An Employer's Guide to Workplace Emotional Wellness

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All materials in this toolkit are available online at: www.businessgrouphealth.org.

1   Executive Summary

Business executives know the long-term success of a company depends heavily upon the sustained productivity of its people. What not enough executives fully value, or have yet to act upon, is that the strategic definition of organizational assets should extend to humans, not just capital. More importantly, actively investing in a company's human assets, including its employees' physical, mental and emotional health, is just as vital as maintaining its machinery, supply chain and customer relationships. Some argue employee emotional health is too "soft" for employers to directly support; this Guide is intended to address these business concerns and will provide recommendations to help employers strategically address employee emotional health.

Executives and senior management are seeing the impact of this oversight or neglect as the cost of health care continues spiral out of control. Total U.S. health care expenditures are approaching $2.2 trillion, which represents nearly 16% of the country's gross domestic product. A 2008 Health Care Cost Survey, showed companies are paying an average of over $9,000 per employee for health care. In 2006, corporate health care costs represented 44.1% of total benefit costs compared to 8.8% of total benefit costs in 1950.[i]

In addition to addressing the cost of health care, the current economic crisis has intensified the focus on productivity, with organizational leaders understanding that increasing and maintaining employee productivity will be essential to meeting shareholder expectations. Additionally, the aging of the workforce and employees, who are choosing to remain in the workplace past traditional retirement age, will require everyone in management to seek a new understanding and creative approaches to achieving organizational productivity objectives.

Some employers are exploring new concepts that focus on the **total value of health**, and **culture of health** to help achieve corporate objectives. These companies are beginning to realize that success includes improving and maintaining employee and dependent health status. These success factors include:

- Improving the health status of the workforce. The issue is not what it costs to keep people healthy and productive, rather what it costs to let them remain unhealthy.

- Providing financial and other incentives that encourage the use of high value and proven preventive practices and interventions, and discouraging use of wasteful or unproven services.

- Aligning economic and behavioral incentives for health care providers, employers, suppliers and consumers to increase the value and sustainable impact of these services.

- Empowering employers, purchasers, intermediaries, providers, and individuals with shared, clear roles of responsibility and accountability for health and resulting productivity.

- Using broad metrics that go beyond medical costs and focusing on improving health status.

- Measuring the full return on investment from increased productivity as well as medical costs and savings from continually improving the health status of the workforce.

To achieve their strategic business objectives, employers must create an environment that encourages employees to maintain their total health: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Dee Edington, writing in <u>Zero Trends</u>, has outlined five strategies of change that will help organizations develop a culture of health and achieving health and productivity goals. These strategies include changing:

1. From health as the absence of disease to health as vitality and energy;

2. From only caring for the sick to enabling health people to stay healthy;

3. From the cost of healthcare to the total value of health;

4. From individual participation to population engagement; and

5. From behavior change to a culture of health. [ii]

In order to control costs and promote health, employers are offering expanded benefits, including employee assistance, health promotion and disease management programs. Of these, health promotion programs are the only programs designed primarily to *prevent* poor health. These programs target common risk factors of chronic diseases including tobacco use, physical activity and diet. Rarely do these programs extend beyond physical health and target behavioral health or emotional health issues, even though these issues contribute significantly to the health and productivity of employees.

To achieve a meaningful culture of health, company policies, business practices, and communication methods must support positive emotional health and not contribute to poor health. Achieving emotionally healthy employees requires organizational leadership and a corporate culture that values emotional health.

1.1 Purpose of the Guide

The purpose of this guide is to educate employers about the business association between organizational practices, personal resilience and the emotional health of its employees and

dependents. The guide includes actionable strategies and recommendations that will enable employers to create a work environment and related programs that promote emotional health. This purpose will be accomplished by exploring organizational practices that contribute to individual stress, depression, and anxiety. The guide will also explore preventive mental health services that can be offered through the health benefits plan, disability management, and employee assistance as well as health promotion/wellness programs.

The Business Group believes that by identifying common organizational stressors, implementing effective programs and using targeted communication practices, employers can be more proactive at improving the emotional health of their employees and dependents.

1.2 Approach

The Business Group convened the National Committee on Workplace Emotional Wellness (NCWEW) to develop recommendations for the design, quality assurance, structure, and integration of programs and services of workplace emotional wellness. The Committee consisted of 25 health and wellness benefits experts, health and productivity professionals, and representatives from managed care and managed behavioral health organizations, pharmacology experts, academic researchers, health care consultants, and benefit managers and medical directors.

This Committee met in March, 2010 in Washington DC and participated in several conference calls in 2010. The purpose of these meetings was to identify and set corporate policy and communication recommendations that addressed workplace emotional wellness. This effort was also supported by Business Group staff as well as external consultants, who performed research in support of this project and developed the Guide.

1.3 Summary of Key Employer Recommendations

The following communication, program and policy recommendations were developed for employers by the NCWEH:

1.3.1 Workplace Emotional Wellness Strategies and Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Examine communication around emotional wellness in a multi-dimensional manner.

Recommendation #2: Clearly define the business value proposition of emotional wellness for each stakeholder group.

Recommendation #3: Adopt language that each identified stakeholder group understands and describe how emotional health relates to or affects its strategic interests and operational requirements.

Recommendation #4: Clearly define and communicate the expected role(s) for each identified stakeholder group.

Recommendation #5: Identify and adopt the most effective communication methods for each identified stakeholder group.

Recommendation #6: Maintain transparency.

1.3.2 Workplace Emotional Wellness Programs, Services, and Culture Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Help employees build and use personal skills to take responsibility for their emotional wellness.

Recommendation #2: Integrate emotional wellness with general medical and wellness programs.

Recommendation #3: Align the corporate culture to incorporate workplace emotional wellness.

Recommendation #4: Facilitate transparency, communication and support for a corporate culture of emotional wellness from executives and managers.

Recommendation #5: Remove actual and perceived barriers to emotional wellness programs and service.

1.3.3 Workplace Emotional Wellness Policies and Metrics

Recommendation #1: Create balance between work and personal life.

Recommendation #2: Incorporate emotional wellness assessments into short- and long-term disability, FMLA, etc.

Recommendation #3: Create a dashboard with metrics that gauge employee emotional wellness and the corporate culture of health.

1.4 Future Opportunities

The following ideas and considerations were identified during the development of this Guide, and should be evaluated as part of any future efforts that address workplace emotional wellness.

- Develop a workplace emotional wellness metadata structure and supporting assessment tools that employers can use to quantify workplace emotional wellness and related business impact for individual employees, dependents / families, and employee populations.
- Establish benefit planning and implementation resources that employers can use to support the recommendations contained in this Guide.
- Define attributes of stress including the sources and symptoms.
- Identify criteria that would facilitate an understanding between workplace emotional wellness and job fit for specific types of jobs or job classes.
- Define the individual- and population-level variables that are statistically correlated with emotional wellness.

2 Defining Emotional Wellness

2.1 Workplace Emotional Wellness

In March 2010, the National Committee on Workplace Emotional Wellness (NCWEW) was charged with defining emotional health for the purpose of this Guide. Given the abstractness of the emotional health concept and the lack of a common language or nomenclature, developing an operational definition for workplace emotional health was a significant challenge. The Committee reviewed existing research on the topic and worked with content experts to develop a set of key attributes and a working definition for workplace emotional health.
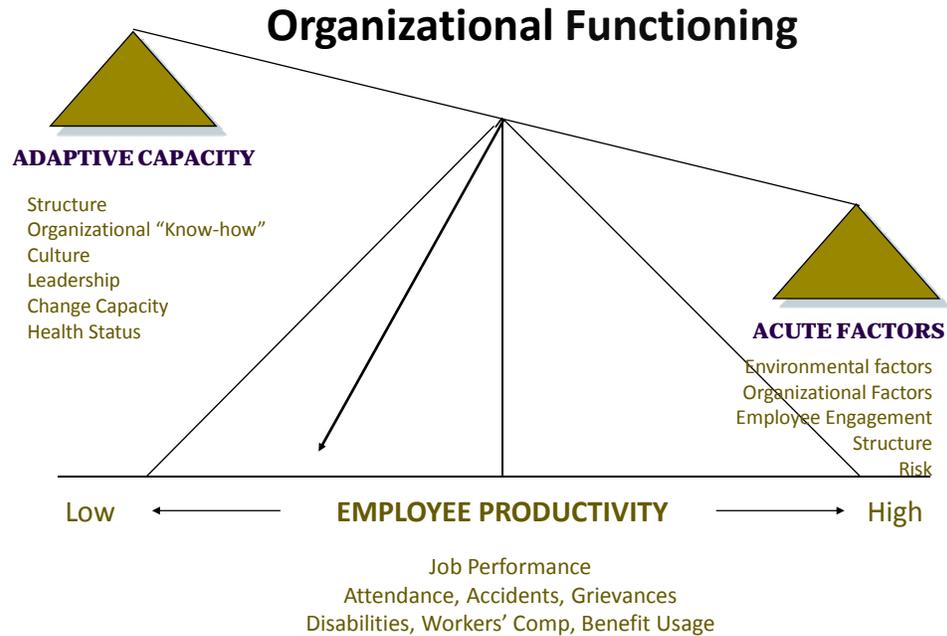
First, workplace emotional health is a multi-variable concept, which means that several factors are influencing and being influenced by each other in varying amounts at different times. When applied to employee or employee groups within a workplace, these variables include:

