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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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

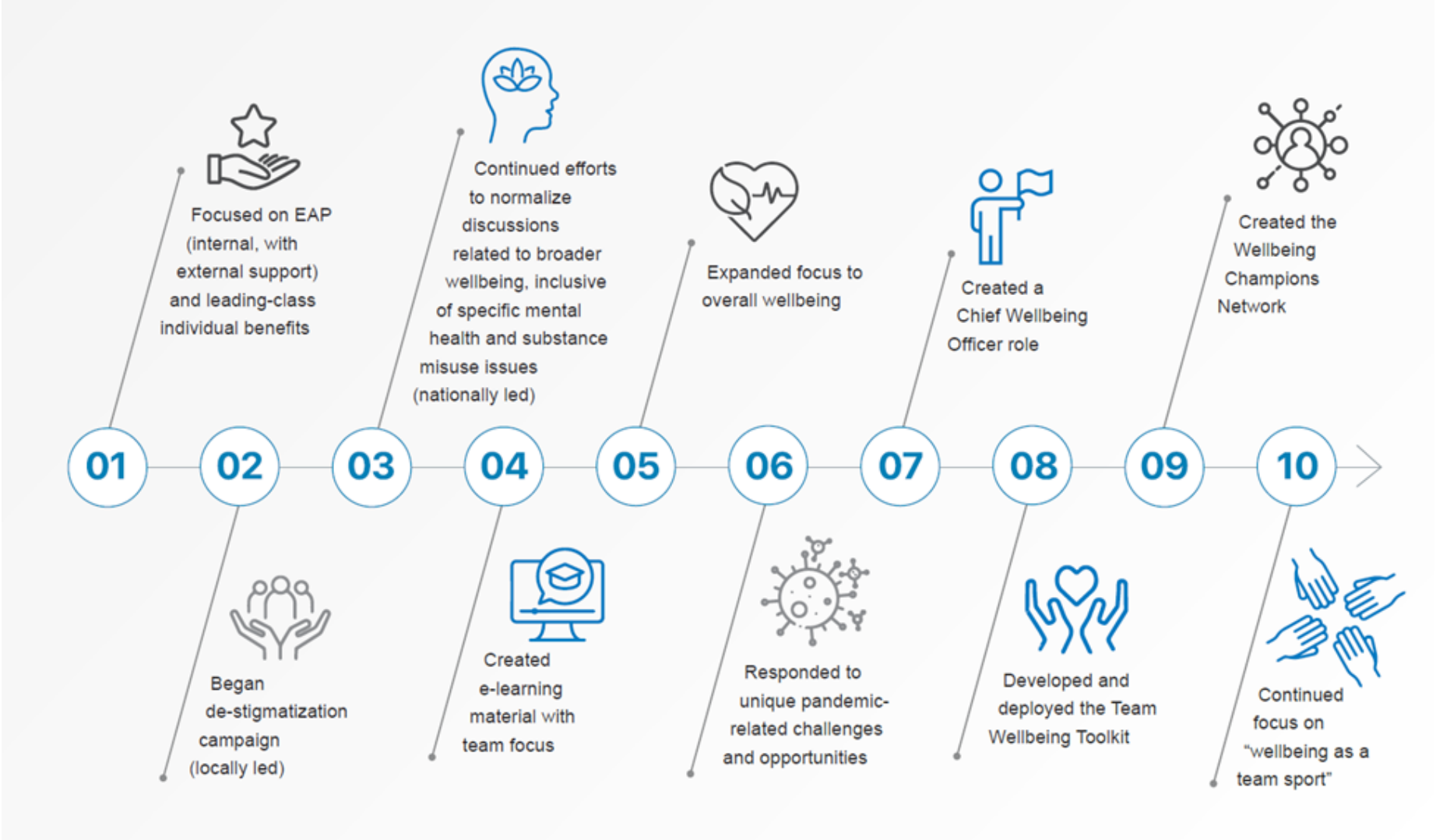
Created buy-in and accountability at the team level

- 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”

Evolution of Wellbeing at EY US



Challenges

Organizational culture change is difficult

Making time for wellbeing can be difficult

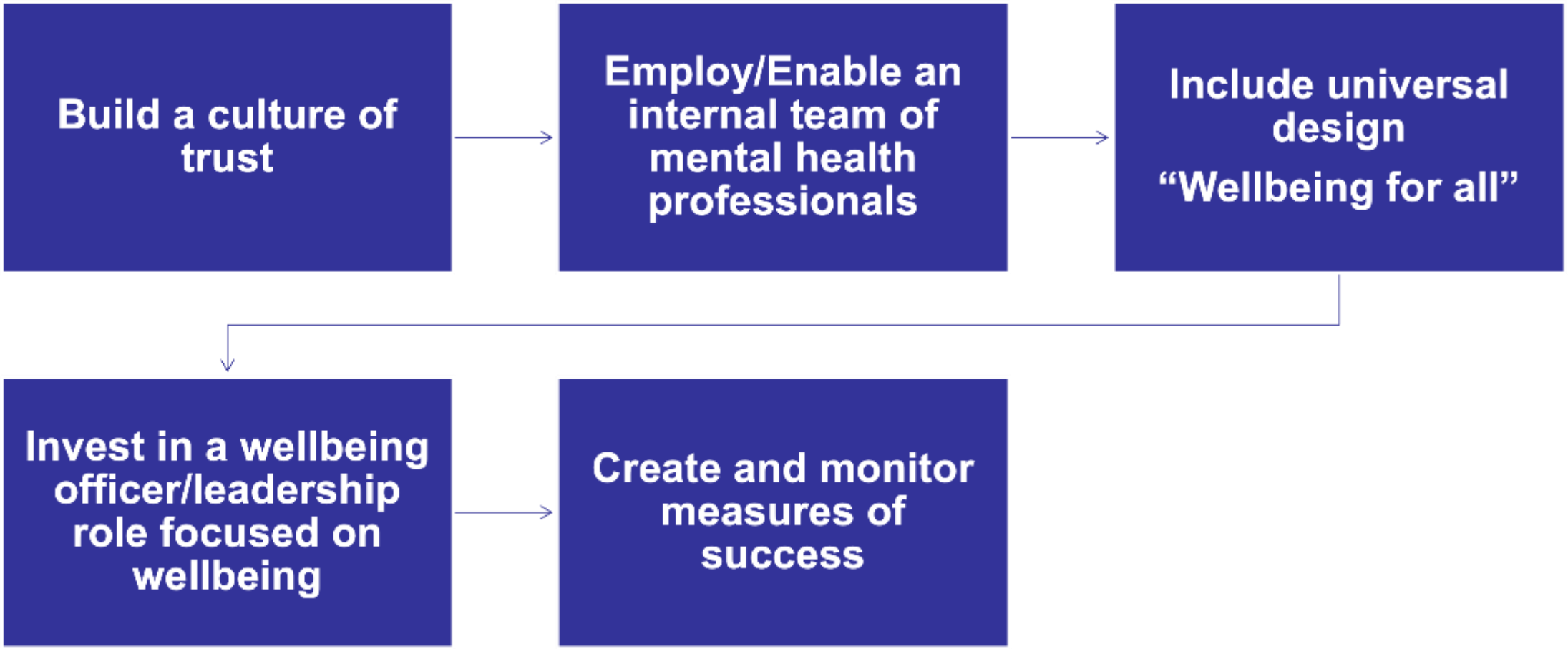
Staying current and relevant requires constant review

- Developing/updating apps, tools, resources
- Monitoring usage
- Receiving feedback

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

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).

Recommendations for Building a Culture of Wellbeing