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School of Management and Labor Relations

Wellbeing as Workplace Culture

A Brief Examination of One Firm's Approach to Changing its Landscape of Wellbeing

Employer Disability Practices Center

RUTGERS School of Management and Labor Relations | Burton Blatt Institute Syracuse University | NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY | INDIANA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

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Mental health and wellbeing in the workplace: why does it matter?

- Rates of depression and anxiety have increased since pre-pandemic levels
- Pandemic made it clear workplace affects mental health
- Mental illness, depression, anxiety are prime causes of work absence
- Lack of effective structures and support at work can affect workers' ability to do their jobs well
- Poor mental health support can decrease worker attendance and lead to higher levels of turnover
- Worker demand for employers' attention to mental wellbeing is rising

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Program Implementation is Challenging

Many companies struggle to find and implement appropriate mental health structures/programs

2022 study found that employees reported only 2 in 5 managers encouraged them to take time off when under stress

Only 20% of employers require managers take part in annual mental health awareness training

When programs do exist, it's challenging to encourage employees to use them

47% of workers know about employer mental health services but only 38% feel comfortable using them

Stigma impacts workers' willingness to disclose

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The Study

Mixed Methods

- Case study design
- 7 semi-structured interviews
- 6 firm representatives
- Thematic analysis of qualitative data
- Quantitative deidentified data

Impact Measures

- Organizational change academic research
- Monitoring employees' awareness and interest in programs/initiatives
- Normalization of the issue of focus
- Attendance or usage of the program or initiative

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Context/Background

- EY US—large professional services firm
- Operates in teams across service lines and regions
- Offered mental health supports as early as 1970
- Shifted from design meant to fix problematic employee situations to one of universal design

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Evolution of Wellbeing at EY US (slide 1 of 4)

Started with an Employee Assistance Program

- No-cost counseling sessions
- Low utilization due to stigma

Deliberately Approached De-stigmatization

- Internal Employee Resource Group (ERG) developed program to create awareness around signs of mental health or substance abuse issues
- Anti-stigma initiative
- Locally-based events
- Leaders-first model
- Levels of trust varied across teams
- Program usage increased when anti-stigma initiative launched

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Evolution of Wellbeing at EY US (slide 2 of 4)

Expanded the Scope of Wellbeing

- Developed curriculum focused on normalizing conversations around mental health
- Content was later expanded to include life events, caregiver struggles, parental transitions, financial challenges, loneliness, relationships, healthy sleep habits

Connected internally to enable relevance

- Internal EAP clinicians engaged with departments across the firm
- Provided wellbeing support tailored to specific communities and needs within the firm

Responded to new challenges and opportunities

- Pandemic helped to normalize talking about mental health and wellbeing
- WFH made work feel more personal
- Easier to attend events virtually

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Evolution of Wellbeing at EY US (slide 3 of 4)

Increased adoption through leadership buy-in

- Created a Chief Wellbeing Officer position
- Signaled long-term commitment

Normalized wellbeing at the team level

- Created and launched the Team Wellbeing Toolkit
- Teams choose ways to implement wellbeing for their team

Included wellbeing-focused goals in the business model

- Implemented the “vitality index” to measure team’s progress on wellbeing goals

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Evolution of Wellbeing at EY US (slide 4 of 4)

Solidified wellbeing at the team level

- Created and leveraged the Wellbeing Champion Network
- Invited employees to become wellbeing champion volunteers
- Received further training
- Led teams in wellbeing strategies and practices

Created buy-in and accountability at the team level

- Developed a framework to shape workplace culture
- 4 pillars of healthy work: Focus, Connections, Flexibility, and Efficient impact

Continue to redefine team norms

- Team responsibility
- "Wellbeing is a team sport"

