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people

WHITE PAPER

The Benefits of Developing and Maintaining an
**Organizational Culture and
Climate of Well-Being**

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The Case for Culture

The competitive position of organizations throughout North America and many places in the developed world is being challenged from a number of fronts. Among the issues facing workplaces are health benefits costs that are escalating at multiples of the rate of inflation, and challenges to productivity associated with absenteeism, and a lack of employee engagement sometimes termed presenteeism. A major reason for this is the dramatically increasing incidence of obesity, hypertension, musculoskeletal problems, stress, anxiety and depression among employees and dependents, which also contribute to our declining levels of productivity compared with international competitors.

In response to these challenges, organizations have increased workplace health promotion efforts, offload of benefit costs to employees through consumer-directed health plans, and organization-level initiatives to improve productivity, such as lean methods. However, research has demonstrated that work stressors are significant barriers to employees' health and productivity. These workplace stressors negatively impact engagement in workplace health promotion initiatives, as well as employees' ability to improve their health behavior.¹ Yet in the face of these findings, recent reports show that North American companies are expanding their overall wellness investments but cutting back on stress management initiatives. This kind of strategy is inconsistent with data on the impact of stress levels on wellness.

Among the emerging responses to these challenges are those that address the organizational context to improve the success of health promotion and wellness efforts. In practice, a broader health risk assessment model has been used, one that includes employee perceptions of work-related well-being (versus uncontrollable stress) and other aspects of workplace culture. Caterpillar Inc. has credited this approach for below-inflation increases in healthcare costs, improved employee wellness and well-being and increased organizational productivity and quality. These results were achieved at returns that were several times investment.²

There is evidence that workplace stress, when perceived as uncontrollable, is associated with poorer health and reduced probability of enrolling in health promotion initiatives. In addition, uncontrollable stress reduces self-efficacy and one's ability to successfully adopt healthier behaviors, particularly for those in more passive or reactive jobs.³ Therefore, employers have an opportunity to improve employee engagement in workplace health improvement programs as well as the outcomes of such engagement – by improving their organization's stress management culture and climate as a means of promoting employee well-being, health and productivity.

The focus on employee well-being as a way to reduce health care costs and improve productivity is not a new idea. An extensive review of the academic literature on the relationship between employee health and well-being was published in 1999, which outlined work setting, intrapersonal and organizational stress factors that are antecedents of employee well-being, as well as the positive individual and organizational outcomes of well-being.⁴ Organizational effects include lower trends in health claims costs, improved productivity and fewer compensable health-related absences from work.

In support of pairing organizational and individual-level efforts for employee health and well-being, many leaders in the health improvement field have stressed the importance of creating an organizational culture of health. A recent keynote panellist at a major U.S. benefits conference described having a culture of health as the “game changer.”⁵ Culture has been defined as, “. . .what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration.”⁶ Culture includes both values and climate dimensions, according to leading organizational behavior experts.⁷

Climate Change, the Good Kind

Organizational climate is reflected in employees’ perceptions of their employers’ policies, procedures and practices.⁸ Climates vary in the consistency of their perception by members of an organization (climate strength), and in the rated level of a given dimension of climate (e.g., support for employee well-being) from aggregated data in employee surveys. Writings and research on workplace well-being also have pointed to the specific importance of organizational climate.^{9, 10}

Predictive modeling has been used with this broader health risk assessment approach (one that is sensitive to organizational context), demonstrating that well-being drives both health and productivity in the workplace.¹¹ This is contrary to common current practice, which limits assessment to individual-level factors in health risk assessments. Well-being has been described by one thought leader as including overall life evaluation (including social health), emotional health, community (access to health & life resources), physical health, work environment and quality, and healthy behavior dimensions.¹² Another has listed four dimensions that partially overlap the above list: physical health, capacity for change, work well-being and health risk dimensions.¹³

Health, wellness, well-being, productivity, culture, climate. . . Here’s what it all boils down to – talking the talk AND walking the talk, as an organization, are critical to employee health, engagement, productivity, and retention, as well as organizational knowledge management and cost containment outcomes that companies need to improve their competitiveness and economic viability.