- Degree of engagement with one's job
- Energy and vigor
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Level of motivation and engagement
- Personal and work-related control
- Resiliency
- Tolerance for ambiguity

These factors provided the foundation for what are perhaps the most fundamental concepts of workplace emotional health: functionality and engagement. In other words, the bottom line is about being able to sustain a desirable level of functioning in the workplace, and remain fully engaged in work in the midst of various pressures, stressors and changes.

Second, emotional health is not a "black and white" concept, but instead exists along a **continuum** (See Table 1)**.** At one end of this continuum employees can sustain high levels of functioning and are emotionally healthy. The opposite end of the continuum is characterized by low-functioning and emotionally unhealthy individuals. Furthermore, individuals who experience diagnosable physical or behavioral health problems (e.g., major depressive disorder or anxiety disorders) may also function on this low-functioning end of the continuum. Between these end points lie individuals showing moderate symptoms, as well as those employees who may be at-risk for becoming emotionally unhealthy in the future.

Table 1 Functioning Continuum

Organizational Functioning

ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

Structure
Organizational "Know-how"
Culture
Leadership
Change Capacity
Health Status

ACUTE FACTORS

Environmental factors
Organizational Factors
Employee Engagement
Structure
Risk

Low ← **EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY** → High

Job Performance
Attendance, Accidents, Grievances
Disabilities, Workers' Comp, Benefit Usage

A third, and related, attribute of workplace emotional health focuses on *population health management*, which should not be confused with *disease or condition management.* Traditionally, disease management targets those employees who are experiencing the most severe or chronic health difficulties. Population health management, on the other hand, has a much broader focus. Population health management reaches across the span of the emotional health continuum, addressing problems at all acuity levels – improving the severely emotionally unhealthy, preventing the at-risk groups becoming emotionally unhealthy and maintaining or enhancing the emotional health for those who are emotionally healthy and high functioning.

2.1.1 WHO definition

For the purpose of this Guide, an employee's emotional health could be thought of as part of an employee's overall health status. One of the more commonly referenced definitions of overall health has been developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). WHO states that health is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."[iii]

2.1.2 Work group definition

Expanding on the WHO's definition of health, the NCWEW collectively believes that health is a state in which an individual understands his capabilities, manages optimal

levels of stress and energy in his life, maximizes engagement, and experiences a sense of control of his environment. It is in this state that an individual employee is capable of functioning at full or optimal capacity in the workplace.

The emotionally healthy individual is resilient - he or she is able to cope with optimal levels of stress and conflict.

The emotionally healthy person maintains a positive approach to life that is rooted in his/her sense of personal responsibility for, and ability to manage, his/her life in personally fulfilling ways.

An emotionally healthy individual:

- Is capable of adapting to changing situations and exhibiting resiliency in stressful situations

- Feels that his basic needs are being met both at home and in the workplace.

- Is self-aware and accepts a wide range of feelings in self and others

- Is tolerant of ambiguity, flexibility and is adaptable to change

- Can function autonomously while remaining cognizant of self limitations

- Accepts challenges and risks and acknowledges conflict and optimal levels of stress as being potentially health

- Effectively manages to arrive at personal decisions based upon the integration of feelings, cognition and behavior

- Forms interdependent relationships based upon mutual commitment, trust and respect

Attributes of **Workplace Emotional Wellness –**

- High functionality in all aspects of life

- Meaningful psychological contact between employee and employer

- Sustained engagement and mindfulness

- Intellectual curiosity and desire, cognitive flexibility

- Strong collaboration and motivation to work

- Humility, generosity, recognition of the "greater context" and sense of purpose

- Sense of interconnectedness with ones organizational culture and climate, inter/intrapersonal alignment

- Sense of control over self and mastery and control of environment

- Tolerance of ambiguity

- Feeling that basic physical, social, financial, mental and emotional needs are being met

- Wellness across the continuum, as an ongoing process

- Emphasis on organizational diversity

- Mutual respect and loyalty within the workforce

3 Business Case for Workplace Emotional Wellness

More and more companies are recognizing that emotional health is an important success factor. According to the Conference Board's CEO Challenge 2010 report, CEOs identified "excellence in execution", "speed, flexibility, adaptability to change", and "stimulating innovation / creativity / enabling entrepreneurship as one of their most important challenges.[iv] These three challenges are directly impacted by the way in which emotional health is addressed by corporate leaders. In other words, the ability of a company to excel in the marketplace, to quickly adapt to change, or to be innovative require its people to be physically, mentally and emotionally healthy.

Table 2 Conference Board CEO Challenge: Global Top Ten (N = 144)

Relative ranking			Cite challenge as being of "greatest concern in the coming year"	
Oct.-Nov 2008	*Oct.-Dec 2009*	*Challenge*	*Oct.-Dec. 2009*	*Oct.-Nov.2008*
1	1	Excellence in execution	42.3%	55.4%
2	2	Consistent execution of strategy by top management	39.9	47.0
5	3	Sustained and steady top-line growth	38.8	42.3
6	4	Customer loyalty/retention	33.5	40.1
3	5	Speed, flexibility, adaptability to change	29.0	46.6
15	6	Corporate reputation for quality products/services	24.1	20.2
16	7	Stimulating innovation/creativity/enabling entrepreneurship	23.0	18.2
9	8	Profit growth	22.7	34.6
7	9	Improving productivity	19.9	36.9
26	10	Government regulation	18.9	12.6

Note: Respondents were allowed to rate multiple challenges as being "greatest concern(s)" in the coming year. The matched set of challenges between the 2008 and 2009 survey questions is created by removing all of the challenges asked in one year and not the other. An accurate year-on-year analysis of the relative shifts in ranking of the exact same challenges is completed by calculating rankings independent of new additions and deletions to the survey questions. The global CEO Challenge rankings are weighted to correct for regional representation. Each CEO's responses are weighted by his or her respective region's representation in global GDP (Asia, 21.7 percent; Europe, 36.4 percent; the United States, 23.7 percent; and other, 18.2 percent), according to the GDP data from the International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook Database (as of September 2009).

3.1 Goals for Workplace Emotional Wellness

When considering workplace emotional health, the goal of a company is to:

- Achieve a higher purpose;
- Delight and balance the needs of its stakeholders;
- Grow profitably; and
- Create long term enduring value.

