

Vitality!

EFAP NEWSLETTER



Winter 2007

Human Solutions™

Workplace Health Promotion

The importance of including health-producing management practices.



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Many work organizations have discovered that by actively promoting the health of employees, the health of the business is well-served. However, when we think about health promotion in the workplace, what probably comes to mind for most of us are fitness, stress management, smoking cessation, back care, nutrition, and other such wellness-oriented programs. But this is just one side of the health promotion coin. The other side is the work environment itself which can either promote good health or cause poor health.

“There are many work conditions that either lead to or exacerbate employee health problems. Likewise, a supportive, family-friendly, health-promoting work organization is a source of better health,” says Dr. Greg Banwell, Executive Vice President, Wilson Banwell PROACT Human Solutions™.

“Providing a noon hour talk on coping with stress just doesn’t do the trick if we want to ensure a healthy, productive workplace. Something bigger has to happen to realize a gain for both the employee and the organization. And this starts at the top with a leadership that provides the direction, expectations, and resources to help managers create a healthy workplace.”

“Illnesses arise out of poor management through a work climate characterized by conflict, lack of influence and clarity, constant overload, loss of esteem, lack of support, threats, and condescension. Whatever the case, these understaffed and overworked times are ripe for illness when there is so little time to focus on what researchers call the psychosocial factors of the workplace,” says Dr. Banwell.

Human Solutions™/Graham Lowe 2007 Survey

39%

Percentage of organizations that provide workplace health promotion programs.

89%

Percentage of organizations that provide health-related internet resources.

67%

Percentage of respondents who identified management practices/competencies as necessary to achieve health and productivity goals.

The Business Case For Organization Interventions

Dr. Martin Shain at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, along with other researchers, report that a quartet of psychosocial stressors are disproportionately influential contributors to adverse health outcomes. These are High Demand coupled with Low Control, and High Effort coupled with Low Reward.

- ❖ **High Demand** means having too much to do in too short a time over too long a period.
- ❖ **Low Control** means not having enough influence over the way your job is done on a day-to-day basis.
- ❖ **High Effort** means having to expend too much mental energy over too long a period.
- ❖ **Low Reward** means not receiving adequate feedback on performance, acknowledgement for work well-done, and recognition.

Addressing these and other psychosocial factors, by their very nature, require interventions at the organizational level. In Human Solutions' 2008 Annual Report *A Quiet Crisis: The Business Case for Managing Employee Mental Health*, author and researcher Dr. Mark Attridge reports that many studies show that well-structured organizational approaches to improving mental and physical health generate effects that are stronger and longer lasting than interventions delivered at the individual level. "Worksite-based preventative interventions seek to remove work-related practices and behaviours that contribute to employee stress and mental health conditions."

The 2002 Conference Board of Canada report *Health Promotion Programs at Work: A Frivolous Cost or a Sound Investment?* stated that employers who engaged in health promotion, along with initiatives toward improving psychosocial and physical work environments, saw results in overall healthcare cost savings, improved productivity, and better employee retention.

"Clearly, research in the last decade or so is telling us that health producing management practices positively impact the bottom line," concludes Dr. Banwell.

Health-promoting leadership strategies

Despite the fact there is a strong correlation between productivity and health promoting strategies, not all workplaces are implementing them. Earlier this year, Human Solutions™ and the Graham Lowe Group undertook a market survey of private sector organizations across Canada employing between 200 and 10,000 employees to find out what organizational health practices were currently being employed.

The survey found that 72% of companies tracked health data like illness-related absenteeism and far fewer (46%) measure employee health risk. Even less (9%) use a workplace health survey to measure workplace factors that lead to illness.

"Leadership should mine all possible HR data to identify key trends and opportunities for improvement," says Dr. Banwell. "Undertaking a workplace health survey or health risk assessment to determine leading indicator measurements and define a health score card, is a way to stay on top of health needs and provide the support required.

"Using this information, leadership could look at what health programs and policies would be most beneficial for their organization. This includes such things as code of conduct development, conflict resolution, and family-friendly policies such as flexible work time," he says.

The survey did find that 76% of organizations surveyed offered flexible work schedules. "I applaud these organizations as it shows the first signs of some preventative thinking. Supporting an accord between work and other parts of life is one of the keys to promoting employee health."

Health promotion or employee wellness programs that provide life skills development (e.g. parenting education), lifestyle change (e.g. nutrition), health clinics (e.g. diabetes), and psychological skills development (e.g. resilience training), should be part of the

Survey Findings

When employees work under sustained conditions of high effort/low reward and high pressure/low control they are:

- 2 times more likely to contract heart problems
- 3 times more likely to suffer back pain
- 5 times more likely to suffer certain cancers
- 2 to 3 times more likely to have conflicts
- 2 to 3 times more likely to suffer mental health problems
- 2 to 3 times more likely to suffer infections
- 2 to 3 times more likely to suffer injuries
- 2 times more likely to have substance abuse

Source: Dr. Martin Shain, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Elements Of A Psychologically Healthy Workplace

- ❑ **Transformational Leadership.** A management style that offers motivation, stimulation and individual consideration to employees and the results are strongly associated with well-being and work productivity.
- ❑ **Workload and Pace.** Workload is appropriate to the employee's skill level, allows time for recovery from demanding tasks, and provides discretion around how to complete tasks.
- ❑ **Work Schedule.** Work schedules fit work/life needs and allow some form of perceived control over the scheduling of work.
- ❑ **Role Clarity.** This concerns how well the employee's job is defined and the degree to which an employee has control over how to perform the work.
- ❑ **Job Future.** This concerns the perceptions that the job will continue into the future in a stable manner and that there is realistic opportunity for career advancement.
- ❑ **Autonomy.** Employees need to know that they have some individual choice over significant components of their work and that they can use personal knowledge and skills to best accomplish tasks.
- ❑ **Workplace Justice.** Employees perceive they are being treated fairly from management and co-workers.
- ❑ **Reduced Status Distinctions.** The company culture does not have a distinct hierarchy among employees at different levels of the company.
- ❑ **Social Environment.** Employees prefer to have social relationships at work and satisfaction with interpersonal aspects of the work environment.
- ❑ **Extrinsic Factors.** This area includes basic physical comfort such as noise and temperature that employees have adequate control over.