Based on this conceptual and evidence-based analysis of organizational and individual well-being, health promotion interventions should identify and find ways to reduce uncontrollable work-related stress, or at least the sense of its uncontrollability. Well-being initiatives encompass yet go beyond traditional wellness and health / disease management interventions, including features such as anger management programs and special programs for those who face significant home-to-work commutes. Integrating these kinds of programs with efforts to develop and reinforce a culture and climate of well-being creates a winning combination, according to existing evidence. Empowering and coaching organizational leaders to reinforce this culture / climate change, along with providing accessible and attractive programs to improve employee well-being, are the foundation for optimizing health improvement and disease management initiatives.

The upshot is that contextual / environmental factors are important in maintaining or changing behaviour, as has been argued by organizational behavior experts such as Gary Johns¹⁴ and Peter Langford¹⁵. Just as health coaches assist clients to develop and use healthier psychological processes to make and sustain positive changes in their health behavior, it is also important to create work contexts that support well-being. Contrary to some who may believe that this “mollycoddling” costs too much, reports of payoffs from well-being enhancing initiatives have been significant.¹⁶ Such efforts, like ensuring that employees have the resources needed to do a good job, can pay off in improved productivity, health, retention, engagement and success in broader health affirming initiatives. These promising results call for further exploration in larger scale, published research with comparative effectiveness designs. This kind of research will serve to validate the strength of evidence for this approach to workplace health improvement. In other words, it will provide a rigorous demonstration of the effectiveness of enhancing organizational well-being, as a route to employee health, engagement and productivity, lower benefit costs and improved competitive position.

At the individual employee level, health coaching has proven to be effective in producing lasting behavior change in those who engage in it, and further, to promote employee engagement in broader health improvement and well-being interventions.^{17, 18} It is important that the coaches are well-chosen, well-trained and monitored for quality and outcomes, using evidence-based motivational interviewing, cognitive-behavioural and social learning protocols to help clients to envision, commit to and achieve lasting, positive health behavior change. In addition, having clients work with a consistent coach, although potentially more difficult from a scheduling / operational perspective, builds therapeutic / working alliance. Therapeutic or working alliance was shown in two meta-analyses to contribute significantly to a wide variety of positive behavior change and other health-related therapeutic outcomes.^{19, 20} However, this works best in an organizational culture that supports wellness and well-being, as argued above.

So Where Do We Begin?

Culture change involves shifting the interpersonal, structural and reinforcement practices that help to form the foundation of an organization. This kind of change is often difficult to initiate and sustain. However, it can be achieved with the benefit of valid assessment and external, objective guidance to ensure that desired changes are integrated into core organizational practices, decisions and espoused values. Sykes CareCoach® Wellness Programs begin with evidence-based health risk and organizational well-being culture assessment. From there, results highlight gaps between wellness-enhancing and current practices on organizational and work group levels. From there, it is important to focus on coaching leaders to close those gaps and on providing communication strategies and templates to announce the value of these changes to employees, their families, their communities and their employer.

Just as health choices and behaviors can be changed through coaching, so can managers learn to take the steps that build a culture of well-being. Leadership coaches can help your leaders to improve way their workplace environments support wellness, a critical step in achieving maximum advantage from workplace wellness initiatives.

To a large extent, work stress results from perceived lack of respect, fairness and appreciation.²¹ Coaching leaders on actions to change these perceptions begins the journey to a culture of well-being.

With improvements to your organization's culture of well-being, your new or renewed wellness program is headed for success. Sykes can then help you with employee communications and promotion of your wellness program, to enhance employee participation and engagement. Our commitment to confidentiality and privacy meets legal requirements and provides assurance to employees that we are there to help them meet their goals, not to police their participation.

Finally, through an engaging and educational online program, combined with our individually-tailored motivation enhancing wellness coaching, Sykes will help your company to deliver employee-centred, one-on-one support for wellness in a cost-effective manner. In other words, we can help you achieve real results for your employees and for your bottom line.

But don't just take our word for results. We will analyze your claims, health risk improvements, employee engagement and culture of well-being to provide proof of the success of your wellness program.

How Sykes Assistance Services Can Help

Research evidence shows that the following six core elements are critical for the success of a workplace wellness program. Our team of clinical and business experts work with your organization and its members to design and implement a tailored program to improve the health and well-being of your employees, along with your bottom line.

- **Leading-edge assessments of the current state of your organizational culture of well-being**

We can go beyond standard health risk assessments of employee health risks and wellness status, measuring work-related employee well-being and productivity.

- **Coaching for your managers, leaders and supervisors to take specific steps that strengthen your organization's culture of well-being, as a key driver of employee health and productivity**

Tailored to assessment results and your company's goals, our organizational development experts coach your leaders on developing and reinforcing a culture of well-being in their worksites.

