

Wellness in Occupational Health and Safety Program

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Introduction

The cost of healthcare has been increasing over the years and new approaches are needed to take action. In 2007, a study by Loeppke, Taitel, Richling, et al. estimates that for every dollar spent by employers on sick or injured employees results in \$2.30 in indirect costs such as absenteeism and loss of productivity (Loeppke, Taitel, Richling, et al. 2007). To reduce the cost of healthcare spending, wellness programs can be introduced in organizations to give positive results. For example, there are meta-analysis results showing improved risk factors of injury and chronic disease provided by Occupational Safety and Health and wellness promotion (An-ger, et al., 2015). However, not all companies that apply wellness programs succeed in improving employees' health. Underwriters Laboratories Inc. and ASSE found eight necessary items, such as commitment to health by upper management, to develop successful results using wellness interventions. It is also important to note that when organizations support employee's health and safety, it creates a win-win situation for the employees and employers. Employees can improve their health and employers spend less overall by putting their employees' health first. The integration of wellness programs and Occupational Health and Safety Programs demonstrates positive results overall, through the use of key techniques, and benefits both the employer and the employees (Kapp E.A. and Han A.A.).

Research and positive result

A review of literature on the topic of wellness in occupational health and safety programs provides outcomes regarding improved risk factors and positive reception of wellness programs. A study by Fabius, R., Thayer, R.D., Konicki, D.L., et al. supports improved health with evidence of lowered health risk factors of injury and chronic disease after the implementation of wellness programs in the workplace (2013). Some common health risk factors include high

cholesterol, obesity, insufficient exercise, and smoking (United Health Foundation, 2014). These conditions can be improved by utilizing wellness programs. Wellness programs use techniques for behavioral change such as making lifestyle changes. Some examples goals for health and wellness programs might include attaining a healthy weight, meeting guidelines for physical activity, and eliminating tobacco use.

In addition to the improvement of risk factors, employees' perspectives of wellness program integration into the workplace is also positive. Employee experience with the integration of safety and health were measured with surveys conducted by Underwriters Laboratories Inc. and ASSE. Participants answered questions on their agreeability to specific statements such as, "My Company Has an Integrated Health & Safety Program," and "Top Management Commitment to Integrated Safety & Healthy in Successful vs. Unsuccessful Programs." Overall, those that agreed or strongly agreed were greater than those that disagreed.

Strategies

Studies by Underwriters Laboratories Inc. and ASSE indicated that there are eight key practices we can follow to develop effective and integrated safety and health programs. The first strategy states that having upper-level management's commitment to integrated safety tends to result in successful programs. The second is about having a well-written policy; having integrated safety and health literacy in the business strategy, mission or vision is important. The third is supported by data showing that integrated safety and health works better in larger business plans. Creating a larger business strategy, mission or vision of integrated safety and health can be communicated to disseminate policies widely. The fourth strategy is to have a sufficient budget set specifically for integrated safety and health. The fifth strategy is to have one

or more people in the organization responsible for integrated safety and health. The last strategy is to collaborate with middle managers and frontline supervisors so that commitment to integrated safety and health is apparent throughout the company.

Benefit in Both Employee and Employer

There is a relationship between employees' health conditions and employers' productivity and profitability. Business owners that integrate safety and health are benefitting by investing in their employees' health. A study in 2016 examined the effectiveness of combining integrated workplace interventions and the promotion of occupational health and safety; it showed improvements in the employees' physical and mental health (Cooklin, Joss, Husser, et al. 2016). It was also shown by Dr. Pronk that cultures of health and wellbeing are connected to the performance of a company (2015). Pronk suggests that employers create "workforce fitness" policies and regulations that would improve employees' health, reduce spending on preventable health issues, and create a human-centric culture in the workplace. As an additional example of profit for wellness-integrating companies, a study in 2013 showed a 77% increase in the stocks of an S&P 500 investment company by integrating safety and health (Fabius, et al., 2013). This data aligns with the concept of mutually beneficial outcomes of prioritizing employee health.

Discussion and Programming Ideas

In the past, integrating safety and health with Occupational Health and Safety Programs have shown positive results. However, by observing data and study outcomes, it is apparent that many factors are needed to accomplish successful integration of Health and Safety programs. First, systems and policies that engage in Health and Safety, that are actively performed by all top management members, needs to be created. Having active top management members

could set examples and influence employees in healthy ways. Health mentality can be passed on, and as time goes by, we can create a healthy norm in the organization that extends to families and to the community. Examples of well-detailed worksite wellness programs can be written into policies. For example, the president, managers, and all employees are expected to participate in 5 minutes of morning exercise daily. Or perhaps, computers will automatically sleep for 5 minutes every hour to allow for mandatory breaks. Or, in the cafeteria, 90% of the foods are fresh.

The health plan needs to be large so that many people can participate. On-site fitness centers could be set up to provide group exercises such as yoga, nutrition classes, cooking classes, or create a walking competition that employees and their families can join. The budget for the program can be monitored and the most popular classes can be scheduled more frequently while less popular classes can be scheduled less. Itemized costs and operating in ways that keep spending within budget can keep wellness integration affordable for the company. It would also be necessary to have one or more Health and Safety managers in each division. The Health and Safety manager can take responsibility to organize and set up the programs as well as monitor the data around employee satisfaction and budget restrictions.

To have success in encouraging health and safety, frequent communication and promotion of programs with multiple communication methods are important. For example, I think that using Facebook is a fast and easy way to communicate with many people these days. Data from successful companies revealed that they were using multiple means of communication to motivate employees in the participation of health and safety programs. Examples of successful communication methods were bulletin boards, newsletters, email, and company websites. I also believe that visual data, such as graphs and charts, is an easy way for employees to notice their

progress in well-being and could encourage employees to participate in more healthy and safe activities. Finally, integrated health and safety policies need to reiterate that top management, middle management, and frontline supervisors must participate and be role models for employees. They are the leaders of the company and their decisions influence the organizations they are a part of. They are the ones that trigger health and safety changes to be the norm in the company.

Shown by the successful example of a S&P 500 investment company, businesses that invest in integrating health and safety improve employees' well-being and consequently their productivity. If employees are not healthy and have health issues, they are susceptible to poor performance at work. For example, a person that does cardio exercise can circulate more blood flow into their brain and bring more nutrients in, but some employees that smoke could weaken arteries and may constrict blood flow which may cause their brains to fog. When we have enough active nutrients in our body, we can function better than a person who has a blood clot. I think investing in employee health and safety would result in positive outcomes for companies and employees alike.

Conclusion

Integrating wellness program in Occupational Health and Safety can help to better employee health and productivity. Helping employees stay healthy can help companies grow. Worksite environments with safe and health in mind can influence employee well-being as well. Using successful key strategies in a practical and smooth way can assist with approaching wellness and health in a company. We can achieve this success by enforcing descriptive

programs in organization policies. Lastly, when we invest in employees' health and well-being, employers would reduce spending on healthcare costs and receive better revenues.

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