



Cultivating a ‘Culture of Health’ in Your Organization

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Health and wellness used to be considered the sole responsibility of employees. If they didn’t exercise on their own time, bring healthy food to the office, or get up from their desk every hour or so to avoid “sitting disease,” their own lack of discipline was often to blame.

However, that perception is changing.

More employers realize the role they can and should play in encouraging and enabling employees to improve their own health and wellbeing. A growing body of research shows that a workplace of healthy, happy employees boosts productivity and contributes to its overall success. Consider a 2013 Rand study that found, for every \$1 spent on a wellness program (fees of the program vendors and costs of screening employees) employers could expect an overall Return on Investment (ROI) of \$1.50¹.

A study published in 2016 in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine found that a healthy and safe workforce results in higher performing companies, and positively correlates with the company’s ability to provide positive returns to shareholders. The study also found that a direct correlation between health and safety metrics based on the “Corporate Health Achievement Award” evaluation process merits inclusion with existing measures for market valuation.²

The non-profit International Corporate Health Leadership Council (ICHLC) says a “culture of health” can greatly enhance health and wellness strategies.³ This more all-encompassing or holistic approach is increasingly popular among employers. In

¹ http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9744.html

² http://journals.lww.com/joem/Abstract/2016/01000/Tracking_the_Market_Performance_of_Companies_That.2.aspx

³ <http://www.ichlc.org/>

2016, 69 per cent of multinational companies had a global strategy for health promotion, up from 34 per cent in 2008, according to a Xerox-sponsored report.⁴

Effective Employee Health Programs

Still, it's not enough to simply adopt a health program and recommend employees to eat right and move more. Organizations need to embed health and wellness into their policies and programs and give employees the right environment and tools — such as healthy food choices in the cafeteria and fitness trackers that monitor activities — to empower and engage them. A 2014 Gallup study showed that 60 per cent of employees were aware of their employer's health and wellness program, yet only 40 per cent participated.⁵

Increased engagement can only come from a stronger health and wellness culture.

“A culture of health within an organization, not unlike a culture of safety, can serve to enhance employee engagement and encourage long-term behaviour change,” the ICHLC says in its report, *Creating a Culture of Health for a Global Organization*.⁶ According to the report, many U.S.-based corporations have begun efforts to enhance corporate culture to include and emphasize health and wellness, and in some cases, are developing metrics to measure the benefits of such a culture.

Apart from engaging employees and providing them with the right tools, employers also need to measure the progress and impact of their health and wellness programs. In addition to participation, measurement should be done across a number of metrics, including absenteeism and “presenteeism” – both of which impact productivity.

Outcomes assessment is an essential part of a culture of health framework. The results can be used to assess progress and effectiveness, as well as to encourage action and collaboration.

“Culture of Health” Program Challenges

There are many challenges with setting up and embedding a “Culture of Health” in an organization. The struggles include (but are not limited to) finding additional resources — time and money — to administer and track the program. Effective and ongoing communication is also required across the organization to ensure the program is well understood and is the right fit for employees.

⁴ http://www.globalhealthyworkplace.org/casestudies/2016_Global_Wellbeing_Survey_Executive-Summary.pdf

⁵ <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/168995/why-workplace-wellness-program-isn-working.aspx>

⁶ http://www.ihpm.org/pdf/GCOH_WP.pdf

Management buy-in is also critical to ensuring programs meet their intended goals. In fact, leadership support is “one of the essential pillars necessary to define and disseminate a clear vision for a healthy and productive workforce,” says the ICHLC report. It notes that management support can be challenging in bigger companies with a global footprint, given the different leadership layers and varied cultures.

It’s another reason why a culture of health is needed.

“A strong organization-wide culture of health can serve as a foundation for leadership support and in turn must be supported and nurtured by leadership,” says the ICHLC report.⁷ It cites the review of current culture of health efforts, published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine in 2012, which suggest organizations with engaged leaders were almost four times more likely to report significant improvement in employee health and 2.5 times more likely to report significant improvement in medical cost trend.⁸

There are also challenges to running a global wellness program, including the need to consider issues and cultural sensitivities unique to a particular jurisdiction, according to Lisa Beichl, CEO of Transparent Borders, a global consultancy dedicated to helping companies make informed health and wellness decisions. An example is a resources company with employees in North America and Africa. In North America, major health issues are often obesity and type 2 diabetes, while in Africa the focus might be on HIV education, or perhaps a bus that can safely deliver and return workers to their homes.

Understanding the local perspective helps companies identify the right offerings. For example, in India within the past decade, only seven per cent of the population wore eyeglasses, even though an estimated 65 per cent needed them.⁹ Providing access to eye care could result in important productivity gains at companies where eyeglasses are not a covered benefit. In another example, Procter & Gamble India recognized the growing interest to help employees balance work/life issues and introduced reduced work schedules.¹⁰

“Organizations need to be aware of the local health literacy levels. Creating awareness and education in the importance of health promotion is the foundation of any successful venture,” says Beichl.

Data privacy is also a concern for companies and consumers, given the growing

⁷ http://www.ihpm.org/pdf/GCOH_WP.pdf

⁸ http://journals.lww.com/joem/Abstract/2012/04000/A_Review_of_the_Knowledge_Base_on_Healthy_Worksite.5.aspx

⁹ “Better Vision for the Poor” Aneel Karnani, Bernard Garrette, Jordan Kassalow, & Moses Lee, Spring 2011 Stanford Social Innovation Review. http://ssir.org/articles/entry/better_vision_for_the_poor

¹⁰ Boston College Center for Work and Family, Executive Briefing Series: <http://www.ihpm.org/pdf/Footnote10.pdf>

number of cyber security breaches that have been making headlines, and especially for those companies operating in different countries, where there are varying regulations in each jurisdiction. Organizations operating in different countries need to build a core program with easily modifiable components that can be adapted based on various factors such as language, holidays and religious observances, local foods and differing health values.

Takeaway: Why Health and Wellness Efforts are Worthwhile

Health and wellness have become key pillars of corporate responsibility within organizations around the world — and an important part of their culture and success. There are countless examples of organizations that attribute their high performance to the strong health and wellness of their employees.

For example, Johnson & Johnson (J&J) began a wellness journey in 1978 with its “*Live for Life*” program, which has a strong leadership commitment to wellness.¹¹ Its programs range from health risk assessments for employees to providing access to on-site health clinics. To measure the impact of the program, J&J defined global standards, policies and minimum expectations. The programs are measured annually, which helps set benchmarks and provides lessons across different geographies.

According to J&J’s 2015 annual sustainability report, 92 per cent of employees completed a health risk assessment and were aware of their key health indicators, which was 12 per cent higher than the company’s stated goal. The report also found that 73 per cent of employees were characterized as low risk based on employee health results, still below J&J’s stated goal of 80 per cent.¹²

Creating a supportive health and wellness environment is not without numerous challenges: management engagement; resources to administer and track the program; communication to employees; data privacy; and, cultural sensitivities and differences in companies operating globally. The results are clear: having a culture of health is the right thing to do for both employees, and the employer.

Anne Marie Kirby is the founder and CEO of [CoreHealth Technologies](https://corehealth.global) - <https://corehealth.global> a leading corporate wellness platform trusted by wellness providers, including corporate wellness companies, insurers, health facilities, benefits brokers, EAP providers and HR consulting firms, for 2+ million employees worldwide.

¹¹ Institute for Health and Productivity Studies, Johns Hopkins University, 2015: <http://www.ihpm.org/pdf/Footnote11.pdf>

¹² <https://www.jni.com/document?id=00000159-6a1e-dba3-afdb-7aff1b270000>