



## **International Association of Worksite Health Promotion Worksite Health Promotion Training Workshop**

### **White Paper Implementing Worksite Health Champions**

#### **Purpose**

The intent here is to examine the interpersonal and team structures that influence the workplace environment related to worker health, wellness and well-being. Outlining the process to establish a network of champions is our goal. This paper serves as the evidence to support a certification program developed by the International Association of Worksite Health Promotion (IAWHP).

The social-ecological model of health promotion outlines multiple aspects of influence for employee health [1]. Developing the social support within an employer workforce is a key component of sustainable success for employee health promotion. An employer's health promotion profile includes the dynamic influences of employees and corporate factors as well as the interaction between these organizational factors and individual behaviors [2]. Establishing capacity in the employee population through an operating infrastructure of teams and champions is the focus of this paper. A review of pertinent research, current best practices and observation through experience informs our approach to this effort and guides the following discussion.

#### **Why Worksite Health Promotion**

The health risk profile of U.S. adults poses multiple threats to a high quality of life. Tobacco use in young adults age 18-24 exceeds one in four (25.3%). Almost two out of five (38.0%) adults report virtually zero physical activity in an average week. Approximately one in four adults (23.4%) is obese and almost two-thirds are either overweight or obese [3]. Adherence to recommended self-care and preventive health services runs at about 50% [4]. These lifestyle issues drive degraded functionality, productivity and impact a host of financial factors for U.S. employers.

Health care costs in many employers run at an 8-10% rate of annual inflation, disability and workers' compensation costs are 9% in many states, disability and FMLA costs are escalating every year. There is a strong association found when health risks and the previous costs are studied [5]. Health risks tend to accumulate as we age. Health status tends to degrade over time as we age. When individuals change lifestyle habits and decrease health risks, we observe a change in health and improved profile, at any age. It is practical to infer that the increased health and productivity costs are not caused by age as much as they are driven by health risks.



Worksite health promotion has an opportunity to improve health risks, health status and subsequently health and productivity costs. Several meta-evaluation studies and literature review articles have substantiated the reduction in costs associated with successful health promotion programs. The average cost benefit ratio calculated in 16 studies with well-designed evaluation methods was 5.93: 1. The approximate cost reduction in absenteeism, health costs and workers' compensation – disability costs exceeded 25% in all categories [6]. A conclusion reached in this study and other literature review articles, supported by the International Association of Worksite Health Promotion Workshop Team conclude that the more rigorous the study, the greater the likelihood that savings will be found.

## **Overview**

The following paper outlines information from the body of scientific literature about developing teams and social networks in worksites to support health promotion programming. Several of the references are from fields including human resources and organizational development beyond the more common health promotion journals. Practical application recommendations integrated with the evidence in the literature has been shaped by a diverse team of IAWHP professionals. The sections of the white paper follow below.

- Introducing Change or an Innovation Into Your Company
- Organizing an Employee Health Promotion Team
- Creating a Social Network of Support – Champions
- Recruiting a Company Sponsor
- Team Activation and Operational Issues
- Practical Issues to Consider
- Summary

## **Introducing Change or an Innovation Into Your Company**

Change management is an established competency within many companies [7]. The development of a health promotion initiative within a company may be considered as any other change management process. The introduction of health as an organizational value requires more than a few memorandums, email newsletters and promotional spiels at town hall meetings. Establishing employee health as a core value is typically more daunting than other typical organizational changes.



When two companies merge the change management process addresses; names, logos, staffing, personnel retention/dismissal, benefit packages and similar issues. As complex and anxiety provoking as these can be for employees, the change management process for most issues has a short life-expectancy. The approach for any change management process is similar regardless of the topic.

A unique feature of health promotion as an innovation or change is the long-term implementation phase and severe influence on basic values within the employee population. The percentage of employees that require participation and engagement in health promotion programs is another unique feature. The previous company change topics that were mentioned typically influence a small percentage of the employees. Yet, for health promotion to succeed in an employee population a participation rate of 50-70% is typically required [5, 8, 9].

