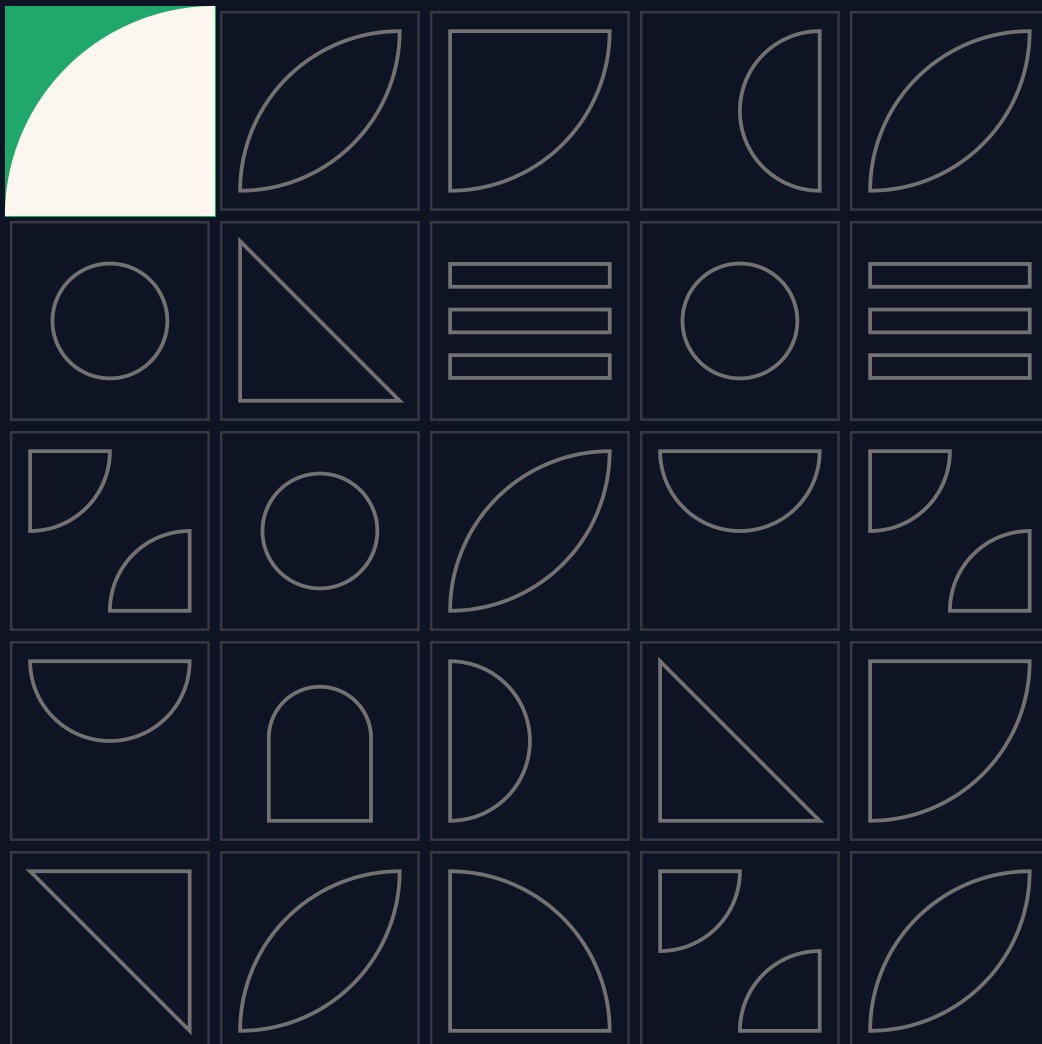


THE ZERO-CRINGE SHARE

Why most wellness programmes are unshareable (they expose struggle), and the five-factor rubric — countable rep, sunny output, badge of identity, zero-cringe share, built-in audience — that makes a programme spread on LinkedIn.

Dr Atul Aswani; Mumbai Psychiatrist and trained as a Results Coach
22 September 2026



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EmotionApp is a non-clinical emotional-fitness coaching platform. It is not a clinical service and does not offer diagnosis or treatment. Distressed users are routed to a crisis lane that sits outside every share surface.

