

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INVESTING IN HEALTH:

Pursuit of excellence is a healthy thing to do, healthy for employees, healthy for customers and for stakeholders. The pursuit of a healthy workplace is very much about achieving excellence and with excellence comes high performance. There is a difference that comes from a strategic focus on a healthy workplace.

Non-traditional areas of occupational health and safety, are increasing and new issues are emerging. The lack of a comprehensive workplace health strategy to deal with these issues on a preventative basis is causing significant negative impact on productivity and on the public health care system.

Accessibility to the health services is the foundation of health initiative for any organization. Employees should have access at the workplace to health prevention and promotion programmes.

Hence a comprehensive approach by organizations towards workplace wellness and employee well-being that extends beyond the traditional approach to occupational health and safety is required. Some organizations have begun to strategically address workplace health issues, however many more organizations need to reach out and embrace a comprehensive approach to a healthy workplace. One reason why more organizations are not doing this is that the case does not seem as obvious for decision-makers. Therefore the need to focus on the reality of “making the business case” for a healthy workplace.

The reality check is that the understanding of the importance of a healthy workplace is where quality was 15 years ago.

Fifteen years ago many organizational leaders had to be convinced that investing in quality was a good business decision that would produce a significant return on investment.

The key issue back then was getting organizations to move from a focus on quality, which is correction based, to a focus that was strategic and preventive. The experience was that such change required leadership commitment, as the real issue was to bring cultural

change to how an organization goes about creating real and sustainable value for the customer.

Today, in this globally competitive world most organizational leaders understand the value of having system for quality in place. We now have the same issue with healthy workplace, as real change will only come from commitment. That commitment requires understanding the impact that employee satisfaction has on the organizational strategies and implementing healthy workplace policies and practices from a strategic context.

A healthy workplace is integral to achieving organizational excellence as the focus is on creating the right work environment for employees, which in turn creates the right approach to satisfying the strategic and operational goals of satisfied customers, clients and stakeholders. The work with many organizations in Canada, in the private sector and in the public sector provides very clear evidence with regard to the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer/client satisfaction.

It is also clear that the key determinant for employee satisfaction, is the relationship that employees have with their organization .That is the fundamental premise that in order to get it right for customers we must get it right for employees.

Commitment makes the difference between those organizations that make the transformation and those that do not. Therefore the need to take a strategic and holistic approach for creating a high performing organization is by focusing on the principles and practices of quality and a healthy workplace. It takes patience, persistence and passion for the results to become clear.

There is a growing body of evidence that organizations that have prepared for the future, through investing in organizational excellence, build shareholder and stakeholder value through sustainable performance. These organizations see that a commitment to organizational excellence as an investment in the future rather than a cost. The case for a healthy workplace must be positioned within the context of achieving excellence and as an investment in not just the health of employees but in the long-term health of the organization.

The need to have a strategic and comprehensive approach to a healthy workplace will emerge in the next few years as being in the mainstream of how organizations think about their mandate and their strategic future. The reality is that most organizations have not moved beyond the historical approach to occupational health and safety, with specific programs that are set up mostly as a corrective approach rather than preventive.

There are many articles and stories in various media with regard to the increasing costs of employee health care. A recent Statistics Canada report on “Average Days Lost per Worker” indicates that health care and social assistance workers missed on average 12.5 days at work where the average for all industries is 8.0 days.

Employers need to begin to take notice of the need for a comprehensive approach to wellness in the workplace. Studies indicate that about 40% of workplaces have a wellness program in Canada.

Those employers who do have a comprehensive approach to healthy workplace should share their experience and the evidence that such an approach has in terms of results on a cost/benefit basis. What we need is to have more employers to start the journey with the same enlightened approach.

Financial resources are often seen to be the limiting factor for implementing a comprehensive healthy workplace in small scale industries. That said though, the business case for a healthy workplace needs to be better articulated as once the many small to medium sized employers see the cost/benefits, innovative programs and practices will come.

In making the case there are two tracks, one being the strategic drivers that provide leaders with the macro reason for investing in a healthy workplace and the other being the focused operational cost/benefit reason for moving forward with such an approach.

The common thread for leaders of industry is to realize the need to have a work culture that recognizes the whole person, as it is through the professionalism and competency of the people who do the work that strategic growth happens.

Here are key strategic factors that can be critical to making the case for a having a focus on a healthy workplace:

- Being an employer of choice: recruiting the best people will require advanced leadership thinking about the working environment.
- Corporate social responsibility; there are increasing expectations on the role of business and how it fulfills its responsibility to society. Investors are increasingly focusing on how organizations meet this expectation. There is a need to describe the “value” to an organization that is recognized as being a good investment and the implications in terms of stock price and shareholder value. A healthy workplace should be viewed as a critical part of developing this strategy.
- Creating value is a powerful strategic driver for senior management; having a healthy workplace with motivated employees is a critical component in the value chain in a knowledge-based organization. That’s how excellent organizations go about creating value for customers, clients, citizens and stakeholders.
- The new economy is about linkage and transparency; what happens in one part of an organization impacts on the broader nature of the organization in terms of political, social, financial and operational. Negative trends in employee health and rising health costs have such a multiple impact. For those individuals mandated with ensuring sustainability of an organization, safety and health performance is a very clear measure in the assessment process.

- The above drivers are the key strategic reasons that need to be included in building a case for a healthy workplace.