Research in the process that organizations/employers use to implement change has application in health promotion program management. When an organization attempts to stimulate a change in the climate of health, the process is comparable to other elements of change for employers. The social interaction with co-workers and manager's including senior manager's is a salient feature of effective change management [10]. The involvement of co-workers in a change management process is a key concept that justifies the creation of health champions. When employees feel a strong commitment from the organization and a connection through social networks they are more accepting of changes introduced by the company [7]. The social networks influence may be responsible for mitigating the perception of top-down management styles. Participative leadership style within an employer helps facilitate the management of change. Trust in management is also associated with health promotion participation in employers [2].

There are two established models that can help guide an organization through the change process or the introduction of an innovation such as health promotion. A brief description of the models is provided below. These help serve as the evidence based structure to guide the development of your company infrastructure (teams and champions).

### Lewin's Theory of Change [11]

A change in policy, procedure or other organizational standards in an employer can be guided by a three-step process. The phases of the change process are dynamic and can evolve and regress within the many influencing factors found in the work place environment. The three phase model is a guide to consider when developing new teams such as the employee health promotion team and health champion network. The three phase model is outlined below.



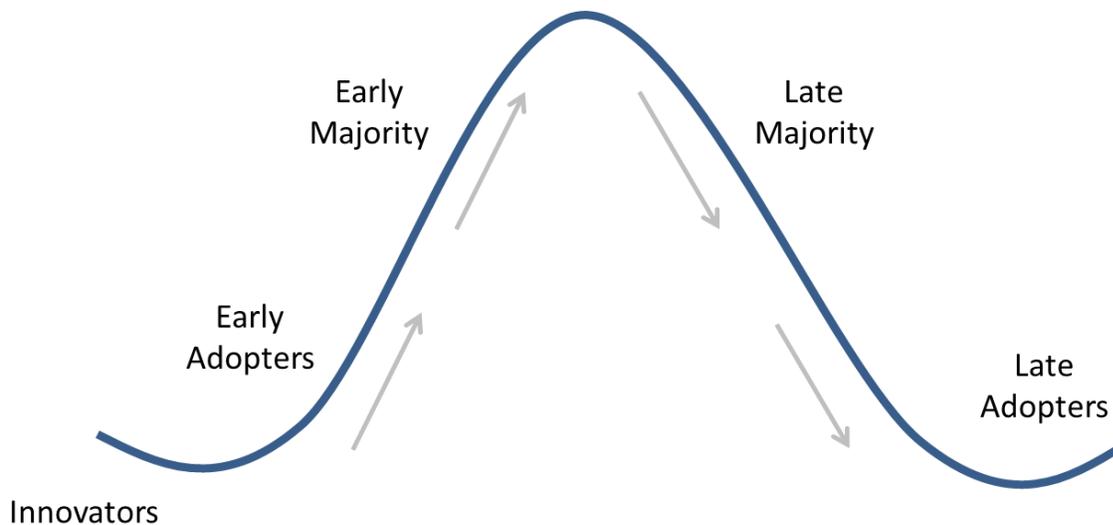
1. Unfreezing
2. Moving
3. Refreezing

### Roger's Stages of Innovation [12]

The five stages of innovation are familiar to most of us who have been students of marketing or innovation. These stages relate to how an innovation moves through any group of individuals.

1. Innovators
2. Early adopters
3. Early majority
4. Late majority
5. Late adopters

Illustration 1.





The introduction of change into an organization always creates some level of uncertainty and unknown. The ability of a company to manage through change and maintain productivity and minimize the uncertainty is related to environmental issues of the organization, the composition of individuals (employees) and external influences acting upon the organization.

The previous sections outline the published literature and peer reviewed evidence to guide the following recommendations. This collective foundation of knowledge is used to shape the step by step process of building your employee health team and network of champions.

### **Creating a Social Network of Support – Champions**

The climate that surrounds the employee population includes a diverse set of ecological variables. The collective attitude of company leaders, managers and officers as well as co-workers provide social support within the health climate [2]. The physical or environmental factors, company policies, cultural norms, demographic and psychographic variables are additional influences on the employee population [13].

Policies can serve as evidence of organizational support for the climate. The organizational climate created through the policy infrastructure can be segmented in categories of organizational support, co-worker social support and relationships, intra-department communications, enterprise wide communications [2].