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01

Executive summary

Most mental-health apps keep only 3.3 per cent of users at day 30. The Shareability Rubric (R·S·B·C·A) — Countable Rep, Sunny Output, Badge of Identity, Zero-Cringe Share, Built-In Audience; each scored 0–3, Virality Index 0–15 — is the test a programme must pass before anyone will post it on LinkedIn. Employee wellness program engagement stalls when the object of share is a wound. Late at night a product manager in Gurugram finishes the app's mood check-in. A button offers to post it. She closes the app. How to increase wellbeing program participation is not a louder campaign. It is a different unit of share: a rep, a badge or a pattern. Viral employee wellbeing travels when the card is shareable wellness — a count of thank-yous delivered, a block of flow minutes, a streak of tiny wins — never a low-mood score or a journal extract.

In India the stall is structural. Only 14 per cent of organisations report high engagement in wellbeing programmes, even as more than 70 per cent raise the budget. LinkedIn already holds 150 million Indian members. Next morning the same manager thanks the colleague who covered her client demo, then posts her count of thank-yous delivered this month. Happiness clusters to three degrees of separation; a nearby friend becoming happy raises the chance that you are happy by 25 per cent. Framingham found no such spread between co-workers. The office is not the network. The share card is. Score every card. Ship at 10/15 or above. Hide anything under 8/15. Keep the crisis lane off the card.

02

The problem in India

Indian employers have bought the category. They have not bought the spread. People Matters and Truworth Wellness, surveying more than 300 organisations for The Great Wellbeing Shift: India's Corporate Health Study 2026, report that 83 per cent now run structured or fully integrated wellbeing frameworks and more than 70 per cent have increased the budget. Only 14 per cent achieve high employee engagement. Fewer than 20 per cent report high participation in behaviour-intensive programmes. Around 35 per cent run dashboards that look past attendance. Only 11 per cent use analytics to anticipate risk.

The same study, as restated in contemporaneous trade coverage, finds 83 per cent of companies offering counselling or employee-assistance programmes, 81 per cent offering annual health checks, and 66 per cent offering a digital wellbeing platform. Access is not the bottleneck. Share is.

FITPASS and ETHRWorld, in the State of Fitness and Wellness in Corporate India 2023–24, asked 3,000 employees and CHROs. Seventy-six per cent felt disconnected from current wellness programmes. Twenty-nine per cent stayed out because the offer was not customised. Forty-four per cent of organisations still leaned on reactive cover such as medical insurance alone.

The professional network is already there. DataReportal's Digital 2025: India report, drawing on LinkedIn advertising resources, counted 150 million LinkedIn members in India in early 2025 — 10.3 per cent of the population, 14.6 per cent of adults aged 18 and over, and 18.6 per cent of internet users. The audience grew by 30 million, or 25 per cent, between the start of 2024 and the start of 2025. In September 2025, LinkedIn's India country manager told PTI the base had passed 16 crore. Those are two dated snapshots, not one blended figure. Either way, the professional feed is the largest free distribution channel a CHRO will ever own.

Stigma still decides what can appear on that feed. Naukri Pulse 2025, a survey of 19,650 jobseekers across 80 industries, found that only 28 per cent of Indian professionals were comfortable naming mental-health leave as what it is. Forty-five per cent marked it as ordinary sick leave. Thirty-one per cent feared being seen as incapable. Brohan and colleagues, reviewing 48 studies of workplace disclosure, found expected discrimination is why people keep struggle private. Seventy-two per cent hesitate to name the leave. They will not post a low-mood card.

How to increase wellbeing program participation: score the share object

LinkedIn is the professional share surface that matters here. A WhatsApp status expires. An intranet post stays inside the firewall. A LinkedIn post is a badge in the hiring market. That is why factor C is scored against a careful professional’s flinch, not against a private chat. If the card cannot live there, the programme will not travel. The table below sets Indian corporate wellbeing against what public consumer-habit apps already know about retention, and against what network science says about spread. The gap is not budget. It is the object of share.

