



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, IT AND MANAGEMENT

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Contributions to books

- Sharma T., Kwatra, G. (2008) Effectiveness of Social Advertising: A Study of Selected Campaigns, Corporate Social Responsibility, Edited by David Crowther & Nicholas Capaldi, Ashgate Research Companion to Corporate Social Responsibility, Chapter 15, pp 287-303.

Journal and other articles

- Schemenner, R.W., Huber, J.C. and Cook, R.L. (1987), "Geographic Differences and the Location of New Manufacturing Facilities," Journal of Urban Economics, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 83-104.

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- Chandel K.S. (2009): "Ethics in Commerce Education." Paper presented at the Annual International Conference for the All India Management Association, New Delhi, India, 19–22 June.

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- Kelkar V. (2009): Towards a New Natural Gas Policy, Economic and Political Weekly, Viewed on February 17, 2011 <http://epw.in/epw/user/viewabstract.jsp>

WORKPLACE WELLNESS LEADS TO EMPLOYEE POTENTIAL & HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT – A STUDY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

DR. HARINI J. METHUKU

LECTURER

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS & ACCOUNTING

MUSCAT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

SULTANATE OF OMAN

SIMI SIMON

LECTURER

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS & ACCOUNTING

MUSCAT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

SULTANATE OF OMAN

LINA FERNANDES

LECTURER

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS & ACCOUNTING

MUSCAT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

SULTANATE OF OMAN

ABSTRACT

This study reviews the key issues involved in the employee wellness in the industries in the Middle East cities. The study addresses the present work place stress and the problems faced by the employees because of the changes in the global business scenario. Further the write-up discusses the role of management in promoting wellness in the Corporates. The literature review highlights the wellness program as a support to healthier working practices. A wellness program was devised to provide a road map for implementing and sustaining an effective wellness program in the Middle East. The intent is that this tool will serve as a useful guide for a healthier state of well being for all employees. Further suggestions are put forward for the success of the wellness programs and its great influence on the creativity of employees at work.

KEYWORDS

wellness, healthier working environment, wellness program for corporates, employee potential, six dimensional model.

INTRODUCTION

Wellness defined by (Hatfield) as; “the conscious and deliberate process by which people are actively involved in enhancing their well-being: intellectual, physical, social, emotional, occupational and spiritual”. Wellness is considered to be the positive component of good health which reflects how one feels as well as one’s ability to function effectively. Health and Wellness can be described using 6 dimensions of wellness which relate to Physical fitness and nutrition, Emotional well-being, Intellectual well-being, Social, family, community and environment, Occupational aspects and Spiritual, values and ethics (Hettler). Wellness is therefore a state to be attained before disease starts or even risk factors set in. Wellness also can be promoted and inspired for at any stage of illness so that further progress of disease and deterioration of quality of life is prevented (Azman).

World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as more than freedom from illness, disease, and debilitating conditions (WHO, 1947). The suggestion by the World Health Organization that health has a positive component led to use of the term wellness. (Corbin & Pangrazi, 2001). Wellness is first and foremost a choice to assume responsibility for the quality of your life. It begins with a conscious decision to shape a healthy lifestyle. Wellness is a mind set, a predisposition to adopt a series of key principles in varied life areas that lead to high levels of well-being and life satisfaction. (Ardell, 2002). With a wellness lifestyle, a person is of right weight, fit, stress free and intelligent with a mind of his own, emotionally balanced, critical in thinking, open and alert to discoveries, and able to add meaning and purpose to life.

IMPORTANCE OF WELLNESS IN TRADING & SERVICE INDUSTRY

Wellness is the key for the future of the Middle East service industry and it is considered as an important health service goal that the Ministry of Health has laid down for designing and planning the health care for the countries. The health goals are Wellness focus, Person focus, Informed person, Self help, self care and self improvement, Care provided at home or close to home, Seamless, continuous care, Services tailored at individuals or groups, Effective, efficient and affordable services.