To achieve this goal, companies need emotionally healthy, mature, engaged and productive people. The goal of a company is not solely to build a cadre of personally fulfilled people,

but rather to see personal fulfillment as a means to an end and to develop a workforce of fulfilled people who are more likely to be engaged and committed to the organization. By doing so, the personal mission of employees connects with the mission of the company.[v]

One way to visualize these goals is to consider a company's human capital "value chain" (See Figure 1).
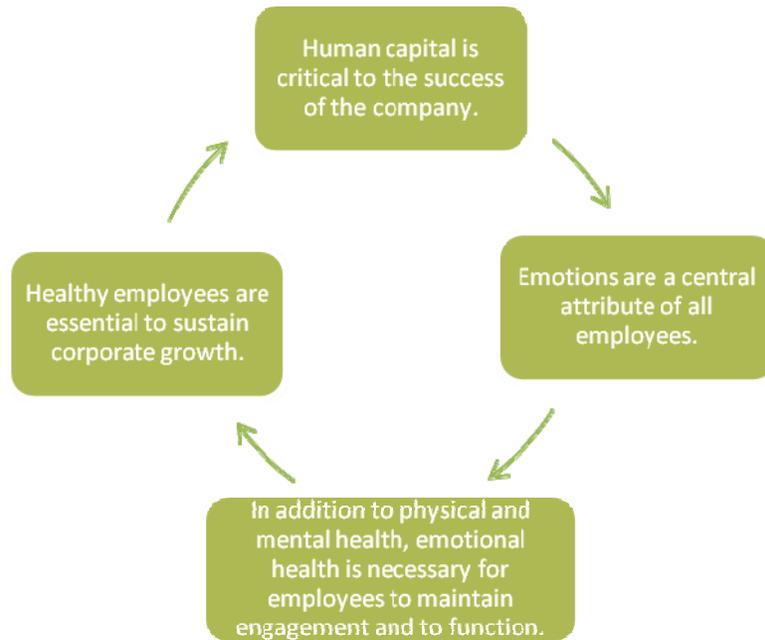

Figure 1:   Human Capital "Value Chain"

Historically, employers primarily focused on the relationship between work and employee physical health. Workflow processes were examined and methods were developed to address the ergonomic impact on employees. In addition to focusing on employee physical health, employers have recognized over the last few decades that an employee's mental health has an impact on performance, and employers have developed an array of programs and benefits that address mental health. More recently, with the focus of work shifting to a knowledge-based economy and social networking becoming a standard part of the work environment, employers are exploring the idea of employee emotional health and its role and impact on productivity.

3.2 Business Impact for Workplace Emotional Wellness

3.2.1 How does emotional health impact the workplace?

The average employed adult spends 7.5 hours at work per day.[vi] For many people, work represents more than a place to pursue intellectual and economic goals. The workplace

is also an important source of social support. Work can be a source of meaning, membership, and mutual support through which employees create close friendships and even life partners. Furthermore, with population trends changing the structure of nuclear families, religious communities, and tight-knit neighborhoods, the workplace has, for many, become a primary place of communication, social development, and relationship-forming. A series of surveys conducted in the 1980s found that nearly half of employed Americans had at least one close friend from work. In addition, nearly one in five said that at least half of their closest friends were co-workers, and nine out of ten people felt a part of community at work and looked forward to being with co-workers each day.[vii]

This marriage of identity and the workplace is even more prominent in corporate culture. The organizational culture of corporations tends to define the context in which people behave and how the organization will be structured. A corporate culture is formed through the development of assumptions, values, and beliefs that are learned and adopted by employees. This formal and informal code of conduct becomes entrenched as a culture as new employees join the organization, link the values and beliefs to success within the company, and adopt them into their own particular behaviors and work styles.[viii]

However, success at work also requires employees to also manage and balance their emotional health. One could consider the workplace as the "playing field" of people's lives, in which employees are granted opportunities to succeed and find fulfillment, but employees must also confront significant challenges, stress, and the threat of failure, as well as the psychological tolls these entail. Modern workers may have to deal with long hours, long commutes, and deprived time from family and friends. In fact, in a recent study, two-thirds of American employees said that they wanted to work an average of two fewer hours a day if possible.[ix]

3.2.1.1 *Psychological health*

American workers tend to maintain a psychological attachment to their job. Some argue that a healthy psychological attachment to work is positive and enhances human performance at work. On the other hand, this investment can have a negative on emotionally unhealthy individuals who lose their jobs. It is not uncommon for individuals who unexpectedly lose their job to struggle with mental health problems such as depression, substance abuse, and anxiety. On a larger scale, widespread unemployment in a geographic area has been associated with decline in the quality of neighborhoods and family relationships, as well as an increase in crime.

1. Depression and other behavioral health problems are very common in the population, and maybe even more common than formal epidemiological studies suggest. This prevalence is particularly significant if one includes individuals experiencing lower levels of distress (See Figure 2).[x]
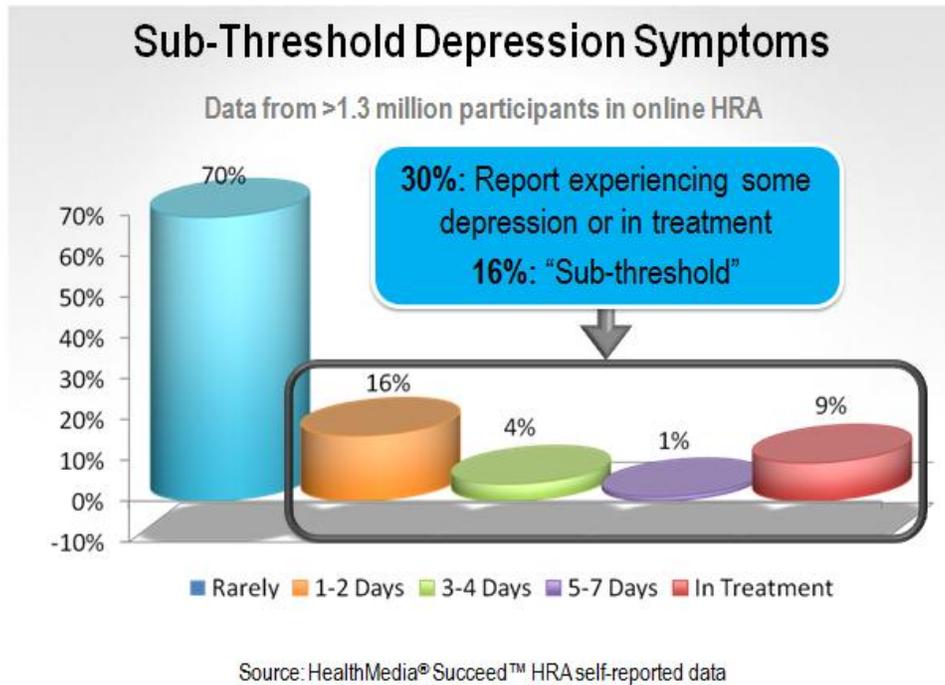