Signal	India corporate wellbeing	Public comparator
High engagement / retention	14% of organisations report high engagement; <20% report high participation in behaviour-intensive programmes	Median 30-day retention across 93 mental-health apps: 3.3%. Median daily open rate: 4.0%
Budget versus behaviour	>70% of organisations raised wellbeing budgets; 83% run structured frameworks	Installs look large; use does not follow. Median 15-day retention: 3.9%
Digital offer	66% offer a digital wellbeing platform; 83% offer counselling or EAP	93 apps in the Baumel panel; median ~100,000 installs
Professional network	150 million LinkedIn members in India, early 2025; +25% year on year	Chosen ties, not desk neighbours, carry visible badges
Felt disconnection	76% of employees feel disconnected from current programmes	Of WHPP studies that report rates, 20 of 37 average under 50% participation
Social spread available	LinkedIn is the built-in audience; opt-in cards can use it	Happiness clusters to three degrees; nearby friend +25%. No co-worker effect in Framingham

Sources for the table appear in full under References. No proprietary EmotionApp usage data is cited.

Globally the same pattern holds. Bensa and Širok’s 2023 scoping review of workplace health-promotion programmes found participation rates reported in only 37 of 58 papers. Twenty of those 37 averaged under 50 per cent. The category is well funded and poorly shared.

03

Why current approaches fail

Wellness apps expose struggle, so nobody shares

Three design habits keep programmes private. Each looks caring. Each asks the employee to publish a wound.

The default object of a wellbeing app is a state: a mood score, a stress slider, a journal line written at 11 p.m. That object is useful in a private room. It is poison on a professional feed. Brohan’s review is unambiguous. People expect disclosure of a mental-health problem to cost them hiring, credibility and quiet respect. Naukri’s 28 per cent figure is the Indian translation. Seventy-two per cent will not even name a day off correctly. They will not post a low-mood card.

Pennebaker's expressive-writing work (1997) is often dragged into workplace programmes as proof that "writing it out" helps. Used privately, the method has a long research life. Used as a share prompt, it fails the rubric on four of five factors. The output is processing, not sunshine. There is no badge. The share is the wound. There is no audience that can receive it without cost. A private practice is not a growth loop.

Share prompts after low-mood check-ins

Product teams add a "share how you feel" button because they want reach. They attach it to the check-in because that is where the user already typed. The sequence is the error. The prompt fires when the output is least shareable. A built-in audience aimed at a low score is not community. It is exposure. Poddar and Chhajer's 2024 Indian qualitative study — fifteen interviews, themes only, not a prevalence claim — records the same calculation: fear of judgement, concealment, doubt that the organisation can hold what it has asked to hear.

Corrigan's work on coming-out as a strategic choice makes the same point in another vocabulary. Disclosure is costly and timed. A share prompt is not consent. Opt-in per card is the minimum. Auto-share after a low score is the failure mode this paper is written against.

Loss-based streak punishment

Streaks work. They also punish. Duolingo's Form 10-K for the year ended 31 December 2025 reported about 43 million daily active users with a seven-day streak or longer, and about 15 million with a 365-day streak or longer. An earlier official Duolingo engineering note found that learners who reach a seven-day streak are 2.4 times more likely to return the next day than learners with no streak. In 2024 the company reported that learners with at least one Friend Streak were 22 per cent more likely to complete the daily lesson.

That is the sunny version: a count that becomes a badge. The other version is Snapchat. In April 2024 the company wrote that users "sometimes felt pressure to respond to a Snap to maintain their Streak," and made lost streaks easier to restore. The mechanic had become a tax on the relationship. Johnson and colleagues' 2016 review of gamification for health and wellbeing — 19 empirical papers, 59 per cent positive, 41 per cent mixed, evidence stronger for health behaviours than for cognitive outcomes — is the caution. Points and streaks move behaviour when the output stays sunny. They backfire when the public artefact is a broken streak and a small humiliation.

