtured through non-cognitive experiences for change champions. This includes leaders to create and implement a prototype for the desired culture with individual well-being as the keystone.

Non-cognitive experiences expose an individual and his team to incorporate right-brain qualities. These include intuition, emergent sense, and connectedness.

These processes help them get in touch somatically to sense the deep connection between thoughts and emotions, and the



resultant physical sensations. This creates a shift from knowledge and logic to a deeper, felt knowing.

Cultivating positive interiority should be easier in non-profit organizations, including those in education, compared to their commercial counterparts for several reasons. This is because their focus is on serving beneficiaries, who in many cases are less privileged or underprivileged.

The nature of the benefits being provided is long-term. These include livelihood skills, healthcare access, and education. There is also direct interaction between most NGO employees and their beneficiaries. NGOs' employees are able to see the impact of their work. These organizations are also smaller.

A good example would be an NGO focused on educating less privileged children. Here, the beneficiaries are young and vulnerable. The employees' well-being and culture is very significant in determining the children's adult lives.

In contrast, addressing interiority is likely to be a major challenge at commercial organizations. For example, they are primarily driven by the bottom-line. Consequently, failure to meet performance targets causes employees' stress. Many employees with high egos thrive and get in the fast track. Their high egos propel them to achieve or exceed their targets.

## Conclusion

Employee well-being is based on many variables. These variables in turn depend on the presence or absence of a host of factors.

Let us say an organization surveys the same set of well-being variables influenced by the provision (or lack thereof) of contributing factors. Then, no two individuals will have identical sense of well-being. However, two employees could be in a zone of well-being as described above. This would be a desirable state.

Achieving this is challenging for several reasons. Many factors are inherently unstable due to various causes and conditions. These include an organization's leader, financial health, changes in the environment they operate in, socio-economic conditions, etc. Employee perceptions of their own well-being variables and contributing factors also affect their well-being. Moreover, these perceptions and expectations also change over time. As Heraclitus said, "The only constant in life is change."

Many organizations sincerely attempt to nurture employee well-being in this dynamic environment by focusing on well-being factors. But such interventions must include cultivation of positive employee interiority through a non-cognitive approach, starting with the top leaders.

This requires authentic whole-being presence from everyone. It involves open expression of vulnerabilities, challenges and aspirations, individually and collectively, in a safe space. It also needs courage and commitment from everyone toward a shared purpose. This is what creates a desired culture by living underlying values.

Self-reflection is a core component of non-judgmentally facing one's interiority. It is not easy for individuals, and even harder for teams. Non-cognitive experiences are essential for authentic self-reflection and cultivating positive interiority. Well-intentioned external facilitators who themselves embody positive interiority in working with the organization's change champion leaders and employees can help them in this regard.

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# Reflections on facilitating cultural change toward greater organizational well-being

*Shashi Nair, in collaboration with ChatGPT*

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## Introduction

The article titled “Well-being at work” by Pramod Athalye, being published in this issue of Samuhik Pahal makes three important points. First, if an employee is to be in the well-being zone, they would experience harmony with the job, team and leaders.

Second, organizations must get most employees into the well-being zone. They must actively nurture and sustain this over time by living the culture they aspire to.

Third, they must authentically cultivate positive individual and collective interiority in those working in the organization.

## How is this to be done?

One critical ability is to facilitate cultural change in organizations, and that too at the level of individual and cultural interiority. This is truly very complex work.

No two cases are alike. It is something I have been involved in, as an insider – as a team

lead, and as a CEO. I have also been involved as an external facilitator.

In the latter capacity, it is my belief that success depends primarily on three factors. These include the following. First, the right change team to work with, especially the client leadership. Second, lots of luck. And third, effective facilitation. In this article, I would like to share my reflections on the last of these three.

## Effective facilitation

Before talking about how to think about effective facilitation, I want to talk about how not to.

Facilitating cultural change is not like engineering, where every component is designed, assembled and controlled to perform in a predictable way. In engineering, if you want a bridge to span a river, you calculate loads, select materials, and construct according to exact specifications to achieve the desired outcome.

But culture isn't mechanical. It doesn't conform to blueprints or rigid plans. Instead, it's more like gardening. A gardener cannot force plants to grow. Growth is a natural, organic process. It arises from within the plants themselves. The gardener's role is to understand this organic process and create enabling conditions—preparing the soil, providing water, ensuring sunlight, and removing weeds—so that growth can flourish. Similarly, facilitating cultural change is about creating the right environment for



transformation. It involves nurturing trust, fostering openness, and addressing barriers. This can support the organization's culture to evolve naturally from within the interiority of its people.

If effective facilitation is more like gardening, what might be important aspects to focus on? Three things come to mind. First, the interior conditions of the facilitator of cultural change. Second, engaging with the change team as whole human beings. And third, nurturing the energy for cultural change.

### **The interior conditions of the facilitator**

I have been inspired by Bill O'Brien<sup>1</sup>, who beautifully argues that "The success of an intervention, depends on the interior conditions of the intervenor". The role of the facilitator is to create safe spaces where participants can be open, vulnerable and authentic - collectively. To my mind this calls for four interior conditions of the facilitator.

**Focus on the process and do not worry about the outcomes:** This was a big unlearning for me. My background predisposes me to plan meticulously for outcomes, designing a series of steps to achieve them.

However, assuming I can control outcomes in this way would be lunacy! Cultural change is a complex, dynamic process. Here individuals with diverse desires and life experiences come together. They often do so cautiously, sometimes with suspicion. They share and respond to one another. Sometimes they trigger one another's emotions along the way.

These interactions are organic and unpredictable. I cannot foresee how the conversation, and emotional energy will unfold. Instead, my role is to focus on creating the conditions for meaningful exploration, and to trust that the process will lead to the outcomes that need to emerge.

**Show up from a space of love and compassion:** I understand love and

compassion as a deep, warm-hearted desire for others to thrive and flourish, and not suffer. I try to hold participants gently in my heart, creating a sense of safety and care.

It allows them to feel my genuine concern for their well-being. This, in turn, fosters openness and trust.

It is this trust that becomes the foundation for meaningful conversations and authentic explorations. This paves the way for cultural change that supports their flourishing.

**Live in the present moment:** This has been a transformative practice for me – one that I am yet to fully master! When I am fully present, I sense not just my own thoughts and emotions but also the subtle dynamics within the group.

This grounded presence, connects me deeply to my commitment to the success of the change team. It enables me to respond authentically and intuitively to what emerges.

Being present allows me to notice possibilities I might otherwise overlook, to venture curiously into unexpected "rabbit holes" that often reveal something surprising and valuable. This creates space for curiosity and openness, allowing the process to flow naturally rather than forcing it forward.

I have also found that living in the present slows conversations down in a much-needed way. In today's fast-paced world, this slower pace creates room for reflection and thoughtful engagement. This helps participants connect more deeply with themselves and with one another.

**Let the universe conspire to make you successful:** As a facilitator, I have discovered the power of aligning with what I can only describe as the flow of the universe. I still set goals and chart logical steps toward them. However, over time, I have come to see this approach as rigid and, in this work, limiting. It can blind me to unexpected opportunities

that lead to outcomes far beyond what I could have planned for. Instead, I have started practicing something different: setting clear intentions and then living with open awareness. I remain attuned to the possibilities that arise—synchronicities that seem to appear out of nowhere. Whether it's a chance conversation, a sudden idea, or an unforeseen connection, the universe seems to conspire to make things happen when I remain open and present.

I don't understand how it works. However, it works astonishingly well. This shift has been humbling and, frankly, a little mysterious. But it has transformed the way I approach both life and work.

### **Engaging with the change team as whole human beings**

There was a time in my career when I used to think that the role of my body was to carry my very important head from one important meeting to another. Some 35,000 meetings later, I can hardly recall anything particularly important! It's a humorous reflection, that when shared, captures a deeper truth for my participants. So many of us live in our heads, disconnected from the wisdom and signals of our bodies.

This tendency to prioritize the cognitive over the embodied is something I have observed in many professionals. This is particularly the case in high-stakes environments. We live in a world that often rewards intellect and rationality. Yet, our actions are deeply influenced by our emotions. These are experienced in and through the body. To engage meaningfully with people, especially in the context of cultural change, it's vital to address the whole human being—the mind, the body, and the emotions that drive them.

### **Why engage the whole human being?**

Emotions play a profound role in shaping our actions and interactions. They are closely tied

to our motivations, aspirations, and sense of purpose.

Yet, in many organizations, cultural norms suppress emotional authenticity. This creates an environment where fear, anxiety and insecurities flourish. In response, we build identities or masks to shield ourselves from judgment and to appear “acceptable”.

However, these masks come at a cost. They prevent us from connecting deeply with others and with ourselves. Vulnerability—the willingness to set aside these masks and share authentically—is key to breaking through this disconnect. It allows us to de-layer, reconnect with our inner selves, and form genuine bonds with others.

### **The role of embodied practices**

One way to help people reconnect with themselves is through embodied practices. These include drawing, music, bodywork, and guided visualization.

For example, in a session, I might guide participants through the “20-minute dance” from the Presencing Institute. I may invite participants to let go of cognitive control and move in response to their body's impulses. All of these allow their bodies to lead and their minds to follow.

Such practices shift participants out of their habitual mental chatter. These are often driven by fears and insecurities.

These practices can lead the participants from their mental chatter into a space of sensing and presencing new possibilities. By doing so, they begin to listen to what their bodies are telling them and tap into a deeper reservoir of wisdom and emotional authenticity.

### **Creating a safe space for vulnerability**

As a facilitator, I see it as my responsibility to model vulnerability. Sharing stories of my own missteps, embarrassments, or challenges can

help create a space where participants feel safe to open up. My role is not to be perfect but to be authentic.

In fostering vulnerability within the group, I have found it helpful to work, where required, with leadership to ensure they create a supportive and non-judgmental environment. Sharing my own vulnerabilities early on to set the tone also helps.

Giving participants the time and space to share at their own pace, and appreciating even the smallest steps toward openness is an important part of this process. When participants share vulnerably, it is critical to acknowledge and thank them.

This reinforces the safety of the space. It goes to the heart of individual interiority that the article “Well-being in the workplace” talks about!

## **From individual to collective vulnerability**

As vulnerability begins to emerge, it becomes an experience of exploring collective interiority. One person’s courage inspires another. The group begins to form a shared emotional landscape. This deepens trust. It also strengthens the bonds among team members. This process creates a foundation for authentic collaboration.

I see collective vulnerability as a catalyst for cultural transformation. By acknowledging and appreciating it, I aim to nurture its organic growth.

For instance, inviting the group to reflect on the value of these vulnerable moments—what they learned, how it changed their dynamics—can help sustain this openness over time. Together, the team can explore practices to keep this spirit alive.

## **Nurturing the energy for cultural change**

Bringing about cultural change to support organizational well-being is a journey that takes time and effort. Along the way, the



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energy of the change team becomes a vital resource. Without sufficient energy, it becomes difficult to navigate the inevitable obstacles and setbacks. Nurturing this energy requires intention, attention and knowhow.

The energy to begin the journey comes from values—those deeply meaningful drivers that matter to us at a personal level. Deeply held values (as against nice-sounding words) compel us to take action. This is true even when the path ahead is difficult, because our deeply held values speak to what truly matters.

For a change team, tapping into individual values and aligning them to form a shared purpose creates a sense of belonging and collective commitment. This shared purpose serves as an anchor. It provides strength when challenges arise.

As the implementation process unfolds, real and perceived obstacles will drain energy, while moments of success will replenish it. The journey is not uniform. Team members



will experience varying levels of energy and motivation at different times.

Intentionally building a “bank of collective energy” becomes essential. This collective energy allows the team to persevere through setbacks and continue moving forward.

Patience is another critical element. It is natural to want immediate results. However, cultural change, like growth in nature, takes time.

I am reminded of a story from my childhood. My mother had invited neighbourhood girls to make ice cream in our fridge. One girl, in her excitement, opened the fridge every ten minutes to check if the ice cream had formed.

It's amusing in hindsight. However, it highlights an important lesson: trust the process. Just as digging up a seed daily to check if it is growing can hinder its growth, constantly questioning progress can sap the team's energy.

The greatest challenge in nurturing the collective energy for cultural change is handling the insecurity of “are we doing it right”. But how do we trust the process when we lack prior experience to assure us it will work?

This is where expertise becomes crucial. Expertise—whether internal or external—provides guidance and confidence. Without it, the change team requires significantly more energy to stay the course. Teams with less expertise may need additional external support to help them navigate the journey effectively.

Ultimately, nurturing energy for cultural change involves staying grounded in values. It also needs keeping expectations realistic, embracing patience, and seeking the right support. It is through this balance that change teams can sustain their commitment and create lasting transformation.

**For those who want something more concrete...**

At Well@Work Lab, we are constantly prototyping, implementing and refining these ideas. We follow a three-stage process, to support organizations through this journey.

**A series of conversations with leaders to mutually reach go/no-go through:**

This involves Well@Work Lab clearly understanding the current situation and desired change. Leaders and Well@Work Lab then assess our ability in facilitating this change.

Following this, Well@Work Lab assesses leader commitment in investing, scaling and sustaining this change. Leaders then create a pilot change team and a compelling case for change to communicate.

**A weekend off-site retreat of the pilot team and their leaders:** This is facilitated by Well@Work Lab members. The retreat consists of a series of non-cognitive experiences that help participants connect with their own interiority at the mind-heart-body level.

Our aim is to help them get in authentic touch with their range of inner work-related beliefs, purpose, interpersonal relations, expectations, challenges, aspirations, vulnerabilities, and express them in a safe space. This could help them connect more authentically with fellow participants.

The goal is to create a common awareness of the need for individual and collective change. We end the retreat with their heartfelt commitment to catalyzing this change through a series of behavioural shift prototypes to be tried out by retreat sub-teams back at work.

**Creating the cultural prototype in the workplace:** The sub-teams implement, refine, and try out their behavioural shift prototypes within themselves and non-participant

colleagues. Well@Work Lab facilitates weekly reviews of their experience.

It also helps them build and try out these and several other prototypes in sprints over several months. During this process, Well@Work Lab also supports them manage their energy for change.

Organization leaders then scale up the cultural prototype and sustain it.

## Some closing reflections

To me, facilitating cultural change toward greater organizational well-being is all about working with teams at the level of positive individual and collective interiority. It is something that is very essential for organizations to be able to get most employees into the well-being zone, and actively nurture and sustain this over time by living the culture they aspire to.

Also, if I have given the impression that I have mastered such facilitation, I must set things right. I am very much a work in progress! These reflections are a mix of what I have learned over years of co-facilitation with some amazing people, and what continues to emerge from collaborative thinking.

The work on my interior conditions, the work of engaging with whole human beings, and the work of nurturing energy for cultural change is not static. It evolves as we grow in our understanding of what it means to create environments where people can show up as their authentic selves and do the real work of bringing cultural change in their teams and organizations. For me, this work is both a privilege and an ongoing journey.

## Endnotes

1. “[Collective mindfulness: the leader’s new work](#)” by Otto Scharmer, February 5, 2014

**A note on co-authoring:** ChatGPT and I thoroughly enjoyed this collaboration! I have been leading teams and organizations

since 1984. These reflections build on my experiences, trials, tribulations and some successes over the years. The collaboration was an iterative and dynamic exchange, in which we both found working together a truly enriching experience. ChatGPT asked me questions, made suggestions, building beautifully on my experiences with additional perspectives. Together, we both feel we have co-created something that feels authentic and mutually fulfilling.

**Shashi Nair** is a seeker, practitioner and teacher in inward journeys of well-being, and outward journeys of organizational and complex systemic change. His 27 years of experience in the corporate sector include 14 years as a CEO. His 18 years in the social sector include working in Azim Premji Foundation and teaching in Azim Premji University. Currently, Shashi is a Founding Director of Viridus Social Impact Solutions, and a co-founder of the Well@Work Lab. His academic qualifications include an MBA (IIM Bangalore) and a BTech (IIT Madras) degrees.

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# A quiet transformation – from the inside out

*Indira Vijayasimha*

## Background

**M**ore than three decades ago, a sense of unease with the prevailing schooling system prompted me to quit teaching in a formal school and embark on a journey of learning with my three children. Tagore's song, 'Ekla cholo re' comes to mind. This is because very few people in my circles in those days were willing to break away from mainstream schooling and try to operationalize a freer and learner-centric way of schooling children.