Figure 2: Depression and Sub-Threshold Symptoms

2. Even sub-threshold symptoms can exert an influence in the workplace. For example, individuals who report being depressed just one or two days a week, who might never qualify for a formal diagnosis of depression, nonetheless show significantly higher rates of absenteeism and productivity impairment compared to those who report rarely feeling depressed (See Figure 3 and Figure 4).[xi]
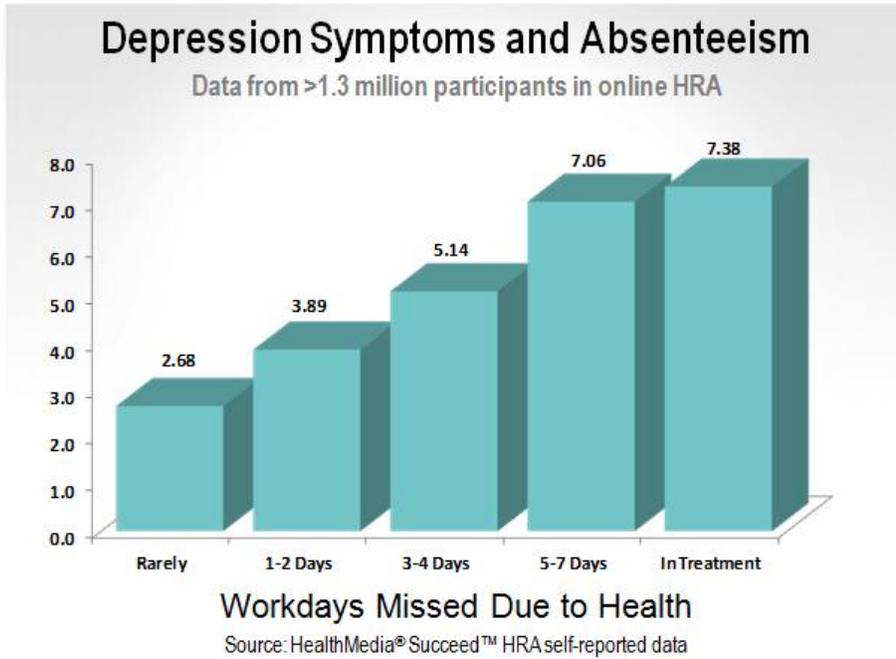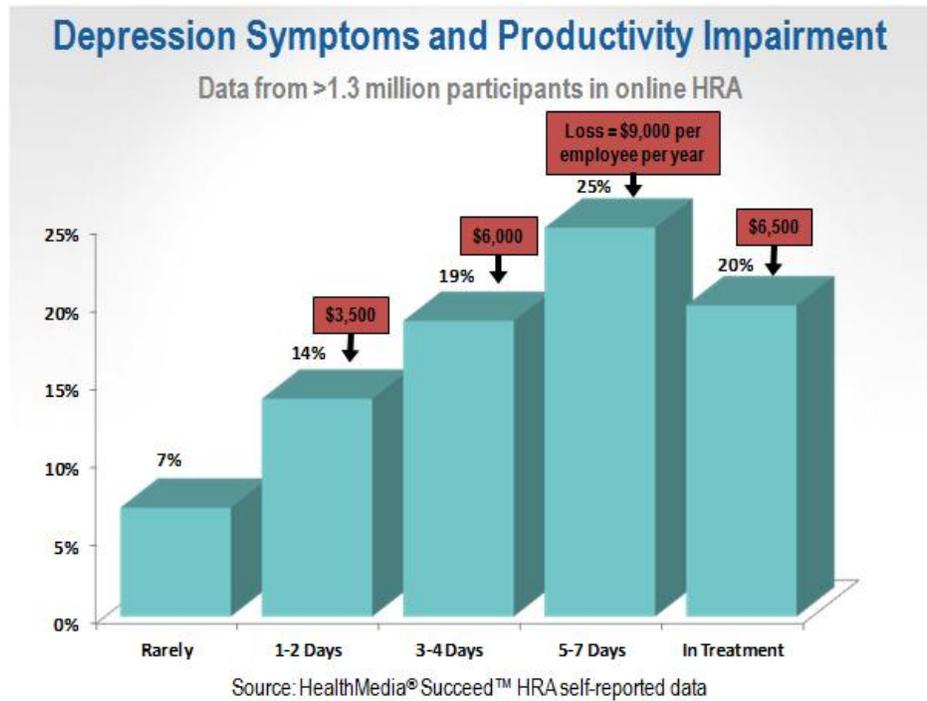
Figure 3: Depression and Absenteeism

Figure 4: Depression and Productivity

3. The productivity data on "sub-threshold" depression suggest that for some individuals with mental health problems, difficulties at work may appear early on, often before other symptoms and related health problems begin to surface. Consequently, the employer may begin to pay a price from the very first indications of a mental health problem, long before the distressed employee seeks help from a health care provider.

4. Research shows that treatment for mental health disorders, including both medication and psychotherapy, typically works. If treatment is effective, then one of the problems may be access. The following factors limit both access to, and efficacy of, treatment:

   a. While both psychotherapy and medication have been shown effective, nearly two-thirds of people with mental health problems will never seek treatment of any kind.

   b. Less than 10% of people with a mental health problem will obtain specialty care (e.g., medication consultation with a psychiatrist, psychotherapy with a mental health professional).

   c. The bulk of people with a mental health problem who come forward for treatment will be seen by a primary care physician, where they are typically prescribed medication.

   d. Primary care providers are already being asked to do too much. Saddling them with the responsibility for medicating large numbers of patients with mental health issues only adds to their burden, and might not be the best course of action. Indeed, research indicates that medication in primary care seldom proceeds according to established clinical guidelines, with an estimated 80% of cases failing to meet standards of care.

   e. Stigma is a legitimate issue for accessing care, as evidenced by research that continues to indicate a majority of employees believe that their work status would be damaged by seeking treatment for depression and other mental health problems.[xii]

5. If it works as intended, mental health parity should help remove gaps in insurance coverage and improve access to treatment for those who most need it. These regulations should offer an additional safety net for those who suffer from severe mental illness, and for their families. However, mental health parity will not solve many of the problems with treatment access and quality described above. While mental health parity may go a long way toward reducing

disparities in coverage between physical disorders and mental health problems, it will not affect the millions of employees who suffer these problems silently and never come forward for any form of treatment. Likewise, it is unlikely to have an impact on those employees at the lower end of the severity continuum, specifically those who have "sub-threshold" symptoms or those who are not yet symptomatic but are at risk for developing problems in the future.

3.2.1.2   *Physical health*

1. Extensive data exists on the relationship between chronic health conditions and productivity impairment.

2. Even in the absence of more serious conditions, variables like sleep loss and weight gain result in higher rates of productivity impairment.

3. The relationship between physical health and psychological health is complex and bi-directional, with each factor exerting influence on the other.

4. The prevalence of depression (and other behavioral health problems) significantly increases among those with chronic health conditions, as well as those who are obese. For example, while the prevalence of mood disorders in the general population has been estimated at around 9.5%, depression affects about 25% of adult-onset diabetic patients.[xiii]

5. When depression and other behavioral health problems are co-morbid (i.e., co-occurring) with other health problems, productivity impairment increases exponentially (See Figure 5).[xiv]   When mental health problems are co-morbid with other medical conditions they increase the risk of all the elements that raise healthcare costs -- including complications, hospitalization, disability, and mortality. Conversely, successful treatment of mental health disorders is associated with improved patient outcomes and lower costs. Among patients with chronic conditions, those with behavioral health issues stand out as the most costly and complicated. Just two examples among many:

Depression Comorbidity and Productivity
WPAI Data from online HRA

This differential costs up to $10,000 per employee/year

■ Rarely ■ 3+ Days/wk

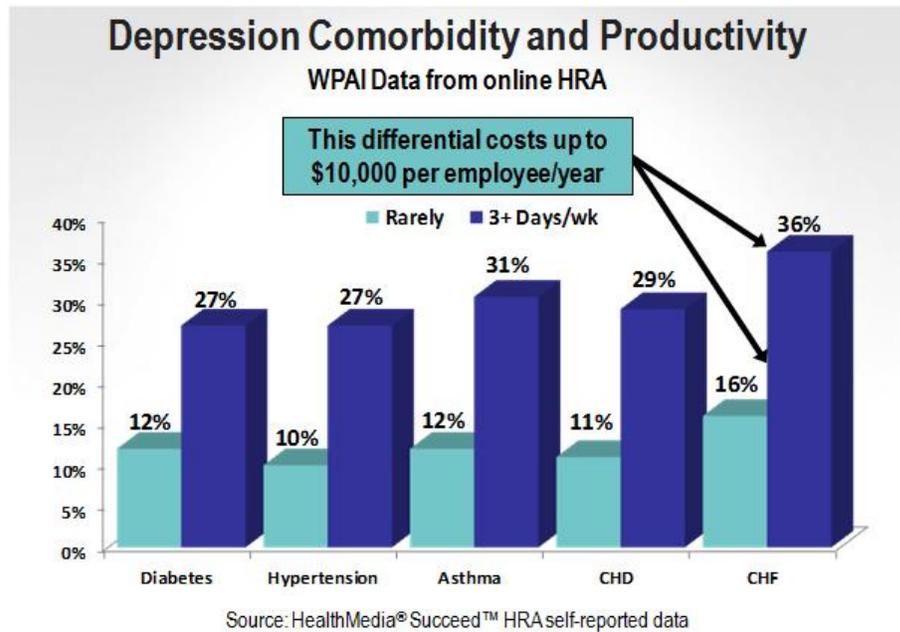Source: HealthMedia® Succeed™ HRA self-reported data

Figure 5: Depression Co-morbidity

About one in four diabetic patients experiences depression (See Figure 6).[xv] Diabetic patients with major depression are significantly less likely to adhere to medication treatment. They also show poor dietary habits, are much less likely to exercise, and are more than twice as likely to smoke as other diabetic patients.[xvi]

Diabetes and Depression

Relationship of depression to self-care problems

Self-care activities (past 7 days)	No Major depression	Major depression	Percentage increase
Healthy eating ≤1 time/week	8.8%	17.2%	95%
5 servings fruit/vegetables ≤1 time/week	21.1%	32.4%	54%
High fat foods ≥6 times/week	11.9%	15.5%	30%
Physical activity (>30min) ≤1 time/week	27.3	44.1	62%
Smoking: Yes	7.7	16.1	109%

