WHITE PAPER · 01

Reps, Not Feelings

The Emotional Fitness Standard: a non-clinical operating model that turns positive-psychology techniques into countable daily reps for Indian professionals.

Dr Atul Aswani; Mumbai Psychiatrist and trained as a Results Coach
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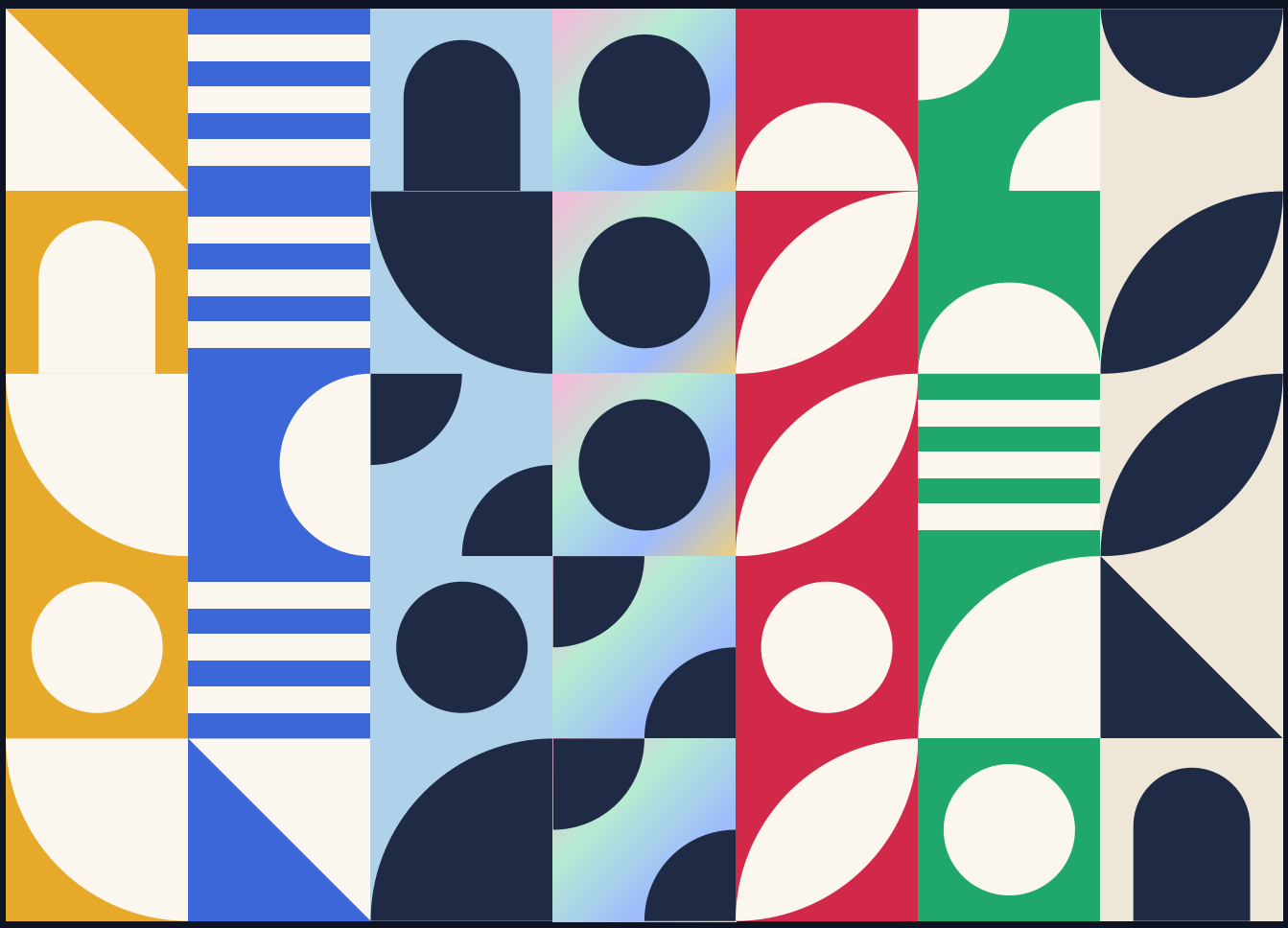

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01 Executive summary

Poor mental health among employees costs Indian employers about USD 14 billion a year in absenteeism, presenteeism and attrition, according to Deloitte India's 2022 workplace study of 3,995 employees.