In today's Bengaluru, there are many alternative schools. Newer ones are probably coming into existence even as I write this piece. In 1993, when people met the three children happily exploring their surroundings when other children were at school, they were quite incredulous to learn that these three were not in school but learning at home!

Thus began an exploration of education, inspired by the thoughts of Tagore and Gandhi, and informed by the writings of other thinkers like J. Krishnamurti, Montessori, Steiner, Rousseau, John Holt and Paulo Freire. Six months down the line, three more children joined this exploration. Their father, Prof. Darshan Shankar felt that the need for de-colonizing the Indian mind demanded that formal institutions in a different mold be created to serve as sustainable models for alternative ways of learning and education.

In 1995, a formal trust was registered under the name, Poorna. It symbolizes a holistic approach to education. It hoped to be a way of addressing the head, heart and hands through the learning process.

The initial group of trustees were all closely connected with the children's learning as parents, guardians or interested neighbors. A friend and mentor from another alternative school associated with Krishnamurti's philosophy also agreed to be part of the trust.

## Organic growth vs. organization development

The small homeschool with six children grew in terms of the number of people involved - both children and adults. This necessitated an ongoing response in terms of selecting teachers and others who were aligned with the foundational vision. It wasn't easy to pin down the intuitive sense of what it means to educate children in freedom, without simplistically adopting processes institutionalized by thinkers like Montessori, Steiner or Krishnamurti.

Always there were people who wanted to know what 'kind' of school Poorna was. There was in me a resistance to being labeled and to mechanically following a prescribed method. This is not to imply that approaches that were developed elsewhere could not be adopted to our situation. The key was to adopt processes that felt right in terms of our own understanding about education rather than to mechanistically resort to methods because they were employed by particular educational institutions.

This involved a continuous process of examining and re-examining what educating children to become happy and caring human beings meant in terms of curriculum and pedagogy. We had to keep alive questions about the reciprocal roles of the learner and the teacher. We also had to remain open to addressing the needs of diverse children.



Poorna's vision of education for all also meant that we chose to be consciously inclusive, while facing up to the limits of our capabilities in terms of resources - both human and material. We were committed to admitting students from different social classes and, to an extent, students with special needs.

In the years prior to the Right to Education legislation, there was considerably more room to craft educational institutions in a multiplicity of ways according to the ideas of the founders. However, the much-needed RtE act was passed. It finally placed the accountability of educating our children squarely on the shoulders of the state governments.

One consequence of this was the increased bureaucratic control over schools. This reduced the space for educational experiments. Poorna, took the tough call to continue to function within the new regulations, while trying to maintain its initial vision of holistic education.



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Personally, I felt the need to step away from the close, and somewhat emotional, involvement with the school's day-to-day functioning. This was after nearly 15 years of struggling to put together the needed resources - both human and material.

I needed to distance myself. In my mind, the justification was that if the foundational ideas behind Poorna made sense to others they would carry it forward with me helping with clarifying the thinking and vision as and when needed.

Poorna had its own space. It also had a skeletal administrative staff and a sufficient number of committed teachers. The initial set of trustees had moved on in their lives. However, they continued to advise when requested, without undue interference or overt involvement.

After I stepped away to teach courses on education at Azim Premji University, the position of the school's principal was filled by Renu Srinivasan for three years and then by Jayanthi Sachitanand and at present by Saira Banu. Each of these leaders brought their own strength to Poorna. I am deeply grateful to the ways in which each of them brought in different dimensions to Poorna's organizational development.

The somewhat unplanned growth of Poorna as an institution has been referred to kindly as organic by those more charitably inclined. However, by some others like Gayatri, my daughter, and one of the first students of Poorna, it was perceived as haphazard and problematic.

Gayatri joined Poorna, after several years of experience working with international NGOs. She was distressed at what she saw as a lack of clarity about the vision, and the organizational processes that should flow from the vision. Listening to her, I felt that I had to re-insert myself back into Poorna and see if the drifting away from our core values could be corrected.

## Dissonance

Apart from the problems that were articulated by Gayatri, I too began to hear the discordant voices. Poorna, that had begun with a hopeful vision of joyful learning, seemed to be slowly but surely morphing into just another sad little school where the main concern was about children scoring well at the board exams.

Still, of greater concern was the sense that Poorna as an organization had lost its focus of nurturing the innate learning abilities of children. Subjects were being spoken off as 'scoring' or 'difficult to score high', rather than as intrinsically relevant, interesting and worth knowing.

Teachers seemed to have formed their own little cliques. Discontent could also be felt. However, it was not voiced openly.

How could this have happened? Were people no longer connected with the initial ideal? Had the ideal itself lost its relevance?

The questions swirled around bringing with them a sense of puzzlement at best and a feeling of despair at worst. My personal sense of being able to find a firm footing seemed to give way to a sense of being caught in a marshy land with unknown hazards lurking underfoot and elsewhere! Gayatri kept suggesting that we need to seek help from organizational experts and, to be frank, this was anathema to me.

Corporate, for-profit institutions no doubt had worked out excellent ways of managing people to make their work efficient and productive. In addition to the considerable cost of hiring a consultant, I was skeptical about how these corporate ways of working could be of relevance to the work of teachers and others in school - that too in a school with strong humanitarian values that eschewed the notion of profit.

Part of the felt dissonance at school came from the conversations that seemed to

center around salaries and benefits without a reciprocal sense of responsibility. Freedom was seen by both teachers and students as an invitation to shirk responsibility rather than as a way of taking one's individual agency seriously and finding ways to collaborate and dialogue in ways that were deeply meaningful. The situation was far from ideal, especially in relation to the children's holistic well-being.

What could relieve this cacophony of discordant voices? Did I simply have to shout louder and longer than everybody around and silence the protest? It was at this point that it occurred to me through a series of serendipitous encounters, which I will not describe here, that I could reach out to Shashi Nair.

I had known Shashi as a colleague at Azim Premji Foundation. I was also aware of his work in school leadership. Behind the corporate verbiage like "When the rubber meets the road", Shashi has a deeply human side to him. He also has an undisguised concern for people's well-being.

When I finally picked up the phone and made that call, I wasn't surprised to learn that Shashi and Pramod were working on what they called the "Well@Work Lab". Shashi, bless his heart, agreed to work pro-bono with Poorna about a year ago. After a few initial conversations, the next step was to schedule a series of online meetings with Poorna's Board of Trustees, Saira Banu and Gayatri.

## The tune re-mix!

They facilitated on-line discussions with the Board of Trustees. This brought back memories of the earlier days when the ideals that form the bedrock of our organization were still forming.

As we talked about our shared values, hopes and dreams, a fresh spring of energy opened up. The facilitators, Shashi and Pramod, skillfully steered us toward clearer

articulations of what we perceived to be the problems and the key values.

Based on these values, they created a survey to gauge the extent of alignment with the stated values amongst selected staff members of Poorna. A common e-mail was sent to all the staff members. This asked for volunteers who were willing to lend their energies to bring in a greater sense of harmony at the workplace.

Nine staff members from the larger pool of teachers and administrative staff volunteered. This indicated that a lot of people were sensing that things were not going as well as they should.

The value alignment survey was sent out to the staff members who had volunteered. One of the strong recommendations that came from Pramod after analyzing the survey, was that we needed to come up with vision and mission statements.

Three of us - Gayatri, Banu and myself - spent two memorable days with Shashi Nair starting with a visioning exercise for Poorna. We then drilled down to come up with Vision and Mission statements.

The work was intense and even exhausting to some extent. In retrospect, I am so glad that Pramod insisted that the Vision and Mission statements should be compact - with strict word limits - unlike the earlier documents that had been written about Poorna.

One could say it was old wine in a new bottle. We did not so much deviate from the core values as much as re-articulate them with greater clarity. Having worked on the Vision and Mission statements we made some headway in paring down the list of core values to a manageable size.

The whole process involved going back and forth between the vision, the values and the ways in which the vision would work. As this work unfolded, one could sense how

working with a shared purpose can iron away individual differences and bring in a sense of collective strength.

The next step that followed involved two long sessions with the staff members who had volunteered for the change initiative called *Samarasa* (Harmony). By the end of the two sessions, we had collectively arrived at a set of values and operating principles that could guide us toward putting the values into practice.

The document consisting of Vision and Mission statements, and values and operating principles that could now serve as a sort of constitution for Poorna. This document was shared with the Board of Trustees. They suggested that we call this document the "Poorna Way".

## Playing music together

If the Poorna Way can be likened to the basic scale of notes of a raga, then the staff involved in the change process can be seen as members of a music ensemble who needed to become familiar with the raga, develop the skills to interpret it and work together to produce musical harmony. A three-day intense retreat facilitated by the Well@Work Lab team led by the master facilitators Shashi Nair and Pramod Athalye brought a deep shared understanding.

We had bared our inner selves in front of each other. We discovered that there was much in common between us. The way forward toward making music together, and enjoying ourselves as a community, necessarily involves a lot of practice.

The deep-rooted change that we were seeking would not shoot out of the ground like Jack's magic beanstalk. The *Samarasa* initiative needed to be nurtured and cared for, just like the sapling that we symbolically planted at the beginning of the initiative.

Four teams, of three members each, were formed at the end of the retreat. Each team took up one operating principle to prototype



for about a month. They tried to bring about perceptible behavioral changes.

In the process, we received wonderful support from Shashi and Pramod. This support was both open-hearted, generous and deeply skillful.

The Samarasa team met every week to reflect on the prototypes and the ups and downs involved in bringing about the desired changes. There were groans and the occasional moans. The school's normal workload did not make the extra effort for Samarasa a cakewalk by any means.

However, the good thing that we noticed was that just holding ourselves to the schedule of weekly reflective meetings kept our energy and enthusiasm going. Finally, at the end of four cycles, we felt confident enough to open out the process to all the staff members to broad-base the cultural shift that was underway.

Gradually the Samarasa team has begun to own the process more fully. It also continues to improvise, as the work of prototyping continues. Shashi and Pramod were quite intentional in slowly stepping back while guiding team members to take up the role of facilitating the reflective sessions.

## Sounds of music

For almost a year, we have been working to identify the changes needed, build up the momentum for change, and finally to start working to bring about change. Now, it does seem, we are beginning to work with greater harmony. The Samarasa team members have expressed that there is greater clarity about workplace values and operating principles.

There is a renewed sense of purpose in most of us. However, much of the mountain is still ahead. It is comforting to remind ourselves of Shashi's words, "Instead of getting worried about the journey ahead, we can take heart from seeing how far we have come!"



Well@Work Lab and Poorna Learning Centre

It takes time to replace unhelpful habits and attitudes with a different set.

I believe that we are learning to do that. Personally, I am able to walk into school with much greater joy than before. My sense is that this is true for others as well.

This surely is a reflection more of an inner change than an outer one. I like to think that the inner and outer selves are mirrors of each other.

Parent teacher meetings have become more joyful already. It is as if the vision for 2030 that we collectively came up with has begun to influence the present!

Slowly, we have begun to involve more and more staff members into the work of prototyping the operating principles. I think this will help bring about the necessary changes toward greater well-being for all those working at Poorna.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step!

**Indira Vijayasimha** is the Founder of Poorna Learning Centre, an alternative school in Bengaluru. She is also a Professor (Retd.) from Azim Premji University.

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# From emotions to excellence: Kshamtalaya's journey of well-being

*Pooja Singh and Abhishek Tiwari*



Kshamtalaya

"Khushi Shala" ToT workshop

*"Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive." – His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.*

This quote has inspired our journey in education, centering compassion as the foundation of learning. In August 2016, we began working in Bakhel. It is one of the most remote villages in southern Rajasthan, India. The classrooms had high dropout rates. By grade 8, only 2 or 3 girls out of 25 students remained in school.

On that particular day, I must have looked defeated. One of the girls in my class approached me as I stood outside. She hesitated for a moment before saying something that has stayed with me ever since: "Didi, do you know why we don't share when you ask us questions? It's because we are not allowed to talk. I fear that if I speak, someone will tell me how wrong I am. And

then everyone will laugh at me. It's better to stay quiet than to speak and be mocked."

Her words hit me hard. They revealed an issue deeper than just classroom participation. These reflected a culture where fear and judgment silenced young voices, especially those of girls.

For a child like that girl, the brain's natural response is to fight or flee. But in her case, there was no room for fighting back. There was only the overwhelming urge to flee. Her mind was probably preoccupied with counting down the minutes until the bell rang, signaling her release from the classroom.

That conversation marked a turning point for me. It reminded me that creating a safe, supportive space for children to express themselves without fear of judgment is

not just important. It is indispensable for learning.

## The role of educators' well-being

The pandemic of 2020 further emphasized the importance of well-being. This was not just for students but also for educators. In conversations with government schoolteachers, one expressed, “The world is appreciating doctors and police personnel. But who thinks about teachers? We have left our families to run quarantine centers, distribute food, and to adapt to online education.”

Research shows that teachers' emotions profoundly impact their students. Through sessions with over 10,000 teachers across India, we have witnessed the transformative power of prioritizing educators' well-being. One teacher, with tears in her eyes, shared, “This is the first time someone has asked about my feelings.” When teachers are supported, they can extend genuine compassion and care to their students. This leads to safer, more nurturing classrooms.

Our work focuses on making classrooms safe, nurturing and compassionate spaces. In collaboration with SCERT (State Council of Educational Research and Training) Rajasthan, in 2021, we have implemented initiatives like the *Hausla Program* in all the 33 districts' DIETs (District Institutes of Education and Training). We have also contributed to the state's curriculum framework. These interventions emphasize health, well-being, and guidance counseling. Additionally, we have developed handbooks for teachers. These include ‘Khushi Shala’ and ‘Khud Ki Khoj’. These handbooks integrate well-being into daily teaching. Kshamtalaya Foundation employs a three-pronged approach to support the stakeholders at various levels. These include the following.

**Classroom demonstration models:** Here we pilot methods to directly impact learning and well-being.

**Local leadership:** We empower local youth to lead initiatives in their communities. This takes place through internships, fellowships, and the Family Champions Program.

**Systemic excellence:** We also try to influence policy and scale impact. We try and do this through state-level collaborations through our work with the SCERTs in the states we work in.



## Expanding impact in Bihar

In 2022, we extended our work to Bihar through two programs. We share relevant details about these interventions below.

### Mental Well-being Fellowship (Hausla Well-beingpreneurs)

This program engages over 2,000 teachers. It focuses on skills like attention and awareness, emotion regulation, and community integration. Fellows undergo intensive training to facilitate well-being sessions with teachers and students.

**i-Discover Fellowship:** This program is modeled after its counterpart in Rajasthan. It supports integrated social, emotional and ethical learning (SEEL) in 15 schools. This is coupled with parents' engagement, and the involvement of school management committees (SMCs).

We have scaled the Hausla 21-day Mental Well-being Program. This helps us reach 50,000 newly recruited teachers. It has now become a part of their induction training. This has taken place in collaboration with SCERT, Bihar. As of 2024, we are completing a pilot study for the Khushi Shala Khud Ki Khoj



handbook. This involves 120 educators from Rajasthan's Banswara and Sirohi districts. This initiative highlights the importance of teacher well-being.

We hope it would have ripple effects on student-teacher relationships. By 2025, we aim to scale this project. This would help in demonstrating how well-being fosters joyful and meaningful learning for both educators and students.

## Students' well-being

Through internal assessments, we have found positive shifts in children's skills related to awareness and regulation. A story from Mau Wazidpur in Bihar bears testimony to the data.

Two best friends, Anjali and Anvigiri from Class 8, had an argument during class. Their fight escalated into anger. They ended up saying hurtful things to each other. Eventually, they stopped speaking altogether.

Their mutual friend, Suhani, noticed this. She decided to help. She brought Anjali and Anvigiri to their "Khushi Ki Potli". This is a personal resource box. It has been created as part of the second chapter of SEE Learning curriculum's "Building Resilience".

Suhani asked them to open their boxes. She requested them to look at their favorite items inside. As they did, their anger faded. This was replaced by feelings of calmness. These items reminded them of the happy moments they had shared. Within a few days, Anjali and Anvigiri were friends again. They were talking, laughing and playing like before. Their bond grew even stronger.