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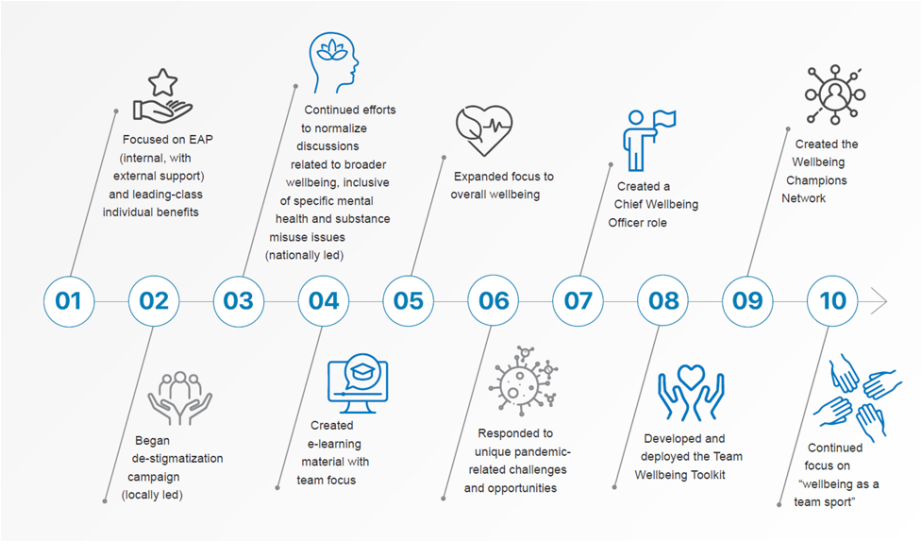
Evolution of Wellbeing at EY US



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Challenges

- Organizational culture change is difficult
- Making time for wellbeing can be difficult
- Staying current and relevant requires constant review
  - Developing/updating apps, tools, resources
  - Monitoring usage
  - Receiving feedback

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Impact

High levels of Awareness/Interest	*"There's so much awareness. People know that we are serious about this."*
Increased Normalization	*now we're creating an environment where everybody feels like, 'it's actually OK for me to go and have that conversation*
High Attendance/Usage	*"We've had over 31,000 views of [wellbeing-focused] webcasts. And it's continuing, it's growing."*
Informing Action	Low wellbeing scores lead to analysis of team data, tailored programs

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Wellbeing Metrics

- **Overall wellbeing sentiment increases**
  - *"I am comfortable with the personal and professional demands for my time"* Increased by 8 percentage points between 2021 and 2024
  - *"I have the ability to dedicate time to my health and wellbeing needs"* Increased by over 10 percentage points between 2021 and 2022
  - *"I can experience a level of wellbeing that is right for me"* increased by an average of seven percentage points after program completion across the 2022 and 2023 cohorts
  - Improvements of 6% in mindfulness and 16% in wellbeing and empathy
  - *"I've been feeling I'm not thinking clearly,"* saw an average improvement of 20%
  - Positive increase by 25% for comfort with demands on their time, 27% for ability to dedicate time to support mental and emotional health, and 38% for ability to dedicate time to practice healthy physical habits (between 2021 and 2022).

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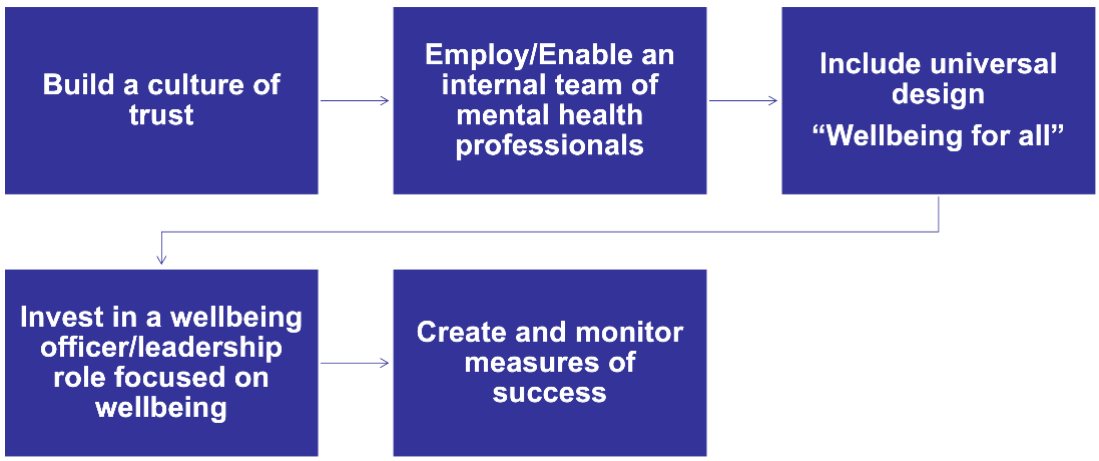
Recommendations for Building a Culture of Wellbeing



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