Source: Dr. Julian Barling. Presentation at the *2nd Canadian Congress on Research on Mental Health & Addiction in the Workplace, 2007 (May)*, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

overall strategy. Here the survey found 40% of employers provide life skills development and 45% provide lifestyle change initiatives.

The Role Of Individual Workplace Leaders

Canadian researcher Dr. Julian Barling of Queens University recently completed a comprehensive review of workplace performance literature and identified ten key organizational elements of a psychologically healthy workplace, and the impact that work design factors have on the health and well-being of employees and their work performance.

At the top of the list is transformational leadership which Dr. Barling defines as “a leader who can elevate employees through his or her ability to demonstrate humility, values, and concern for others. This management style offers motivation, stimulation, and individual consideration to employees and the results are strongly associated with well-being and work productivity.”

Another Canadian researcher, Dr. Jean-Pierre Brun of Laval University, looked specifically at employee recognition and found that people who reported they got recognition in their workplace showed four times fewer signs of high level emotional distress. “Furthermore, authentic recognition, much more than salary, creativity, and innovation, is what allows corporations to remain at the forefront of an increasingly competitive economy,” he says.

Dr. Banwell agrees that individual managers can make an enormous difference. “The manager who listens well, gives credit where credit is due, tolerates a necessary range of diversity on the team, rewards team effort, supports everyone's confidence during challenging times, and shows interest in the welfare, learning, and advancement of employees is far more likely to create a higher level of health, as well as productivity.”

“On the other hand,” he says, “there is a kind of boss behaviour that doesn't work well for a lot of employees, usually centered on a failure to build a respectful workplace or a boss who acts on the belief that you get paid to do your job well. Not surprisingly, a 2007 survey of Canadian employees who chose to terminate their employment found that the majority of them said they did so primarily because of their boss. We all know that it takes pretty sizeable golden handcuffs for employees to

tolerate poor managers. But the number is too large to rationalize as a personality conflict or poor job fit.”

A 2001 study by Dr. Linda Duxbury at Carleton University and Chris Higgins of the University of Western Ontario supports this. It found that employees with ‘supportive supervisors’ report significantly higher satisfaction, trust of managers, commitment to the organization, and less role overload, job stress, depression, poor health, work-life balance issues, fatigue, absenteeism, and intention to leave the organization.

“Good managers are key, but like safety supporting behaviour, health producing management practices need the push and pull of leadership,” explains Dr. Banwell. “Health promoting leadership provides the direction, expectations, and resources to help managers create a healthy workplace.”

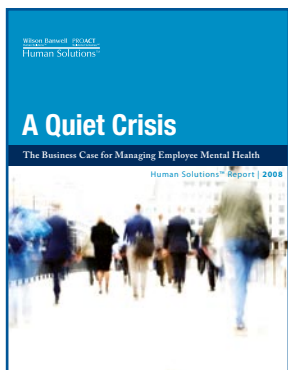
Year-end message from Craig Thompson, Vice President, Customer Relations

As the holiday season is before us, we want to thank all of our customers, long-term and new, for their continued support and trust. This is a time for us to turn our attention to those in our community who may be struggling and require additional community support. **This holiday season Human Solutions™ has made a cash donation to the Canadian Mental Health Association. We wish you and your family members a healthy, joyful, and safe holiday season.**

New Developments

2008 Annual Report

The goal of our company is to serve your organization and your employees as effectively as possible through the provision of highly professional and useful assistance services. Assistance can come in the form of strong clinical care for those who require it, but also as timely advice and consult for leadership when addressing a troubled employee, or when your HR team is planning a Health Promotion initiative. We are committed to being supportive and available whenever you or your staff requires assistance, and to provide relevant, friendly, and evidence-based advice at all times. We invite your feedback anytime.



Take a moment when you get a chance and read through our 2008 annual report ***A Quiet Crisis: The Business Case for Managing Employee Mental Health***. It provides an overview of the most current and effective, empirically validated strategies for building a mentally healthy workplace. It is structured to assist the busy HR or Occupational Health professional with practical information, including the evidence and the key messages for each section. We wanted to give you the most cogent and useful material possible on this subject, and we trust you will find it beneficial.

New Health Promotion Service

Starting in January, Human Solutions™ will be providing an exciting new health promotion service as part of our basic EFAP. We've developed a 12 month rolling calendar that will highlight a different health-related theme each month that ties in with a significant event (e.g. summer holidays) or national health campaign (e.g. February is National Heart Month and April is Cancer Awareness Month).

Each month our Account Managers will e-mail all of their customers a ***Change Your Way to Health!*** e-newsletter which relates to the monthly theme, for distribution to employees. This two-page newsletter is intended to be both informative and fun to read. In addition, our Account Managers will provide customers with some ideas that workplaces could undertake if they wish to further promote the monthly theme in a proactive and positive way.



About Vitality!

Vitality! is a publication of Human Solutions™.

For more information on the issues presented here feel free to contact your EFAP provider.

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Comments

We'd like to know what you think about *Vitality!* Send your comments and suggestions to:

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