

The Implementation of Workplace Wellness Program and its Impact on Employee Work Productivity: The Case of Safaricom Company Ltd

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Abstract

The objective of the study is to find out the impact of workplace fitness programs and the outcome on employee job output. Many employers have become conscious of employee's health and have instituted fitness programs in their workplace with the goal of improving and maintaining employee health and increasing worker performance and productivity. The study utilized cross section study design to assess the workplace fitness programs and its outcome on employee's job performance. In all, 150 consented employees were interviewed in the telephone communication industry. The study found that the implementation of fitness program has positive effects on work performance and work productivity. Over 90% of the physically active employees did not take sick leave over a period of one year. In addition, more than 80% of the employees who are engaged in an exercise program of at least 30 minutes each day reported, less medical problems or disability and sound mental wellbeing compared with those who do not have any exercise program. The implementation of an employee health and fitness program at the workplace can enhance employee work performance and work output. This has multiple positive and lasting effects on the employee and employer.

Keywords: Safaricom, Workplace, Wellness, Employee, Productivity.

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1 Introduction

The twenty-first century work environment is very stressful- keen competition and work demands put pressure on both the organization and employees to go beyond their limit. Although employees are the most important resource in an organization, even more important is a healthy and productive workforce. In recent times, there has been a growing recognition about the relationship between employees' health and the quality of their work. For instance, Cascio (2007) reports a staggering statistic on the US population:

Employees with chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes, congestive heart failure, all of which can be managed, account for 60% of the typical employer's total medical costs. Common backaches alone account for about 25% of all workdays lost per year, for a total of \$15 to \$20 billion is lost to productivity, disability payments and lawsuits. About 29% have high blood pressure (one-third are unaware of it). Majority of the employees do not exercise regularly and 200,000 ages 45-65 are killed or disabled by heart disease each year (Pg. 615).

Similarly, work-related stress negatively affects at least 40 million workers in 15 countries of the European Union, costing 20 billion Euros annually (cited by Kyriazoglou, 2015a). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2005), mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and stress are common; affecting individuals, their families, co-workers and the broader community. These have direct impact on workplaces through increased absenteeism, reduced productivity and increased costs.

Accordingly, many organizations are beginning to look to health promotion and disease management as one way to reduce health-care spending. The WHO defines a healthy working environment as one in, which there is not only an absence of harmful conditions but also an abundance of health-promoting programs and initiatives (WHO, 2015). Also, (Dolyle, L'Estrange, & Bauman define workplace health program as activities undertaken in the workplace that support the health and wellbeing of employees. These activities may focus on individual behavior change and may also target the organization creating policies and environments that support healthy behaviors.

Philips & Gully (2014a) also express wellness programs as initiatives designed to increase employees' productivity through improved employee health. Thus, wellness programs are intended to improve and promote the health and fitness level of employees. More so, Kyriazoglou (2015b) describes wellness as the quality or state of being healthy not only in the body but also in the mind, especially as a result of deliberate effort. He further classifies personal wellness into three dimensions. The first dimension focuses on spiritual wellness. This is associated with building meaningful connections in one's life, where the connections are with self, others, nature or a higher being (Yamada et al, 2014). Personal relationships, work environment, culture, belief in a higher Being, lifestyle influence our sense of spiritual wellness. The second-dimension deals

with the wellness of the mind. Mental health has been defined by WHO (2016) as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, copes with the normal stresses of life, works productively and fruitfully, and makes contributions to the community. Mental peace, fortitude, self-image and self-confidence could affect the wellness of our minds. There is strong evidence that both the content and context of work can play a role in the development of mental health problem in the work place. The last category concentrates on the physical body. This dimension focuses on sustaining, nourishing and strengthening our body. Therefore, our diet, exercise habit, blood sugar level, blood pressure, etc., determine the wellness of our physical body.

Wellness programs can address several factors including healthy eating, smoking cessation, weight management, physical activity, stress management and many more. Every employee has a right to a healthy work environment. Apart from ethical considerations, a safer and healthy workplace is more efficient and more economical (Phillips & Gully, 2014b).