There are a number of studies that are often referred with regard to financial benefits from an approach to a healthy workplace. There is the often quoted Sears study on the impact that employee satisfaction has on customer satisfaction. Similarly, referred in the 1990 Canada Life study that noted an increase in productivity in an experimental group after starting an employee fitness program.

In the United States, out of 24 studies published in peer -review journals from 1991-1993 only one positive health outcome was evident. Such studies in the USA demonstrate a compelling business case for organizations to adopt a comprehensive approach to healthy workplace such that the conclusion is that a sizeable portion of the billions of dollars currently spent by employers on health related costs is preventable.

Hence there is a compelling need to identify the advantages that impact organization's health, identify opportunities to improve the bottom line, develop a Healthy Workplace Plan and calculate a Predicted Return on Investment.

It is a convincing case that the journey is worthwhile and the pursuit of excellence is healthy.

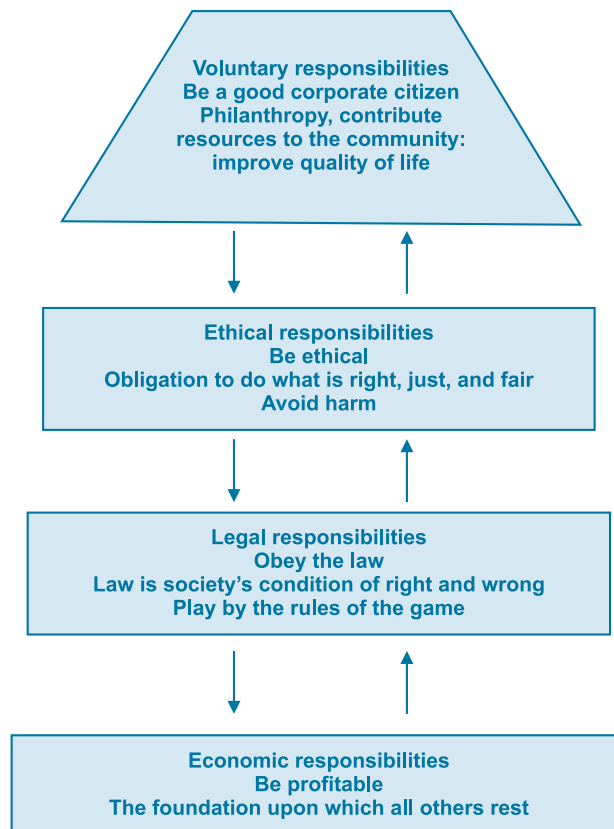
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

The challenges in creating the congenial work health place are many. There are the factors of compliance and the issues which fall beyond the purview of compliance. The compliance issues are also of as much concern. Though there are laws and acts for corporate sector, companies are more or less following them with a wide range of disparities. This too is out of the need to advertise at the moment. Building a partnership for effective compliance is thus a challenge. Building up the environment for compliance is the other issue.

Beyond compliance factors, the corporate social responsibility is itself a challenge which asks for corporate social investments too. Without an approach to reach out to the community, making the services more amenable and accessible to the community is a big challenge. Building up the infrastructure for proper health and to reduce stress so that it provides customer satisfaction is another challenge.

Finally to be able to generate and raise sufficient resources for sustainability from within the organisation and from outside is a challenge.

A model of health promotion given by Bateman and Snell²⁹ also speaks out for the responsibilities the corporate sector and the employees have as regards to promote healthy workplace environment.



SOME SALIENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a need to build up a corporate partnership for effective compliance for work health promotion.
- There is a need for corporate financing and investment in health promotion.
- There is a need to include healthy work place environment beyond the compliance issues.
- Stress relaxation and counseling sessions particularly to those in the Service sector and the pharmaceutical sector has to be ensured. Meditation and yoga sessions may be helpful.
- There should be a mechanism for thorough periodic health assessment of the employees on an annual basis. A group health insurance policy and some incentives may work wonders.
- The health infrastructural facilities at the organisations should be of exemplary standards to the consumer and the community at large should be able to access it. This is an important issue and has relevance for compliance factors beyond compliance issues.
- Organisations need to have an open environment for discussions and sharing of experiences and a mechanism for periodic work evaluation and feedback mechanisms.
- There should be a mechanism to bring about some security in job settings in the SSUs and some mechanism to release the stress due to overload of work, flexibility in timings in the service sector.

COMPREHENSIVE GUIDELINES:

1. The case for a healthy workplace to be positioned within the context of achieving excellence and as an investment in not just the health of employees but in the long-term health of the organization- leadership commitment in the organization.
2. There should be a thorough mechanism for periodic health assessment of the state of health (of wellness)of the employees in the organization. This will help determine the priorities in health at workplace.
3. The priorities in health at workplace to be linked into the overall strategic framework of the organization .
4. The workplace processes to be assessed and steps to promote health to be planned with special focus on specific healthy workplace programs as brought out in the evaluation (long term objectives for workplace health).
5. Health promotion strategies not to be limited to a specific health problem, or to a specific set. Factors that account for healthy work place environment must go well beyond the compliance issues.
6. Participation of the employees in developing the framework and programs.
7. To explore and assess different methods on return on investment and cost-effectiveness of workplace wellness programs being developed in the organization.
8. Monitor and Evaluate the programs (with defined time frames) at regular intervals. The programs should have built in feed back mechanisms.

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