Source: Katon, 2004

Figure 6: Diabetes and Depression

Binge eating, the most common eating disorder, is far more prevalent among the obese: 25% of severely obese patients are binge eaters, and are at significantly greater risk for medical and psychological problems than obese patients who do not binge eat (See Figure 6).[xvii] They also have higher rates of obesity-related functional disability, and show a greater degree of psychological distress evidenced by higher rates of depression and anxiety, and more frequent suicide attempts. They report earlier onsets of obesity and dieting behavior, and experience greater weight fluctuations, and, not surprisingly, show poorer outcomes from weight loss treatment and weight loss surgery. At all weight levels, binge eaters show significantly higher productivity impairment than those who do not binge eat.[xviii]

Productivity Impairment and BMI

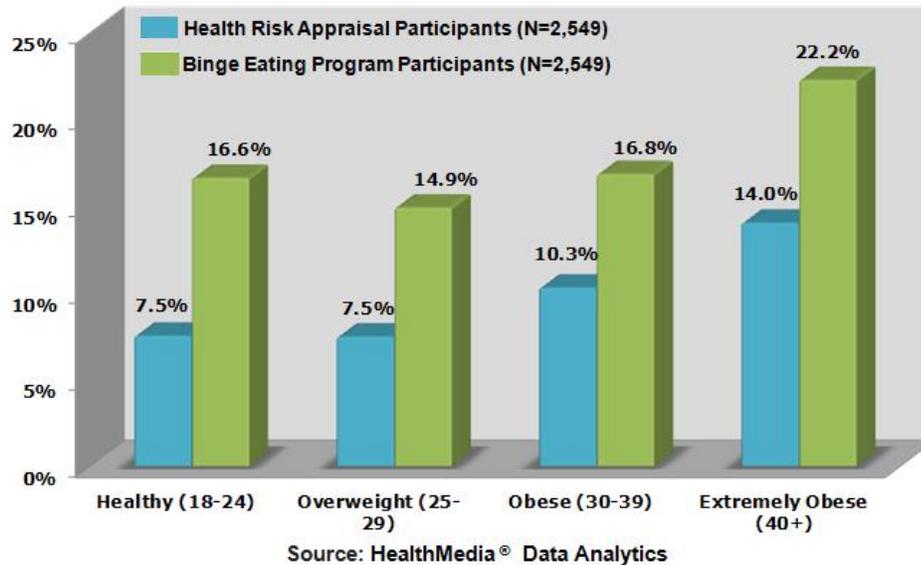## WPAI Scores Estimate Percentage of Work Time Lost

Source: HealthMedia® Data Analytics

Figure 7: BMI and Productivity Impairment

3.3 Benefits and Risks of Workplace Emotional Wellness

3.3.1 The Meaning of Work and the Complexity of the Work Place

While the economic downturn of the last few years seems be nearing the bottom, its effects on businesses have yet to be resolved. The long-lasting impact the economy has had on businesses, their operations, and their employees has forced many companies to rethink their business strategy and make significant adjustments to their business priorities. The changing economy has led to new - or emphasized existing - pressures in the workplace, including:

- Increased stress;
- More anxiety;
- Less job security; and
- Increased job demands.

In the "reset economy" these factors will become major priorities for businesses to address. These pressures in the workplace and new expectations have forced employers to think beyond their traditional models and approaches to ensuring a healthy, productive and functional workforce. These priorities, all of which have significant bearing on the human capital of a business, will change business operations and

reposition how employees connect and adapt to the changing work environment.

The 2009 Towers Watson's Global Workforce Study points to several findings that show the importance of addressing emotional health as employers continues to face the most challenging economy since the Great Depression.[xix]

- The desire for the most basic needs in the workplace - security and stability – has become a significant concern among employees in these trying economic times. Thinning job security and stability has caused employees to feel more anxious and less secure in their work. At the same time, many employees are reluctantly trading in professional growth for increased security and stability in their jobs as their organization weathers the economic storm.

- Employees understand that ultimately they are accountable for their health and well-being, productivity in the workplace and career growth. However, employees have doubts about their abilities to take on this accountability without appropriate guidance or support from their employers.

- Even with job security and stability at stake, employees want flexibility and balance between their work and personal lives. In such struggling economic times, however, employees may be reluctant to ask for the guidance, resources and support to achieve such flexibility and balance.

- Confidence in organizational leadership is low. Employees have low confidence in their leadership's ability to keep the organization functional and at the same time inspire and engage the workforce.

The findings from the Towers Watson Global Workforce Study demonstrates implications for employers and the decisions they need to make about the magnitude, nature and timing of their workforce investments. While some of the changes in employee attitudes may not endure, we are nonetheless at the earliest stages of a significant workplace transformation.

4 Primary Factors Influencing Workplace Emotional Wellness

As described earlier, NCWEH conceptualized workplace emotional health as a multi-variable concept, noting the various attributes are influencing and being influenced by each other. At the organizational level, these attributes are also impacting and being impacted by several domains that are seen as critical to a company's long-term success:

1. Leadership
2. Culture
3. Organizational Structure
4. Change Capacity

4.1 Leadership

Organizational Leadership, in the context of workplace emotional health, is primarily concerned with the emotional health of executives and management and their ability to shape a culture of health within the organization. Mature leaders also possess significant leadership courage and are willing to take responsible risks to build a culture of health within the company and engage employees to support this culture and the related policies and programs.

Leadership courage is expressed in how engaged company leaders are in relation to the long-term vision and direction of the company. This type of leader clearly articulates the relationship between the culture of health and strategic direction of the company as well as the actions that are required to achieve the company's stated goals. Furthermore, effective leadership is expressed in how well the senior management team can engage employees and implement this strategy.

4.2 Organization Culture

Organization culture represents the values and social norms that are specific to a particular organization. Adopting a culture of health is beginning to be recognized as a strategic factor in an organization's long-term success. Some employers acknowledge that emotional health should be considered when examining the overall health status of their employee population, and are acknowledging that emotional health is part of the organization's overall value of health. When emotional health is acknowledged as part of the organization's values, it can then be leveraged to support specific social norms within the organization.

Creating an effective culture of health requires the adoption of five components or "pillars", as described below:

1. Leadership and commitment at all levels of the organization;
2. Creative enterprise-wide programming to foster emotional and physical health;
3. Policies and procedures that facilitate and reward health-promoting behaviors;
4. Marketing and communications to ensure high rates of participation among employees;
5. Accurate organization assessment leading to clearly defined objectives and valid measurement of outcomes, demonstrating efficacy and return on investment.

Other recommendations employers can consider when developing a culture of health include:

- Initiating or increasing screening and early intervention for emotional/behavioral health problems among employee populations, including "sub-threshold" symptoms, before they become more serious
- Encouraging employees to participate in Health Risk Appraisal (HRA) and wellness/prevention programs. Consider using incentives ("carrot" and/or "stick") to maximize participation
- Referencing behavioral health in all health promotion efforts. Insist that all Health Risk Appraisal include references to it.
- Use HRA and claims data to identify populations at risk and incorporate culture of health references in recruitment strategies.
- Offer confidential, scalable alternatives to medication and "high touch" services, including digital coaching, to reach those who may never come forward for any other help.
- Do everything reasonably possible to educate employees about emotional health and behavioral health problems with a focus on reducing stigma. Remember that real-life role models are the most powerful teachers.

4.3 Organizational Structure

The structure of the organization is another important factor to examine when considering the workplace emotional health. Structure, for the purpose of this discussion, refers to

a) Types of people
b) Number of people
c) Reporting structure
d) Deployment of people (right people in the right places)
e) Job design
f) Work process design

g) Infrastructure support
h) Information flow
i) Authority/Responsibility match

Organizational practices have changed dramatically in this new economy, and will continue to evolve in the reset economy. To compete more effectively, many large companies have restructured themselves by downsizing their workforces and outsourcing all but core functions. At the same time, nontraditional employment practices that depend on temporary workers and contract labor have grown steadily. Organizations are also adopting new and flatter management structures that result in downward transfer of management responsibility and decentralized control, and they are implementing more flexible and lean production technologies such as just-in-time manufacturing. The rubric "high performance work systems" has been used to describe and justify many of these organizational practices.