This study therefore examines the wellness program of Safaricom Company Ltd and its impact on their employees' productivity. Safaricom Ltd is a leading network operator in Kenya, providing comprehensive range of integrated telecommunication services, including mobile and fixed Voice, SMS, Data, Internet and Mobile money (M-PESA) to over 25 million subscribers. Safaricom currently commands market share of 67% in the country according to Communications Authority of Kenya (CA) June 2015 Sector Statistics reports (Collymore, 2015).

1.1 Benefits of Workplace Wellness

There is no doubt that institutions of all sizes need to be concerned about employee health and wellness. Though the benefits of workplace wellness are difficult to quantify, the outcome is obvious. Healthier employees are more productive, take fewer sick and disability days, and are at a lower risk for many serious health problems (Phillips & Gully, 2014c). Sullivan (2013) also claims that many employers credit their wellness program for productivity gains in terms of reduced errors, improved efficiency and better decision-making. Apart from health benefits, effective wellness programs can be an effective tool for branding and recruiting prospective talented employees. Employees often see a comprehensive workplace health program as an investment made by their company for their well-being and a reflection of how much the company cares about its employees which may impact job satisfaction and morale (CDC, 2013a). Furthermore, workplace wellness programs have a substantial effect on indirect costs, the most notable of which include absenteeism, presenteeism and productivity (Morrison & MacKinnon, 2008). An analysis of research studies evaluating the impact of employee wellness programs conducted by Shephard (1991), revealed that (1) gains were larger when incentives were used to encourage participation; (2) medical claims decreased by an average of \$100-

\$400 per year relative to participants in control groups; (3) cardiac risk factors were lowered in wellness program participants. Further research has indicated that workplace wellness programs are associated with a reduction of stress, body fat percentage, smoking, and pain from musculoskeletal disorders (Merrill et al., 2011a).

Participation in health promotion activities also improves employees' perceptions of their mental, physical and emotional health (Merrill, Aldana, Vyhliadal et al., 2011b) and allows employees to develop knowledge, self-management and coping skills as well as build a social support network among coworkers, supervisors, and family. Hence, team spirit is nurtured among participating employees and as suggested by Noelcke (2004), by wellness program, each employee will be an important part of the team. In addition to the individual employee health benefits associated with participation in wellness programs, research has also identified a number of benefits to employers who implement such programs. Benefits include increased workplace productivity, reduced absenteeism, improved employee satisfaction, improved employee recruitment and retention, improved employee engagement, reduced injury and worker's compensation costs (Kuoppala et al., 2008).

This shows that workplace wellness program is a two-edge sword that benefits both the employee and the employer in the long run. Apart from the economic benefits, employers have a duty of care and this means adopting a socially responsible approach to looking after their people. And it is in the interests of employers to do so because this will increase the likelihood of their employees being committed to the organization and help to establish it as a 'best place to work'. In a nutshell, comprehensive workplace wellness program can over time, produce three key benefits: less absences, high productivity and worker satisfaction and retention (Bray, 2016).

2 Methodology

This study was designed as a cross-sectional survey, using qualitative and quantitative data. Study participants who were randomly selected composed of 57 employees who are active and consistent participants of Safaricom wellness program. The study focused only on those employees who were actively participating in the company's wellness program. Using a mixed method, a semi-structured questionnaire and an interview schedule served as the survey instruments designed to obtain data for the study. Among the 57 participants were 15 who were leaders of the various organs of the wellness program and were sampled for one-on-one interview with a structured questionnaire. The structured questionnaire consists of 16 questions which investigated the respondent's views on the existence of the workplace wellness program in the company, the extent to which the workers can access the facilities of the program, policies governing the

program, challenges faced in the program and perception of health status of the participants and medical expenses after the establishment of the program.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the organization's committee on research. The team was directed to see the Public Relations Officer whom through the assistance of her office managed to introduce the team to the relevant officers (Wellness Manager). With the support of the wellness manager, the team was able to access all the respondents and key informants involved in the study. More so, the research team sought the consent of the respondents before collecting data from them. All the respondents were requested to allow the research team to use the information they offered for the publication. The data for the structured interview was recorded and themes developed for each question. Finally, a content analysis was done to sample and group results into a coherent whole.