This story highlights how students are learning to regulate their emotions, understand each other's feelings, and practice compassion. The curriculum empowers them to lead calming practices. It also helps them choose strategies to manage emotions, and support both themselves and others.

## Educators' well-being

The most impactful initiative we have implemented for educators' well-being is Hausla. This program has reshaped our approach to supporting teachers as individuals, not just as professionals.

Over 60% of the educators showed measurable improvement in the WHO Well-being Index. This has been alongside enhanced mindfulness and resilience. Beyond the numbers, Hausla has helped us connect with teachers on a deeply human level.

The stories teachers have been sharing with us are deeply humbling and inspiring. I vividly recall a Sunday morning when, amidst the usual messages in various groups, a teacher posted a photo of himself with his two children. They were practicing a meditative exercise from one of Hausla's audio sessions.

That simple, personal moment moved me profoundly. It was a testament to the program's impact. This has been both on the teacher's professional life, and on his family and personal growth as well.



Grounding practice in school

When humans genuinely feel the benefits, it doesn't need to be mandated or enforced. The motivation to share it becomes natural and organic.

There have been many ripple effects of Hausla. As educators grow in well-being, mindfulness and resilience, they engage with their students in a more empathetic way.

Another teacher shared an experience of his response with a rickshaw driver, which goes like this: "One day, while riding my bike to school, I had a small accident with a Toto driver. I felt angry. I wanted to argue. However, I remembered the practice of pausing. I took a deep breath. I calmed myself and avoided a fight. That simple pause changed how I saw the situation and kept things peaceful."

Despite its importance, well-being is often viewed as secondary to academic outcomes. For instance, parents sometimes question the value of activities like guided meditations, prioritizing traditional academics instead. Similarly, systemic issues like resource constraints and a focus on rote learning hinder innovation.

## Approaching well-being in educational interventions

There are excellent curricula and resources for mental well-being and social-emotional learning. However, implementation often becomes complex.

Over the past eight (8) years, we have been working at the grassroots. We have been intervening at other levels of the system as well. Through this process, we have learned valuable lessons. These can help you avoid common early mistakes. We share here some suggestions that are useful to consider.

### Integrated approach for well-being:

Ninety minutes are not enough to cover the curriculum. Well-being combines a varied set of skills. These need repeated practice to become second nature.



Kshamtalay

A 'Khushi Shala' classroom

Activities like classroom agreements should extend beyond one session. These must be revisited throughout the teaching learning process. This must take place in all school subjects, including subjects like math.

Educators must incorporate these practices daily to create a compassionate classroom. These must not remain just as rules on a wall. Similarly, regulatory practices such as resourcing, grounding, and attention strategies should become regular classroom rituals for achieving the desired outcomes.

**Focusing on community interventions:** It is difficult to bring about change, by only working with children in the classroom or the school, to move toward sustainability. Therefore, we have started working with the children's parents as well.

We undertake community visits four days a week. The aim is to meet each parent at least twice a month. In these meetings, we discuss issues related to the children's learning and well-being with them.

We also try and stay at the children's homes in the community at least five days a month. This helps us understand their daily routine. We also conduct parent-teacher meetings at least once a month.

## **Extensive training and support for educators:**

The SEE Learning Program offers a range of short and immersive training sessions for many individuals each year. However, the language and medium of the training may not always be suitable for on-ground facilitators.

The organization or school must identify an anchor who can absorb all the academic and structured training. These must then be broken down into smaller, context-specific needs for the organization and the school.

Simply conducting training is not enough. Additional support is necessary to ensure effective classroom facilitation.

This includes continuously reviewing lesson plans, observing the classroom, and providing growth-oriented feedback. Conducting mock sessions, deeply immersing in each learning experience, and creating a bank of activities to achieve the same learning outcomes are also critical aspects of this work.

Some students may need more time to master the skills. Integrating regular check-ins and feedback loops for teachers also helps. In this context, weekly check-ins and group sessions are important. Sharing circles also provide a space for reflection, sharing challenges, building connections, and celebrating progress.

## **Creating a culture of well-being**

Initiatives to nurture well-being must engage school leaders and administrators to actively participate in personal practices. This can help them further promote well-being practices.

Identifying and empowering teachers who can champion well-being initiatives within their schools is also critical. They can then go

on to support their peers, lead activities, and serve as role models.

We must also include community-based initiatives for holistic well-being support. These must leverage local strengths.

At Kshamtalaya Foundation, we are deeply committed to our dream. This is to make well-being tools and skills accessible to every educator and child.

Together, we can transform schools into spaces of growth, connection and joy. This will enable individuals to unlock their fullest potential.

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The RSCERT team



# My well-being journey

*Ruchi Ghose*

**E**ighteen years ago, I was diagnosed with cancer – a bone cancer in my left thigh, right in the middle of my femur. However, this simply stated fact does not capture my experience.

The first doctor that I consulted was well-meaning, but lacking in judgement, as I later realized. He operated on me without due diligence, as a result of which my cancer spread and metastasized over the next few years.

Three months later after my first botched up surgery, they removed my femur and replaced it with a titanium femur. They replaced my hip and my knee. It took me 10 months in bed to recover somewhat and get back some feeling and movement in the operated leg. I had to learn to walk again.

My legs hold me up. However, my movement is quite limited. I was left with a permanent disability. I walk with a crutch. I cannot sit on the floor, or bend my knee.

Subsequently in the next five years I underwent multiple surgeries of my primary site and of my lungs as my cancer metastasized.

During those times, every time the biopsy report came back, I intensified my planning and plotting for contingencies. I tried to accept the fact that I may not be there for my family in the future. When life is good and on even keel, we tend to believe that we are special and that life as we know it will go on forever!

As I struggled to accept that I may not be there for my family, I devised ways of how I was going to be there for them even from the “other world”. I planned to make recordings

on tapes and write them letters for every eventuality and every milestone event.

I could not imagine that they could survive without me. How we glorify ourselves and think we are indispensable! How we cling to life!

But today I stand almost 20 years later, well, happy, contented and cancer free. I defeated the monster. I am so very aware of the grace in my life.

I cannot pretend that it was an easy path. I cannot pretend that I did not feel fear, and frustration and even anger. If I had to walk that path again, I am not sure I could. But the love and care of my friends and family combined with the will to keep going for the people that I loved and needed me gave me strength.

I survived by powering through with discipline and sheer determination. I was lucky, yes. However, looking back, I now realize I could have navigated that journey better. I share here a few of the lessons learnt on the path.

## **Self-compassion**

During those years, I didn't allow myself to grieve. I believed being strong and resilient meant suppressing my emotions, so I wouldn't burden others who loved me; who suffered to see me - weak, in pain and confined to a bed; completely dependent on others.

I did not allow myself to even acknowledge all that I had lost! My health, my self-image as a strong, independent woman, my freedom, my work, and most of all the joy of movement! I have long made my peace with it.





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Group meditation

However, as a one-time trained classical dancer, when I hear music sometimes, even now, I feel a deep sadness and frustration. My body hears the music. It wants to move to respond to it. However, it cannot fully express. I still move after a fashion. But it's not the same thing that I see in my head and feel in my heart.

I took pride in being labelled 'strong' and 'an inspiration'. But I see now that I should have allowed myself to grieve. Suppressed emotions don't disappear. They linger and resurface.

Sometimes, an unexpected trigger makes me weep uncontrollably. These are perhaps an outpouring of those unprocessed feelings.

I now understand that I needed to be more self-compassionate. Self-compassion fuels resilience and well-being. Though I now teach it to others, I still wrestle with practicing it

myself. I have learned to honour my emotions, but it remains a work in progress.

## Gratitude

This is a lesson that I have learnt well and found so very valuable. It has been my doorway into well-being. As I look back at my experience of the five years of battling cancer, I have learnt to notice and acknowledge the grace and the protective hand of the universe in my life. I have learnt to even feel grateful for the cancer. If not for the cancer, I would not have known, felt and realized the love that I have.

I would not have experienced so tangibly the nurture and the nourishment that I received. The love that cocooned me and willed me to get better, to walk again and to build my life back. The doctors who despite their mistakes nurtured me and took care of me. It allowed me to learn some lessons firsthand that have

led me directly to the work that I do and find so rewarding and fulfilling.

Noticing and acknowledging the good in my life is a muscle that I have learnt to strengthen. It gives me immense joy and inoculates me against despair and brings joy and peace.

## Acceptance

I intuitively accepted what had happened. I did not rail against the universe or the doctor who had messed up my life. I can genuinely say hand on heart that I did not blame him for his error in judgement.

If I had, I would have made it worse for myself. As the Buddhists say, I would have shot myself the second arrow - the self-inflicted pain we create by resisting reality. I accepted and moved on.

This is something that has seen me through many a difficult time. Not resisting, not blaming, just getting on with what 'is' and seeing the best that can be done.

## Optimism

Optimism was my anchor. I feel grateful that I am by nature an optimistic person. When the doctor outlined my prognosis, a voice inside me said, "He doesn't know me. I will walk again."

Perhaps it was stubbornness. However, it helped me move forward. I refused to dwell on 'what ifs'. This spared me unnecessary anguish and allowed me to rebuild my life.

## A transformative turning point

These insights didn't come all at once. It took time, people and experiences to reshape my perspective. One transformative experience was attending the Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT) Program and later becoming a certified facilitator.

This program helped me to see with greater clarity. It offered me an alternative way of

viewing the world, including myself, that was both realistic and helpful. It made me realize that I had a choice when I could not see one.

It helped me build a consistent meditation practice. It helped me to relate to myself and others with greater compassion. Becoming a certified facilitator perforce deepened my practice and my understanding of self-compassion, gratitude and resilience. This also enriched both my personal and professional life.

## Moving forward

Today, as I reflect on my journey, I am filled with gratitude—not just for surviving but also for the lessons I have learned. It makes me want to reach out to others to help them overcome their challenges.


My work now involves helping others navigate challenges and find hope. I write this to tell anyone facing troubled times: it feels like there is no choice but it's possible to find one. Life can get better, even when it feels impossible.

This journey has shaped me in profound ways. Though I often stumble, I continue to walk forward—with a crutch, but also with purpose.

**Ruchi Ghose** has over 30 years of work experience. Of this, the last 19 have been in education. In recent years, her focus has been on 'well-being' for herself and others. She has a deep-rooted conviction that we can all learn to be happier and more well. Ruchi is certified by Emory University to facilitate CBCT® programs and to train teachers in SEEL (Socio-Emotional and Ethical Learning). She is a Director at Viridus Social Impact Solutions.

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# Open spaces to co-create students' flourishing on campus

Lakshmi Hariharan



Srushti Degree College

**A**s adults, we often envy the young for living in times we could only dream of. They have freedom and opportunities to choose careers, unlimited access to information, AI to assist in tasks, and a world where ideas can travel far and be heard — a dream era to manifest one's aspirations.

But do all young people see it this way? Being in an institutional space for higher education, it's troubling to see students being overwhelmed and stressed with so much on their plate. How can we help the students flourish on campus amidst these abundant opportunities?

We step into a different world every day. Rapid change, especially with the digital and AI revolution, has made our future uncertain. Youth are the most affected, overwhelmed by information overload, and the fear of missing out (FOMO). Besides, they are caught between education and gig jobs.

They experience stress. Disconnected from traditional anchors like family, community and culture, they turn to wokeism, living in the virtual world of social media. This deepens their disconnection from reality and

makes them feel lonely. Faculty on campuses struggle to bridge the gap with students immersed in the digital age, leaving both sides frustrated and confused.

The world is in a transition phase, and so are its people across generations. The gap between the young, and their parents and teachers is widening.

In higher education institutions, we can perhaps make sense of this rapid change together by redefining and restoring well-being and flourishing across generations. How can we create spaces for conversations on campus to restore inner well-being and student flourishing?

At Srushti Degree College, we attempt to address the above issue by designing open spaces to co-create a better world. Srushti Degree College, started in 2011, is affiliated to Bengaluru North University. Located in Bengaluru, the college tries to inspire students to innovate and embrace entrepreneurship while creating a supportive environment where they can flourish. It offers degree programs - B. Com, BBA, BVA (Design), and BA (English).



The college, like all higher education institutions, is dedicated to nurturing strong conceptual knowledge through academic rigor. At the same time, it supports the students in building essential competencies and skills through practical projects. The college also tries to create equal opportunities by offering scholarships for underprivileged students for higher education.

Open spaces facilitate conversations that bring together the learning community to listen to intergenerational and diverse perspectives, and to dialogue to arrive at a meeting point, where all can co-create something better than what is. This practice has eased the tension of handling difficult situations on campus. In fact, it has transformed them into opportunities for building trust. Each of these open-space conversations have helped everyone to feel heard and understood, hence enhancing their inner well-being.

This framework for designing open spaces to co-create an emerging future was developed by me from a decade of practical grassroots work at Srushti Trust founded in 2001. Here, we enabled youth as social innovators by using dance and theatre to create open spaces for dialog in the community to bring out of school children back to school in more than 500 villages of North Karnataka.

Based on this, I undertook research for an independent study on “Individual and social change by adolescents through arts and design”. The open space framework is bringing together the community to engage and inquire into their ways of doing things (culture) using arts and design processes. This opens up spaces for dialogs where they co-create something better, together with the community. It’s an iterative process, where one must continuously engage in learning, unlearning and relearning.

Our tools for designing open spaces have improved over the years. We have attempted

to share our learnings with other institutions, through our flagship program of Youth Social Innovation campus conference (YSI). At the YSI conferences, students tackle a design challenge on issues that bother them on campus. They then present their innovative solutions for student flourishing.

They also simultaneously imbibe indigenous values of great changemakers of India, like Gandhi and Tagore. Every civilization has sustained itself with the wisdom of its ancestors. Indigenous values in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), rooted in interconnectedness, are worth revisiting. Processes related to the arts are also integral to YSI. These help to build a shared understanding of complex issues involving multiple stakeholders.

Over the themes in the various editions of YSI conference from 2018 to 2022, students have redefined what well-being means to them. The related processes continue to evolve. So far, the four editions of YSI have seen the participation of more than 250 students and 50 faculty members. They have been able to contribute 50+ replicable models of campus transformation for student flourishing.

ICSSR (Indian Council for Social Science Research), Bengaluru North University, Gandhi Bhavana, etc., are some of the organizations who have collaborated with Srushti Degree College in the YSI conferences.

## **YSI-18**

In our first conference, we took up the topic of honesty and Gandhian values to explore. This coincided with Gandhiji’s 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. Responding to the design challenge of bringing honesty on campus, one group of students introduced a treasure box in the class for shared valuables, to stop theft in the classrooms. This simple innovation built trust and deeper connections, echoing Gandhiji’s value of integrity. This generated well-being for self and the others.



Sandeep from Kairali Niketan College said, “At first, we did not believe in this topic much, as we are living in a world of corruption. However, we found value in it as we did the project. Honest communication is necessary in every relationship, because it builds a positive relationship between two people”.

## YSI-19

Inspired by Gandhian thoughts of finding oneself by connecting with the other, students discovered more about their untapped abilities and the abilities of children who were challenged, by connecting with them. Faculty gained insights into the Gen Z mindset, realizing their role in better understanding the youth. Connecting with the ‘other’ is an important aspect of well-being, as it makes us aware of who we are and who we are not.

Nivedita, one the YSI fellows from Srushti Degree College, reflected on this project saying, “I have realized that one is not defined by an identity, but by one’s ability and sympathy to build connections with others. It helps you grow into a better human being.”

## YSI-20

During the lockdowns enforced with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning disrupted the well-being of the learning community. Students tried to restore it by experimenting with Gandhi’s philosophy: “My well-being is in the well-being of others”.

Students surprised everyone with their innovative models which focused on meeting others’ needs, which inspired in others a willingness to share and give.

During online classes, students negotiated for time with one phone at home, which was shared by other family members or a private space in their small homes to do online classes. This helped them become empathetic to the needs of others.

Dhaniya, a student of Sheshadripuram College shared, “Gandhiji’s quote has played a miracle in my life. By looking at the well-being of others, it has brought people together, where they understand each other, strengthens connection, and creates happiness between both parties in conflict.”



Srushti Degree College

## YSI-22

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenge shifted to weaning students off their mobiles. This was guided by Tagore's vision of an aesthetic environment and harmonious relationships on campus.