For many workers, these reorganizing trends have resulted in a variety of potentially stressful or hazardous circumstances, such as reduced job stability and increased workload. Data suggest, for example, that the average work year for prime-age working couples has increased by nearly 700 hours in the last two decades and that high levels of emotional exhaustion at the end of the workday are the norm for 25% to 30% of the workforce. Alternatively, increased flexibility, responsibility, and learning opportunity in today's workplace may offer workers greater potential for self-direction, skill development and career growth, leading to reduced stress and increased satisfaction and wellbeing.

Further, employee productivity is currently very high, perhaps historically high. Employers have focused on increased employee productivity as a result of the economic crisis, including paying of overtime. Employers are uncertain about increased business costs associated with these practices (i.e., the impact of healthcare reform, regulatory reform, etc), and have not hired new employees for fear they would face new downsizings with rising costs. Unfortunately, these continuing changes in the organization of work have far outpaced our understanding of their implications for work life quality and safety and health on the job. However, making sure that workplace emotional health is included in organizational change discussions is highly recommended.

4.4 Change Capacity

The ability of the organization to recognize and adjust to changing market and related conditions is considered a strategic attribute of mature companies. These conditions originate from numerous factors and can be quite volatile, such as supply chain variability, changes in technology, environmental factors, regulatory changes, etc. Furthermore, mature companies have developed policies and programs that support and build resilience in employees who have to confront individual or personal challenges.

Below is a list of themes to consider when assessing workplace emotional health and the change capacity of an organization:

(1) Individuals with good emotional health can adapt to stressful situations and changing pressures (See Table 3) [xx]
(2) Emotional health is affected by individual factors, experiences, social interactions, the work environment and cultural norms
(3) One of the key components of workplace emotional health is the ability of individuals to fulfill a role in society (i.e., the capacity to work)
(4) Work contributes to personal and social growth, benefits one's health

Table 3 Stress and Psychologically Health Workplaces

74% of employees say work is a significant source of stress and one in five has missed work as a result of stress.
55% of employees say they were less productive at work as a result of stress.
52% of employees report they have considered or made a decision about their career, such as looking for a new job, declining a promotion or leaving a job, based on workplace stress.
52% of employees say job demands interfere with family or home responsibilities, while 43% say home and family responsibilities interfere with job performance.
31% of adults experience stress as a result of managing work and family responsibilities and 35% cite jobs interfering with their family or personal time as a significant source of stress.

5 Employer Solutions for Workplace Emotional Wellness

This Guide includes both communication and policy recommendations that employers can use to improve the emotional health status of their organizations.

5.1 Workplace Emotional Wellness Strategies and Recommendations

The communication recommendations in this Guide describe two approaches. The first set of recommendations describes emotional health communication strategies for human resources professionals, benefits managers and corporate medical directors. The second part provides a matrix of recommendations that outlines the language, objectives and call-to-action for three stakeholder groups: business executives, managers and supervisors, and employees.

Recommendation #1: Communication around emotional health should be examined in a multi-dimensional manner.

In terms of communication, benefits managers and corporate medical directors will typically have responsibility for translating the concept of emotional health for all levels within an organization. Therefore, these groups will need to communicate to several key target groups:

- **UP** to the executive team;
- **ACROSS** to company managers and supervisors; and
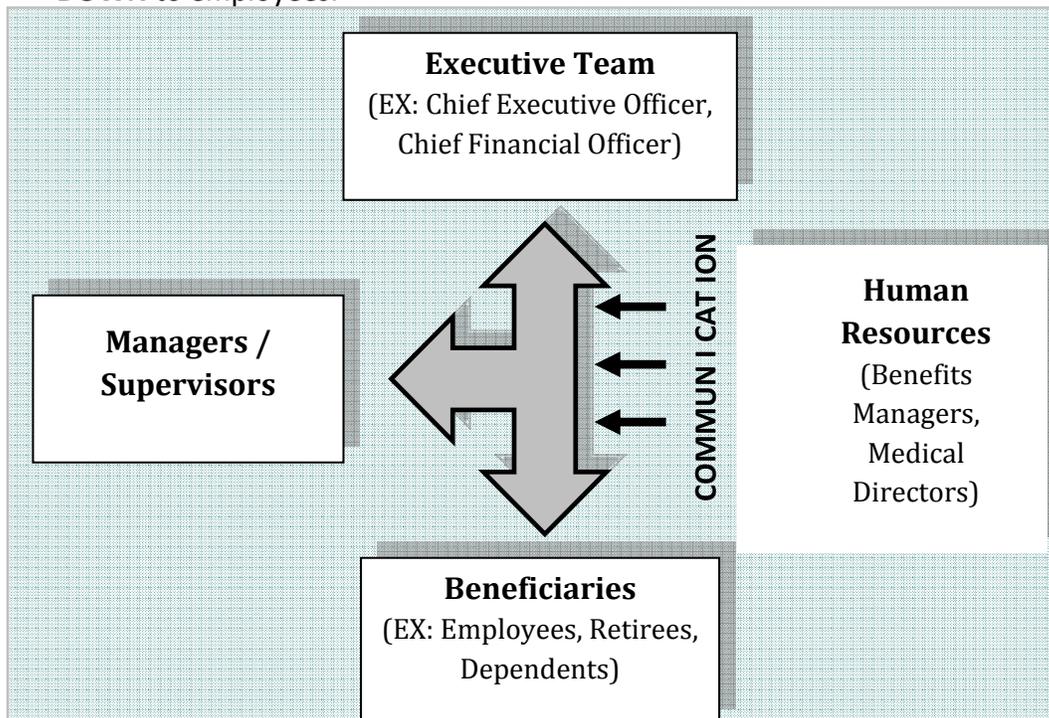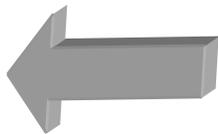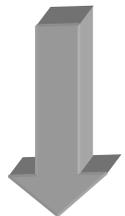- **DOWN** to employees.

Figure 8: Multidimensional Communications Framework

Executive team. Executive team support for workplace emotional health policies and initiatives is critical. Strong and effective communication to the executive team needs to address support for a corporate culture of health and emphasize the importance of emotional health. Impetus for broad change within companies typically leverages a top-down approach. If executives understand and support the value proposition of investing in policies and programs that support emotional health, these policies and programs will have a greater chance of receiving financial support, implementation and viability.

Managers and supervisors. Managers and supervisors are a key communication channel to employees. Communication to managers and supervisors should include resources and training on policies and programs available to employees to support their emotional health. Communication efforts to this target group should also include training supervisors to recognize signs of emotional instability and how to address employee needs with company programs such as the employee assistance program.

Employees and dependents. When communicating to employees and their dependents about emotional health, employers should first consider how they communicate to employees about other human resources-related information. Employers should leverage best practices and lessons learned from successful human resources communication strategies (such as open-enrollment communication or wellness program communication) to reach out to employees and dependents. In addition, providing opportunities for employee and dependent feedback is also crucial. Two-way communication between employees and human resources allows employees to inquire about and feel supported by the company, which will reinforce a culture of emotional health.

Recommendation #2: Clearly define the business value proposition of emotional health for each stakeholder group.

Since roles and responsibilities vary within different levels of an organization, the communication will need to address the specific needs of each group. To ensure that emotional health is on the radar of each key stakeholder group, employers need to understand the value proposition of emotional health. Table 4 outlines ways in which emotional health affects each stakeholder group. Benefits managers or medical directors can use this chart to guide them in understanding the value of emotional health to each stakeholder group.

Table 4: Value Proposition to Key Target Groups

TARGET GROUP	EXECUTIVES	MANAGERS / SUPERVISORS	EMPLOYEES
VALUE PROPOSITION	Emotionally healthy organizations: • lead to better engagement. Better engagement leads to improved business outcomes (productivity, decreased turnover, better performance, better customer service, profitability). • establish a clear connection between the organization's mission, vision and values, and business practices. • are compelling places to attract and retain top talent • create a competitive advantage in the marketplace. • increase shareholder value. • Emotionally healthy, engaged, and productive people are a business asset and not a liability. • Anxiety, which is typically viewed as unhealthy, can be reframed as a positive and powerful force for change and performance. • Emotional health is the foundation for present and future performance and growth.	Emotionally healthy organizations: • facilitate improved employee performance • increase employee attention to the relationship between safety and performance • enhance loyalty to a company and lead to less unwanted turnover. • enhance supervisor / management relationship with employees • increase employee job satisfaction • reduce unscheduled absenteeism • maintain and can increase individual, unit, and corporate productivity • support job satisfaction	Emotionally healthy organizations: • promotes higher quality of employee and family health • increases the "happiness quotient" for employee and their families • helps employees to model healthy behavior for children and others • facilitate a more supportive work environment • enhances job / life satisfaction and personal fulfillment • improves job performance • feeling genuinely supported by the organization

Recommendation #3: Adopt language that each identified stakeholder group understands and describe how emotional health relates to or impacts their strategic interests and operational requirements.

