

The Essentials of A Healthy Workplace

Prof. Deepika Pandita

Assistant Professor, SIBM, Pune

E-mail: deepikapandita@sibm.edu

The place where we spend our time (work place,home) and our social contacts in those settings shape our health"

In order to address the strong relationship between work and health, it is necessary to consider all the components of a healthy work place that have an effect on the employee. Over the last 40 years, major changes have taken place in the work place. The growth in the use of information technology at work, the globalization of many industries, organizational restructuring, changes in work contracts and work time scheduling have radically transformed the nature of work in many organizations. The work for ceitsel fisal so diversifying with an increase in female participation and agrowing number of dual-earner couples¹.

Organizations in countries hit by recession were downsizing or de-layering in an effort to survive. During the last decade, this trend for restructuring and downsizing has continued in many organizations, together with an increase in sub-contracting and outsourcing, in order to compete successfully in the increasingly competitive global market. Other changes include new patterns of working, such as teleworking, self-regulated work and teamwork, an increased reliance on computerized technology and a move towards a more flexible workforce, both in number of employees and in their skills and functions².

As the work place has slowly transformed, the corporate sectors in European and North American countries have adapted smartly to the changes and productivity levels have gone up. The core issues that come up when discussing work place environment, stress, occupational health and employee well-being, revolve around four major areas i.e. job in security, work hours, control at work, and managerial style. This situation is a cause of concern in the west and in India, similar conditions are very much relevant to the IT sector.

Reasons of Building a Healthy Workplace

The booming of IT outsourcing centers in metros reveals the vulnerability of the above mentioned factors. Each of these issues has become a major concern as a result of the recent radical organizational changes. There are now fewer people at work, doing more and feeling less security and control in their jobs. Management in particular

has increased pressures trying to keep pace and manage their workforce against a background of rapid change. This heightened pressure has brought an impact on their behaviour towards employees. In today's market driven competitive world, a capable employee is the most important resource and a fundamental precondition of productive action.

Promotion of the employees' -both women and men's-working ability and functional capacity are based on the needs of the whole society. Building a healthy workforce as well more productive working conditions calls for organizational change processes, strategies/tactics, management of work environment issues, systematic management of safety and a capable and motivated personnel. Workplaces that foster employee health and well-being create an environment of improved employee productivity, attendance, retention and engagement³.

"There is no one single way to create a psychologically healthy work environment," they comprise practices that fall into five categories⁴:

- Employee involvement.
- Health and safety.
- Employee growth and development.
- Work/life balance.
- Employee recognition.

Ways of Creating A Healthy Workplace

Employee participation in decision-making; programs promoting healthy lifestyle and behavior choices; skills training and leadership development; flexible work arrangements; and marking individual and team milestones are among the practices that contribute to a psychologically healthy workplace⁵.

Creating a psychologically healthy workplace takes a firm commitment and recognizing the internal and external factors that affect the context in which those programs operate. Those factors include the employer's values, mission and culture; its leadership; its processes; communication channels; the nature of its work; its geographic area; market environment, stakeholders and competitors; management practices; facilities and its readiness for change.

"There are some very healthy, very successful companies that had to ... do a lot of very difficult things" during the recession. "The organizations that did things in a healthy way" and were mindful of all their stakeholders "will emerge positioned to move forward and be successful in the economic recovery." A good assessment of employee needs is the place to start in building a psychologically healthy workplace. In addition, organizations need to:

1. Tie healthy workplace practices to the company mission, values and goals. Otherwise, these programs will be among the first cut when budgets tighten.
2. Tailor programs to the organization and its employee demographics.
3. Get senior management's commitment and participation.