To achieve this vision, organizations should concentrate on its employee’s health & safety measure which is dedicated to build a smart partnership with individuals and their families to facilitate and support them in attaining their potential in workplace by motivating and appreciating the employees as a valuable asset. This leads to further improvement in sustaining their health status to enjoy a better quality of life.

THE ROLE OF THE MANAGEMENT IN PROMOTING WELLNESS

Various programmes and activities are being carried out both by the government and organizations management for implementing health facilities throughout the Middle East. The aim to create a successful wellness program is to assume that through hard work, passion and commitment, success will be achieved. But there is one key component that cannot be overlooked – that of leadership support. Without such support a program may be mediocre; with it the possibilities are endless. Since wellness encompasses many areas of health, a variety of health professionals can adequately fulfill the role. This person will need to be able to work well with others, advocate for change, and be creative in program development and implementation. Each organization is different, and what might work for one facility may not for another. It may be helpful to seek advice from someone with experience in this area. To arrange wellness program the management can consider “Six Components of wellness”.

Physical	Body, Endurance, Flexibility, Strength
Social	Family, Friends, Relationships
Occupational	Personal and Professional Development, Worthwhile Work
Intellectual	Mind, Creativity, Knowledge
Spiritual	Values, Purpose, Religion, Intuition
Emotional	Feelings, Self Esteem, Coping with Stress

Source: Hettler (1979)

Programming may include interventions from more than one component of wellness. A wellness program is not just about having the occasional lunchtime program. Wellness is about valuing the whole employee in all six dimensions. Worksite wellness focuses more specifically on how these six dimensions affect productivity and creativity at work.

Wellness is a multidimensional state of describing the existence of positive health in an individual as exemplified by quality of life and a sense of well-being. (Bouchard, Shephard, Stephens, Sutton, & McPherson, 1990).

Ardell (2002) discusses three domains of wellness including: mental, physical, and meaning & purpose. The physical domain has exercise and fitness, nutrition, appearance, adaptations/challenges, lifestyle habits. The mental domain includes emotional intelligence, effective decisions, stress management, factual knowledge and mental health. The meaning & purpose domain includes meaning and purpose, relationships, humor, and play. This study adopted a seven dimensional model created by Health Women's Healthy Living Goals (2006). The seven dimensions include physical, emotional, career, social, financial, spiritual, and personal & family. These domains are taken as the main variables for assessing wellness amongst the employees of the Middle East.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although several research studies were conducted about the role of Wellness this research highlights the importance of health and wellness in work place. Polakoff and O'Rourke (1990) suggested creating an integrated health database of the entire workforce to assist with designing health programs and policies. Different authors suggested not viewing investments in improving employee health as a cost but as potential savings. A wellness program is an activity undertaken by the company to reduce health care needs. Savings can occur due to reduction in costs of medical treatment and also reductions in lost time from work directly as the result of illness and injury. These programs educate and motivate employees and their families to adopt better health habits. Falconer (1993) recommended three factors to determine if health care should be obtained or not, these include past costs related to the item, potential impact of an item that may occur in the future, and changes in the covered group. Companies were urged to not adopt a wellness plan that was one-size-fits-all. According to Danna and Griffin (1999), well-being is viewed as comprising the various life/non-work satisfactions enjoyed by individuals including satisfaction with social life, family life, recreation, spirituality and co-worker compatibility and general health. Health in turn is seen as a sub-component of well-being and comprises the combination of mental, psychological and physical indicators.

