Creating a Culture of Health and Engagement Through Organizational Support

A healthy culture is intentionally designed with elements and indicators that support health and well-being. Creating a culture of health and engagement is an important initiative for many organizations in 2015. In fact, many 2014 industry surveys on health care strategy revealed that developing a workplace culture of health is a top priority for employers this year.

To achieve this goal, plan sponsors need to learn from other disciplines such as organizational development, positive psychology and behavioral economics to evaluate their culture, systems and drivers of organizational behavior related to health. These organizational dynamics not only impact employee engagement, but also are believed to impact employees’ engagement in their health and the programs developed to support their health and well-being.

Healthy Workforce Culture

Recently, the Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) convened more than 40 practitioners to define the attributes of a healthy workplace culture. This group identified 24 elements, shown in Table I, that help create a culture of health within an organization.

As illustrated by the breadth of these elements, a healthy workforce culture is defined by many intangible characteristics. It has been suggested that a culture of health reflects “prevailing values and expectations of employees in order to effectively influence the way they think, feel and behave related toward personal and group health.”

Creating a culture of health involves recognizing the influence of workplace norms, values, beliefs and traditions on each individual’s choice to engage in his or her own health. In addition, it is critical to recognize how the workplace climate, environment and resources can provide the opportunity to engage in healthy behavior. Finally, workplace policies and procedures, employee involvement, rewards and recognition, training and development influence health behaviors and beliefs. This underscores the complexity and systemic nature of creating a culture of health.
The Health Enhancement Research Organization and Population Health Alliance have collaborated on a guide to help employers measure support for health and well-being.
Organizational Support

Considering its broad nature, creating a healthy workforce culture becomes more challenging for employers as they try to demonstrate the effectiveness of their initiatives. HERO and the Population Health Alliance (PHA) formed a joint committee to identify measures to help companies assess organizational support for health and well-being. The committee defined steps an organization can take and identified ways to measure the effectiveness of their efforts. These are outlined in the recently published *Program Measurement & Evaluation Guide: Core Metrics for Employee Health Management.*

From the guide, employers can learn the steps to make “the healthy choice the easy and desired choice” within the workplace. These steps incorporate management policies and practices that involve, empower and engage employees in decisions about their work, health, safety and the business. Such an environment makes it easy and expected for employees to engage in healthy and safe behaviors.

These eight elements define the necessary support a company must provide to be most successful:

1. Company-stated health values
2. Health-related policies
3. Supportive environment (the physical or “built” workplace environment)
4. Organizational structure
5. Leadership support
6. Resources and strategies (adequate employee health management (EHM) services, budget, communication, etc.)
7. Employee involvement (employees have an opportunity for input and evaluation)
8. Rewards and recognition.

In addition, employee needs and values should guide how an organization chooses to initiate or provide this support. In other words, organizations need to

- Assess what resources and support elements employees need and desire to help them prioritize their health and well-being at the workplace.
- Identify what managers and leaders require to effectively support their employees in the area of health and well-being.
- Identify training and development needs to educate managers and leaders on better supporting their subordinates in this important area.

In sum, the first step in providing strong organizational support is conducting a needs assessment. Whether this information is collected through surveys, focus groups, town...
As noted, an organization needs to measure the effectiveness of each effort and determine whether the support employees received is making a difference in their ability to manage their health and well-being. It is also important to confirm that managers and leaders believe they have access to the resources they need to support others within the organization.

These measurement recommendations stem from what is known as perceived organizational support (POS). The organizational support theory suggests employees have a global belief about how their employer values their contributions and cares for their well-being. During the last 30 years, research has demonstrated that a positive relationship exists between POS and employee satisfaction, engagement, motivation and performance. More specifically, POS and health support have been shown to positively impact safety behavior. Considering this evidence, it is believed that high levels of POS for health and well-being would positively impact health behavior and encourage individual health engagement. Measuring employee, manager and leader POS provides insight into the degree to which employee well-being is encouraged and supported.