Students co-created a beautiful space on the campus by transforming ordinary notice boards to gratitude boards, and by bringing greenery into the dark corridors dumped with old furniture. Students felt joy in co-creating something beautiful. This gave them satisfaction, and a sense of belongingness on campus.

Swarna Mukhi, a YSI fellow from Acharya Institute, reflected by sharing, "Creating a painting by relating colors with each other, in a way that pleases the senses, makes one feel joyful."

The open space created at the YSI conference have brought the learning community together to inquire into the concerns of students on campus, using the lens of indigenous culture to redefine their well-being. It has enabled students to make deeper connections with themselves, others, and the earth, while creating positive impacts for the inner well-being of the learning community and institutional spaces for collective growth and transformation.

The YSI projects may be simple innovations by a small group of students. Yet these have helped enhance their inner well-being. Beyond solutions, YSI nurtures agency, both collective and individual, to bring about positive change. This process helps the students redefine well-being for themselves. It also builds ownership.

The wisdom of the young has made the faculty sit up, listen to them, and take them seriously. Engaging in the arts has been a joyful, liberating experience. This has allowed students to explore authentic emotions and imagination, while taking a break from utilitarian routines.

For me, "well-being" is something I am now conscious about. Curating the YSI conference has been a very enriching experience of my life. I admire the young people's generosity of heart, the openness to change perspectives, creative ideas, energy in action, willingness to change and imbibe values after inquiry and reflection, and their natural tendency to connect. I believe in their potential to make a better world. These young minds have influenced me.

My journey with YSI has impacted me to be more open to diverse thoughts, feelings and take action, where all can thrive. Interestingly the YSI themes organically evolved by first connecting with the self, with others, and together with the earth, each time broadening my perspective of who 'I' am to a universal self. All this has influenced my well-being positively.

## In conclusion

Open spaces could be the goal of an ideal college, where the learning community can come together with an open mind, heart, and the will to act, in the interest of all, where all can flourish. Rooted in integrity and trust, open-space conversations unfold organically, shaping outcomes through genuine conversations. In such an institutional space, we may inspire a new generation of young people who can co-create a beautiful world.

**Lakshmi Hariharan** is a seeker, artist and teacher. Since the last two decades, she has focused on enabling youth as social innovators for student flourishing on campus. She is the founder of Srushti Trust (2001) and of Srushti Degree College (2011) where she served as the principal. She is also a member of the Academic Council of Bengaluru North University.

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# What well-being means to us at Gubbachi

*Manimakalai Raja*

**T**he well-being of Gubbachi is embodied in the values we believe in. We share these below.

**Care and concern** for the children, the communities and the Gubbachi team.

**Authenticity** in all our relationships with peers and children, which encourages us to be honest about our struggles.

**Learning to learn** from our peers, children and mentors.

**Knowledge sharing** between us, our teams and our programs.

However, we realized that merely putting it out there is not enough!

## Understanding our values

We had started working with Pallavi Naik as an external facilitator, with the different teams in Gubbachi drawing their attention to our values and what it means to walk the talk. She now has given us part-time commitment in the role of People Development.

This has ensured continuity and greater focus on building personal capacities. Teachers have created posters of Gubbachi values to encourage children to respond to each other



The emotion wheel

and their environment, keeping the values in mind.

## **Gubbachi's policies that foster well-being**

**Leave policy:** we encourage teachers to take their leave. This is not divided into casual and sick leave. It ensures authenticity. We don't have rewards for people who have not taken leave. And we do not monetize leave not taken. We introduced a paternity leave policy, which was an oversight once we realized it.

**Holidays:** team members can avail 22 days of leave in a year. This is apart from the compulsory government holidays. Keeping in mind the fact that teachers at Gubbachi do not enjoy the benefits of long summer holidays like other educational institutions, (because summer is the only time children do not migrate back to their hometowns) teachers are encouraged to take turns to take planned leaves during summer.

**Short-term, critical, need-based advances:** These are provided to employees with criteria attached. This measure is based on the understanding that borrowing from the market in an emergency is a financial burden to be avoided.

**Educational support for families:** Where available and feasible, we encourage employees to enrol their toddlers in our ECCE program.

## **Zero tolerance of violence in the workspace**

Prospective employees are informed during the interview that Gubbachi will terminate (after two warnings) employees who are verbally or physically violent with children or colleagues. Combined with the values of the organization, compassion is automatically built into its ethos – compassion for the child, an understanding of her difficulties, and thereby her parents' struggles.

However, it's not enough if we specify a policy like this. It must be followed up with capacity building to help teachers with ways

to practice it in class. They work in mixed-age classrooms. The children come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

How do I bring about discipline without yelling at the child or giving him a whack? How do I foster an environment of care and concern among children who are at the receiving end of violence in their lives outside school? How do I help a child understand that she cannot bring violence into the classroom, to respect the sanctity of a fear-free space?

Workshops on classroom management, and mindfulness have benefitted teachers devise helpful techniques. These support children who take time settling down and who are disruptive.

## **Our values in action that foster well-being**

**Community orientation:** As a strategy, Gubbachi identifies members from the community to be a part of the team. This person is the go-to person for any issues related to the community. Late one night, a community member developed chest pain. His family reached out to a Gubbachi team member for help. The patient was immediately taken to the designated hospital. It was ensured that appropriate treatment was given. There have been many cases of women going into labour late in the evening, and it was the Gubbachi team that ensured safe passage to the hospital with proper care.

**Being available as a team to respond to needs:** The team knows we are there to support them in times of need, however late in the night. Late one evening, Priya's 6-year-old daughter caught her finger in the door while playing at home. The finger was hanging by the skin. When she took her to the nearby hospital, they were asked to deposit a large amount of money that she did not have. She came back home with the child. Priya's colleague got in touch with a founder and shared the problem. The money





Gubbachi

Supporting a pregnant mother's health and well-being

was transferred to the teacher's account late in the night and the child got to the hospital immediately.

## Well-being with Viridus

Four of us from the founding team attended the well-being program offered by the Viridus team. The first one was an online one during the Covid years. This one focussed on the self.

It was an opportunity for us to examine our mental models and relook some of our beliefs. What stayed with me was the need to be compassionate with myself - the understanding that my well-being will enable well-doing.

### Reflecting on two shifts I made in my beliefs:

I take pride in my work. My belief is that everyone takes pride in their work. Therefore, I do not believe in policing. I also believe that people will fulfil their responsibilities to the best of their abilities. It would bother me if outcomes were not up to my expectations.

I now understand that Gubbachi team members probably take pride in other things, in things other than work. So now, I state my

expectations clearly. I follow-up with the team till outcomes are to my satisfaction.

If I have a problem, I will state it. I will actively seek support to work on it. Therefore, I believe that others in the team will also be open about their problems. So, when I ask people if there is any problem, and they say no, I believe them.

I now understand that people see help-seeking behaviour as a sign of weakness. If I truly want them to be open about their struggles, I realize now that I must assure them that I will not judge them.

### The second well-being program in September 2022 with Viridus:

This was an in-person one. These sessions gave us an opportunity to reflect on our vision, mission and values. These also facilitated clear thinking about our policies and practices.

**Some of our reflections:** If we value care and concern, how do we create a safe space? How can the environment be one of acceptance and non-judgement, where people can share their struggles and anxieties?

If we value authenticity, how do we create a brave space where the team can speak its mind? What could be an impediment in creating a brave and safe space?

### Some micro-shifts that have become part of Gubbachi's culture

**Rewording our mission:** To empower marginalized children and underserved families in urban areas by providing access to quality education, primary healthcare, and vital documentation: bridging the gap to economic stability, social equality, and a life of dignity and opportunity.

**Reworking some policies:** Differential work timings depending on the place of work – e.g., the teaching team in government schools works from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The community learning centre works from 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. The community team has different timings.

We have added maternity benefits for employees who have moved out of the ESI policy.

Decentralization based on project and team needs is now the acceptable norm. The only caveat is that changes are communicated by Program Leads. This ensures that everyone is aware of what is being transpired to avoid surprises.

**Annual Founding Day:** Usually, our Annual Founding Day celebration included workshops for the whole organization. This year, the team requested for space to intermingle and share non-purposive time together.

Capacity building workshops are a regular feature through the year. Taking care of well-being meant that we have an ear on the ground. It also means that we are able to respond to reasonable needs that are expressed.

The Annual Founding Day helped the teams to relax together. It also built some memories of a fun time spent. It created bonding within and between the teams as well.

**Check-ins:** Every meeting, every day, starts with check-ins about how people are feeling. What started out as a one-word sharing has now metamorphosed into a sentence of feeling and why.

Initially it took time for all of us to talk about our feelings. This was simply because we are not used to being in touch with our feelings. So, all the teachers in the eight centres spent a weekend discussing and translating the comprehensive emotion wheel into Kannada.

Now adults have moved to sharing precise and nuanced emotions. Teachers have taken it into the classroom. Children now share their feelings at the start of the day.

This simple act of sharing present feelings has established close bonds between

children and teachers. It has ensured an air of compassion in the classroom.

It sets the mood and context for the rest of the day. It also helps everyone become aware about the others' feelings.

Here are some heartwarming 'feeling' sentences from the children:

"I am feeling sad because my milk glass fell into the big water drum." "I am feeling happy because my father bought me new shoes." "I have no tension because my miss has come to class today" (her teacher was on leave for a few days before this). "I am feeling sad because my father beat my mother."

Care and concern as a value at Gubbachi ensures that well-being and dignity go hand in hand. We believe that well-being results in well-doing. We are working to create a culture of respect and compassion not only among the team, but among the children and the community as well.

**Manimakalai Raja** is a co-founder of Gubbachi Learning Community. She leads the Gubbachi Transform Program. It works in nine government schools in Bengaluru. She delights in working with teachers as much as she does with children. She enjoys travelling and finds gardening the most rewarding. She is convinced that spending time with friends is best for the soul!

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A teacher cutting her student's nails

# Reflective growth: a transformative journey of self-discovery and organizational development

*Bikram Nayak*

**W**e often experience emotions and thoughts through a personal lens, without examining their validity. We take them for granted, assuming they reflect the truth. Our busy routines and numerous responsibilities can overwhelm us, causing us to prioritize work over relationships and personal care. We rarely pause to consider how others perceive us or whether our actions truly contribute to meaningful outcomes.

As a core member of Ashayen, I often faced the challenge of ensuring similar kind of dedication with my team. There was often a mismatch of interests. This made me realize that our processes for developing second-line leadership were underdeveloped. Sharing a few details about Ashayen may be relevant here.

## **About Ashayen**

Ashayen is a youth forum dedicated to empowering children living in street situations through comprehensive interventions and policy advocacy. It has a decade-long legacy as a grassroots organization. Ashayen now has managed to develop an innovative, home-grown model of community-based rehabilitation approach driving tangible change.

We have done extensive work in Odisha, addressing street children's unique needs. Our focus has been on direct interventions at the level of communities and schools. We provide holistic development support, with an alternative education model.

Simultaneously we undertake policy advocacy for influencing legislation for lasting impact. We also work toward ecosystem development through national-level networking. We try to amplify voices and expertise for fostering partnerships for sustainable change as well.

Currently, we run five community centers and work with 15 government schools in Bhubaneswar. We are now incubating a model centre for street children named Pragati Kendra. This is being undertaken in a non-financial partnership with School and Mass Education Department, Government of Odisha.

Our work has been recognized by State-level media houses such as *The Samaj* and *The Pragatibadi*, and by reputed organizations like UNICEF, OSCPCR, KIIT, Commutiny, BIPF, Aarambh India, Edumentum, People for Seva, etc. Many of our children are now driving positive changes at the community level, and are leading other fellow children.

Despite the meaningfulness of the work we are doing and the positive social changes we have been able to drive, we had been feeling that we needed to consolidate our learnings and further deepen the work.

## **Becoming better at 'well-doing' by attending to 'well-being'**

In this context, I attended the "Working toward well-being" workshop by Viridus, aimed at organizational development. I didn't expect it to turn into a journey of self-awareness.





Ashayen Trust

What began as a goal to improve our organization transformed into a deeper exploration of the self. I discovered that everything starts with the individual. I realized how our actions — no matter how small — have a ripple effect on the world around us.

The workshop acted as a mirror. It helped me connect my emotions with broader systems. It also gave me tools to better understand my own reactions.

One of the key insights was that human needs are infinite, as are my own. However, I learned that while our needs may feel endless, it is crucial to set boundaries around happiness and prosperity.

This led me to reflect on a powerful question: Do I seek wealth or true prosperity? Without understanding our needs, no matter how much we accumulate, we will always feel deprived. This realization helped me

focus on what truly matters, filtering out distractions and unnecessary desires. At the organizational level, we faced a similar dilemma. As a grassroots initiative, should we scale our operations or refine existing processes? After careful thought, we chose to enhance the systems we already had, focusing on excellence rather than expansion. We aimed to be a resource-driven organization, not one obsessed with growth.

This experience also helped me understand that true happiness comes more from fulfilling psychological needs than from physical ones. In our work with children, we focus on psycho-social support, teaching them not only to succeed but also to serve others.

By helping them share resources with the less privileged, we have seen a deeper sense of responsibility, fulfilment and connection. Senior children now care for the younger ones, fostering trust, respect and ownership.

## **The complexity of relationships: building true connections**

Relationships are at the core of our lives. Yet, they can be the most complicated part of human experience. A small misunderstanding can disturb your zone of emotional resilience. It can linger for weeks, months, or even years.

That is why it is essential to take care of relationships with mutual respect and understanding. True love and care are not about being overprotective or demanding. They are about allowing independence and co-existence.

Many of the children we work with have experienced fractured relationships with their families and communities. For them, and for the other children we work with as well, this understanding is critical.

Over time, we have developed specific modules to help them rebuild trust, love and connection. These efforts have also helped us gain the support of families. They now share the responsibility for their children's well-being and education.

## **Psychological well-being: the key to unlocking self-awareness**

Psychological well-being is about a deep understanding of oneself. It requires stepping back and observing your own thoughts. It also involves being able to judge yourself from a neutral standpoint.

This is only possible when we nurture harmony, clarity, awareness and authenticity in our lives. The workshop by Viridus provided me with the tools to improve my well-being.

This included practicing gratitude, investing in social connections, and living in the present. It also highlighted the importance of taking care of both the body and the soul.

To integrate these practices into our organization, we introduced several initiatives. We share some of these here.

**Observation and evaluation:** We often make judgments mixed with personal biases. However, by practicing pure observation—separating facts from evaluation—we have helped children and staff focus on constructive feedback. This shift has helped children transition from rude behaviour to more thoughtful and kind interactions.

**Forgiveness:** Holding onto grudges harms our mental health. We introduced the practice of forgiveness, teaching both ourselves and the children that mistakes are a part of growth.

Embracing self-compassion has created a culture of learning and acceptance. We also acknowledge that new initiatives may involve mistakes, and that's okay. It's all part of the journey.

**Listening:** Active listening is essential to building trust and understanding. We believe that every child has a unique perspective.

Listening attentively allows us to connect on a deeper level. This practice has been invaluable in our work with children and staff alike.

**Gratitude practice:** Gratitude is more than just a sentiment. It is a daily practice. We have introduced a routine where children and staff reflect on what they are thankful for each day. It may be a person, nature, or a simple moment.

This practice has sharpened their observation skills. It has also helped them appreciate the small things in life.

**Taking a pause:** Personal space is essential. We have created flexible work hours. This allows team members to adjust, based on their personal needs.

We also encourage open discussions about life challenges. This ensures that everyone feels supported. This practice of emotional resilience has become a core part of our organization.

## **Learning as a lifelong process: creating opportunities for growth**

Learning is a lifelong journey. We understand that growth does not stop at any point of time. We have made it a priority to continuously learn, reflect, and share insights within our organization.

We regularly organize learning sessions. Here, our team members share reflections, explore new ideas, and engage with platforms that encourage out-of-the-box thinking.

By creating a supportive environment, we ensure that everyone has the tools, resources and encouragement to grow. This commitment to lifelong learning keeps us adaptable and ready to tackle new challenges.

## **Ex-team members: a lasting connection**

One of the most beautiful discoveries has been the lasting bond we share with our ex-team members. Many of them, after moving on, have returned as dedicated volunteers, continuing to support our mission.