Madsen (2003) stated that understanding individual change readiness characteristics can help organization development professionals to prescribe and implement more effective change interventions. Wellness programs continue to increase in the work place every year. Readiness is the first part of the natural cycle of change in a number of models. Goetzel (2006) looked at a wide range of factors, including healthcare costs, age of workforce, and smoking and other lifestyle factors. Goetzel then created an (Return on Investment) ROI calculator that allowed him to figure out the minimum improvement required to break even on an investment, as well as the projected ROI that a specific set of improvement assumptions would yield. Klerk (2005) explored work wellness from a spiritual framework by focusing on the contribution that a person's sense of meaning in life can play in improving work wellness and wellness in general. Bob Brady (2007) suggested that if the construct clarity in workplace spirituality was in place, spirituality can be approximated and operationalized through one of its major elements, which is "meaning in life." White (2005) suggested some methods to advocate health care like providing plenty of nutrition options in cafeteria, making workplace smoke free, having fitness centers, offering on-site health educators, screening for high blood pressure and cholesterol, and designing health care program that will reach out to immediate family.

O'Reilly (2006) also suggested that the most likely interventions to improve health were support for healthier working practices, investment in employee assistance programs, and health screening. Watson (2007) stated in a study involving Scottish local authority staff that the leading causes of death in the developed world were ischaemic heart disease, stroke, and cancer. These conditions were caused by poor diet, smoking, and alcohol use. Bob Brady (2007) stated that occupational health professionals can play an important role by offering lifestyle screening, which can identify people likely to benefit from provision of health-related information. Results of the Watson (2007) study suggest that the workforce is amenable to the assessment of lifestyle issues and the receipt of information and advice aimed at promoting health. The job growth of health educators is driven by the rising costs of healthcare, increased awareness of preventable diseases, the need for early detection of diseases, and an increasing recognition of the need for qualified health educators (Teixeira, 2007).

Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) aimed to make a clear distinction between wellness and cure, from the health policy angle. Hence, a line should be drawn between wellness, which includes comprehensive service packages consisting of physical fitness, beauty care, healthy nutrition, meditation, mental education, and illness prevention. While wellness guests can claim services which are very similar to those used by "normal cure guests," wellness guests ask for those services with the motive of preserving or promoting their health, which contrasts with the cure guests' (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001).

NEED OF THE STUDY

Research studies on employee wellness and importance in the global Trading & Service industry against the backdrop of the various challenges that are faced by global companies in general and Middle East companies in particular. Changes in global work scenario, multiple job opportunities enhanced quality of life to the modern executives. In today's business world people typically spend most of their waking hours at work because of the shifts. Different authors have done research on the issue of employee wellness but less evidence is available on the corporates especially in the Middle East. As a result, emphasis is on how the organizations investment will help in healthy workforce by conducting planned employee wellness programs there by helping in saving money validate the current study. Hence the objective of this study is to assess the wellness of employees working in corporate sectors in the Middle East.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objectives of this research study are as following.

1. To evaluate and identify the present scenario of Employee stress level at work place in Middle East and its effect on employee welfare.
2. To understand the need of the wellness programs in Middle East.
3. To device a suitable wellness program for the Corporates in Middle East
4. Suggestions to create a healthier environment through wellness programs.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is to assess the wellness of employees working in two select cities of Dubai, and Muscat in the Middle East. The present research study is further restricted to industries such as IT, BPOs & KPOs, Airline, and Hotel industry.