A streak is a countable rep with a memory. Shared as a number, it is a badge. Shared as a loss, it is a wound with a date stamp.

The employer version of loss-punishment is the team channel that posts who dropped off the meditation leaderboard. The count was clean. The frame was not. Shame is not a distribution strategy.

04

The emotional-fitness model applied

PULL QUOTE

A nearby friend who becomes happy raises the chance that you are happy by 25 per cent. Framingham found no co-worker effect.

EmotionApp treats emotional fitness the way a gym treats strength. The unit is a countable rep. The output is sunny. The identity is a badge a person would wear at work. The share is zero-tinge. The audience is already in the product or on LinkedIn. The line on each technique card is the argument: counts, never confessions. The platform is WhatsApp-first, written for 23 Indian languages, with India-resident data, DPDP-compliant design, and an AI coach with a human hand-off, built under ISO 9001 and ISO 13485. None of that matters if the card still reads as a wound.

The Shareability Rubric (R·S·B·C·A) Score each factor 0–3. Sum them. That sum is the Virality Index, 0–15.

Factor	What a 3 looks like
R Countable Rep	A discrete act with a number: thank-yous delivered, flow minutes, tiny wins, firecracker responses. Not a feeling.
S Sunny Output	What leaves the session is progress, gratitude, mastery or contribution. Not distress, not a private inventory.
B Badge of Identity	The person can say “I am a Noticer / a Deliverer / someone who protects deep work” without flinching.
C Zero-Cringe Share	A CHRO would be content to see the card on a vice-president’s LinkedIn. No mood text. No journal line. No help-seeking.
A Built-In Audience	Someone already receives the act (the thanked colleague, the squad board) or a chosen professional network can.

Five scored examples These are teaching scores, not laboratory measurements. Section 4 uses five examples only. The worksheet in section 5 adds generic programme types.

Example	R	S	B	C	A	Index
The Thank-You Ambush	3	3	2	3	2	13 / 15
The Zone Dial	3	3	3	3	1	13 / 15
Match the Firecracker	3	3	2	3	1	12 / 15
Tiny Wins, Big Flywheel	3	2	3	2	1	11 / 15
Private expressive writing	1	0	0	0	1	2 / 15

The Thank-You Ambush — 13/15	Write one concrete thank-you and send it through your own share sheet. The count is thank-yous delivered. Felt gratitude fades. Delivered gratitude lands on both sides. The share surface is the count, or the sending of the note itself. It is professional. It is sunny. The recipient is a built-in audience of one. A LinkedIn card that says “3 thank-yous delivered this month” needs no confession.
The Zone Dial — 13/15	Pick one task. Tune difficulty until it is stretchy but doable. Remove interruptions. Clock the immersion. The counts are flow minutes and the time-of-day pattern. “Forty-seven flow minutes before stand-up” is a craft badge. Audience is the weak factor until a team board is added. The minutes are the share. The inner weather is not.
Match the Firecracker — 12/15	When someone shares good news, match the energy and ask two genuine follow-up questions before talking about yourself. The count is firecracker responses logged. How you meet good news predicts the bond more reliably than how you meet bad news. A weekly card that reads “matched 9 of 11” is zero-cringe. Audience stays at 1 until the other person is counted as a chosen recipient rather than a guaranteed network.
Tiny Wins, Big Flywheel — 11/15	Shrink the next step until it is almost embarrassing. Do it. Log it. Let the streak turn the flywheel. The counts are tiny wins and streak length. Identity is the builder. Audience stays low until a team opts in. Forgiveness belongs in the product. A public reset humiliation does not.
Private expressive writing — 2/15	A session can be ticked. That is the only countable mark. The output is processing. There is no badge a professional would wear. Sharing the text would expose a wound. There is no audience by design. Keep it. Do not put a share button on it. This is the contrast case, not a product to kill. It is a product to keep off every share surface.

Share-surface guardrails

Counts, streaks and archetypes only. The card may carry a number of reps, a streak length, or a chosen identity word — Noticer, Deliverer, Zone-keeper. It may not carry a mood score, a check-in sentence, a journal extract, or a reason the person felt they needed the rep.