It is recommended that employers measure both their level of organizational support and the degree to which their employees, managers and leaders perceive both that health is a priority for the business and that they are supported by their employer organization. To accomplish this, these measures would include the assessment of:

1. The organizational support elements the employer has

### TABLE II

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
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<td>Best practice design and self-reported outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDC Worksite Health Scorecard*</td>
<td>Evidence-based interventions assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental Assessment Tool</td>
<td>Physical and social environment assessment for obesity prevention</td>
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<td>Well Workplace Checklist</td>
<td>Results-oriented benchmarking tool</td>
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<td>Dimensions of Corporate Well-Being Survey</td>
<td>Assessment of program and policy dimensions</td>
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<td>HealthLead</td>
<td>Organizational engagement, well-being, outcomes</td>
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<td>Checklist of Health Promotion Environments at Worksites (CHEW)</td>
<td>best practice assessment</td>
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<td>Worksite Wellness StrengthsBuilder</td>
<td>Environmental features associated with physical activity, healthy eating, alcohol use and smoking</td>
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<td>HECheck</td>
<td>Opportunity-based assessment and action plan</td>
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<td>*Public domain tools.</td>
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### TABLE III

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<td>Lifeguard Health Culture Audit (LHCA)</td>
<td>Cultural support for avoiding health risk behaviors</td>
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<td>Worksite health climate scales</td>
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<td>Perception of environmental and cultural support for health survey</td>
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<td>Centers for Disease Control National Healthy Worksite Program Health and Safety Climate Survey*</td>
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<td>Leading by Example (LBE) instrument*</td>
<td>Manager perception of leader support for healthy work culture and health programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived Organizational Support Survey</td>
<td>Employee perception of organizational support</td>
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taken to create an environment that supports health and well-being
2. Employee-perceived level of organizational support for health and well-being
3. Leader-perceived level of organizational support for health and well-being and the perceived level of POS to support others in their health and well-being.

Based on this guidance, employers are encouraged to identify tangible ways to support the health and well-being of employees and their family members. These may include including health goals into annual or company goals, leaders modeling healthy behaviors at work, policies that reflect health as a priority and recognition for employees, managers and leaders for prioritizing health. In addition, employers are prompted to use key measures to evaluate their investments and ensure their efforts are fruitful. Although the workplace culture is defined by intangible characteristics, there are concrete, tangible ways to measure perceptions and glean valuable insights on program effectiveness.

**Practical Resources and Assessment Tools**

As noted, creating a culture of health requires a concerted effort, and there are practical resources that can help. Specifically, assessment tools that educate on and assess the use of employee health management best practices, as well as POS for health and well-being, can help an organization establish a baseline for a healthy workplace culture and employee perceptions. Assessing the current state is the first step in this strategic effort.

Table II outlines tools available to allow an organization to assess best practices including organizational support elements. Two of these assessment tools are public domain and may be used free of charge.

Multiple tools also are available to help employers assess the perceived cultural and organizational support of health and well-being. These assessments include employee perception as a key measure, and some differentiate between employee, manager and leader perceptions. Like the best practice assessment tools, public domain options are available and described in Table III.

**Current Industry Initiatives**

Great strides over the past few years have helped to better define a culture of health, understand the elements of a healthy workplace culture and use them to create programs and identify measures to assess program effectiveness. Despite these accomplishments, practitioners have just begun to better understand the connection between organizational dynamics and individual health, well-being and performance, and more efforts are underway.

The HERO Culture of Health Committee is managing a comprehensive effort to catalogue and review hundreds of research studies that have either implemented or evaluated a culture-of-health element within the workplace and have demonstrated a health or safety outcome. The goal is to provide a landscape view of efforts to date. For more information on this initiative, visit www.hero-health.org.

Another significant effort is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Culture of Health Measurement Initiative. This effort is focused on fulfilling the foundation’s mission to create a culture of health within our nation. To assess employers’ commitment to creating healthy communities, RWJF plans to include criteria from the Program Measurement & Evaluation Guide: Core Metrics for Employee Health Management for the purpose of establishing national metrics.

**Conclusion**

Developing a healthy workplace culture is essential in order to optimally support individuals in their personal health management. Identifying strategies that positively influence employee decisions about their health, work, safety and the business, while enhancing organizational culture, systems and drivers of health behavior, is an area of great interest and promise.

**Endnotes**

3. HERO Culture of Health work group.