Emotional fitness — the trained capacity to notice, name, settle, reframe and act on emotion, built through countable daily reps; non-clinical by definition.

That sentence is the category. Buyers in India still cannot tell a wellness perk from a healthcare product. Sit in on an HR review in Bengaluru. One vendor deck screens every employee with a questionnaire. The other offers a meditation login that most people opened once. Neither is a standard a CHRO can take to the board. Emotional fitness at work is the missing third thing: a skill built by practice, not a condition to be screened for.

The World Health Organization places burn-out (ICD-11 QD85) as an occupational phenomenon, not a medical condition. India's Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, section 2(1)(s), defines mental illness as a substantial disorder that grossly impairs judgement, behaviour, reality-testing or ordinary life. Everyday strain at a laptop does not meet that test. The International Coaching Federation defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise personal and professional potential. That is the delivery model. It is not clinical care.

Positive-psychology techniques have pooled, small-to-medium effects across hundreds of studies. Mental-health apps, by contrast, show a median 15-day retention of 3.9 per cent. The gap is not more content. The gap is countable practice. EmotionApp turns nine technique families into daily reps on WhatsApp, in 23 Indian languages, with an AI coach and a human hand-off, on India-resident data under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, built under ISO 9001 and ISO 13485 quality systems. The employer sees participation. The employer never sees feelings.

This paper defines what is emotional fitness, separates emotional fitness vs mental fitness, and gives a 90-day plan a buyer can run without crossing the healthcare line.

02 The problem in India

India's professional class is paying a bill that has a number and no operating model. Deloitte India's Mental health and well-being in the workplace (September 2022) surveyed 3,995 employees across 12 industries. More than 80 per cent of respondents reported at least one adverse mental-health symptom. More than 65 per cent reported at least two. More than 50 per cent reported three or more. The same study priced the cost to Indian employers at about INR 1.10 lakh crore, or about USD 14 billion, in the year of the survey: about USD 1.9 billion in absenteeism, USD 6.6 billion in presenteeism, and USD 5.9 billion in turnover.

Workplace-related stress was named by 47 per cent of affected respondents. Financial stress was named by 46 per cent. COVID-related pressure was named by 42 per cent. Thirty-three per cent kept working through the strain. Twenty-nine per cent took leave. Twenty per cent resigned. Only 46 per cent of employees even knew their employer offered workplace resources.

That is the India problem in one paragraph: a large, priced, occupational load; a legal definition of illness that most of that load does not meet; and a market that answers with either a clinic or a slogan.

A stand-up comic would say the industry sold the feeling of having bought a gym membership. A cricket coach would say the batter who skips the nets keeps his bat clean and loses his timing. Machine learning would say the loss function was never logged, so the model never trained. In office terms: the irritation nobody names ends up chairing the Monday review; the breathing drill learnt at the offsite and never used again is a poster; the value announced at the town hall and never turned into a next step is a speech. A founder would say you cannot scale a mood. You can scale a rep.

WHO's ICD-11 entry on burn-out, code QD85, is the official reminder that occupational strain is not automatically a disease. Burn-out is "a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed." It sits in the chapter on factors influencing health status or contact with health services. It is not classified as a medical condition. It refers only to the occupational context. That is the global classification. India's statute then draws the domestic line.