Their connection to the organization remains strong. Their involvement speaks a lot of the meaningful relationships we have built.

What is truly heartwarming is that they acknowledge their time at Ashayen as a key part of their personal and professional growth. Many of them attribute the leadership experience and exposure they gained with us to their current career success and credibility.

This ongoing involvement helps them. It also continues to strengthen our network and mission.

## **Creating second-line leadership: a path to empowerment**

Building second-line leadership is crucial for any sustainable organization. It is about transferring values and trust, so that future leaders can step into roles with confidence.

For us, this has meant empowering senior children to take ownership of their community centers. Many of these children are now team members. They actively contribute to the leadership and management of our projects.

Transparency and clarity have been essential in maintaining trust. This has ensured that our shared mission continues to thrive.

## **Challenges in practices**

Operationalizing the learnings from the well-being workshop at Ashayen posed significant challenges. This was primarily due to the required mindset shift for both the staff and the children. Overcoming deeply ingrained habits and organizational norms was a major hurdle.

The transition from a growth-centric mindset to one focused on excellence and refining existing systems was initially met with confusion. Scaling up was often viewed as the primary indicator of success. However, we learned that true impact comes from strengthening the core rather than expanding too rapidly.

Introducing self-awareness and emotional resilience practices in a fast-paced environment was also challenging. Staff members, overwhelmed by responsibilities, struggled to prioritize mental and emotional well-being. Practices like taking pauses, reflecting, and engaging in gratitude exercises felt counterintuitive to the work's urgency.

Encouraging children who had faced traumatic experiences to embrace practices like forgiveness and active listening required patience and trust-building. Consistent effort created a safe space for self-expression and development of healthier emotional habits.

Despite these challenges, integrating well-being practices have become a cornerstone of our culture. By creating a supportive



environment, and leading by example, we have embedded these practices in our culture. We see these as essential to both organizational and personal growth.

## In conclusion

The workshop on well-being by Viridus was far more than just a learning session. It was a mirror reflecting our beliefs, thoughts and actions. It provided us with a new language to articulate our practices. It also reaffirmed the importance of self-awareness in our work.

This experience has been transformative. It has shaped both my personal growth and the development of our organization.

We have been embracing self-awareness, emotional balance, and meaningful

relationships. In the process, we continue to create an environment that supports everyone, from staff to children, in their journeys toward fulfilment.

**Bikram Nayak** is the co-founder of Ashayen Trust, and its 'Lead-Planning'. He has over 15 years of experience in driving transformative social change. Renowned for his work in strategy development, community engagement, project management, and social entrepreneurship, he has earned national and international recognition.

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Ashayen Trust

# Well-being at Vision Empower

Meghna Chowdhury and Supriya Dey



Vision Empower

“Pragya at Karnataka 2024” workshop

**H**ard work and perseverance are proven human characteristics to achieve excellence. These are necessities for ‘doing’ well, as individuals or as collectives. Often while pursuing excellence, we forget the necessity of ‘being’ well. The organizational approach of Vision Empower (VE) has individual and collective well-being at its core. This has emerged organically. It has been influenced by the unique contextual needs and opportunities encountered by the VE team and the beneficiaries of VE. Well-being initiatives at VE can be looked at from three perspectives. These are - health and wellness, finances and relationships.

## Health and wellness

Our experiences indicated that physical well-being is the fundamental requirement for all other forms of well-being. Hence, our policies to address diverse health challenges of employees and beneficiaries have been designed with sensitivity and care. We share some of these here.

**COVID-19 support:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, VE provided resources and

flexibility to ensure physical and mental health to employees. The CSO identified beneficiaries with approval from funders. It also supported corporates in their outreach endeavours.

**Disability-related challenges:** We offer assistance and accommodations tailored to individual needs and hiring PWDs whenever possible. Currently VE employs eight persons with disabilities. We provide equitable health insurance to people with disabilities through group insurance, which was otherwise not possible.

**Maternity support:** We provide facilities for adequate leave and health insurance. We try to create an inclusive environment for employees during this critical phase of their lives. At VE, we prioritize the well-being of our team by collaborating with experts.

We implement programs designed to nurture individual and collective growth. These initiatives are aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of well-being. We have been embedding this into our organizational culture.



## **Well-being workshop supported by Wipro:**

Team VE is sincerely grateful to Wipro for this highly effective program. It has been extended to second-line leaders after the founder and the HR Head attended it. This has helped them focus on enhancing personal health and well-being. It has also equipped them to manage newly formed teams effectively.

**Senior management coaching:** We support leadership development through expert coaching of senior management. The goal is to support them in coping with expectations and the stress of performance. In the process, they gain the tools and insights needed to inspire and support the expanding team and VE's new initiatives.

**POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment):** We are committed to maintaining a workplace that is safe, respectful and inclusive. Our POSH initiatives ensure that every team member is trained on their rights, feels valued, and is secure.

## **Finances**

The importance of financial stability for holistic well-being cannot be overemphasized. A few related initiatives at VE include the following.

**Fair remuneration:** VE does not compete to provide the highest salaries in the sector. However, it ensures equitable pay practices. These recognize the value of our team members' contributions. These also support them through health and accident insurance.

**Tailored benefit programs:** We recognize the diverse needs of our team. Thus, we have introduced comprehensive benefits. These include group medical insurance and accident insurance. This underscores our commitment to the health and safety of our people.

**Fundraising and financial management:** We have been strategizing to sustain organizational growth and stability. We hope

this will ensure smooth operations and enhanced outreach.

**Guest talks:** VE also organizes expert talks on financial literacy and the management of personal funds.

## **Relationships**

Relationships are central to our mission. VE attempts to address this with empathy. One of the key approaches in this process involves strengthening collective well-being.

**Blended training programs and interactions for the team:** We blend face-to-face and virtual sessions. This creates opportunities for collaborations, knowledge sharing, and team bonding. A standout initiative is our 'Fun Friday' sessions. These are highly anticipated by the team. These sessions foster exchanges of ideas and strengthen connections. These also allow us to wrap up the week on a positive and energizing note.

**Team celebrations:** We believe that celebrations strengthen bonds and boost morale. These foster a sense of joy within the team as well. Prioritizing such moments, however small, creates a work environment that is productive, uplifting and fulfilling. This contributes to the collective well-being of everyone involved.

**Workload management:** We recognize the increasing demands on time and productivity on the employees to design and implement VE's interventions. Thus, we have formed team structures with clear responsibilities to streamline the execution process. Maintaining work-life balance has been an uphill task at VE, thereby impacting immediate families. VE makes a conscious attempt to provide compensatory holidays and provide additional resources to support projects, when required.

**Beneficiary relationships:** VE personnel are trained to respect the institutional values of the beneficiary schools. They are supported in nurturing trust and in building mutual respect



with teachers, students, and their families through all interactions.

**Partner and funder relationships:** VE fosters strong alliances with partners and funders. We do this through transparent communication and regular sharing of reports.

In the following section, we share a few of the voices of our staff that illustrate our well-being programs in action.

## Voices of team members

“I am very glad to share my learnings from the session on tax return filing held on May 15, 2024. Venkatesan sir explained every aspect of it and taxation in detail. It greatly helped me understand the process and I could file my returns with confidence.” – Rashmi, Maharashtra

“I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Vision Empower for providing such a generous and supportive maternity leave benefit during my pregnancy. The time off allowed me to focus on my family. It helped me transition into this new chapter of life without the added stress of work. It was reassuring to know that my well-being and that of my child were prioritized during this special time. I truly appreciate VE’s commitment to supporting its employees. I feel incredibly fortunate to work for an organization that values work-life balance.” – Nishi, Kerala

“The maternity benefit I am planning to avail will provide crucial support during a significant life transition. It will allow me to focus on my health and well-being, ensuring a smooth recovery while bonding with my newborn. This benefit is an essential part of maintaining a healthy work-life balance, promoting my overall well-being and peace of mind. I would like to thank Vision Empower for providing the benefit.” – Keerthana, Tamil Nadu

“In the month of September 2023, due to a health problem, I needed to undergo a

surgery. I live alone and away from home. I didn’t have any personal health insurance. With the help and support from the HR team of my organization, I was successfully able to get my surgery done. The insurance operator also cooperated with me in time and helped me in my treatment. I would like to thank my organization for this.” – Rajesh, Karnataka

“On 18th of September, I met with an accident. I really needed help financially. I am pleased to inform that I have received the claim amount without any issues when I really needed it the most. The whole amount got credited to the bank in three days. This helped me a lot. I am thankful to Vision Empower for ensuring that everything was handled efficiently. I thank you so much for your invaluable assistance.” – Sagar, Odisha

“One of the greatest strengths of Vision Empower lies in its people and the inclusive culture that seamlessly flows from the leadership to every team member. The supportive leadership team ensures that employees feel valued. It also fosters a positive and empowering work environment. Subtly applying insights from the well-being workshops, they equip subordinates to handle situations independently and confidently. This nurturing environment has greatly enhanced my well-being and productivity. Each day, I wake up energized and motivated, eager to contribute more than ever to our shared mission.” – Meghna, Karnataka

“Attending the workshop facilitated by Ruchi, Shashi and Siva Sankar was a transformative experience for me. They inspired me a lot in many ways. It was my first offline workshop. It was such a safe environment, where I learned how to handle difficult workplace situations, and address team challenges with empathy. The sessions emphasized valuing team emotions, being empathetic, building trust and the importance of maintaining harmony. This has helped me maintain harmony within the team and the organization, while fostering openness and collaboration. Personally, the

workshop allowed me to understand myself better. It gave me opportunities to bond with others from different NGOs. It was beneficial for my organization. It also helped me grow as an individual, creating a better version of myself.” - Rishi, Tamil Nadu

## Challenges faced during executing well-being related initiatives at VE

**Mobilizing funds during the COVID-19 pandemic:** Providing rations to disabled staff during the pandemic posed significant challenges. Many teachers lacked digital literacy. They also faced difficulties accessing their bank accounts. This complicated the distribution process.

**Efforts in content translation:** Our team members are spread across the country. Thus, ensuring effective online training has needed substantial effort in translating content into accessible formats. This has been essential to maintain the quality and inclusivity of the sessions.

**Building trust and momentum in the Ananda Program:** Convincing corporates to trust and support our volunteering engagements was a considerable challenge. Additionally, developing trust among volunteers that the accessible materials they created would reach beneficiaries and make a tangible impact has been a journey in itself.

## Extending well-being to the ecosystem

At Vision Empower, our mission is to foster a culture of shared understanding and collaboration to uplift well-being of our team, our beneficiaries, and our partners in the ecosystem.

**Ananda (The joy of volunteering with VE):** Ananda is about creating meaningful opportunities for community engagement. Through this program, we collaborate with student and corporate volunteers.

The goal is to raise awareness about inclusion and accessibility. Volunteers contribute their

time to develop accessible content. This fosters a sense of giving back to the visually impaired community. It is a feeling that words can't capture.

We share a few of the experiences of our volunteers below, as articulated in their own words.

“I am amazed at how we can virtually support volunteer activities. The explanation of the why, how and impact was very clear. Everything is great. And I appreciate all of you for being a part of this organization and offering your support.”

“We would like to extend our deepest gratitude for the invaluable effort and enthusiasm VE brought to our team gathering event. Your commitment to making a positive impact is truly inspiring. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the VE members who were present at the venue and coordinated with us in the event. Once again, thank you for your time and energy. We are grateful for your partnership and look forward to the possibility of collaborating with you again in the future.”

“The offline volunteering event is fun. It is very engaging. There is a lot of teamwork involved as well. I would like to continue to contribute to the cause and be a part of the volunteering every year. The event was well-organized and very systematic. Wishing VE a lot of success in their endeavors.”



Well-being for inclusion and inclusion for well-being

“It was awesome to create quality content for the students. It was a great experience. I found myself recalling and reflecting on what I learned during my school days. Doing something good for someone truly in need made me feel proud and happy.”

**Community of Practice through Subodha (WhatsApp Feature):** This platform facilitates peer learning and knowledge sharing among educators. It creates a safe and inclusive space where teachers can exchange ideas and seek guidance without the fear of judgment. In the process, it boosts their confidence and morale.

**Vision 30:** Vision 30 is an educational initiative by Vision Empower, being launched to identify and nurture talented students annually from varied backgrounds. The goal is to equip them with the skills and resources necessary to achieve overall internal happiness and well-being. It helps them excel in academics to pursue careers of their choice, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). It focuses on holistic development. In the process, the program aims to empower these students to overcome barriers, unlock their potential, and become role models and responsible citizens of the country. We share a few voices of the participants in the program here.

“All the sessions were highly informative and motivating. This program has helped to build confidence in children. They were able to believe in themselves and realize how high they could reach by developing their own abilities. A nationwide student group was formed. Vision 30 is a necessity for this society to move forward... Continuity of this program will enable a group from the visually challenged community to grow to the status of Future Leaders of India.” - A schoolteacher from Kerala

“Overall, it was a great experience for students. They have learnt a lot of things from

this program. Students found the activities interesting. Every day I got an opportunity to learn something new, where I learnt about mental health, and SWOT analysis, etc. The VE team provided a comfortable and the most memorable moments of my life. This program will boost students' confidence levels. It will also increase their knowledge areas whether it is academics, technology or overall social, emotional and mental development. We as teachers also got a lot of ideas and new experiences, such as how to enhance our teaching methods, how to manage, and how to relate the concepts with the real world.” – A teacher from Delhi NCR

## In conclusion

We see well-being as a collective effort. It grows stronger when shared. Together, we aim to create a ripple effect of inclusion and empower communities.

At the heart of VE's interventions is its dedicated team. Moving forward, we remain collectively committed to ensuring a balanced focus on 'being' well and thereby 'doing' well, in our journey toward our expected vision.

**Meghna Chowdhury** heads human resources at Vision Empower. She has an MBA from Osmania University, and is a Certified Nursery Teachers Trainer. With prior experiences of HR and teaching in Bengaluru, she has been with VE since 2019, managing HR processes and the VE Ananda Volunteering Program.

**Supriya Dey** is VE's co-founder and its managing trustee. She is also the co-founder of Vembi Technologies, which focuses on assistive technology products. She has a BE in Computer Science and an MRes in IT and Society from IIITB. Supriya is an experienced technology professional and a certified PMP.

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# Curiosity, freedom, love and education

Arjun Trivedi

*“It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom. Without this it goes to wrack and ruin without fail.” — Albert Einstein<sup>1</sup>*

*Brand: And that makes me wanna follow my heart. Maybe we have spent too long trying to figure all this out with theory.*

*Cooper: You’re a scientist, Brand!*

*Brand: So listen to me when I say that love isn’t something that we invented. It’s... observable, powerful. [...] Maybe it means something more - something we can’t yet understand. [...] Maybe we should trust that, even if we can’t understand it. [...]. — A dialogue between the characters Brand and Cooper, engineer and scientist, respectively, in the movie Interstellar (2014)<sup>2</sup>*

*“No, no, you are not thinking; you are just being logical.” — Physicist Niels Bohr defending “spooky action at a distance”*

## Prologue

I am deliberately writing the following more as a stream of consciousness. There is no attempt to be complete or comprehensive in any coherent sense. This is for the following overarching reasons.

We need to have a sense of the key points of curiosity, love and freedom, and how they can be cultivated in a culture of well-being. The latter, well-being, also must be cultivated. I find these to be fundamentally undefinable in any intellectual-logical-written framework in a satisfactory manner.



‘Care for earth’ mural group photo, classes 2 to 4

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Instead, we are fundamentally relying on practices of wholesome processes. These engage the heart~mind~body of individuals~collectives to stir awake, grow and nourish. These also keep conditioned the embodied understanding of such words. And such practices of wholesome processes are, at best, complementary for wholesome living. These are anything but a substitute for it. Instead of becoming reliant on such processes and practices, they should be explored curiously and with an open heart~mind~body. The exploration can be to see if they are helpful toward living a wholesome life whose meaning is deeply subjective.

Even in the most profound philosophies and frameworks<sup>3</sup> perhaps, these cannot be defined so objectively so as to be followed prescriptively. This dynamic of individual subjectivity~collective objectivity is not just the great challenge. It is also an opportunity of well-being, of fully living life itself, its knowledges and related educations.

