

Workplace wellness has gained momentum in the last 20 years, in large part due to rising health care costs. Studies, however, continue to show mixed results and workplace experiences. In your opinion:

How do we effectively measure the success of workplace wellness programs and initiatives?

Answer Relies on Responses to Additional Questions



By Sharon Sporman

How do we effectively measure success of worksite wellness programs and initiatives? My perspective on this leads me to more questions:

Based upon the goals and objectives of the company, what does management want to measure or how is success defined?

Is it “hard numbers” based upon a specified return on investment? Is it a reduction in health care claims?

Is it “soft numbers” such as increased productivity or decreased absenteeism/presenteeism or employee satisfaction?

Or a combination thereof?

Starting from the 10,000-foot view, I believe it must be a collective measurement depending upon the goals, mission, values and business strategies of the organization – understanding that ALL are interrelated and interdependent upon each other.

Like the proverbial question(s): Which comes first, the chicken or the egg? Are you stressed because you are sick or are you sick because you are stressed?

If we believe in this collective measurement theory, then I would suggest that we qualify and quantify the following two items:

1. Culture – including leadership/communication/design/business strategies
2. Accountability

Culture

Designing “successful” programs needs to suit the culture and situation of the employer – linking initiatives to the organization’s business strategies and values. Realize that a “one size fits all” (if it works for a said large corporation then it must be good for us) is not effective. Doing your due diligence and looking at best practices is suggested, but then tailoring your program based on your company objectives is the optimal approach.

How do you measure the effectiveness of your culture?

Poll your employees: Do they know your business strategies? Do they know what their role is in achieving the bigger picture? Do you measure employee satisfaction? Does the company provide an environment that is safe, with senior leadership support (realizing that “people don’t work for companies ... they work for people”)?

Do you celebrate victories? Are your employees sharing in the success of other employees? Does the workplace provide opportunities for employees to be healthy with healthy options (nutrition selections, smoke-free worksite and encouragement to move frequently and to engage in full-fledged laughter)?

Are you able to recruit effectively? Do your employees understand the value of doing the right thing every time and how that relates to profit margin/

customer satisfaction?

The culture and communication of the business strategies and values are the foundation of the wellness initiatives. If we don’t “set the stage” for success, we can offer the most dynamic programs and initiatives but, without engagement, they are doomed. Strategic drivers include:

- Effective leaders, a wellness committee and a health plan that aligns with goals of the business.
- Know that the senior leadership is the mirror of the culture. So when analyzing effectiveness, if the culture isn’t what it needs to be (based upon measurements above), then begin by looking in the mirror.

Accountability

If we measure so we can manage, then we must engage accountability; otherwise, credibility and results will fail.

The next steps in collective measurement include quantifiable hard and soft measures that identify opportunities for cost savings and provision of programs that will provide a return on investment. These would include:

- Health care claims – determining the disease conditions that are the greatest source of your company expense and developing a coordinated care plan to “manage” those costs. As mentioned earlier, an environment must be established that provides easy-to-use support resources for behavior change. These opportunities would be provided for employees and family members whose claims also may be the source of escalated expense. Follow up by providing services with a focus on nutrition, fitness, smoking cessation, managing medications, stress reduction, etc. Again, this would be determined and prioritized based upon needs of the employee population and health claims.
- Employee biometrics (blood pressure, cholesterol, BMI, glucose, nicotine usage, etc.). In order to “prevent” continued escalated health care claims as the employee population ages, collecting these measures and then developing a plan to help employees accept personal responsibility for their lifestyle behavior seems to be a reasonable attempt to “manage” risk factors.
- Absenteeism, presenteeism, employee job satisfaction (as mentioned previously) and employee turnover – these factors add expense in varying degrees to the cost of doing business. Measure them. If they are not within the benchmarks of your industry, look at your wellness initiatives correlated to the needs of your employee population.

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If a company decides to measure these factors, then the employees should be held to a higher degree of personal responsibility. This is after educating and making employees aware, developing a healthful culture and providing employees with resources such as intrinsic health coaching (and other wellness initiatives) that guide them to action plans geared toward healthier lifestyles.

These are organizations, in this day of evidence-based outcomes, that will benefit from wellness initiatives, allowing them to thrive, grow, and maintain credibility and respect for the company mission and leaders.

An individual's wellness is a collective measure of healthfulness – physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and more. ONE BEING-ONE WHOLE.

This is reflective of a company's measure of wellness of culture, accountability and more. ONE COMPANY-ONE WHOLE.

As we age, grow or reinvent ourselves (individuals and organizations), we must remain in a constant state of measurement. Needs and goals may and will change – so should wellness initiatives.