Comparison: the load, the law, the product gap

Fact	What the primary source says	What buyers usually do with it	What that misses
Cost to Indian employers	About USD 14 billion a year (Deloitte India, 2022)	Buy an EAP and a webinar	No countable practice; no category line
Workforce symptoms	More than 80% reported at least one adverse symptom (n = 3,995)	Screen everyone as if they were patients	Most of the load is occupational, not statutory illness
Burn-out in ICD-11	QD85: occupational phenomenon, not a medical condition (WHO, 2019)	File it under healthcare procurement	The code itself refuses that filing
Mental illness in Indian law	MHCA 2017, s.2(1)(s): substantial disorder that grossly impairs ordinary life	Treat every low week as if it met s.2(1)(s)	The Act is narrower than the vendor slide
App retention	Median 15-day retention 3.9% across 93 mental-health apps (Baumel et al., 2019)	Add more content	Content without reps is a download, not a practice
Positive-psychology effects	Well-being g = 0.39 across 347 studies (Carr et al., 2021)	Run a one-off gratitude week	Effects come from repeated practice, not a campaign

Table 1. The Indian buyer's gap, sourced to primary documents.

The comparison is not that Indian professionals have no inner life. It is that the inner life has been productised as either a clinic or a cloud of good intentions. Neither produces a dashboard a finance head will defend. Emotional fitness is the attempt to give that inner life a gym logic: countable, daily, non-clinical, and legal to buy as work design rather than as care.

03 Why current approaches fail

'Mental health' programmes inherit stigma and clinical liability

The moment a workplace programme is framed as mental health, two things arrive uninvited. The first is stigma. Deloitte found that societal stigma stopped about 39 per cent of affected respondents from taking any mitigating step. Twenty-two per cent of workers who were struggling said they would prefer not to open up at work. The second is liability. India's Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, is written for persons with mental illness as the Act defines it. Mental healthcare under the Act includes analysis of a person's mental condition. That is a regulated activity. A corporate programme that screens, labels and stores clinical-grade material has stepped toward that activity whether the slide deck says so or not.

Emotional fitness refuses that step. Emotional fitness — the trained capacity to notice, name, settle, reframe and act on emotion, built through countable daily reps; non-clinical by definition — does not decide who is ill. It does not keep a clinical file. It trains a skill the way a running club trains a pace.

‘Wellness’ is undefined and unmeasured

Wellness, as sold to Indian employers, is a word that will not sit still. It can mean fruit, a step-count, a speaker, a meditation login, or a poster in the lift. Because it is undefined, it cannot be measured except as spend. Because it cannot be measured, it cannot be managed. A founder knows this in their bones: a metric that cannot be counted is a story, and stories do not survive a downturn.

Baumel and colleagues, writing in the Journal of Medical Internet Research in 2019, studied real-world use of 93 mental-health apps. Median 15-day retention was 3.9 per cent. Median 30-day retention was 3.3 per cent. Median daily open-rate among installers was 4.0 per cent. That is the wellness-app pattern in the wild: a download, a first day, then silence. The product promised a feeling. Feelings do not log in on day 15.

Mindfulness-only programmes cover one of nine skill families

Mindfulness is a real skill. It is not the whole gym. A programme that only trains attention is like a gym that only has a treadmill and calls itself strength and conditioning. Carr and colleagues (2021) pooled 347 positive-psychology intervention studies, more than 72,000 participants, 41 countries. At post-test the pooled effect on well-being was Hedge’s $g = 0.39$; on strengths, $g = 0.46$; on quality of life, $g = 0.48$. Multi-component programmes outperformed single-component ones. People in non-Western countries showed larger gains. The evidence favours a spread of techniques, practised, not a single sitting-still habit sold as a complete answer.

Name the nine families and the hole in a mindfulness-only buy becomes obvious. Savour and notice is one family. Breathe and settle is another. The other seven — thank, reframe, befriend yourself, use strengths, find meaning, connect, act — do not appear because the programme never built them. That is not a moral failing of mindfulness. It is a category error in procurement.

04 The emotional-fitness model applied

PULL QUOTE

Positive-psychology programmes showed a pooled well-being effect of g = 0.39 across 347 studies.” — Carr et al., 2021.

What is emotional fitness, applied? Emotional fitness — the trained capacity to notice, name, settle, reframe and act on emotion, built through countable daily reps; non-clinical by definition. The model has three moving parts: nine technique families drawn from positive psychology; a rep, which is one countable practice; and gym logic, which shares counts and never shares feelings.