We, at Karunar Kheti Trust and Selenghat Valley School, have not yet developed such wholesome processes in any coherent manner. This is because we are creating



them in a ground-up manner, based on first principles and participatory processes. This is taking time, as it must. At best, they are currently a very promising mixed bag of processes.

And toward our envisioned outcomes of such processes, we have waded only ankle deep in the great ocean of education. We have relatively fewer firm answers during processes borne of exploring vast open questions. These are profound, but anything but uncommon.

I will try and offer a few key insights, principles, processes, practices and learnings that are appearing to become deeply grounding of our explorations. These are promising sparks toward creating glowing embers that may light up the path toward realizing our vision of education as freedom. These may be seen as pickings from a mixed bag as opposed to a comprehensive and complete framework.

## **Wonderful curiosity and the learning process**

“I think 99 times and find nothing. I stop thinking, swim in silence, and the truth comes to me.” — a saying attributed to Albert Einstein

A flow of the learning process is rooted in an almost effortless habit of the heart~body~mind that arises from the

freedom and love of the wonderful curiosity of a direct experience of reality. This can arise in connection with a question or, more powerfully, give birth to it. Such a flow ultimately moves toward its ultimate and numerous tributaries of its great formal knowledge of concepts and techniques. In another flow, the learning process can begin with formally written concepts and techniques and move toward such freedom and loving knowing of direct experiences of reality.

Now, one can imagine there to be a great point of balance between these two flows. This leads to our understanding of education as freedom. This in turn gives birth to embodied understanding, wisdom, and related practical skills. These can enable us to live peacefully with life’s curiosity-driven to need-driven practical problems. A lot of these percolate to settle down with our timeless existential condition. However, I find there not to be such a balance, but an extreme lopsidedness in favor of beginning with concepts and techniques. This has happened to the point where we have lost not just the freedom and love of direct experiences, but also education as freedom.

## **Why not begin with curiosity?**

“Have we become more terrified of intimacy than interstellar travel?” — Aaron Stewart-Ahn<sup>4</sup>

We live in an age in which we are working on interstellar travel, looking ever deeper inside atoms, contemplating artificial intelligence, and developing analytical understanding of consciousness. But why is it that we do not have enough examples of learning in schools that in a raw and direct way begin with curiosity?

It truly humbles me to ask this question. In its exploration, we are facing profoundly overwhelming challenges. Maybe it has something to do with our larger collective practical ability, capacity and resources to be loving and compassionate. All of these, in the history of humanity, have barely been developing in any significant way compared to all our many other great developments.

Maybe our priorities, as a larger collective, are not getting aligned with what we all need individually and for the health of the planet? Maybe that is why we are continually feeling stuck with increasingly complex, complicated and unsolvable problems. We can no longer ignore this, given that it appears to affect the entire health of the planet, from the smallest to the largest human~non-human being<sup>5</sup>?

Or maybe, in some higher order wisdom that we are still to discover, we are on some kind of a right path that we cannot possibly see at the moment?

I feel though, the answer is already “blowing in the wind”. Yet, in a way, just like the song by Bob Dylan, it is a question that is always fresh and relevant.

## Teaching the unteachable

“You cannot transmit wisdom and insight to another person. The seed is already there. A good teacher touches the seed, allowing it to wake up, to sprout, and to grow.” — Thich Nhat Hanh

How can we begin the flow of education with such freedom and love of wonderful curiosity? How can we bring this process into

balance with its own systems that begin with emergent concepts and techniques?

All around us, we see profound, yet simultaneously commonly felt problems. To observe these, one must look no further than such common spaces where these are experienced. These span our hearts, to how humanity is struggling with our great common problems. The latter range from the environment and the climate to truth and politics, from religion and science, to governance and economy, from the yin to the yang - of the wholesome life.

Here, I want to take up just one point in the context of this Samuhik Pahal issue. It focuses on cultivating a culture of well-being that allows teachers to embody freedom and love. Such freedom and love allow children to learn with wonder and curiosity. This is an important step toward education as freedom. This can lead to creating a larger culture of freedom, which tersely defined, is freedom from fear<sup>6</sup>.

Such embodiment of freedom and love can anything but be taught or trained in teachers in intellectual-analytical frameworks to be followed mechanically to lead to predictable time-bound outcomes. Instead, and at best, coherent frameworks based on wholesome processes of individual~collective heart~body~mind can be practiced in attempts to stir awake, grows and nourish. These can help cultivate our effortless ability to arrive in moments that allow us to be set free from the experience of time,



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space, and events beyond their narrowly bounded and fragmented parts, connections, and outcomes. These can support us in experiencing the freedom of their wholesomely boundless interconnectedness that lead to freedom and love.

There are profoundly elegant examples of empirically verified logically-coherent frameworks for such great interconnectedness. These span from modern and scientific ones to ancient experiential~meditative<sup>7</sup> ones.

However, one need not look any further than one's own experiences of such loving freedom. Be it triggered by a favorite song, a loving memory, a moment of great synchronicity, or ordinary presence of powerful depth in a moment. Or this may be any experience in the past, present, or imagined in the future, which sets our heart~mind~body boundlessly free and full of love.

Shashi Nair, in his article for this issue, has already brought out with great validation and powerful catharsis for my own experiences of this point using the metaphor of an engineer and a gardener. I plan to use this below<sup>8</sup>.

## **Leadership: engineer~gardener**

My deepest work has been with not just our teachers and Selenghat Valley School in Assam, but with each individual of our organization for such wholesome organization development. The hope is to allow them their own respective experiences of opening up to such freedom and love.

This approach is based on my own personal experiences of interconnectedness to synchronicity. In such moments, I, using the metaphor of a seed, found myself within the right conditions where my seed's shell cracked open to manifest my freedom<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, with trust in the togetherness of the universe and myself, having stocked

myself richly with resources of patience, and a great determination and courage that arises from gratitude of such great gifts that the universe gave to me, I engineered boundaries of fluid edges bound to a few firm points to create a garden.

Inside this, I have tried to work, above all, as a loving gardener<sup>10</sup>, to create such conditions for cracking open the dormant, distracted, to even deeply wounded seeds of human beings. These include those who may never have found the right ecosystem to crack open.

It was the only way for me to lead and the only way I know how to lead. It is by listening to and trusting human beings. It involves knowing wisdom as a seed somewhere inside each one of us.

I must keep doing my loving best to make the garden as ample with diverse nutrients, so that as many seeds can be so 'touched', as Thich Nhat Hanh so deeply validates me. I must also wait and listen to the energies of the seeds "with a silent heart, with a waiting, open soul, without passion, without desire, without judgement, without opinion"<sup>11</sup>.

## **Starting boundary conditions of an engineered garden**

There have been a few firm points that were the starting conditions, beliefs, principles of action, inputs, and practices and processes for this journey. I share a few examples of these below.

**A condition:** Starting with the smallest feasible and practical collective of human beings, inclusive of staff and children, so that we all had enough space and time to build a core human capacity of loving freedom that can be developed deliberately and directly from the flow of the heart.

**A belief:** Scale as a high order and non-linear dynamical process, based on the stability of a coherent diversity, governed by parameters of peace, happiness and prosperity.



**A principle of action:** Try not to act out of frustration, fear or anger, even as we acknowledge their presence in us.

**An input:** Freedom and love as feedback to efforts to try and learn from mistakes.

**A practice and process:** Our collective morning process of interoceptive~exteroceptive movement~breathing~stillness, for example, mindfulness practices for our inner heart~body~mind, to non-human life spanning microorganisms, to the energy of cosmic bodies like the sun.

**An overarching strategy and mixed bag of related processes and practices**

In a way the overall strategy is two-fold.

**Nutrients of freedom and love:** To make the garden's ecosystem as rich as possible, with nutrients and related conditions, to crack open a diversity of freedom-loving seeds.

**Discipline of freedom and love:** Once sprouted, or even in attempts to make~allow a seed to sprout, the garden is made just as rich to give each seed its tangible structure of discipline of freedom to continue to grow, or even maximize its efforts to sprout.

The following points are germane to either one of the two-fold strategy points. These may even be cultivated simultaneously. For such freedom-nutrients to crack open the seeds within teachers, who are deeply

conditioned by fragmented and rote methods of learning, is anything but trivial.

Therefore, we do it mindfully, by simultaneously building the counterpart of the discipline of freedom and love. Even as we listen and wait, our actions nudge, and sometimes even directly place, teachers in unfamiliar to uncomfortable direct experiences. The expectation is for them to share, and act based on whatever they experience and be open to criticism.

**“Look at the tree!”:** We use this exhortation literally and as one of several word-nutrients. It helps to stir the freedom and love of wonderful curiosity and trust. It supports us in immersing in the experiential flow toward learning experiences.

This goes beyond teachers to all the various program leaders to executive staff of our organization. We invite teachers to simply and directly experience phenomena or life as-it-is. Looking at a tree is but one such example.

These help to ease the burden of having to know and teach about the tree and its parts of roots, trunk, branches, leaves, etc., *ad-infinitum*, to a child, as routine academic rote learning. Instead, the teachers start to feel the freedom and love of the associated lightness. They then experience how wonderful curiosity naturally leads to discussions and knowledge of the various parts of the tree and more!

**“Stop running!”:** We begin our day with wholesome morning processes. These help the heart~mind~body of the teachers, together with the students, to stop running in fear<sup>12</sup>. These also support them to arrive in loving moments of freedom. Some of the key and stable practices are noted below.

**Movement~breathing~stillness:** Practices of heart~mind~body that are in the balance of being structured and fluid, planned and spontaneous, include the following. First, movement to awaken and connect to the body

using mindful, breath-based movements. Second, rhythmic breathing exercises. Third, stillness-based on mindfulness of breathing to other contemplations and meditations based on, for example, gratitude and loving compassion to awareness of thoughts, feelings, and other sensations.

**Custodians of our school's spaces:** Teachers, students, and staff, together, clean our classrooms, toilets, and other physical spaces. Noone is professionally hired for such work. This provides the right opportunities to arrive in a space of collective humility. It also helps to keep conditioned the humanity needed for the highest levels of collaboration.

**Being with and caring for the soil, plants, animals, and people:** The power of this process is endless. It spans direct experiences of our great interconnectedness to how it gives birth to our greatest knowledge. It also spans principles and methods of science to compassion. Such practices include looking after and building soil, caring for our perennial plants, cultivating annual vegetables and flowers, and recycling and managing our waste.

“Breathe-in and breathe-out!”

“Breathing in, I know I am breathing in.

Breathing out, I know I am breathing out” — A gatha for practicing mindfulness by Thich Nhat Hanh, inspired by Ānāpānassati Sutta<sup>13</sup>

We are exploring~working to develop our breath as a means and as an end for restorative concentration. We also continue to remain in habitual mindfulness of the freedom and love of such concentration.

This helps us as we move on in our day and at various points. Instances involve, for example, at the start/end of a meeting or a class, or as we feel a lapse in our collective concentration. This includes that of the students, or when we need to pause for rest, as well.

This is not just mindfulness of breathing. We are exploring any practice of a process to restore concentration at various points in the day.

## Compassionate problem-solving

This is an overarching process used in meetings or other participatory discussions. Here, tributaries of storytelling, and narrative building, etc., converge as freedom-nutrients.

These are driven at the tip by solving problems we all face. However, these are grounded at the base by frameworks of





freedom and love. Science and art, faith and reason, modern and traditional frameworks/philosophies, rural and urban realities, analytical positivism and non-analytical wisdom, modern finance/accounts and ecological farming principles/tools, history and politics, etc., all of which are nothing but stories/narratives that human beings tell and use. These are often used literally in a black-box, problem-solving mode.

We do realize that theories, stories, tools, etc., are needed for building our school and organization. These are important for developing pedagogies for children and for exploring and developing sustainable practices for caring for the earth and people. These also are crucial for a range of things spanning from modern systems of accounting to livelihood models based on agriculture.

At the deeper base of such listening to seed energies, we are mindful that our organization is being built by people who are anything but a part of such systems. At least they are so in their dominant/mainstream ways of working~being.

While accepting their whole being, we also simultaneously deeply question such systems with them, as if we were interacting with them for the first time. While doing so, we use first principles if needed. We then decide for ourselves their good~bad, rights~wrongs, and numerous yin~yangs.

## **Our growing garden and gardeners**

That our garden is growing can now even begin to be measured by the growing number of gardeners and the many different sprouting seeds. Some are even developing the structures and strength of roots and shoots. This is not to say that this growth is impactful at the scale of any sizable culture. However, at least a stable system of significant diversity is palpable in its collective peaceful efforts. This is based on a growing confidence in the flow of wonder and loving curiosity.

Teachers in our school are, little by little, day by day, tilting the lopsided balance toward curiosity. They are increasingly driven by open-ended exploratory problem-solving activities with our young children.

This is increasingly focusing on their freedom and related discipline. We are increasingly discussing their confidence, happiness, creativity, concentration, collaboration, compassion, and communication than linear outcomes of grades.

## **A weary gardener**

“Never give up. No matter what is going on. Develop the heart.” — Dalai Lama XIV

I, as a gardener, after five years, am beginning to feel extremely weary. I must be honest—the art~science of balancing the engineer~gardener, especially as a leader, has been a highly non-trivial challenge. This has been bringing me to the brink of completely eroding and forever losing touch with embodying such wholesome living that led me to so knowing freedom and love of wholesome knowledge.

I am deeply grateful for learnings, which can only come by attempting to bear such challenges. This gives me hope that in my next iteration of attempting this balance, I will better embody the wisdom and practices of my learnings.

I am deeply grateful for the many gardeners who are coming up. Under their leadership, I can even begin to contemplate a period of sabbatical from being the lead gardener. I pray I can act so, take a few steps back, and simply make compost to connect again with such states of wholesome embodiment of life, knowledge, freedom and joy.

## **My personal well-being strategy and related processes and practices**

My well-being strategy and related processes are not in any significant way different from those practiced in our school and

organization. It humbles me to share that the creation of our school and organization is in no insignificant way emergent from my need to seek~create a sangha. This is because the nature of well-being that I am trying to develop cannot be had in isolation<sup>14</sup>.

While the initial seed may have been sowed by me, the garden is becoming emergently-fundamentally richer. I dream of how one day, like in a forest or river where the initial seed or stream of water is lost irrecoverably, my initial contribution will become so in a flow of habits of freedom and love.

Therefore, even as there are flavors of my personal practice that are different, in the context of this writing and also in an overarching sense, I want to end by noting that Selenghat Valley School and Karunar Kheti Trust are increasing becoming the sangha I need for my well-being.

And in this state of being a weary gardener, how often and how much I have relied on this sangha, I can barely recount in words. I do feel a deep gratitude.

## Epilogue

“It’s a process” — Shashi Nair

Freedom, love, calm, and insight would be meaningless if there are not their counterparts of fear, despair, agitation and ignorance. This is but a great truth that binds us all. In a way, well-being is just a continuous process of trying to know this by embodying it and trying to live in balance.

I want to end this writing in the humility of and gratitude for such wisdom<sup>15</sup> and dissolve this temporary isolation of my efforts in this great wisdom-sea of humanity.

**Authorial note and dedication:** I wish to dedicate this writing to Shashi Nair who made me realize all over again, as if anew, as if I was a reincarnation, the wisdom of moments of nurturance. In a way, this writing has been inspired to give myself a note from this wisdom.

## Endnotes

1. Calaprice, Alice. 2011. *The ultimate quotable Einstein*. Princeton University Press.
2. [www.imdb.com/title/tt0816692/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0816692/)
3. I am deliberately at the outset not listing references, lest I already start collapsing this wholesomeness into religion, philosophy, science, etc., and so on, *ad infinitum*. However, over the due course of reading, directly or implicitly in my writing, particular references will stand out. However, these must be seen in the context of such wholesomeness and my personal subjective experiences.
4. In “[On interstellar, love, time and the limitless prison of our cosmos](#)”
5. ‘Wicked problems’ is a currently fashionable, to some even perhaps the right, way to define such problems for our times: <https://www.wicked7.org/>
6. In the ‘Foreword’ for our latest quarterly newsletter titled “Development as freedom borne of practical frameworks of being peaceful”, I have attempted to write more deeply about such freedom from fear.
7. “General relativity” and “Interbeing”, by Albert Einstein and Thich Nhat Hanh, respectively, are examples of some of our most profoundly elegant examples of empirically verified logically coherent frameworks for such great interconnectedness. These span the furthest depths of the external material world to the deepest internal depths of our hearts.
8. I use this mindfully as only a metaphor. If used in a static and absolute sense, it can lead to the very problem that it is currently feeling helpful to solve. I have noted this also in endnote 5. For example, both engineers and gardeners allow the

unteachable to manifest. However, in the current modern times of science, and where its linearized concepts and techniques grip its popular understanding more than its core of freedom and love, it only helps to use it as such a mindful metaphor.

