

Learning-Oriented Organizational Culture and Employee Wellness Practices in Sri Lankan Manufacturing Organizations: A Post-COVID Systematic Literature Review

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10100131>

Received: 04 January 2026; Accepted: 09 January 2026; Published: 24 January 2026

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered workplace priorities, emphasizing both the need for continuous learning and employee wellness. This systematic literature review examines the relationship between learning-oriented organizational culture and employee wellness practices, with particular reference to manufacturing contexts in Sri Lanka after the pandemic. The review synthesizes global research on organizational learning cultures, workplace wellness, and COVID-19's impact on work practices to identify themes, research gaps, and implications for Sri Lankan manufacturing organizations. Findings suggest that fostering learning cultures can enhance adaptability and employee engagement, while wellness practices (holistic, psychological, and physical) are increasingly essential for resilience and performance. The study concludes by highlighting the need for contextualized research in Sri Lanka's manufacturing sector to develop integrated strategies that support learning and wellness simultaneously.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted conventional organizational practices, compelling firms to adapt rapidly to new realities of remote work, health concerns, and skill requirements. In this context, organizational culture – particularly a learning-oriented culture – and employee wellness practices have become focal points for sustainable organizational success. Learning-oriented organizational culture refers to an environment where continuous learning, knowledge sharing, and adaptive capabilities are embedded in the organizational ethos. Such cultures are shown to encourage innovation, agility, and employee engagement (Alonazi, 2021). Parallel to this, employee wellness — encompassing physical, mental, and emotional well-being — is increasingly recognized as a key predictor of productivity and employee retention (Putro, 2024). This review investigates literature on how these two domains intersect, with a specific lens on post-COVID dynamics and applicability in the Sri Lankan manufacturing context.

METHODOLOGY

This review employs a systematic approach to literature synthesis. Searches were conducted in multidisciplinary academic databases using keywords such as organizational learning culture, employee wellness, manufacturing industry, post-COVID workplace, and Sri Lanka. Selected studies span peer-reviewed articles, systematic reviews, and professional reports published between 2019 and 2025. Although limited research directly focuses on the Sri Lankan manufacturing sector, insights from organizational culture and wellness research globally and regionally help build a foundational understanding of relevant dynamics.

Organizational Learning Culture

Organizational learning culture is characterized by shared values that promote continuous improvement, knowledge sharing, and adaptability to environmental change. Alonazi's (2021) national study on organizational learning during the COVID-19 outbreak found that system connections, embedded systems, and teamwork were particularly influential in building effective learning cultures during crises, emphasizing the importance of

structural and collaborative elements in fostering adaptive organizations. These elements support employees in navigating uncertainties and acquiring new skills, which increases organizational resilience.

The literature also suggests that learning-oriented cultures positively influence job satisfaction and performance outcomes, as observed in manufacturing and service sectors beyond crisis contexts. Research in Vietnam, for example, found that learning culture significantly improves employee job satisfaction and subsequently performance, indicating the broader relevance of learning culture beyond the immediate crisis period (Scientific study on organizational learning, 2024). Such insights suggest that learning culture plays a dual role: supporting adaptation to evolving external pressures and enhancing intrinsic employee outcomes such as engagement and satisfaction.

Employee Wellness Practices

Employee wellness is multifaceted, covering physical health, psychological well-being, work-life balance, and social connectedness. According to systematic review evidence, psychological and social well-being aspects significantly enhance organizational outcomes like productivity and innovation, while physical, career, and financial wellness also contribute meaningfully (Putro, 2024). Wellness practices in the workplace have transitioned from basic health programs to holistic paradigms that include mental health support, autonomy, engagement, and psychological safety — a trend reinforced by post-COVID shifts in workplace expectations.

In Sri Lanka, workplace wellbeing initiatives have gained traction through organizational surveys and benchmarking efforts. For example, frameworks assessing wellness through responsible leadership, psychological safety, and sense of community highlight how employers can operationalize wellness strategies within the workplace culture (Great Place To Work® Sri Lanka). Such initiatives underscore that employee wellbeing is not solely an HR initiative but a strategic cultural investment.

Intersecting Themes: Culture and Wellness

Several themes emerge in the literature at the intersection of learning culture and employee wellness:

Adaptation and Resilience: Learning-oriented cultures inherently support resilience by equipping employees with skills and mindsets for continuous change. This adaptability is crucial for managing stress, uncertainty, and rapid shifts in work arrangements post-COVID (Alonazi, 2021). Wellness practices that support psychological resilience — such as mindfulness, flexible work options, and mental health resources — are therefore complementary to learning culture objectives.

Engagement and Psychological Safety: Both domains contribute to employee engagement. A culture that values learning signals investment in employee growth; wellness practices signal care for employee health and worklife balance. Together, they foster psychological safety and motivation — necessary conditions for engagement and innovation (Organizational culture and engagement literature).

Holistic Well-Being and Performance: The integration of wellness practices within organizational culture enhances overall performance. Study evidence indicates that organizations with strong cultures geared toward employee empowerment, justice, and support report higher job satisfaction and productivity outcomes. These factors also correlate with wellness program success, where employees feel their holistic needs are recognized and supported.

Contextualizing in the Sri Lankan Manufacturing Sector

Although direct studies on learning culture and wellness in Sri Lanka's manufacturing firms are scarce, broader research on organizational culture in Sri Lankan workplaces suggests that culture significantly influences employee engagement and job motivation across sectors. Studies in higher education and hospitality sectors in Sri Lanka demonstrate that cultural dimensions such as teamwork, empowerment, and support influence employee engagement and organizational performance (Dangalla et al., 2025; De Silva & Weerasinghe, 2025). These findings point to cultural dynamics that are likely relevant in manufacturing contexts as well.

Sri Lankan workplaces are increasingly recognizing the importance of employee wellbeing through national surveys and workplace awards focusing on gender inclusivity and work-life balance (Great Place To Work®), indicating a broader cultural shift toward integrating wellness in organizational practice. Still, the manufacturing sector has unique challenges — physical demands, shift work, and production targets — which necessitate customized wellness and learning strategies that reflect both cultural context and operational realities.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

The literature reveals several gaps for future research:

Sector-Specific Studies: There is a clear need for primary empirical research examining how learning culture and wellness practices intersect in manufacturing firms within Sri Lanka. Sector-specific data would clarify contextual antecedents and outcomes.

Post-COVID Longitudinal Analysis: Most existing studies capture snapshots of change. Longitudinal research could assess how organizational learning and wellness evolve over time as the post-COVID period stabilizes.

Integrated Frameworks: Conceptual frameworks that link learning culture constructs with wellness outcomes are underdeveloped, especially in emerging economy contexts. Developing integrative models suitable for Sri Lankan manufacturing settings would aid both academics and practitioners.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review highlights that learning-oriented organizational culture and employee wellness practices are deeply interlinked domains contributing to organizational resilience, engagement, and performance, especially in the post-COVID era. While global literature emphasizes adaptability, psychological safety, and holistic wellness, there is limited research specifically examining these phenomena in Sri Lanka's manufacturing sector. This presents a valuable opportunity for future research to develop integrated, contextually relevant models that support sustainable work environments. Organizations that invest in learning culture and wellness not only improve individual well-being but also enhance overall organizational viability in a competitive, postpandemic world.

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