Healthy work environments: Canada’s Next Big Idea

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1. The big idea
Moving health and productivity to a higher level

- Build on workplace health promotion successes
- Learn from gaps
- Expand the scope of individual behaviours and attitudes
- Create enabling contexts
Knowledge economy

Quality of life
Learning and skills
Standard of living
Innovation
Competitiveness

Source: Knowledge Matters. Skills and Learning for Canadians, HRDC, 2002
HR managers’ perceptions of HR’s contribution to organization strategy

- People strategy
- Employee retention
- Recruitment and selection
- Labour/employee relations
- Training and development
- Organizational effectiveness
- Performance management
- Employee communication
- Compensation
- Health and safety
- Benefits

What workers want

- Canadian workers give high priority to:
  - Respect
  - Interesting work
  - Good communication
  - Sense of accomplishment
  - Work-family balance
  - Develop skills and abilities

- Work environments impact all these factors

Convergent thinking

RESULTS

Healthy work environment

- Comprehensive Workplace Health
- High Performance Workplaces
- Learning Organizations
- Continuous Quality Improvement
- Strategic Human Resource Management
- Family-Friendly Workplace
The logic of a healthy work environment

Here’s how a healthy work environment, employee capabilities, and organizational effectiveness are linked:

Healthy environment:
- Challenging but not overworked
- Trust, fairness, commitment
- Resources
- Autonomy & input
- Effective supervision & communication
- Rewards & recognition

Employee capabilities:
- Healthy
- Engaged
- Skilled
- Adaptable

Results:
- Innovation
- Performance
- Quality
2. Capabilities
Talent drives performance

“The fundamental premise of high performance management systems is that organizations perform at a higher level when they are able to tap the ideas, skill, and effort of all their people.”

Leverage existing talent

- New goal: maximize the use of all existing talent...
  - 25% of workers report that their education, skills and experience are not used in their job
- Work environments must enable the continuous use and development of skills
Demographic pressures to accelerate knowledge transfer and learning

- Early Baby Boomers reach 60 in 2006
- Succession planning must encourage knowledge transfer
- Continuous learning to meet future skill needs

Source: Calculated from Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey
Rethinking retirement

• Employers can’t hire their way out of labour shortages
• What would encourage baby-boomers to continue working?
• Would healthier work environments be a major incentive?
3. Innovation
Learning organizations = healthy workplaces

- Knowledge and intellectual capital as core assets
- Human Resource Management practices and work environments that support learning also define a healthy workplace
- Thomas Stewart (Intellectual Capital, 1997): knowledge management is about connection, not collection
- Being too busy at work is the most common barrier to job-related training (Statistics Canada, Perspectives on Labour and Income, Summer 2002)
Involvement and innovation

*Employee Involvement:*
- Information sharing
- Flexible job design
- Teams
- Suggestion programs
- Surveys
- Joint labour-management committees

*Benefits EI & HRM bundles:*
- Innovation in services or products
- Higher job satisfaction

Demands, control and stress

**Decision Latitude** (control)

- **LOW**
  - Low strain
  - Passive

- **HIGH**
  - Active

**Psychological demands**

- **LOW**
  - High strain
- **HIGH**
  - Learning, motivation to develop new behaviour patterns
  - Risk of Psychological stress
  - Physical illness

The long arm of the job

- Job and workplace conditions affect how workers think and act on and off the job
- Individuals who participate in cognitively challenging work activities become:
  - more self-directed
  - intellectually motivated
  - cognitively flexible
- The key is self-directed work: autonomy, independent judgment, complex, non-routine

Source: research by Melvin Kohn, Carmi Schooler, Martin Meissner and others
Managing in the 21st century

*Peter Drucker:*

- Knowledge workers must be treated as assets, not costs
- Their work must enable continuous innovation, learning and teaching
- Traditional approaches to people management are not effective
Reducing capabilities
4. Collaboration
Working together

- Four dimensions of work relationships:
  1. trust
  2. commitment
  3. communication
  4. influence

- Affects morale, satisfaction, turnover, absenteeism, skill use and development

- Strengthened by a healthy and supportive environment

Employment relationships nurture talent

Employees’ perceptions of a healthy work environment

BIGGEST POSITIVE IMPACT:
• Good communication and supportive relationships
  – communication
  – co-workers
  – supervisor
  – recognition

OUTCOMES:
• job satisfaction
• commitment
• morale
• lower absenteeism
• lower turnover

Values

- Values are the cornerstone of a healthy organization
- Fairness, respect and honesty are upper-most in employees’ minds as key workplace values
- Contribute to a ‘psychologically healthy workplace’
- At the core of corporate social responsibility
- Build trust
Trust

Employees trust managers who:
- Are concerned about their well-being
- Listen and respond to their input
- Are open and honest about change
- Consistently act the values
Trust, learning and performance

- Workplace learning is a key feature of High Performance Work Systems
  - high trust and involvement
  - make better use of all workers’ intelligence, skills and creativity
  - engage all employees in seeking ways to improve performance
- “Employees have to feel secure enough to experiment and try new behaviours and learn from mistakes.”
- Trust is a precondition for feeling secure

5. Change
Unhealthy change

*Employees who survived downsizing experienced:*

- Increased job demands and job insecurity
- Decreased job control
- Increased sickness absenteeism (permanent staff)
- Increased presenteeism (temp staff)
- Increased risk of cardiovascular disease

Silent killers

- "Doctors call high cholesterol a ‘silent killer’ because it blocks arteries with no outward symptoms. Companies, too, have silent killers working below the surface – mutually reinforcing barriers that block strategy implementation and organizational learning."

- Core barrier = “poor vertical communication.”

The change *process* matters

- “If there is one clear result from the research on change management, it is that employee participation increases individual ownership and excitement and, in turn, decreases individual resistance to change. The more people are involved, the more the change effort is their change effort.”

A learning strategy for creating healthier organizations

*Thought* ↔ *Action*

- Process models the goals
- Vision driven
- Values based
- Strategic focus
- Top-down & bottom-up
- Empowerment & engagement
- Not a ‘program’!
Avoid over-planning

HOW OBVIOUS DOES AN IDEA NEED TO BE BEFORE WE’LL STOP CALLING IT A STRATEGY?
Putting talk into action

Guiding principles

1. Identify and leverage an organization’s strengths
2. Find opportunities in existing initiatives and language
3. Build people goals into unit/department business plans
4. Nurture a culture of excellent communication and collaboration
5. Involve staff
6. Create alliances with other change agents
Leading change...

What is your vision of a healthy organization?