9. “Because I see it!” is from-a-stream-of-consciousness narration of an immediate experience that literally produced the first crack on my shell. “Arjun, when in a problem, why do you open a book?” is another such hard knock about which I will write another time.
10. Outside of this garden, I created, to carry on the metaphor, equivalent of engineering spaces. Here it is tempting to say that its extent was firm with analytical and predictive precision. However, I will not do so because only to a superficial observer can engineering but be so trivially linear! This is one such point where the logical coherence toward ultimate truth of even this powerful metaphor breaks down.

Engineering, or for that matter any pursuit of life, needs equal servings of the metaphorical gardening mindset! Even a gardener’s work can be reduced to that of analytical and predictive precision! Please also read footnote 8.

11. From the chapter titled ‘The ferryman’ in Herman Hesse’s ‘Siddhartha’
12. This stems significantly from fear caused by the pressure of having to know and teach academic-rota-fragmented parts of life and knowledge.  
  
This is true not just of teachers. We all know this somewhere deep inside, as an extremely superficial artefact of wholesome life and knowledge, and wherein lies our freedom.
13. <https://www.accesstoinstight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.118.than.html>

14. The triple gems of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha have been an invaluable reference in this regard.
15. One such wisdom is the experimental philosophy of Dhamma that I practically try to follow. I do realize intellectually that its essence is the same as other philosophies. These are anything but inclusive to any domain of knowledge. Rather, these freely flow across it. And for me, its thread is singularly unifying.

**Arjun** is exploring the what, why and how of the wisdom, resources and practical skills of humanity to be loving and free in the context of our timeless existential condition as well as immediately urgent practical needs. The latter include, for example, the problems of education and wholesome development. He is trying to see if being loving and free can become practically and coherently wholesome with our many other diverse wisdom, resources and practical skills.

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Karunar Kheti Trust



# Designing and facilitating experiences for well-being in individuals and organizations

*Viridus Social Impact Solutions*



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**V**iridus is a small group of likeminded individuals who want to make a difference with the work that we do. Our collective journey began many years ago as a group who collaborated across multiple change projects. It culminated with us coming together in 2017 to form Viridus.

We began with the belief that thoughtful collective action backed by research, evidence and bodies of knowledge could go a long way in addressing the complexities of social impact. We have grown to believe that the well-being of individuals who participate in the process is central to this endeavour. Our collective and individual journeys have only reinforced these beliefs.

Our work at Viridus focuses on three strategic levers for change. The first relates to the

well-being of individuals in organizational contexts. The second involves strategic organizational design and development. The third is about building the capacities and capabilities of local self-government institutions in both rural and urban settings.

For us, the well-being team, the gradual and deepening of the understanding (from our own experiences and that of others) that, ‘well-being inspires well-doing’ motivated us to focus solely on well-being. We have a strong conviction that the skills, perspectives and tools of well-being can be learnt and cultivated toward greater well-being. That is what keeps us doing the work that we do.

We have been doing this work with Wipro Foundation and others for a few years now.

Our Well-being Programs with Wipro began during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and were conducted online. The learning experiences we delivered when we first began, bear little resemblance to those we offer now.

The name remains and much of the content remains. However, the participant experience has undergone a sea change. Much of what follows may seem familiar, especially to those who design and facilitate capacity-building workshops.

However, what we have experienced is less about revolutionary insights. It is more about validation. Seeing the impact unfold in real-time has been transformative.

Our workshops have evolved tremendously, primarily due to the gradual yet profound shift in our own 'interior condition' as facilitators. We have learned firsthand that "the success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener" (Bill O'Brien)<sup>1</sup>.

We were once outcome focused. Sometimes we were impatient as well. We had relatively fixed notions of how things should unfold and how participants should behave.

We are now more focused on the process. We approach with greater compassion. We are also more accepting of participants' realities and current situations.

For example, there are moments during a workshop where participants struggle to engage with certain activities. Earlier in our journey, we might have seen this as a failure, pushing harder to meet our preconceived outcomes. However, by embracing a process orientation and reflecting on participants' lived realities, we adjust the session mid-way. We allow more spaces for dialogue and unstructured reflections. We also forgive ourselves for sometimes bad judgement.

This shift in approach results in deeper engagement. It also teaches us the

importance of flexibility and trust in the process.

This shift has happened for two key reasons. First, we have come to truly understand, from an instructional design perspective, what it means to put the participant at the center. And second, we are learning in the very lessons we teach, growing in compassion ourselves.

Building capacity for 'well-being' presents a unique challenge from the start. It lacks a visible, direct and immediate impact on participants' work, productivity, and efficiency, which can be easily quantified and communicated.

It is often seen as a 'nice-to-have' rather than a necessity. Therefore, our first challenge has been being able to communicate effectively the value and potential impact of the experience and learning that we will provide the participants.

Over the years, we have experimented with various methods. These include offering a sneak preview or orientation. However, the perfect approach still eludes us.

Word of mouth and participant testimonials have been immensely helpful. But one crucial lesson is that people need to be open, willing and ready for this kind of work. They derive the most value when they are truly prepared for the experience.

One of what I consider our greatest achievements has been shifting toward incorporating 'embodied experiences' in our methodologies. Embodied practices<sup>2</sup> are those that require participants to use their bodies and all their senses. These include practices such as movement and dance. These involve being alive to somatic experiences and learning from them.

This has not been easy. We and our participants have our backgrounds in certain cultural norms, schooling and conditioning.

Our cognitive understanding and mental frameworks often took precedence. They were what we found the most comfortable to design and facilitate. Moving away from this comfort zone needed risk-taking, stepping out of control, and even risking looking foolish.

In the beginning, when we introduced movement-based activities to help participants connect with their emotions physically rather than through cognitive analysis, we ourselves had to combat a certain scepticism. Sometimes, both facilitators and participants felt awkward.

However, as we trusted in the process and stayed the course, the collective shift in energy and engagement validated our belief in the power of embodiment. It was a reminder that growth often lies just beyond our comfort zones.

Thankfully, working collaboratively has been a saving grace. There is always one of us to keep an eye on the process. We remind each other when we stray, and steer us back to our design principles.

Self-awareness is the starting point of any learning journey. This is especially so in one that is focussed on well-being. In multiple ways, self-reflection and self-examination are distinguishing features of our workshops.

This inner work requires participants to be open, honest and vulnerable. They must also confront parts of themselves they may not have previously examined and often do not wish to.

They must place their trust in the facilitators, each other, and the process. Holding this kind of space requires a balance between pushing and allowing. It also involves creating a safe space and holding it firmly. Slowly we have learned to hold and create safe spaces.

One key element in creating this safe space is facilitator vulnerability. Sharing our struggles and showing our own vulnerabilities

can be profoundly impactful. Recently, we experienced the power of 'authentic stories' firsthand.

We started sharing our organization's struggles, individual mistakes, and learnings. This made a visible impact on participants. We were aware of the value of vulnerability earlier as well. However, witnessing its impact was a powerful affirmation.

We have learned something valuable from every workshop. This can sometimes feel like an endless cycle. However, we often plan to stabilize a design for efficiency, only to find ourselves compelled to redesign after new insights or feedback. This is part of our continuous evolution.

In each workshop, we have at least one observer while others facilitate. We observe participants' responses and struggles. We make notes. Then we have post-workshop discussions on what worked and what didn't.

This process allows us to refine the experience continually. We also regularly reflect on our journey. We thus recognize our biggest strength, our team.

Over the years, we have developed a shared understanding. It has also resulted in mutual respect and tolerance for each other's quirks. This makes for an effective and collaborative approach to designing and delivering workshops.

We have multiple designers and facilitators. This allows us to analyze our experiences more objectively. We listen to each other mindfully. We try and let go of personal attachments to specific designs or styles. We also accept feedback without defensiveness.

All of these enable us to move forward on our journey. This process also helps us to learn continually.

Lastly, one other thought comes to mind. One of the things we have had to guard against is





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mistaking positive post-workshop feedback for true impact. Understanding ‘long-term impact’ continues to be a challenge. Most participants, immediately after a powerful and engaging experience, will give positive feedback and say nice things about the process and facilitators.

This is gratifying and can be tempting to interpret as success. However, we are acutely aware that well-being is a journey. It is a deeply personal and unique journey for each individual.

A single experience, no matter how powerful, cannot shift the status quo instantly. Real change happens gradually. It happens over time. It also needs sustained effort.

This understanding makes it all the more rewarding when a participant reaches out, sometimes months or even years later, to share a small win or a personal victory that they attribute to the workshop. These moments, feel like the most authentic indicators of success. They reaffirm the slow but meaningful impact of this work. These also bring a profound sense of joy and purpose to our efforts.

It has indeed been a journey! Sometimes challenging, sometimes frustrating, but always deeply rewarding and enriching. We wouldn't have it any other way. Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to all the participants,

past and present, who have been our willing and appreciative ‘guinea pigs’, encouraging, supporting and validating our efforts at every stage.

## Endnotes

1. Bill O'Brien, the late CEO of Hanover Insurance summarized his most important insights from leading transformational change in his own company. O'Brien said: “The success of an intervention depends on the *interior condition* of the intervener.” We might say it this way: the success of our actions as change-makers does not depend on what we do or how we do it, but on the inner place from which we operate.
2. Embodiment practices use the body as a tool for healing through self-awareness, mindfulness, connection, self-regulation, finding balance, and creating self-acceptance. Embodiment explores the relationship between our physical being and our energy. It involves the interaction of our body, thoughts and actions. For more details, please refer to the website - [positivepsychology.com](https://positivepsychology.com)

Website: [viridus.in](https://viridus.in)

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## उन्नति संस्थान की वेलबीइंग सम्बन्धी प्रथाएँ

सन्तोष लोणकर

वर्तमान युग में हर किसी को मानसिक, भावनात्मक और शारीरिक चुनौतियों का सामना करना पड़ रहा है। डिजिटल प्रौद्योगिकी के कारण लगातार कनेक्टेड रहने का तनाव, व्यक्तिगत जीवन के लिए कम समय, व्यक्तिगत सम्बन्धों में कमी, अनियमित जीवनशैली, सन्तुलित आहार की कमी, काम का बढ़ता हुआ तनाव और कम एकाग्रता के कारण हर किसी का वेलबीइंग प्रभावित हो रहा है। इसलिए हर किसी को अपने वेलबीइंग में सुधार के लिए जागरूक होकर प्रयास करने की आवश्यकता है। इसके लिए हम विशेषज्ञ संगठनों और व्यक्तियों से मार्गदर्शन ले सकते हैं। उन्नति संगठन अपने कर्मचारियों और कार्यकर्ताओं के वेलबीइंग को प्राथमिकता पर रखते हुए इसमें बेहतरी का प्रयास कर रहा है। इस लेख में हम इसके बारे में अधिक जानेंगे।

उन्नति संगठन पिछले 11 वर्षों से सामाजिक क्षेत्र में काम कर रहा है। इस दौरान कर्मचारियों में विभिन्न शारीरिक और मानसिक समस्याएँ उत्पन्न हो रही थीं। इन समस्याओं को दूर करने की हम अपने स्तर पर पूरी कोशिश कर रहे थे, लेकिन हमें बहुत सफलता नहीं मिल रही थी। हमें हमेशा एक विशेषज्ञ मार्गदर्शक या परामर्शदाता की आवश्यकता महसूस होती थी। इस सन्दर्भ में वर्ष 2022 में विप्रो के ज़रिए हमें यह अवसर मिला। हमें पता चला कि बेंगलुरु स्थित विरिडस संगठन वेलबीइंग पर काम करता है और वे इस विषय पर एक कार्यशाला का आयोजन करने वाले हैं। हमने

जल्दी से जानकारी एकत्र की और हमारे संगठन के तीन लोगों ने इस कार्यशाला के लिए पंजीकरण किया।

कार्यशाला को दो चरणों में आयोजित किया जाना था। इसमें व्यक्तिगत वेलबीइंग और संगठनात्मक वेलबीइंग विषय शामिल थे। चूँकि वह कोविड का समय था इसलिए पहला चरण आभासी रूप से और दूसरा चरण बेंगलुरु में व्यक्तिगत रूप से आयोजित किया गया।

विरिडस संगठन ने व्यक्तिगत वेलबीइंग पर आधारित मॉड्यूल को बहुत अच्छी तरह से तैयार किया है। हमने इससे बहुत कुछ सीखा। व्यक्तिगत वेलबीइंग की पहल अप्रैल 2022 में हुई। कार्यशाला को चार दिनों में चार आभासी सत्रों में आयोजित किया गया। कार्यशाला की शुरुआत वेलबीइंग क्या है, इस पर चर्चा से हुई और इसकी अवधारणाओं को स्पष्ट किया गया। वेलबीइंग बनाए रखने के लिए विभिन्न प्रक्रियाओं और उपक्रमों पर चर्चा की गई। विभिन्न गतिविधियों और सामग्रियों से इन प्रक्रियाओं को समझने में मदद मिली।

हमने जाना कि नकारात्मक परिस्थितियों में हमारा दिमाग नकारात्मक भावनाओं का अनुभव करता है। ऐसी स्थितियों में हम सकारात्मक रूप से नहीं सोच पाते। नकारात्मकता से वापस सकारात्मकता की ओर लौटने के लिए भावनाओं की जाँच करना,



चिन्तन करना और प्रियजनों के साथ बिताए गए प्यारे क्षणों, पसन्दीदा स्थानों, जानवरों, प्रकृति आदि जैसे उपकरणों का उपयोग करना नकारात्मकता को खत्म करने और फिर से सामान्य होने में हमारी मदद कर सकता है। यह वेलबीइंग के लिए एक बहुत महत्वपूर्ण और उपयोगी अभ्यास था।

इसके अलावा, आत्म-करुणा और पोषक सम्बन्धों को बढ़ावा देनेवाले सत्र बहुत प्रभावी ढंग से आयोजित किए गए। इसके अलावा, विरिडस ने कुल 7 प्रैक्टिस सर्कल्स का आयोजन किया। ये प्रैक्टिस सर्कल्स विषय की समझ को मज़बूत करने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाते हैं। कुल मिलाकर, विरिडस की विषय विशेषज्ञता की हम सराहना करते हैं।

## हमारे संगठन में किए गए प्रयोग

विरिडस से प्रशिक्षण पूरा करने के बाद हमें ऐसा महसूस हुआ कि यह प्रशिक्षण हमारी टीम के साथ साझा किया जाना चाहिए क्योंकि यह सभी के लिए लाभकारी होगा। इसी आत्मविश्वास के साथ हमने वेलबीइंग पर सत्रों की योजना बनाई।

वेलबीइंग विषय हमारे कार्यकर्ताओं के लिए नया था। चूँकि सभी कार्यकर्ता ग्रामीण क्षेत्र से थे, उन्होंने इस विषय के बारे में न तो कभी सुना था और न ही उन्हें इसकी कोई जानकारी थी। ऐसे में इस विषय को उनके बीच कैसे प्रस्तुत किया जाए और इस पर बातचीत को कैसे आगे बढ़ाया जाए, यह हमारे लिए एक चुनौती थी। इस पर हमने विचार-मंथन कर कुछ समाधान निकाले। सबसे पहले यह तय किया गया कि भाषा ऐसी हो जो सभी को समझ में आए और विषय की सभी बातों को एक ही सत्र में न लेकर अलग-अलग सत्रों में उन पर बातचीत की जाए।

सत्र की योजना बनाने के बाद, पहले सत्र में अधिक समय इस पर चर्चा में गया कि वेलबीइंग का मतलब क्या है। यह आवश्यक भी था क्योंकि हमारे कार्यकर्ताओं के पास इस विषय की कोई भी जानकारी नहीं थी। विषय को आगे समझने के लिए इसकी नींव मज़बूत करना ज़रूरी था।