The nine technique families

EmotionApp groups positive-psychology techniques into nine families. Each family is a skill, not a mood.

Family	What the person practises	What a rep can count
Savour & Notice	Stay with a good moment; name a feeling with precision; scan for what went right	Emotions named; savour minutes; sightings logged
Thank & Appreciate	Deliver gratitude; keep a short good-things list	Thank-yous sent; weekly entries
Breathe & Settle	A physiological down-shift; brief movement as a mood lever	Resets completed; movement minutes
Reframe the Story	Count a partial win; change the pass/fail frame	Partial wins logged
Befriend Yourself	Warmth practised toward the self before it is practised outward	Rounds completed
Strengths in Action	Name a strength in use so it can be reused on purpose	Strengths called
Meaning & Direction	Reconnect a task to the person it serves; visit a realistic best self	Threads traced; sessions completed
Connect & Contribute	Match another person’s energy; send a small, specific warmth	Responses logged; rounds
Act & Build	Tiny wins, scheduled joy, habit days, protected flow	Wins, streaks, blocks kept, habit days

Table 2. Nine families. One gym. No clinical instrument is named and none is used.

A rep is one countable practice

A rep is not a feeling. A rep is a completed act with a unit: one named emotion, one delivered thank-you, one physiological reset, one partial win counted, one strength called, one tiny win logged. “Do one rep. Ninety seconds.” That is the unit of work. It is closer to a press-up than to a session. It is closer to a gradient-descent step than to a vision board. Small, repeated updates beat one large, unlogged leap.

The platform counts what can be counted without crossing into a clinical file: reps completed, streaks held, families used, breadth of emotional vocabulary (how many distinct feeling-words a person can deploy), participation, and language of practice. It does not count a score that pretends to be a verdict on a person. It does not store a formulation. It does not ask the employer to become a clinician.

Gym logic: reps and streaks are shared, feelings never are

A gym publishes attendance. It does not publish heartbreak. That is the privacy architecture. Teams can see that practice is happening. Managers can see that a cohort is showing up. Nobody sees the content of a journal, the wording of a reframe, or the feeling that preceded the rep. Two sales managers in Kolkata learn the same short reset. One never uses it again and forgets it. The other uses it before every hard call; now it is automatic. That picture is easy to misuse. The point is not that people must produce cheerfulness for the firm. The point is that unused capacity compounds into loss, and practised capacity compounds into skill. The firm is entitled to know that practice occurred. The firm is not entitled to the inner weather.

Delivery matches how Indian professionals already live: WhatsApp-first, so the rep arrives where the day already is; 23 Indian languages, so the work can happen in the language closest to the heart; an AI coach for the daily cue; a human hand-off when a person needs a thinking partner rather than a prompt. The International Coaching Federation definition is the human layer: partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise personal and professional potential. That sentence is coaching. It is not care under the 2017 Act.

Data sits in India. Processing follows the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. The company builds under ISO 9001 quality management and ISO 13485 quality systems. Those standards describe how the firm runs. They do not convert a coaching product into a regulated clinical service. The category holds only if that distinction is kept in writing, in the dashboard, and in the contract.

05 The category boundary

Emotional fitness vs mental fitness

BetterUp, the best-known Western coinage in this neighbourhood, defines mental fitness as "a proactive practice that ignites well-being, performance, and growth to become more resilient, realise your potential, and thrive." That is a useful cousin. It is not this category. Mental fitness, as that firm uses it, is a broad human-potential frame: well-being plus performance plus growth, often delivered as one-to-one coaching at enterprise scale. Emotional fitness is narrower and more operational. It names five trained moves — notice, name, settle, reframe, act — and insists that each move become a countable daily rep. It is built for Indian professional life, Indian statute, Indian languages, and India-resident data. The two ideas should not be collapsed. One is a positioning. The other is a standard a procurement team can test.

Emotional fitness vs mental fitness, then, is not a branding quarrel. It is a difference in unit of work, in legal posture in India, and in what the employer is allowed to see.