Previous experience and evidence-based literature substantiate the success of employee teams as the primary entity to promote and execute wellness programs. Health champions serve as the marketing agents within the organization. Participation and engagement through the employee population is driven by these champions. The grass root level feedback, program customization and competition execution is proposed to be coordinated by the health promotion committee described earlier.

The development of Health Champions and the evolution to the health promotion committee is outlined below. The proposed first year process is designed to build a sustainable infrastructure for the program. The following topics constitute the first year's training plan. The expectation is for the training to occur on a monthly cycle.



### Initial Session Topics for Health Promotion Champions

- Role description of the Health Promotion Champion
- Overview of the Program
- How to build support for the Program
- Monthly themes and expected actions
- Challenges and expected actions
- Engaging local managers
- Performing a local audit of resources and culture
- Coordinating with corporate support
- Forming the Employee Health Promotion Team (2 sessions)
- Employee Health Promotion Team Training (2 sessions)

### Health Champion Support

The key to Health Champion support is a clear definition of the role and a robust resource library for champions to access as needed. Champions are viewed as the promotional arm of the Program. These individuals are not designed as program managers or program evaluators. The feedback to the health promotion team is fairly limited as well. Champions will be solicited for program participation feedback and general comments regarding associate reaction to various initiatives. Our experience when supporting Health Promotion Champions is a small number of questions, with the defined role as a promoter of participation.

Health Champions will need a single contact for questions or clarifications. We recommend an email address such as [Health@ABC.com](mailto:Health@ABC.com) for Health Champion questions. An alternate channel for questions is an information line, dedicated to Health Champions. Interactive voice response (IVR) libraries of FAQs that are contemporary issues are the topics within this library are recommended for this venue. FAQs posted on the Intranet portal allow Health Champions to obtain information from several difference communication methods. The information in all three channels must be identical and allow Health Champions to select the most convenient method of communication without hesitation.



## **Health Promotion Champion Engagement Strategy**

Health Promotion Champions serve as the primary promotional arm of the Program. These front line evangelists are the primary mouthpiece, recruiters and advocates for programs and change in an organization. Skill sets that champions should possess include influence and the ability to problem solve [14]. A volunteer champion may be enthusiastic yet be isolated and be meek and a poor negotiator. Although any volunteer is helpful, you will need a network of champions who are effective agents of change and well positioned throughout your organization. The champion network is a key factor if not the primary structure that drives program sustainability [15]. This network is also a strong influence on facilitating the change in the climate of health within an organization.

The aggregate influence of the Health Promotion Champion network is highly leveraged. Yet, at an individual level each Health Promotion Champion is many times the single proponent of programs and activities at their respective location. This potential isolation and lack of connectedness to corporate program managers is a driving factor in the Health Promotion Champion Engagement Strategy.

A comprehensive set of resources and information must be available for Health Promotion Champions to access. A toolbox that contains a comprehensive set of resources for the Health Promotion Champion is recommended for development, production and distribution to Health Promotion Champions who prefer printed material, potentially to each Health Champion. Health Promotion Champions who do not have access to a computer workstation during work hours may resent using personal time to review the information through the on-line portal. The social networking that occurs via the on-line portal is difficult to replicate, but background information and updates are intended to be available through toolkits and periodic updates.

### **Practical Issues to Consider**

Organizational downsizing has been shown to exert a negative influence on employee health and well-being. Increased absence due to sickness, self-reported health and stress levels are associated with downsizing in the workplace [16].

The improvement in delivering knowledge to employees has been shown to be an effective action that improves employee lifestyle choices. Practical program management efforts such as promoting stair use, dietary content of foods in the company cafeteria, vending machine product labeling and general health promotional activity such as posters and communications have proven effective [17].



## Summary

Worksite health promotion includes an organization-wide approach to planning, operations and evaluation. The implementation of health promotion in an employer setting is comparable to any major change across the organization. The best practices and theories that can serve as a model for health promotion program change parallel organizational dynamics grounded in business management.

A health champion network can provide high leveraged marketing support throughout the organization. The recruiting and development of a health champion network requires a deliberate approach. The evidence supporting a health champion network is predominantly drawn from the knowledge of neural networks and social networks. The ability for form a health promotion committee and develop a network of health champions is a segment of total program management. Small and medium sized employers can be effective through these two areas and evolve into more complex areas of health promotion program design and management.



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