## ग्राउंडिंग प्रैक्टिस और इमोशनल चेक-इन्स

अपने वेलबीइंग के लिए नियमित रूप से ग्राउंडिंग प्रैक्टिस करना और अपनी भावनाओं को पहचानकर नकारात्मक भावनाओं को समझदारी से दूर करना बहुत ज़रूरी होता है। हमने अपने कार्यकर्ताओं के साथ यह अभ्यास किया।

प्रत्येक कार्यकर्ता ने अपने जीवन के एक कठिन प्रसंग को अपनी डायरी में लिखा और इस बात पर विचार किया कि उन्होंने उस स्थिति से स्वयं को कैसे बाहर निकाला। इसके बाद, कार्यकर्ताओं को जोड़ी बनाकर उन्हें एक-दूसरे के साथ अपने कठिन अनुभव साझा करने के लिए कहा गया। यह अभ्यास भावनात्मक रूप से सभी को छू गया।

अन्त में, सामूहिक चर्चा के दौरान हर किसी ने अपने अनुभव साझा किए। एक कार्यकर्ता ने कहा, “आज मैंने अपने जीवन में हुई बुरी

घटनाओं के बारे में किसी के साथ खुलकर बात की। इससे मेरे मन का बोझ हल्का हो गया।”

इस अभ्यास के दौरान, कई कार्यकर्ताओं ने अपने मन में जमा नकारात्मक भावनाओं को आँसुओं के माध्यम से बाहर निकाल दिया। यह अभ्यास बहुत उपयोगी साबित हुआ। अब हम हर बैठक की शुरुआत इस अभ्यास से करते हैं, जिससे कार्यकर्ताओं को अपने विचार और भावनाएँ व्यक्त करने का एक मंच मिलता है।

## रिश्तों को मज़बूत कैसे करें?

संगठन में काम करते समय अक्सर कार्यकर्ताओं के बीच मतभेद हो जाते हैं या उन्हें एक-दूसरे से कोई शिकायत होती है, लेकिन वे इसे सीधे तौर पर व्यक्त नहीं करते। इसका सीधा असर काम की गुणवत्ता पर पड़ता है। इस समस्या के समाधान के लिए हमने ‘रिश्तों को मज़बूत कैसे करें’ इस विषय पर एक सत्र आयोजित किया। इसमें यह चर्चा की गई कि अगर आपसी भावनाएँ व्यक्त नहीं की जाती हैं, तो ये वेलबीइंग को कैसे प्रभावित करती हैं।

सत्र में हर कार्यकर्ता को जोड़ी में बाँटा गया और एक-दूसरे के बारे में जो बातें उन्हें खटकती थीं, उन पर खुलकर बात करने को कहा गया। उन्हें यह निर्देश दिया गया कि जब कोई प्रतिक्रिया दे, तो सामने वाला व्यक्ति कोई सफाई न दे। प्रत्येक जोड़ी ने यह प्रक्रिया पूरी की और फिर अपनी जोड़ी बदलकर इसे नए साथी के साथ दोहराया।

इस प्रक्रिया ने कार्यकर्ताओं के मन में दबे हुए भावनात्मक तनाव को बाहर निकालने में मदद की। सामूहिक चर्चा में सभी ने अपने अनुभव साझा किए। इस सत्र के बाद, कार्यकर्ताओं के बीच खुलापन आया और अब वे एक-दूसरे से अपनी शिकायतों पर बिना हिचकिचाहट बात करने लगे हैं। यदि वे इसे अकेले हल नहीं कर पाते, तो वरिष्ठों की मदद भी लेते हैं।

## संस्थान में नियमित रूप से की जाने वाली प्रथाएँ

- प्रत्येक बैठक की शुरुआत ग्राउंडिंग प्रैक्टिस से की जाती है, जिसमें सभी अपनी उस समय की भावनाओं को व्यक्त करते हैं।
- यदि किसी ने संस्थान के काम या व्यक्तिगत कार्य में किसी की मदद की है, तो उसके प्रति आभार व्यक्त करने के लिए संस्थान के कार्यालय में ‘ग्रेटीट्यूड जार’ रखा गया है। लोग इसमें अपनी कृतज्ञता लिखकर डालते हैं। इस जार को प्रत्येक स्टाफ मीटिंग के दिन खोला जाता है और लोगों द्वारा लिखकर इसमें डाली गई बातों को सभी के सामने पढ़ा जाता है।
- संस्थान में वरिष्ठों द्वारा लिए जानेवाले निर्णयों में अन्य सदस्यों की राय ली जाती है।
- प्रत्येक कार्यालय में ‘चाय पे चर्चा’ नाम से एक पहल चलाई जाती है, जिसमें चाय के ब्रेक के दौरान 10-15 मिनट अनौपचारिक बातचीत के लिए दिए जाते हैं।





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## कार्यकर्ताओं को हुए लाभ

- कार्यकर्ता अब अपने मन में खटकनेवाली बातों को स्पष्ट रूप से व्यक्त करने लगे हैं।
- वे सहकर्मियों द्वारा की गई मदद के लिए उनके प्रति कृतज्ञता व्यक्त करते हैं।
- सभी के बीच एक-दूसरे के प्रति सम्मान की भावना विकसित हुई है।
- एक-दूसरे की मदद करने की संस्कृति बढ़ी है।

## हमारे सामने आई चुनौतियाँ

वेलबीइंग प्रक्रिया को लागू करते समय हमें कुछ कठिनाइयों का सामना करना पड़ा। उनमें से कुछ इस प्रकार हैं:

- प्रत्येक सत्र में पिछले सत्र का संक्षिप्त पुनरावलोकन किया गया। इससे नए जुड़े कार्यकर्ताओं को पिछले सत्रों की अवधारणाएँ स्पष्ट नहीं हो सकीं, और उनकी सत्र में उत्साहजनक भागीदारी नहीं रही।
- वेलबीइंग की अवधारणाओं को समझाना कार्यकर्ताओं के लिए थोड़ा कठिन रहा, जिसके लिए अधिक समय लगाना पड़ा।

- संस्थान के वरिष्ठ कार्यकर्ता ही वेलबीइंग सत्रों को अपनी दिनचर्या और कामकाज में लागू कर पाए हैं। अन्य कार्यकर्ताओं की विषय की समझ अब तक पूरी तरह विकसित नहीं हुई है।

## भविष्य की योजना

हमें लगता है कि वेलबीइंग सत्रों की आवृत्ति बढ़ाने की आवश्यकता है, ताकि इसे और प्रभावी ढंग से कार्यकर्ताओं तक पहुँचाया जा सके। अब तक किए गए सत्रों से हमें निश्चित रूप से लाभ हुआ है। भविष्य में भी हम सभी कार्यकर्ताओं के वेलबीइंग को प्राथमिकता देते रहेंगे।

धन्यवाद!

**संतोष लोणकर** पिछले 15 वर्षों से सामाजिक क्षेत्र में सक्रिय हैं। OD, वित्त और संस्थागत कानूनी मामलों में उनकी विशेष रुचि है और टीम बिल्डिंग में उनकी सक्रिय भागीदारी है। उन्नति संस्था के लक्ष्यों को पूरा करने के लिए प्रयासरत हैं।

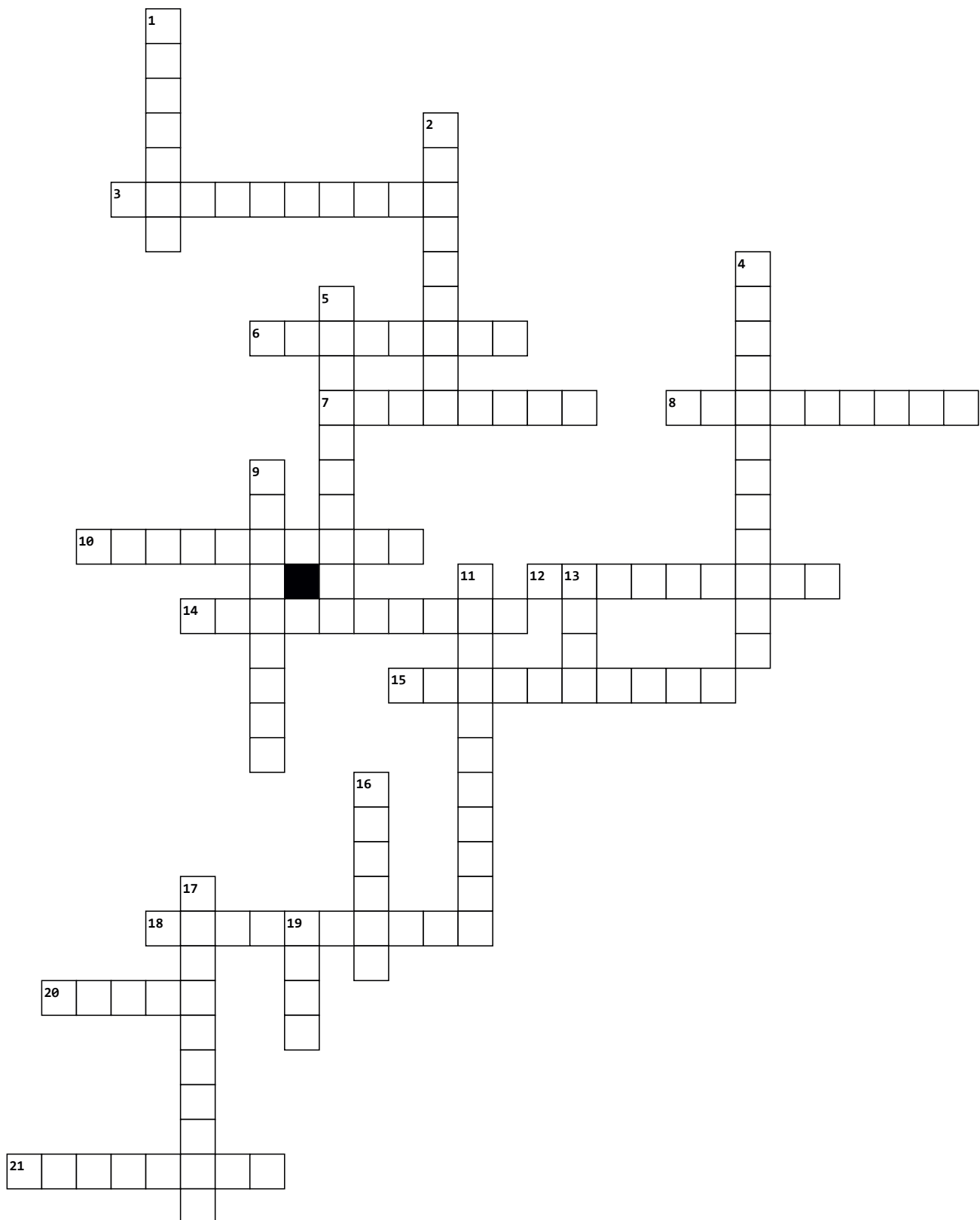
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**Connect on:**



# Well-being crossword



## Across

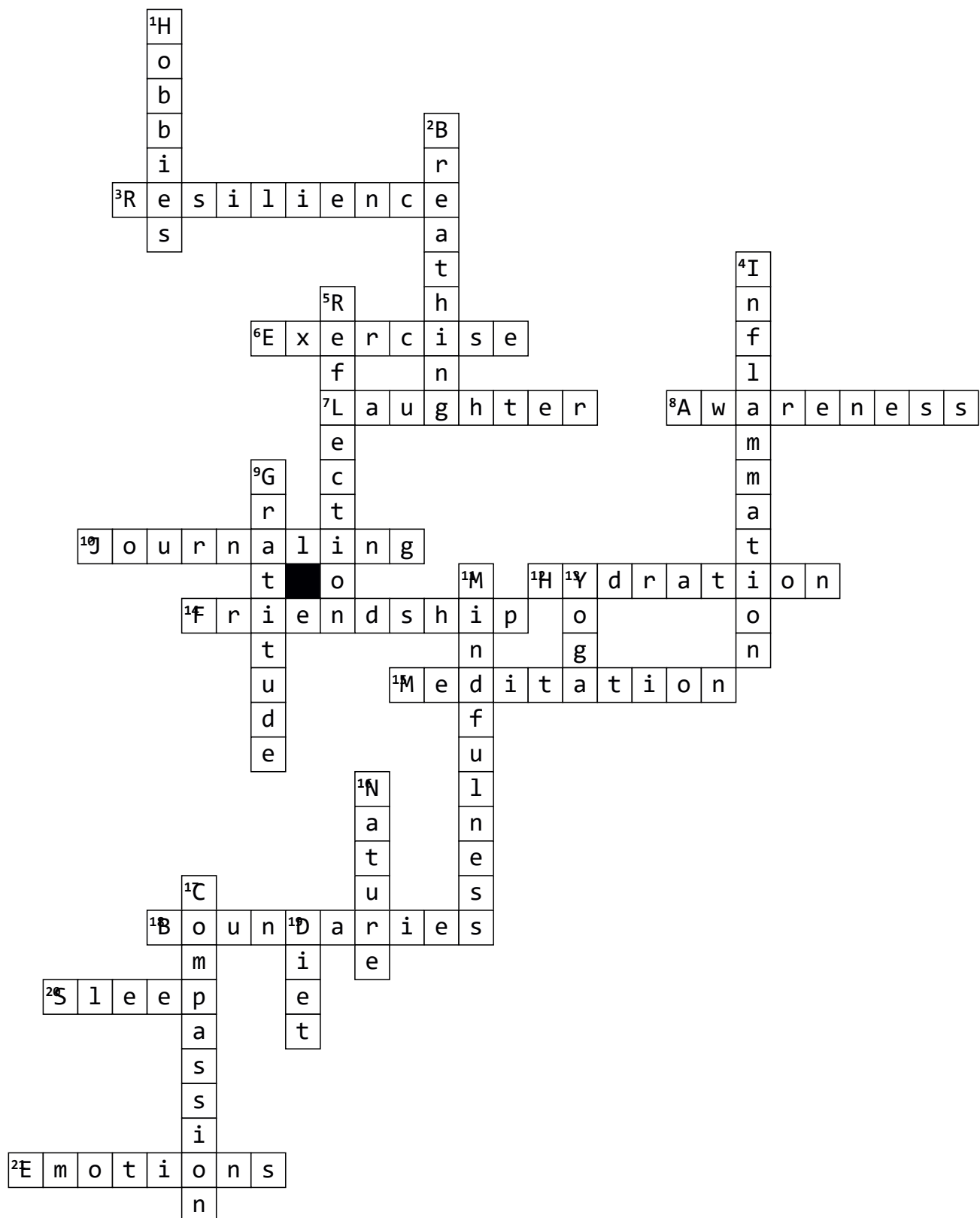
- 3. The ability to bounce back from challenges and adapt to change (10)
- 6. Physical activity that boosts health and mood when done regularly (8)
- 7. A universal language of joy that reduces stress and boosts mood (8)
- 8. Knowing yourself; the first step toward personal growth (9)
- 10. Writing down your thoughts and experiences for greater clarity and reflection (10)
- 12. Drinking enough water to maintain physical and mental balance (9)
- 14. Strong social connections that enhance mental and emotional health (10)
- 15. A calming practice that fosters focus and inner peace (10)
- 18. Setting\_\_\_\_\_helps to protect your time, energy, and mental health (10)
- 20. Essential for recovery, memory and overall well-being (5)
- 21. These feelings shape our experiences and connections with others (8)

## Down

- 1. Activities you enjoy for relaxation and creativity (7)
- 2. Something we do all the time but often overlook as a tool for calmness (9)
- 4. The body's reaction to prolonged stress or unhealthy habits (12)
- 5. The act of examining your thoughts, emotions and beliefs for growth (10)
- 9. Recognizing and appreciating the good things in life (9)
- 11. The practice of staying fully present in the moment (12)
- 13. A form of exercise that combines physical postures, breathing exercises, and meditation (4)
- 16. Spending time here is proven to reduce stress and increase happiness (6)
- 17. A kind and empathetic response to the struggles of others (10)
- 19. What you eat daily; a cornerstone of physical health (4)



## Well-being crossword - answer key



**Note:** This crossword has been prepared by Ruchi Ghose.



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