The concept of emotional health itself is extremely broad and complex. Therefore, it is critical, when describing emotional health policies and initiatives, to use language that each key stakeholder group will understand. Bob Rosen Ph.D, President of *Healthy Companies*

International, has found that a CEO has his own organizing metaphor that captures his way of thinking about his organization. The same could be said for managers and employees. When describing emotional health programs and policies, employers need to use language – the metaphors - that has value to each key stakeholder group. Like communication methods, language that speaks to one stakeholder group may not be as effective in evoking action for others. Thus, the language used to communicate about emotional health needs to be carefully thought out. Table four outlines some key language themes to consider for each of the stakeholder groups.

Table 5: Keywords for Target Groups

TARGET GROUP	EXECUTIVES	MANAGERS / SUPERVISORS	EMPLOYEES
Language – Sample **keywords or themes** for communicating emotional health.	Use language that easily translates into **business outcomes**: • Authentic engagement • Cost-saving • Flourishing • Functionality • Productive • Promotes a positive corporate brand • Readiness (emotionally, physically, mentally) • Resilience • Supports organizational mission • Well-being	Use language that focuses on **performance**: • Employee engagement • Enhanced productivity • Improved performance • Increase healthy emotions (being genuinely valued and challenged). • Reduce unhealthy emotions (e.g., anger, frustration)	Use language that focuses **managing stress and achieving balance** in personal and work-related life: • Ability to balance stress & anxiety • Emphasize thriving • Focus on building or enhancing emotional health • Genuinely valued and challenged • Managing everyday life challenges • Personal responsibility • Self-oriented • Support from the organization • Supports personal development

Recommendation #4: Clearly define and communicate the expected role(s) for each identified stakeholder group.

Employers should establish a "call to action" for each key stakeholder groups. It is up to employers to clearly define and communicate the expected roles of each key stakeholder group in order to develop and sustain a corporate culture of health and to improve the overall emotional health within an organization.

Call to Action – The Executive Team

• **Leadership commitment and resources** – Investment of tangible resources shows that executive management actively supports organizational policies and initiatives that improve emotional well-being and engagement. In order for policies and programs to be sustainable, they need to have the commitment and support of the key decision makers within the organization.

- **Partner with human resources to build a human capital strategy that creates a culture of health** – The executive team and human resources department should partner to develop short- and long-term strategies to create a sustainable culture of health, which includes a focus on emotional health. This strategy should include setting a clear policy direction, action steps, an environmental scan of the organization's readiness, specific resource allocation to support the strategies, and measurable outcomes.

- **Include measurable goals and action steps relating to emotional health in performance planning and evaluation** – The executive team should establish specific goals and action steps for improving the organizational emotional health. Goals and action steps should focus on developing a culture of health within an organization, developing corporate policies for emotional health and implementing programs that improve employee and dependent emotional health.

- **Clearly frame and communicate the human capital value chain to all stakeholders** – *Employee health and wellbeing → Employee engagement → Workforce effectiveness → Human performance → Business Productivity → Marketplace Success*

- **Master the three dimensions of leadership.**
    - *Cognitive – strategy / plans / methods / metrics*
    - *Physical – wellness / hardiness / agility /courage*
    - *Emotional – relationships / commitments*

Call to Action – Managers / Supervisors

- **Be aware of and knowledgeable of the company's policies and programs on emotional health** – Managers are usually the first line of communication to employees. Managers who are familiar with company programs and policies that support emotional health – such as stress management programs or professional development opportunities – can be a valuable referral resource for employees.

- **Incorporate emotional health driven metrics into corporate key performance indicators** – When using key performance indicators to assess the success of a division, unit or team, include emotional health-related indicators. These indicators might address unscheduled absenteeism, employee grievances, worker's compensation claims, and job satisfaction. Including these indicators provides additional data, identifies trends, and helps managers recognize areas in which there could be an opportunity for improvement in the emotional health of their employees.

- **Be aware of pressing employee health and emotional issues** – A key role of managers and supervisors is to understand his or her staff's work productivity patterns. When

emotional health impedes employee productivity, the manager needs to consider emotional health issues when looking at the factors influencing productivity. Therefore, managers and supervisors should regularly assess the emotional health of their employees. When appropriate, managers should communicate to their employees about resources available to support their emotional health.

Call to Action – Employees

- **Learn to identify triggers and early intervention methods to enhance their own emotional health, their co-workers, and family members –** Employees should be cognizant of the triggers – work/life imbalance, lack of resources to complete one's job task, personal financial troubles – that push them beyond their optimal level of functioning. Identifying these triggers and intervention methods – such as a flexible work schedules or financial management courses - can help prevent the reductions in functioning and overall health status.

- **Access employer resources and programs that support employee or dependent emotional health** – Employers set the stage for emotional health in the workplace. However, it is up to employees to seek out and utilize programs that address key emotional health issues such as stress management programs, employee assistance programs, and work/life balance benefits.

- **Believe in the authenticity of the initiatives** – Most employers are not in the business of creating a thriving employee population. However, in most employers' mission, vision or values, "valuing the employee" and "integrity" are common themes that shape company culture and guide the way the company runs its business. While creating a thriving employee may not be a company's primary line of business, its human capital is the company's most important asset. Investing in resources that promote employee emotional health allows this most important asset to flourish.

Recommendation #5: Identify and adopt the most effective communication methods for each identified stakeholder group.

Interpreting, processing and understanding information – particularly a broad concept like emotional health – varies among the key stakeholder groups. Methods of communication, such as written materials or online information, must be tailored to each specific stakeholder group and perhaps even more specifically to subgroups within them.

For **the executive team**, such as CEOs, communication methods should include:

- Face-to-face presentations that address the business case for emotional health; and

- Presentations with relevant benchmarks, data and outcomes related to employee emotional health and business outcomes (i.e., engagement, productivity, turnover, customer service).

For **supervisors and manager**s, communication methods should include:

- Training sessions with benefits managers and corporate medical directors;
- Support for peer-to-peer networks between managers; and
- Presentations with relevant benchmarks, data and outcomes related to employee emotional health and outcomes related to their area of responsibility (i.e., engagement, absenteeism, customer service, and productivity).

For **employees**, communication methods should include:

- Educational materials (written, online, etc) that clearly outline policies and programs related to workplace emotional health;
- Lunch and Learn sessions where human resource managers can have informal discussions with employee about programs and policies that support employee emotional health;
- Social marketing campaigns that promote workplace emotional health and relevant programs and services;
- Development of an employee task-force to identify emotional health "champions" within the employee population. An employee "champion" is a valuable way to communicate the companies policies and programs for workplace emotional health; and
- Convenient access to workplace emotional health resources – such as health coaching and on-going support through various technology mediums (i.e., Intranet and email).

Recommendation #6: Maintain transparency.

In these economic times, executives, managers and employees all feel the stress of the economy on their work and personal lives. More transparency from company leaders and key decision makers is needed to keep employers informed of the company's business direction and related challenges. In turn, keeping employees informed of a company's business direction – such as financial viability and major organizational changes - leaves less room for uncertainty. For many employees, it is this uncertainty that can lead to significant stress (for example, by creating a feeling of job insecurity), which in turn can negatively affect their productivity.

5.2 Workplace Emotional Wellness Programs, Services, and Culture Recommendations

The following objectives and recommendations summarize actionable steps in helping employers to develop workplace emotional health programs and to support a broader culture of health within the organization.

Recommendation #1: Help employees build and use personal skills to take responsibility for their emotional health.

Action(s): When contracting with employee assistance programs (EAPs), employers should ensure the EAP provides access to specific counseling and resources for stress management and resilience-building skills. Stress management resources can include:

- Individual or group therapy sessions focused on identifying sources of stress and managing the corresponding symptoms of stress;
- Counseling for work- and family-related problems (such as parenting, legal and financial advice, and alcoholism); and
- Skill-building and/or behavior modification courses, such as time management and stress-coping strategies.