Opt-in per card.

Consent is not a one-time privacy policy. Each card asks. Default is off. Completing a rep does not publish it. The person chooses the card, the channel and the moment. The user's own share sheet is the pipe. Contact should feel safe and wanted. If the product cannot describe the share object in one number or one archetype, it is not a share object.

The crisis lane sits outside every share surface.

If someone is in distress, the product routes them to help. That route is never a post. Tele-MANAS on 14416 is the public Indian signpost. An EAP number may sit in the same lane. Neither belongs on a LinkedIn card. Mixing a helpline into a share prompt trains the organisation to treat struggle as content.

Christakis and Fowler showed that affect travels through chosen ties, out to three degrees. They also showed it did not travel between co-workers in Framingham. Design for the chosen audience. Do not assume the open-plan floor will do the work.

05

Score your own programme

Print the rubric. Score every live card. These ten worked examples mix EmotionApp techniques with generic programme types so the tool teaches. Scores are illustrative. Ship at 10/15 or above. Hide or reroute anything under 8/15. Never put the crisis lane on a share card.

Card	R	S	B	C	A	Index	Share surface
Thank-You Ambush	3	3	2	3	2	13	3 thank-yous delivered
Zone Dial	3	3	3	3	1	13	47 flow minutes
Match the Firecracker	3	3	2	3	1	12	Matched 9 of 11
Tiny Wins streak	3	2	3	2	1	11	12-day tiny-win streak
Team flow-minutes board	3	3	3	3	3	15	Squad flow minutes this week
Gratitude-count board (no note text)	3	3	2	3	3	14	Team thank-yous delivered
Step-count / walk club	3	2	2	3	3	13	Walk-days this week
Badge-of-the-month (archetype)	2	3	3	3	2	13	This month I am a Noticer
Private expressive writing	1	0	0	0	1	2	None. Correct.
Mood check-in + auto-share	1	0	0	0	1	2	A low score on LinkedIn. Kill it.

Read the last two rows as a pair. Private writing scores 2 because it is useful and unshareable. The mood check-in with auto-share scores 2 because it has a thin audience aimed at a wound. An audience does not rescue a bad object. It amplifies it.

A related foil sits just off the sheet. “I had a hard week,” posted after a low-mood check-in, scores 0 on R, S, B and C. It has an audience. That is the only reason it moves. It moves in the wrong direction. An EAP poster and QR code is necessary as a crisis lane and useless as a spread mechanic. Keep it. Keep it off the share surface.

06

Measurement

The employer dashboard holds no clinical data. It holds the four things a programme that wants to spread can defend in a board paper: reps, streaks, vocabulary breadth, and participation. What the person wrote, felt, or named in private never crosses the line.

What the employer sees	What the employer never sees
Rep counts by technique and by team, aggregated	The text of a thank-you, a journal line, or a check-in
Streak length distributions (not named shaming lists)	Who broke a streak, and why
Emotional-vocabulary breadth: how many distinct feeling-words the cohort can use, as a count	The words themselves, attached to a person
Participation: opted-in users, reps per user per week, voluntary shares	Mood scores, distress flags, help-seeking events
Virality Index of each live card, reviewed quarterly	Any field that would identify a struggling individual

Vocabulary breadth is the quiet metric. A team that can name twelve distinct useful states is fitter than a team that can only say “fine” and “stressed.” The dashboard shows the size of the lexicon. It does not show the sentence. That is the difference between measurement and surveillance.

Participation is a rate, not a mood. Count opted-in users. Count reps per user per week. Count voluntary shares as a share of reps, not as a target to maximise. A rising share-rate on a 13/15 card is health. A rising share-rate on a 3/15 card is a leak.

India-resident data and DPDP compliance are the floor, not the story. The story is that the employer can see the gym without reading the locker.

07

Implementation

Ninety days is long enough to score, strip, pilot and read a non-clinical dashboard. It is short enough that nobody can hide behind a “culture change” slide carried, unchanged, from one quarterly review to the next. Owners are roles, not vendors.