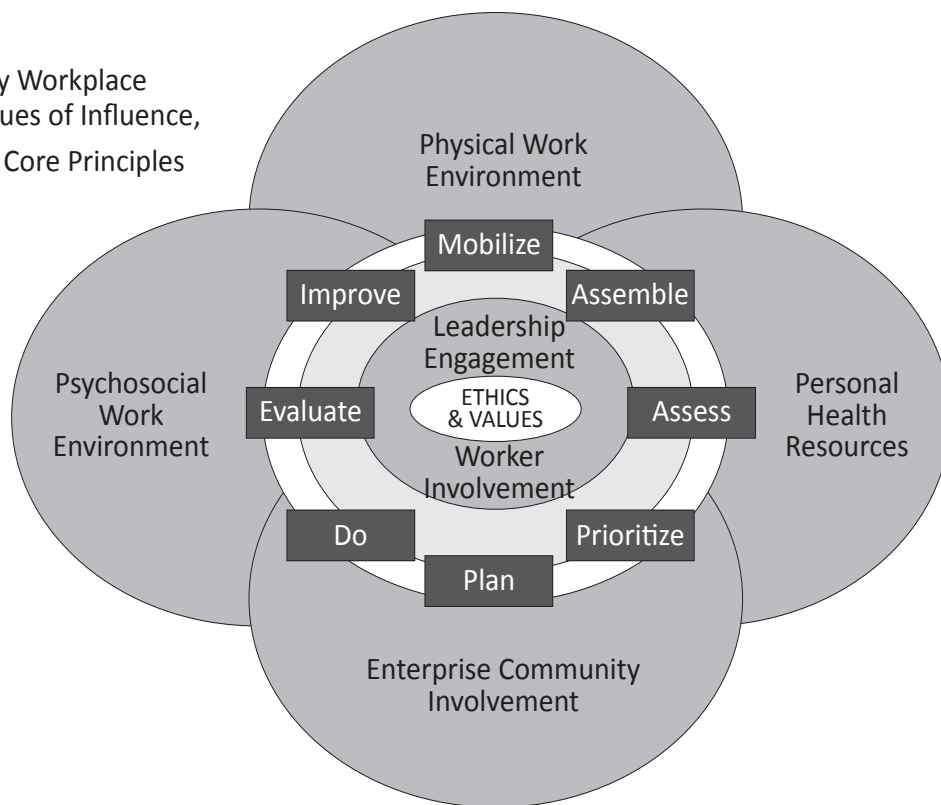
4. Involve employees in building and evaluating programs that promote psychologically healthy workplaces.
5. Communicate the programs effectively to employees and evaluate those programs continually to find ways to make improvements.

Employee satisfaction and engagement are not the same, satisfied employees generally exhibit low absenteeism, low turnover and low substance abuse, but engaged employees go beyond those traits, Schneider said, likening them to focused mountain climbers. Engaged employees are more likely to be proactive and adaptable and to reach beyond their expected roles. Job design, trust and safety, and treating employees fairly are part of the framework that fosters and sustains engagement. Creating an atmosphere of fairness includes paying attention to the seemingly mundane aspects of work—keeping promises, treating people with respect and providing the resources, training and support that employees need to perform their work.

Models on the Healthy Workplace

The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed a model on Healthy Workplace to explain the parameters affecting the health of the organization.

Figure 1
WHO Healthy Workplace Model: Avenues of Influence, Process, and Core Principles



Source: WHO Healthy Workplace Framework and Model: Background Document and Supporting Literature and Practices

This model speaks about the factors of healthy workplace broadly classified as Physical

Work Environment, Personal Health Resources, Enterprise Community Involvement and Psychosocial Work Environment. The values and ethics of the company play a very important role in building a healthy workplace. The leaders as well as the employees should be involved in the process of building a healthy workplace.

There are 3 factors which influence the health or wellness of the organization and its employees⁶.

1. Health & Safety

The environment in which people work is a major influence on employee health. Some aspects are:

Noise level	Workplace design
Air quality	Safe lifting
Ergonomics	Employee violence
Toxic substances	Physical demands
Work pace	Safety guidelines

2. Culture & Social Environment

Basic human needs such as sense of belonging, purpose and mission, sense of control and freedom from harassment.

Related issues are:

Balance between work and family	Employee satisfaction
Staff involvement in decision making	Positive supervisor communication and feedback
Flex time	Staff morale
Peer communication	Employee recognition
Employee training and development	Social atmosphere

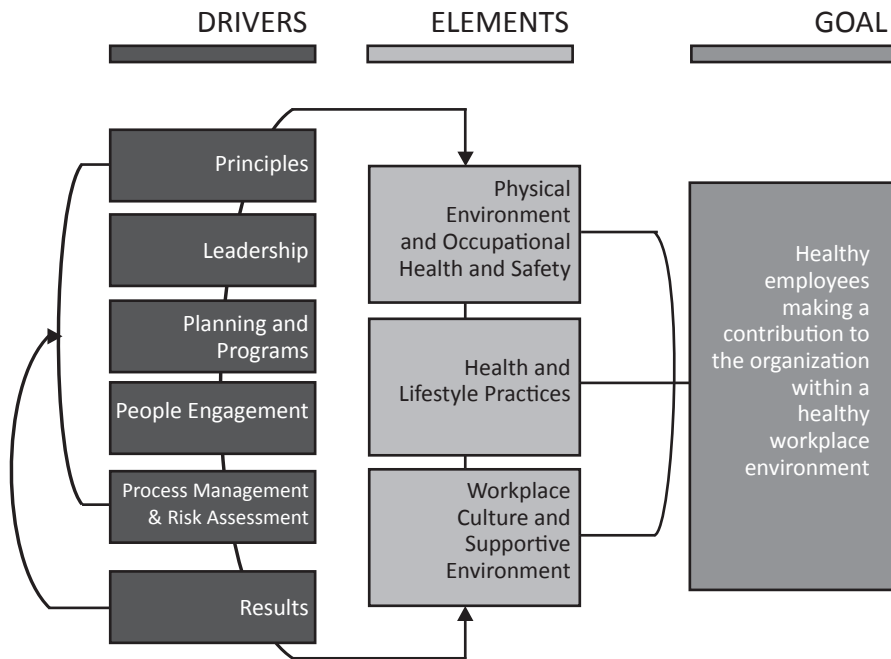
3. Lifestyle Practices of Employees :