Action(s): Provide counseling and education services for employees in financial distress. Approximately, one in four American workers cites that his personal financial situation is a significant source of stress in his daily life. The workplace implications of financial distress for employers can be dramatic. Financial distress is associated with poorer overall health – physical, psychological and emotional – as well as decreased productivity.[xxi]

Early research suggests that workplace or employer-sponsored financial counseling helps employees build skills to make better financial decisions.[xxii] One study found employees who were referred to financial education services through their EAP, utilization of financial management resources referred through an EAP When considering financial education services for employees, employers should consider:

1. Offering access to financial education and related resource that extends beyond the education associated with basic retirement or 401K plans sponsored by employers. Financial education should include personal budgeting, financial management, credit management and tax planning.

2. Offering counseling and education services regularly. Financial situations change and in order to be most effective and utilized should be available at times of need rather than annually during open enrollment.

Research also suggests that financial education services offered by employers are effective and have a positive return on investment. Financial education is relatively inexpensive to employers and can be offered as part of other financial services or an EAP. On average, the cost of financial education to an employer ranges from $10 per employee per year to $3,000 for an all-day seminar.[xxiii]

Recommendation #2: Integrate emotional health with general medical and wellness programs.

Research suggests that unmanaged symptoms of stress and the inability of employees to cope with the sources of stress are associated with physical health risk factors and/or increased prevalence of illness. Employees with significant sources of stress also tend to neglect their own health by not taking appropriate preventive measures. The following recommendations outline how employers can work to integrate emotional health into their general medical plan or wellness programs.

Action(s): When working with a health plan, employers should ensure that employees will have access to health coaches or other health professionals who specialize in emotional health issues such as stress management. These professionals should be available via telephone, electronically (email or electronic chat) or in-person. These professionals should be available at non-work hours (evenings or weekends) to encourage use among employees. Health professionals should have the appropriate qualifications or certifications to assist employers in managing sources and symptoms of stress, developing coping strategies and building resilience skills to improve their emotional health.

Action(s): Employers should attempt to link wellness programs with other workplace emotional health initiatives. Wellness programs are designed to prevent illness and the need for health care services. While the evidence is insufficient to conclude whether wellness programs actually cut healthcare costs, they have been shown to improve overall employee health. Corporate wellness programs – such as tobacco cessation or weight loss programs – should incorporate an emotional health component. For example, participants in tobacco cessation programs should be pre-screened for significant sources and symptoms of stress, and referred to additional resources such as an EAP or stress-management program as appropriate.

Action(s): Employers should consider incentives that support preventive care and reward employees who receive recommended preventive services for their age, gender and risk factors**.** Incentives and rewards can help increase the utilization of these preventive services. Employees who are emotionally unhealthy tend to be less likely to receive appropriate preventive care based on recommended guidelines. At the same

time, emotionally healthy employees may invest time and resources, such as taking leave from work for a preventive care visit, to ensure their health and wellness. Employers need to provide incentives to help those employees who are not getting appropriate and recommended care, but also acknowledge and reward those employees who are receiving the support and care so that they continue to do so.

Recommendation #3: Align the corporate culture to incorporate workplace emotional health.

Action(s): Employers should adopt a business strategy that creates and supports a culture of health**.** Establishing an organizational culture takes a top-down approach, and the implementation of a culture that supports workplace emotional health will require a direct link to executives and managers.

The executive and manager teams should work with human resources develop both a short- and long-term strategy for their organization to create a *sustainable* culture of health.

This strategy should include:

1. *An environmental scan of the organization* – Understanding the current culture of health – or lack thereof – of an organization and identifying gaps between the current culture and the proposed future culture.
2. *Setting a direction* – Assessing where your organization's current culture of health and the culture it wants to develop.
3. *Action planning* – Carefully planning the key steps, targets and milestones required to develop a corporate culture of health.
4. *Resource allocation* – Identifying where both financial and human capital resources will be most efficiently and effectively used in creating a culture of health.
5. *Evaluation of the strategy* – Develop and measuring key indicators that help evaluate the culture's success and its sustainability over time.

Action(s): Employers should consider opportunities for enhancing employee and dependent social support networks. The average employed person spends one-third of their day at work. For many employees, the workplace is a community, much like a neighborhood or school that provides a valuable social support net for employees. In addition, social support – such as having a close friend at work – can be a determinant of job satisfaction.

Having a strong social support network at work allows people to feel supported in their daily tasks. At the same time, it gives people an opportunity to develop their empathetic

and interpersonal skills, which can be of value to both their physical and mental health, as well as work productivity.

Recommendation #4: Transparency, communication and support for a corporate culture of emotional health from executives and managers.

The executive leadership of an organization is critical in establishing a culture of health within an organization. However, a Towers Watson study found that in 2008, employee confidence in corporate leaders and managers was extraordinarily low.

Action(s): Employers should incorporate workplace emotional health issues into their executive and manager leadership training**.** Nearly all companies have "on-boarding" training for newly appointed executives or managers. The structure of these training programs naturally varies between companies based on factors such as industry, geographical location and the like. However, all executives and managers should have some form on training that addresses problem solving and communication skills about employee and organizational emotional health.

Action(s): Executives and senior managers should provide regular, timely and transparent communications to employees. Previous workplace studies by Watson Wyatt and Mercer have shown that communication from executives and managers to employees had a positive effect on employee satisfaction, work commitment and turnover. These studies suggest that employees who feel valued are more engaged, productive and have a stronger loyalty the organization.[xxiv]

Recommendation #5: *Remove actual and perceived barriers to emotional health programs and service.*

Action(s): Programs and services that support emotional health should be flexible. Programs and services to support emotional health – such as EAPs – should be available during non-work hours, weekends and through various mediums – such as in-person or via phone. Employers should ensure that when contracting with an EAP, the vendor offers flexibility to meet the needs of a diverse employee population wishing to obtain these services.

Action(s): Make programs and services that support emotional health accessible. Barriers to programs and services that support emotional health may be financial or geographical in nature. Employers should remove significant financial barriers – such as shifting most of the costs on to the employee. Removal of barriers may not increase use of these services, but it helps clear a path for employees in need of emotional health support services. Additionally, when contracting with vendors or developing in-house

programs, employers should ensure that these programs and services are easily accessible geographically. Locations in a variety of geographical areas, or on-site, will encourage employees to utilize programs and services.

Action(s): Ensure that programs and services that support emotional health are culturally and ethnically sensitive. Not all cultures and ethnicities understand emotional health in the same way. Employers should consider their own employee diversity when assessing the diversity of providers and resources available to support emotional health, such as language barriers, race and ethnicity. Employers should request this information from any vendors that they work with on emotional health initiatives. Employers should also ensure that any on-site initiatives are also sensitive to different ethnic and cultural needs.

5.3 Workplace Emotional Wellness Policies and Metrics

The following policy and quantitative recommendations help to codify workplace emotional health programs and facilitate an integrated approach to support these programs.

Recommendation #1: Create a balance between work and personal life.

Balancing work commitments with personal commitments is a key challenge for the employee. Providing a work environment that supports both a productive work environment and a work/life balance is a key challenge for employers. Workplace policies should balance the business needs of the company with the emotional health needs of employees and their dependents.

Action(s): Ensure that employees understand telecommuting and flexible scheduling policies. Many companies already offer telecommuting, flexible scheduling and paid-time-off benefits to their employees.

Recommendation #2: Incorporating emotional health assessments into short- and long-term disability, FMLA, etc.

Action(s): Employers may consider providing designated case managers to employees who are on short- or long-term disability, caregivers and those who screen positive for depression or take family medical leave to ensure coordination of care. Case managers can be employed through the EAP or the contracted health plan and should consider developing communication plans for providers, including routine updates to other caregivers.

Recommendation #3: Create a dashboard with metrics that gauge employee emotional health and the corporate culture of health.

> **Action(s):** Incorporate emotional health driven metrics into corporate key performance indicators. When using key performance indicators to assess the success of a division, unit or team, add indicators for emotional health. Such indicators might include absenteeism, grievances, worker's compensation claims, and job satisfaction. Including these indicators provides additional data, identifies trends, and helps managers recognize areas in which there could be an opportunity for improvement in the emotional health of their employees, engagement and productivity.

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