PRESENT SCENARIO OF EMPLOYEE STRESS LEVEL AT WORK PLACE IN MIDDLE EAST

Wellness needs to be a part of the culture of the organization but not a just program. A survey, titled "Working Well: A Global survey of Health Promotion and Workplace wellness strategies" pointed out that the organizations spent 35 percent more on the wellness program in 2010 compared to 2009 (Buck consultants). It again noticed that the organizations that measure the impact of their wellness programs are seem to be more successful at improving the health of their employees (Barry Hall). But many of the organizations in the Middle East who undertakes the wellness programs don't know how to measure the results, or majority of them don't have the resources to do so. Though, the results are not measured accurately in most of the organizations, reducing the work place stress is considered to be top driver in almost all wellness programs. Employers in the Middle East are reporting with stress as their primary health care concern for their employees according to the recently released study. Lack of job satisfaction and security, changing work styles and patterns and globalization are increasingly hurting the employees at the bottom line. Stress causes excessive absenteeism, loss of productivity, lower worker morale and loss of sense of belongingness toward the organization (Barry Hall). The chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes rank first in many of the Middle East employees. It is found that even with high job satisfaction, the employees are forced to work beyond office hours and even evenings and weekends. Lack of balance between work and home and fear of job loss also rates immense impact on the organizations in using its employee potential (Kathy Gurchiek). Mental stress can cause inability to focus and concentrate in the work. According to the Dubai and Health Medical services Cardiovascular diseases were among the top 10 causes of deaths in UAE and Oman in 2009 and it is three times even higher in Dubai. 19.5% of the adult population in UAE and Oman has Diabetes, and another 18% is at the risk of developing the same. Heart diseases, strokes and Diabetes alone estimated to reduce the growth Domestic product by 1%-5% in the Middle East. An online poll conducted by a recruitment company from 12,368 respondents from across the Middle East found that nearly three in five respondents have irregular eating habits that are causing loss of concentration, mood and behavioural changes in the work place.

NEED OF THE WELLNESS PROGRAM IN MIDDLE EAST

The above affirmed studies clearly reveal the need of the organizations to adopt appropriate wellness programs. It contributes to the Corporate Social Responsibility by improving the employee well being. These programs will inculcate a habit of individual responsibility and ownership to create and maintain their own work life balance and to achieve the organizational goals. It aids to reduce the stress at work place and accomplish personal fulfillment at the work place thereby increases the productivity, motivation, commitment and loyalty of work force.

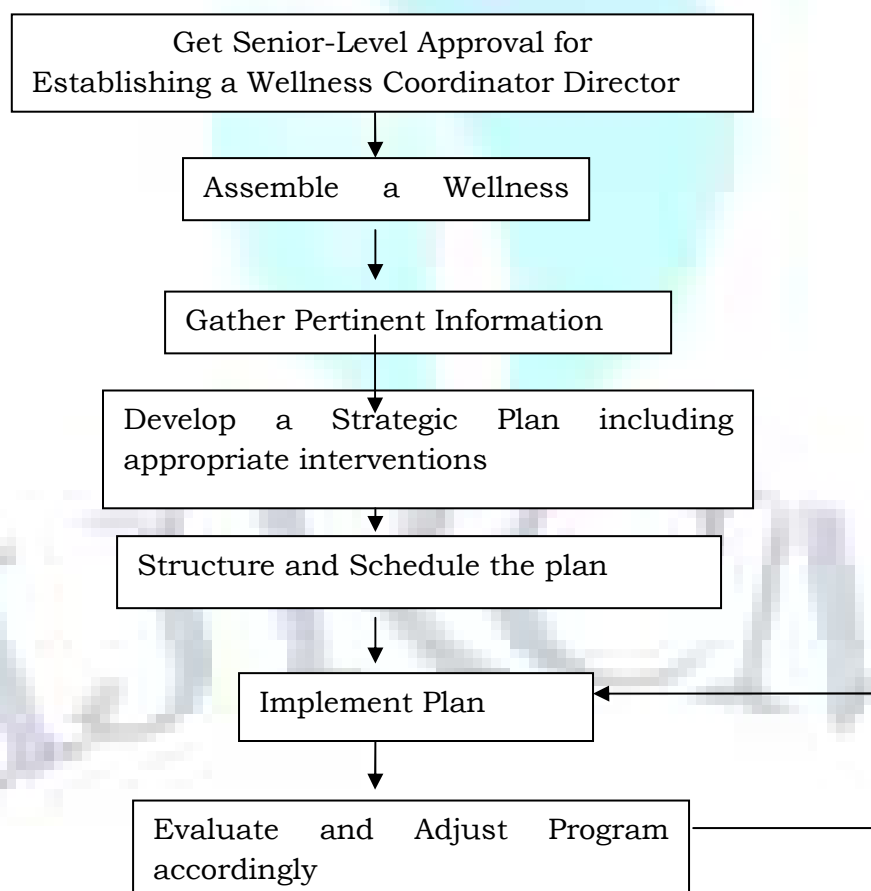
SUGGESTED WELLNESS PROGRAM FOR THE CORPORATES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The aim is to create a successful wellness program and one can assume that through hard work, passion and commitment, success will be achieved. Leadership is one of the vital elements in the wellness program. In the earliest stages, it may be a leap of faith to expect support for an employee wellness program, so it is important to provide justification. Below program is suggested for implementation of wellness program in Middle East.