- **A comprehensive program that fits your organization's needs and helps you achieve your health, well-being and productivity / competitive goals**

We provide a comprehensive, multi-channel program for wellness and health improvement. A one-size-fits-all approach is not effective for individuals or for organizations. We tailor our approach to the needs and goals of your members, worksites and organization, based on leading edge assessments and discussions about goals.

- **Affordable, attention-getting and attractive communication strategies and employee incentives to drive the engagement and commitment of your staff and their dependents to improve their health**

This is the foundation for cost reduction of your health care expenses, by avoiding unnecessary care and expensive medical treatments through your employees' preventive, guided self-management of their health. We will provide tools and templates for effective communication and incentives. Incentives produce better results where wellness communication and organizational support for wellness are strong,²² so we can help you get more bang for the money you invest into employee wellness incentives.

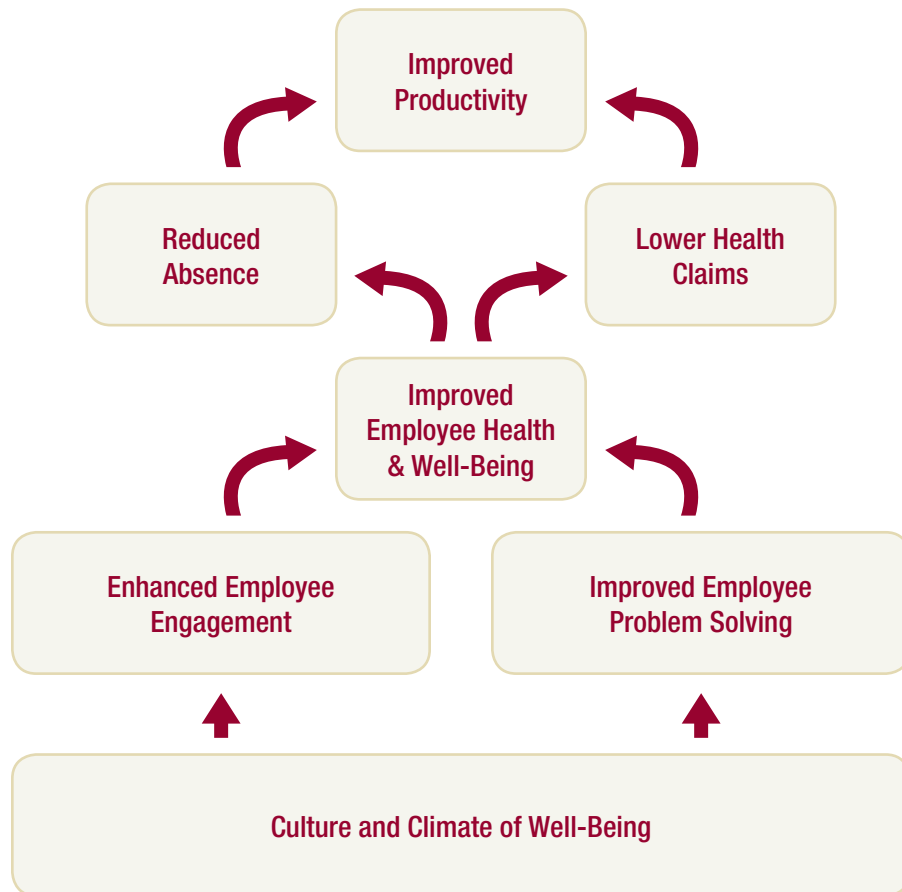
- **Highly motivating coaching from our wellness CareCoaches® that is tailored to each employee's needs, health-related assets / strengths, values and goals**

Our innovative assessments and experienced CareCoaches® enable us to deliver supportive, engaging and effective coaching, tailored to the individual in the recommended one size fits one approach.

- **Certified outcomes measurement methodology**

We will use an evidence-based and auditor-certified outcomes measurement approach.

We're confident that we can help you bend the health cost curve at your company. A recent meta-analysis demonstrated significant returns on investments in employee wellness in the U.S.: approximately \$3.27 savings in reduced medical costs and \$2.73 savings in reduced absenteeism costs for every dollar spent on workplace wellness.²³



Sykes Assistance Services – Telehealth Solutions

SYKES has been providing clinical telehealth solutions since 1997. Our services include patient access management, symptom management, health information, chronic illness support, and wellness and prevention programs providing evidence-informed, accessible healthcare that improves lives and saves money.

