The Influence of Workplace Interactions on Perception of Well-Being and Health Behaviors

Karen Mastroianni, EdD, MPH, COHN-S, FAAOHN
Dissertation Findings 2012 NC State University, Raleigh, NC
Research Purpose & Questions

To understand how employees perceived their work interactions as helping or hindering their perception of well-being, and how these relationships influenced health behavior practices.

1. How do employees perceive workplace relationships as relating to feelings of well-being?

2. How do employees perceive workplace relationships relating to health promoting behaviors?
Qualitative Exploratory Case Study

**Position**
- Health & Health Behaviors Are Complex Social Constructs
- Both Are Influenced By Multiple Factors
- An In-Depth Exploration Was Desired

**Addressing Limitations**
- Size, but reached saturation, plus varied participants
- 2 interviews and 2-week journaling assignment
- Peer Review Coding
Framed By

Social Ecology Model
- Intrapersonal
- Interpersonal
- Community
- Institutional
- Organizational

Communities of Practice
(Lave and Wenger, 1991)
- Meaning making
- Learning in practice
- Identity
### 4 Companies Participated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture - 2 Facilities</td>
<td>25,000+</td>
<td>Wellness Committee, OHN Clinics, EHS Manager, 2010 Wellness Leader Recognition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>500+ in the SE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pharma/Biotechnology</td>
<td>800 + employees in the Southeast</td>
<td>Wellness Coordinator, Occupational Health Nurse, EHS Manager, 2010 Wellness Leader Recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cosmetics/Personal Care</td>
<td>450 employees in the Southeast</td>
<td>Occupational Health Nurse, EHS Manager, 2010 Wellness Leader Recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biotechnology - 2 Facilities</td>
<td>450+ employees in the Southeast</td>
<td>Occupational Health Nurse, EHS Manager, Starting a wellness program, Safety Recognition Awards</td>
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19 Participants

- **Gender** -- 14 Females and 5 Males
- **Age range** -- from 34-57 years old
- **Ethnicity** - Self-identifying as:
  - 12 Caucasian, 2 Asian,
  - 1 Sri Lankan, 1 India/Am,
  - 1 African Am, 1 Black,
  - 1 Am (1 parent was Italian and 1 African Am)
- **Employment** - current company from 1 year & 9 months up to 23 years.
- **Education** - High School to PhD’s
## Summary of Characteristics that Enhance or Detract from Well-Being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics That Enhanced Well-Being</th>
<th>Characteristics That Detracted from Well-Being</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration/Teamwork</td>
<td>Lack of Collaboration/ Teamwork</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mutual Respect</td>
<td>Disrespect/Condescending</td>
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<td>Trust</td>
<td>Lack of Integrity/Distrust</td>
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<td>Open, Clear Communication</td>
<td>Lack of Open Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valued/Recognition</td>
<td>Lack of Value/Recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socializing/Personal Connection</td>
<td>Difficult Interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injustice/Lack of Fairness</td>
<td>Lack of Empathy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Regardless of Worksite Wellness Programs –
The Social Climate Impacted Health, Participation, Well-Being
Summary of Influence on Well-being and Health Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Well-Being &amp; Health Behaviors Influenced:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Symptoms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
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<td>Exercise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Energy Level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional Health</td>
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<td>Social Impact</td>
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<td>Personal Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Impact</td>
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Other Key Findings

• Core values had the greatest influence on well-being and health behaviors;
• The ripple effect to relationships inside and outside of work;
• Broad definitions of health and well-being; but ratings of health, based on physical attributes alone;
• Perceived lack of support and resources (such as HR) to address detracting characteristics;
• CoPs enhanced well-being & health practices
Stories Shared

• “It’s your values, your core values that get compromised. What you believe in...interactions that blame or accuse, and lack respect and trust, target self assurance”. She slowly and with emphasis said that, “...who I am, is being questioned and attacked and that’s what is so bad to deal with”.

• When talking about management decisions, Kirk discussed, If you're transparent and you treat us, you know, with respect, I'm not, not every job can tell every decision, but there are so many cases on a daily basis where there is very little transparency in decision making that impacts our daily lives.”

• Manager at the time said: ‘You're just not worth the money that you make here...I actually said I thought a manager's job was to bring out the best. And he was like, ‘Well, that's not my management style. You have to adapt to me. You have to do what I want.’
Stories Shared

• All nineteen participants shared that what made them feel good, what enhanced their feelings of well-being, was related to working together, having each other’s back, feeling part of a team, or collaborating to address an issue.

• It's the social-slash-collaborating yeah. And working on a common purpose. I get the people together and so we can have these sort of interactions...I mean, we don't always agree, sometimes we have a little bit of friction but it's okay, it's because of respect and trust.”

• described, “...being able to come together, everyone putting in their ideas and then they bring on a game plan and going forward with it.”
Stories Shared

• Coworker discussions after manager scolded an employee for being late when she was always late. Described as parenting, but they decided, ‘do as I say’ policy not only being bad parenting, but being bad role modeling as well.

• One revealed making a cynical remark when her manager came to her looking for another employee who Bridgett described as “a problem employee.” Bridgett’s response was that it “wasn’t her day to watch her.” She said her boss ‘conked’ her in the head for saying it was not her day to watch the employee. Bridgett recalled, “And she hit me in the head. She didn't just tap me; she hit me hard in the head.”
Implications

• Broaden the focus of wellness initiatives to include dimensions of well-being and multi-level approaches

• Create interventions that improve interpersonal dynamics, as well as organizational factors supporting the dynamics

• Assess and address social environmental issues for positivity and ‘psychological’ safety and well-being

• Utilize CoP for implementing sustainable HRD and health promotion initiatives

• Consider larger research studies in the area of the workplace social climate and individual well-being
Summary

Individual Well-Being

AND

The Well-Being of Others, Our Communities, Relationships, Workplaces

Inextricably Connected
Work Culture Matters & Should Be Considered Before Wellness Initiatives Are Planned

The scientific search for the basic building blocks of life has revealed a startling fact: there are none. The deeper that physicists peer into the nature of reality, the only thing they find is relationships

-M. Wheatley
Contact Information

karenm@dimensions-ohs.com
(919) 676-2877 ext 112
www.dimensions-ohs.com

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