	Emotional fitness	Mental fitness	Mental health (workplace programmes)	Clinical care
Who delivers it	Coach and platform; AI with human hand-off	Coach-led human-potential programmes	HR plus mixed vendors; sometimes clinicians	Registered mental-health professionals in establishments the 2017 Act recognises
What is measured	Reps, streaks, vocabulary breadth, participation	Self-reported thriving, goals, coaching engagement	Utilisation, sometimes symptom screens	Clinical formulation and outcome as defined by the clinician
Legal status in India	Non-clinical coaching and skill practice; outside MHCA 2017 s.2(1)(s)	Not an Indian statutory category; imported commercial frame	Ambiguous; slides toward the Act if screening and records look clinical	Regulated by the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017
What it is not	Not a screen, not a condition, not care	Not a substitute for Indian legal design	Not a defined skill model and not a clean legal box	Not a wellness perk and not a daily-rep gym

Table 3. Four boxes. One of them is this paper's claim.

Read the table left to right and the buyer's error becomes visible. Teams buy column four language and hope for column one behaviour. Or they buy column three and wonder why nobody opens the app on day 15. The standard is column one.

06 Measurement

A dashboard that holds no clinical data is not a marketing flourish. It is the legal and cultural design. If the dashboard can be mistaken for a clinical record, the category has already failed.

What the employer sees

Rep counts, by team and by period. Streaks: how many people practised on consecutive working days. Family coverage: whether the nine families are in use or whether the cohort collapsed into a single habit. Emotional-vocabulary breadth: how many distinct feeling-words people can deploy, which is a skill metric, not a mood score. Participation: who opted in, who is active, who has gone quiet. Language of practice. Time-to-first-rep. Hand-off rate from the AI coach to a human coach. Nothing in that list is a verdict on a person's health.

What the employer never sees

Journal text. The content of a reframe. Named feelings attached to a named employee. Any output that could be read as a clinical formulation. Any score that pretends to classify a person under ICD or under section 2(1)(s). The gym publishes attendance. It does not publish the conversation in the locker room.

This is also good product design. An analyst on the evening local types one line about Tuesday's review into the app. Kept private, that line is something she can work with. Forwarded to her manager, it becomes politics. So the skill is practised in private and reviewed as a count. The step she takes next is visible; what she felt before it is not a KPI. Entrepreneurship agrees: inspect the process, not the soul.

07 Implementation

A 90-day plan tests the category without turning the firm into a clinic. The CHRO signs one contract line; the CFO reads one page at the end. Owner names below are roles, not vendors.

Week	Owner	Action	Metric
0	CHRO + Legal + DPO	Write the category line into the contract: non-clinical; no screens; India data; DPDP roles; crisis signpost to Tele-MANAS 14416	Signed addendum; DPDP record of processing
1	CHRO + Comms	Name the programme emotional fitness. Ban clinical language in launch copy. Brief managers: reps, not feelings	Launch copy reviewed; manager brief attendance
1–2	People partner + platform	Invite one pilot cohort (one function, 150–400 people). WhatsApp opt-in. Language choice. No mandate dressed as care	Opt-in rate; language mix
2	Platform + coach lead	First rep inside 48 hours of opt-in. Teach the nine families in plain sentences. AI coach on; human hand-off path live	Time-to-first-rep; hand-off path tested
3–4	People analytics	Stand up the employer dashboard: reps, streaks, vocabulary breadth, participation. Confirm feelings are absent	Dashboard live; privacy test passed
4–6	Function lead	Weekly 10-minute team ritual: share a streak number, never a feeling. Protect one joy-block on the calendar	Weekly ritual held; joy-blocks kept
6–8	CHRO	Mid-pilot review. Kill what is unused. Double what is used. Do not add a screen “just in case”	Family-coverage report; unused families dropped or coached
8–10	Legal + DPO	Spot-check data residency, retention, access logs. Confirm no clinical fields exist	Access-log review; field inventory = zero clinical
10–12	CHRO + CFO sponsor	90-day readout: participation, reps per active user, streak distribution, hand-off quality. Decide scale or stop	One-page readout; go / no-go
12+	CHRO	If go: next two functions. Keep the same contract language. Do not let local HR reinvent a clinical form	Functions live; contract language unchanged

Table 4. Ninety days. One category. No new clinic.