Scalable, flexible, streamlined and multi-channel, SYKES telehealth services integrate a full spectrum of the latest communications and medical device technologies with best practices in evidence-based clinical services and customer relationship management (CRM) systems to deliver improved outcomes for our stakeholders.

The Right Technology

SYKES provides a comprehensive suite of telehealth services and tools such as contact centres, helpdesks, live chat support, Interactive Voice Response/Recognition (IVR), web sites, remote monitoring, virtual coaching, access to personal health records, email, and Bluetooth enabled monitoring devices.

Demographically-appropriate platforms such as text messaging for teens and young adults, and social networking tools with which patients of all ages are becoming increasingly comfortable are being used by SYKES to “close the gap” in terms of both service and distance. Telehealth solutions are facilitating a transformation to a multi-modal healthcare delivery system that empowers communities, caregivers and patients alike.

A Careful Balance of Accessibility and Privacy

As technology evolves, so too will the ability to monitor patients more closely. There will be more sophisticated, simpler and less costly tele-monitoring and tele-homecare devices. Patients will be able to upload their health data into their physicians' electronic medical records (EMR), and patients may have their own electronic personal health records. Concurrently, SYKES is ensuring that secure networks meet the increasing need to protect the personal health information of our users. Each new service is supported by a security and privacy impact assessment to ensure that each program meets or exceeds the requirements of Federal and Provincial privacy legislation. Our staff are trained initially on their role in protecting and advocating for the individual's right to privacy. In addition to this annual refreshers ensure that privacy is embedded into the culture of Sykes Assistance Services.

Ensuring Clinical Excellence

In keeping with our exacting standards of excellence, SYKES recruits only highly qualified clinicians and support personnel. Our clinical staff places the healthcare needs of patients at the forefront, ensuring the highest possible standard of evidence-based care at every contact.

Extensive personal and professional development, specifically designed to deliver improved care and customer satisfaction, is required of all agents and healthcare staff working at SYKES. Our clinicians are provided rigorous orientation to tele-practice, supported by individual mentors and ongoing coaching to assure a safe evolution from novice to mastery.

Quality assurance and continuous quality improvement are at the core of what SYKES delivers. Our pioneering approach to operational excellence has allowed us to match the best practices of customer relationship management with evidence-based clinical practice.

SYKES has embedded continuous process improvement into the culture of the organization. Our five step Continuous Improvement Process – Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control – underlies all performance analyses and improvement recommendations. SYKES has implemented Lean and Six Sigma continuous process improvement using tools such as value stream mapping, A3 Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles, root cause analysis and Kaizen events. The fusion of Lean and Six Sigma works particularly well in healthcare because of its emphasis on customer/patient value. By eliminating waste and improving value, one can reduce costs and improve patient satisfaction and loyalty.

High Touch Patient Care

Every interaction that we implement has elements of best practice communications, behavior change and support – delivered in a thoughtful balance of high-tech and high-touch patient care. The technology of telehealth enables the right provider to be available at the right time; it is the competencies and communications process used by the healthcare provider that makes the difference in patient outcomes.

SYKES views the concept of telehealth coaching in its broadest sense:

- If we are supporting a scheduling service, our callers or users will have a different experience than if they called another program. They will feel cared for and at the centre of the process – not someone being shuffled through the system and treated like a number.
- If we are performing triage, we build a relationship with the callers so that they see the process as a journey taken together. They feel empowered and are more likely to follow the advice provided because, in effect, they were part of the decision itself.
- For Wellness and Disease Management clients, we carefully consider the whole person and all other aspects of their life situation. Through the use of motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral counseling, and social learning processes, SYKES professionals help our clients to envision, commit to and achieve lasting, positive health behavior change.

About Us

A member of a family of global businesses delivering business process outsourcing services, SYKES sets the standard for excellence in customer service. With 15 years of experience delivering healthcare through more than 10 million clinical interactions using the latest telehealth technology, our professionals provide interventions that are:

- **On target**

Personalized, evidence-based and accurate

- **Just enough**

Efficient, satisfying to the user and no more or less than needed to solve the problem

- **Just in time**

Available to users the way they want it, where they want it and when it makes the critical difference

Helping people make health decisions, SYKES delivers services that are always current and relevant.

SYKES creates working partnerships with clients to meet the complex healthcare challenges of the 21st century.

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End Notes

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