3 Results

Participants' characteristics

Majority (63%) of the participants were between the age range of 31-40 years and about 58% were males and 42% female. The ration of married to single was almost the same even though male were slightly more than female. Most of the participants were highly educated, 21.1% and 70.2% had undergraduate and postgraduate degrees respectively (Table 1).

Table 1: Participants Demographic Variable

Variable	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	33	57.9
	Female	24	42.1
Age Bracket	21-30	12	21.1
	31-40	36	63.2
	41-50	7	12.3
	51 and above	1	1.8
Marital Status	Married	33	57.9
	Single	24	42.1
	Primary/Secondary	3	5.3
Education	Undergraduate	12	21.1
	Graduate	40	70.2
	Diploma	1	1.8
	Postgraduate	1	1.8

Employee wellness program of Safaricom

In the interest of promoting a healthy workforce, employees have access to fully equipped gymnasium. This is coupled with game rooms to help employees unwind and socialize. Those who are unable to access the company-owned gymnasiums

due to their work locations have been given access to third party gymnasiums. A one-on-one interview with a key administrator in the company and our own observation confirms that Safaricom has initiated programs for the workforce that is targeted to improving the general well being of the employees. The company's wellness program includes prayer rooms where religious magazines and Bibles are made available for prayer and meditation. Besides, professional counseling services are provided for employees in need at the cost of the organization. Also, the organization performs spot check alcohol consumption at work occasionally and then subjects the victims to counseling and rehabilitation. Employees are encouraged to use the company's wellness facilities before work begins, stay in late, or during weekends. There is also jogging club that runs for 2 hours every weekend.

Safaricom also provides a free health check and health awareness program periodically, designated for screening and creating awareness for willing employees. There is a health clinic within the organization with a resident medical doctor that takes care of minor health problems of the employees. Healthy and vegetarian meals are served at the cafeteria. The study also revealed that the organization has a non-discriminatory medical insurance cover for employee. The cover is comprehensive and rarely workers exceed the cover premium. It covers medical, dental and work place injury compensation. There is no charge deducted from the employee to pay the cover, as the organization meets all the cost. The above wellness initiatives practiced by Safaricom seems to promote physical fitness, preventive care, healthy eating and spiritual wellbeing of its employees.

What benefits do employees of Safaricom get from the wellness program?

Respondents were asked to indicate the three most important benefits they derived from actively participating in the wellness program. Feeling healthier, weight loss and less health problems are the main significant benefits (see Table 2). For instance, the following comment is representative of participants' responses:

"I had High blood pressure before, and after the work outs for 2 years my blood pressure has normalized. It was 150/100mm/Hg and it is now 100/60mmHg, my weight has reduced from 135 kg to 107 kg." "I participate in routine screening and jogging club which has proven to be a magic pill to me."

Table 2: Top Three Benefits of Wellness Program

Benefits of Wellness Program	Frequency	Percentage
Feel healthier and no longer complain of fatigue at work	30	53
Lost some weight after joining the gym & sports club for 1-2 years	16	28
No health problem found during screening and felt better than before, very active and less fatigued at work.	11	19

What is the outcome of the wellness program on work output of Safaricom?

Majority (96%) of the active participants of the wellness program believed that the wellness program has improved their general workout put.

Table 3: Do you think the Fitness Program Improves Your Work Output?

Program	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	55	96.5
Not Sure	2	3.5
TOTAL	57	100

At least, 68% of the respondents were never absent from work within a year, 28% missed at least 1 day and less than 4% of the respondents missed at least 8 days (Table 4 below). A follow up interview revealed that a few of these absences were due to injury outside the work environment. These injuries were not related to work and therefore the sick leaves were also not related work.