FLOWCHART FOR THE IMPLEMENTAION OF THE WELLNESS PROGRAM

It is important to begin a wellness program strategically rather than just relying on gut feeling or random feedback and observations from the worksite. A well-thought out program has the best chance of succeeding in making a measurable change in the employees' health habits and productivity.

The following flowchart illustrates the basic steps for implementation of a wellness program.



The establishment of a wellness program has no end point, since the needs of employees and stakeholders are ever-evolving. With the advances in health-related research, it's important to continually revise and adjust wellness programs for maximum effectiveness.

GETTING SUPPORT FOR THE WELLNESS PROGRAM

Consider some of the following strategies in order to get support for initiating a program.

Paint a clear picture - Be able to describe a vision for the wellness team, possible programming, and the business impact that's attainable for the organization.

Present the facts - Gathering data specific to the employee population can be conducted in a later step but it may become necessary to present initial information in order to support the intent. Documented support of employee wellness is available in health and business journals.

Compare and contrast - A market analysis to show management what similar organizations are offering, and their costs, can be beneficial.

Join forces - Show how employee wellness fits with the overall mission of the facility and how these efforts can tie together existing programs. This allows leadership to see how collaboration is effective in working towards a common goal.

Be clear with requests - Making a case for the overall benefit of employee wellness includes a specific request to approve the initiation of a program. Clearly state what's needed to proceed and how progress will be reported. Help leadership to understand the need for resources but know that they may need actual data to better visualize a return on investment. Make use of external data to strengthen the case.

Be willing to negotiate - After clearly expressing the request, concessions may have to be made. For instance, when requesting Full Time Employee (FTE) for creating a Wellness Coordinator position, a part-time or temporary arrangement may initially need to be considered. Proposing a temporary position may further help in getting a "foot in the door". However, be careful not to underestimate the time that it will take to build a program and see any measurable results.

ESTABLISHING A WELLNESS COORDINATOR/DIRECTOR

Coordinator/Director chosen to lead the program should be energetic, knowledgeable, and able to serve as a role model for healthy behavior and should also be a strong leader. This step is critical and will help to ensure effective communication, support and success. Since wellness encompasses many areas of health, a variety of health professionals can adequately fulfill the role. This person will need to be able to work well with others, advocate for change, and be creative in program development and implementation. It is crucial to choose a person that is well-respected by fellow employees and one who can easily gain their trust. It is also important to build rapport and establish a wellness team that understands the culture of the organization.

ASSEMBLING A WELLNESS TEAM

Selecting appropriate members to serve on a wellness team can be just as important as identifying the appropriate program director. Wellness team members should be as enthusiastic about promoting health as the coordinator, but may not need to be the expert in all or any area of wellness. Team members can be selected based on area of expertise or as representatives from various work areas of the organization. It is wise to include occupational health, employee association, and union/other labor representatives on the planning team. Be careful about involving too many or too few members on the team, as this can create a barrier to building a strong team. Having a variety of members allows for different perspectives, which can help in developing realistic interventions. However the team should be committed to dedicating time for building and implementing the program and is passionate about the efforts at hand.