08 One-page checklist the reader can run this week

Print this. Tick it. If more than two boxes stay empty, you do not yet have an emotional-fitness programme. You have a hope.

#	Check	Pass looks like
1	Can you say the definition without looking?	Emotional fitness — the trained capacity to notice, name, settle, reframe and act on emotion, built through countable daily reps; non-clinical by definition.
2	Does the contract say non-clinical?	MHCA 2017 s.2(1)(s) is named as the line you will not cross.
3	Is there a countable unit?	A rep exists. A feeling does not count as a unit.
4	Are nine families available, not one?	Mindfulness-only is a fail.
5	Does the dashboard hold no clinical data?	A stranger from Legal can read it without learning anyone's inner weather.
6	Is delivery where the day already is?	WhatsApp-first, or an equally frictionless channel. An unused app store listing is a fail.
7	Can a person practise in an Indian language they think in?	Language choice is real, not a flag icon.
8	Is there a human hand-off?	AI cues the rep. A coach takes the conversation when the person asks.
9	Does data stay in India and name a DPDP role?	Residency and fiduciary are in writing.
10	Is crisis routed out of the product?	Tele-MANAS 14416 is in the footer, the onboarding, and the contract.
11	Have managers been briefed not to ask for feelings?	The ritual shares streaks. It does not share journals.
12	Is there a 90-day number that will decide scale?	Participation and reps per active user, agreed before launch.

Table 5. Twelve checks. This week, not next quarter.

09 FAQ

Q1 Is this mental health support for my employees?

No. Emotional fitness — the trained capacity to notice, name, settle, reframe and act on emotion, built through countable daily reps; non-clinical by definition — sits outside healthcare. India's Act defines mental illness in section 2(1)(s) as a substantial disorder that grossly impairs ordinary life. A daily rep is not that. If someone is in crisis, they leave the gym and call Tele-MANAS 14416.

Q2 How is emotional fitness vs mental fitness anything other than a slogan?

Mental fitness, as popularised in the West, is a broad thriving frame. Emotional fitness is five trained moves and a countable unit. BetterUp's public line is a proactive practice for well-being, performance and growth. This standard is narrower, Indian-legal, and dashboarded as reps. The difference is the unit: one rep, not one vibe.

Q3 Will people actually use it after week two?

Most mental-health apps do not. Baumel et al. (2019) found median 15-day retention of 3.9 per cent across 93 apps. That is the baseline you are beating. The design bet is a 90-second WhatsApp rep plus a streak the team can see. If day-15 activity is still a rounding error, stop. Do not buy more content.

Q4 What number do I take to the board?

Deloitte priced the Indian employer cost at about USD 14 billion a year. You will not move that number in a quarter. You can report opt-in, reps per active user, streak distribution and family coverage at day 90. Those four are board-safe because they contain no clinical data and they describe work, not weather.

Q5 **Are we allowed to do this under Indian law?**

Yes, if you stay on the coaching side of the line. ICF coaching is a partnership to maximise potential. MHCA 2017 regulates care for mental illness as defined. WHO's ICD-11 QD85 already says burn-out is occupational, not a medical condition. Write that line into the contract. Then keep the dashboard clean.

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Primary sources only. Each item carries a URL or DOI. Secondary press is not used as the source of a number.

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Dr Atul Aswani is a Mumbai Psychiatrist and trained as a Results Coach. He is the founder voice behind EmotionApp, a non-clinical emotional-fitness platform for Indian professionals run by Tranquilo Meditek Sytems Private Limited, Mumbai. His work turns positive-psychology techniques into countable daily reps, delivered WhatsApp-first in Indian languages, with an AI coach, a human hand-off, and India-resident data.

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NOTE

EmotionApp is a non-clinical emotional-fitness coaching platform. This paper describes practices, techniques and coaching. It is not therapy, treatment, diagnosis or medical advice.

SAFETY NOTE

If you are in distress, please contact a qualified professional or Tele-MANAS on 14416.