Table 4: Days Absent from Work within a Year Due to Sickness

Sick Leave	Frequency	Percentage
0 days	39	68.4
1-7 day	16	28.1
8-14 days	1	1.8
21-30 days	1	1.8
TOTAL	57	100

4 Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate the potential value of effective health and wellness program at the workplace. As noted above, there are likely benefits for both the employer and the employees. The employees who are active in the company's wellness program have testified of the benefits that have accrued to them. The employees have indicated that the wellness program has helped them felt healthier, have lost weight, and they have less health problems. The Center for Disease Control has said that a workplace health program that combines both individual and organizational strategies may produce benefits both for individual employees and their families as well as the organization as a whole (CDC, 2013b). The maintenance of employees' individual health is often seen as a difficult challenge amidst competing demands of the workday, family responsibility, and other social obligations. However, adopting healthy behaviors not only reduces risk for developing disabling or life threatening diseases and their associated costs, but also improves everyday quality of life. The employers as a result of implementation of workplace health or wellness program gain the following

benefits: lowers health care and disability costs, enhances employees' productivity, reduces employees absenteeism, decreases rates of illness and injuries in the organization, enhances corporate images, improves employees morale, improves employees recruitment and retention and increases organizational commitment and creation of a culture of health. On the other hand, the employee also gains the following benefits: increased well-being, self-image, and self-esteem; improved health status; lower cost for acute health issues; lower out of pocket costs for health services; increased access to health promotion resources and social support; improved job satisfaction; and safer and more supportive work environment (CDC, 2013c).

The challenge though is how to encourage employees to take interest in their own health and consequently participate in the corporate wellness program. Safaricom could offer incentives to increase employees' participation in the program. Moris, Kocakülâh, & Cherry (2013) contend that offering monetary incentives could 'act as a carrot to lure people into the program'. According to DeVries III (2010), the most effective way to achieve maximum member participation is by establishing a wellness "worksites health promotion" program that will guarantee awareness and will ensure that wellness is perceived as a highly valued aspect of life within the organization. Hence, meaningful employee engagement at all stages of wellness initiative is critical for employee buy-in, participation and program sustainability (Morrison & MacKinnon, 2008a). Besides, employees should be actively engaged to identify their own health and wellness needs, to ensure that the wellness programs are designed to their unique issues. For instance, what programs and activities do employees prefer or value? (E.g. access to healthy food, stress management programs, physical activity, personal health checks, nutrition seminars, etc.). Engaging employees at the decision-making table also increases transparency and alleviates fear that wellness programs constitute an invasion of sensitive health information (Morrison & MacKinnon, 2008b).

The implications of the findings for future research and practices is such that companies must institute policies that reward employees for participating in healthy behaviors such as liking exercising. Also, to redesign the wellness initiatives to help employees foster good behaviors, rather than punishing them for bad ones. On the other hand, employers must include employees in designing wellness programs. Organizations of all sizes and Safaricom in particular could introduce wellness incentives to motivate employees' participation and lifestyle change. More so, creating a culture of wellness in which healthy lifestyle choices are the norm of top management can motivate employees to engage in personal health improvement. It is also important to note that holistic wellness is more than physical health. Organizations need to give equal attention to the mental, social and spiritual wellbeing of the employees as well. A study reported that employees who reduced one health risk improved their presenteeism by 9% and reduced absenteeism by 2%. Therefore, reductions in health risks clearly demonstrate that

it can improve productivity (Pelletier, Boles & Lynch, 2004).

5 Limitations

This research was limited by a small sample size and lack of a wide cross-section of participants. Non-participating employees' perspectives were absent from the analysis. Future studies may widen the scope of the study and also find out why some employees don't participate in the program.

6 Conclusion

Employees' health and wellness is of prime importance to organizations. Realizing this, many organizations including Sararicom have initiated wellness program to enhance the health of their employees.

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