GATHERING PERTINENT INFORMATION

A map for a wellness program is most effective if one knows where to start and how to get there. To determine a beginning point, it's essential to gather as much information as possible. Knowing the demographics of employees, including not only gender, age, education, and race, but also what hours employees work, how far they live from work, and whether they care for children or elderly parents, can be helpful in determining the direction of a program. The Human Resources department is often able to generate this information. In addition, it is vital to gather some type of health data, such as weight, lipids, blood pressure, past diagnosis, etc. This can be gathered from the worksite health insurer in aggregate data form, but the confidentiality of individual employees must be protected. Occupational Health data (including injuries at the workplace) can also be collected. Such data should be de-identified, unless otherwise approved by individual employees. All information should be confidential and ethically respected.

DEVELOP A STRATEGIC PLAN

After the data has been gathered, the next step is to formulate a plan for achieving the goals. A Strategic Plan should include the main objectives, the steps that will ensure achievement, and a way to measure success. A well-detailed plan is also helpful to determine the resources to be used, the people who will be responsible for overseeing certain components of the plan, and a target deadline that will keep everyone on course. The objectives should align with the wellness program's mission statement and that of the organization. Conversely, the organization's strategic plan should also contain a component to support employee wellness. A Strategic Plan should be updated often and revised at least once a year. The ultimate goal is to integrate wellness into the very culture of the organization; a culture that places real value on a healthier lifestyle for employees and their families.

As the strategic plan is developed, one may encounter a gap between the ideal program and what is affordable. Fortunately, there are numerous free resources available.

STRUCTURE AND SCHEDULE THE WELLNESS PLAN

Even the most well written strategic plan means nothing until it is put into practice. Formulating the strategies identified on the plan into a schedule assures that the objectives will be reached. Use the plan and strategic calendar to determine a completion date for the strategies. This is the time to be realistic. Honestly consider the time it will take to prepare for each event. Remember that great change does not happen overnight. Consider appropriate times of the year to address pertinent topics at the worksite. Consider the resources, including manpower that will be available to help implement each strategy at the ideal time of year.

SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WELLNESS PROGRAM

The final step of the program is implementation and the hard work will result in a more successful program. The key now is to get participation and buy-in from all levels in the organization. Finally it is important to communicate this plan to management. Leaders need to know what role they play and how they can become a fundamental aspect of a wellness program. They should understand that satisfied employees are crucial to the success of an organization and they understand the importance of a healthy workforce. Consider developing a wellness portfolio to keep track of activities, goals, objectives, measures, and evaluation. The use of incentives can be a clever way to make the benefit of participating in an event or program greater than the cost. Incentives can include cash, refreshments, give-a-ways, discounts, drawing entries, recognition, time off, or educational/training time.

EVALUATION

Evaluation is one of the most critical points in the development of a program. If the strategic plan was built correctly, measures to gauge success are included in the implementation plan. An analysis of the results will determine what course corrections are needed. Do not worry if the goal has not yet been achieved. Evaluation is not a time for ego, but rather self-confidence as this is just one step in the journey. It is important not to ignore the information, but rather to use it in making an increasingly strong program.

SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the lifestyle and to reduce the work stress the following suggestions are put forth-

1. Get high level support and commitment to effect a change in the organisation culture.
2. Create innovative low budget practices and take programs directly to the people at their jobs.
3. Budgeting for the program is a crucial factor before initiating the program.
4. Try to involve the families of the employees in the program.
5. Motivate employees to stay committed and improve their life experience.
6. Thorough survey of middle and upper management regarding their expectations for the program will not only help to gain their support but will also ensure success of a wellness program.

CONCLUSION

A piece of advice to remember amidst all of all the findings, strategic plans and operational objectives included in the study is that **Worksite Wellness** means working with people. If the employer needs quantifiable behavior change and return on investment in the organisation employees are the first priority. One must truly care about the employee's health and family in order to make long-lasting change. Mutual trust and honesty about personal struggles is a key to the success of a program and employees will often respond better to a genuine spirit, than a "number-cruncher" whose focus is to get more productivity out of the workforce. Be clear on the goals, steadfast with the plan, but true to the mission to achieve wellness.

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