Workplaces that support health practices encourage healthy behaviors skills.

Smoking cessation	Hygiene
Healthy weight	Stress management
Healthy eating	Coping with shift work
Physical activity	Healthy pregnancy
Women's health issues	Alcohol and drug use

Another Model on Healthy Workplace emphasizes on the drivers and the elements that drives a healthy workplace.

Figure 2



Source: Canadian Healthy Workplace Criteria

Developed in 1998 by the NQI in partnership with Health Canada and a team of key health professionals, the Canadian Healthy Workplace Criteria addresses a broad-based approach to health and wellness issues in the workplace. The criteria brings together environmental, physical, mental, safety and social issues into a strategic model that helps organizations set goals and manage their wellness programs. The Canadian Healthy Workplace Criteria is used to adjudicate the Healthy Workplace Category of the Canada Awards for Excellence.

These are certain facts in place of work occupancy which is already taken care off and put under its desired perspectives. Most often than not people inculcate these workplace ethics but in certain cases matter is lightly resolved because of a go free attitude. The maintenance could be a weekly or a monthly affair. But the spontaneity with respect to its due diligence metamorphoses giving way to duty indulgence. This is a light throwing awakener for streamlining daily habits into a shade of reality.

Conclusion

Each office must face the challenges of becoming and staying organized and efficient. Many times morale among staff suffers as everyday task seem monumental due to lack of organization. Chaos just seems to flow when there is not real organization or a place where things are supposed to get done. If your office does a lot of copying, create a copy space. Group printers, copiers and the needed supplies together so that staff is not running through the office looking for copy paper or toner. If your office needs large spaces for layout have tables and good lighting that allows for items to be laid out and collated quickly and most importantly correctly. If you have staff members whose jobs are interconnected place their offices or cubicles close together so that valuable time is

not wasted while trying to track another person down. Take some time to absorb what are the vital functions of your office and see if grouping together or rearranging functions will improve organization and efficiency. And then once an area is established make sure that everyone knows its designated purpose. Insist that the employees keep areas clean and organized. Clutter and trash is distracting. A clear workplace makes for clear thinking.

Make sure to take full advantage of any applicable technology that will help you stay organized and get more accomplished. Virtual communications has probably become the biggest factor that has allowed so many people to increase their productivity and efficiency. There is also of course the whole World Wide Web, email, instant messages, virtual phones, cell phones, virtual fax, and video conferencing, and the list goes on and on.

Another major concern is mixing up official and private lives together. Most often all private lives of employees tend to start after they are out of the office limits. Organizations should not take cognizance of their workers' doings once the stipulated working hours are complete. Employees should keep their private lives and personal activities as separate as possible from the workplace. All of us, as human beings need private lives and need to do personal activities. First, the office is a place where ideas are laid on the table, where there should be no limits, where creativity should not have any boundaries, with the exception of a few limitations, legally and morally speaking. These ideas are things that must be nurtured to build upon them. They can then provide answers to questions and solutions to problems. Meaning, some people are inspired by those that they are surrounded by and the activities they are involved in. However, employees can be inspired by these things while keeping these elements out of the office.

Hence companies should lay importance by showing our care for keeping our workstation spick and span and by steering clear of our personal life's involvement within office limits will pave the way for a buildup of powerful ethical up gradation amongst all corporate. Ethics are free, but the absence of ethics can be extremely costly. Hence a company that finds a way to change the system can be influenced to act ethically and responsibly is far more likely to succeed. A healthy workplace creates a healthy environment.

References

1. WHO Study of Healthy Workplace in Corporate Sector 2008
2. Cox, Griffiths, and Rial-Gonzalez, 2000
3. The American Psychological Association (APA) in March 2010 conference in Washington, D.C.
4. Kathy Gurchiek, SHRM Study, Psychologically Healthy Workplaces
5. APA American Psychological Association
6. Health Canada, 1992 & National Quality Institute, 1998