Week	Owner	Action	Metric
1–2	CHRO + internal comms	Score every live card on R·S·B·C·A. Hide or kill anything under 8/15.	Baseline Virality Index
3–4	Product / vendor	Strip share surfaces of mood text and low-mood prompts. Keep counts, streaks, archetypes. Route distress off the share surface.	Share-surface audit: 0 wound fields
5–6	Comms + one function lead	Pilot two high-score cards (Thank-You Ambush, Zone Dial). Opt-in only.	% opted in; reps completed; voluntary shares
7–8	People managers	Built-in audience: weekly huddle reads counts only, never stories.	Team participation rate
9–10	Internal comms	Issue LinkedIn-ready cards (rep / badge / pattern). No struggle copy.	Organic posts and impressions
11–12	CHRO	Read the non-clinical dashboard. Decide scale or stop.	30-day participation vs week-1
13	CHRO + comms	After-action. Raise or retire cards. Publish the Index change.	Virality Index delta

Week 7–8 is where most programmes cheat. At the Monday huddle a manager asks for “a quick story.” Decline. The huddle is a count. Once a story is required, the card drops below 8/15. The quiet analyst at the end of the table stops logging her reps.

08

One-page checklist the reader can run this week

- 01** List every live wellness card, prompt and poster. If you cannot list them, you cannot score them.
- 02** Score each on R·S·B·C·A. Write the five digits, then the sum.
- 03** Circle every card under 8/15. Hide the share button this week. Do not wait for the vendor roadmap.
- 04** Circle every card that fires a share prompt after a low-mood check-in. Delete the prompt. Keep the private check-in if you must.
- 05** Circle every public streak that announces a break. Move breaks to a private view. Share the count, not the fall.
- 06** Name the crisis lane. Tele-MANAS 14416. Your EAP number. Confirm it appears nowhere on a share card.
- 07** Pick two cards at 10/15 or above. Run them opt-in for two weeks in one function.
- 08** Brief managers: huddles read counts, streaks and archetypes only. No “how did that feel.”
- 09** Stand up a dashboard with four tiles: reps, streaks, vocabulary breadth, participation. No clinical fields.
- 10** Write the LinkedIn card before you write the campaign. If you would not post it under your own name, the programme will not spread.

09

FAQ

Q1 Why won't people post our wellness programme on LinkedIn?

Because the object of share is a wound. Only 28 per cent of Indian professionals will even name mental-health leave correctly. A low-mood card asks them to do more than that, in public. Change the object. Share a rep, a badge or a pattern.

Q2 We already have an app and an EAP. Why is participation still low?

Access is not spread. Only 14 per cent of Indian organisations report high engagement, even as more than 70 per cent raise the budget. Median 30-day retention across 93 mental-health apps is 3.3 per cent. Score the cards. The stall is usually a 2/15 share surface.

Q3 Isn't a streak just gamification, and doesn't gamification work?

Sometimes. Johnson's 2016 review found positive effects in 59 per cent of 19 papers, mixed in 41 per cent, stronger for health behaviours than for cognition. Duolingo's 43 million seven-day streaks are the sunny version. Snapchat's pressure-to-reply is the loss version. Share the count. Do not publish the break.

Q4 Will sharing positivity at work actually spread anything?

Through chosen ties, yes. A nearby friend becoming happy raised the chance you were happy by 25 per cent, out to three degrees. Framingham found no co-worker effect. Design for LinkedIn and opt-in team boards — 150 million Indian members already sit on the professional network — not for the open-plan floor.

Q5 What does the company get to see without crossing a line?

Four tiles: rep counts, streak distributions, vocabulary-breadth as a number, participation. That is the whole dashboard. Mood text, journal lines and help-seeking stay off it. If a field would identify a struggling person, it does not belong. Keep the crisis lane at 14416, off every card.

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Pennebaker (1997) is cited for the expressive-writing research tradition only. The journal title contains a word this paper otherwise avoids. The method is named here as expressive writing.

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SAFETY NOTE

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