

Integral wellness management

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Nationwide is the world's largest Building Society and an Investors in People Champion Organisation with assets of over £120m, c.870 retail outlets and c.16,000 employees across the UK. Business Services is a support function within Nationwide employing c.400 employees and includes the Property Services Department (PSD). This article describes how an integral wellness management strategy was implemented within PSD.

The case for wellness

Due to improvements in living standards in many Western European countries, not only are people living longer, but also facing the prospect of having to work longer. Increased longevity and a raised retirement age are therefore likely to demand that employers enable their employees to perform at their optimum throughout their working lives. However, organisations face many challenges in pursuit of this aim. For example, in PSD research (n = 68), 84 per cent of employees reported that their pace of life had increased in the last five years and 76 per cent felt that there were more pressures in their lives. If our ability to cope with these changes does not keep pace, there is a danger that physical health and mental well-being, as well as performance at work, will suffer. Unfortunately, this situation appears to be increasingly common. The Work Foundation has reported that approximately 25 per cent of employees are performing sub-optimally at work because of physical or mental strain. A CIPD report (2007) concludes that mental health problems are having a "huge" impact in the workplace, with increasing numbers of employees taking time off for stress and depression. To address these concerns many employers are focusing their efforts on developing their managers to manage people. But this is only a part of the equation; organisations now increasingly recognise that wellness related habits and satisfaction with lifestyle have a significant impact on the ability of employees to achieve higher sustainable work performance.

Aligning culture to support business strategy

In 2001, James Anderson-Dixon designed a 'People Skills' training programme aimed at helping individuals gain a greater understanding of self as well as build stronger relationships with colleagues and customers alike. The programme was based on Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), a methodology that enables individuals to model what top achievers do well. The programme was offered to all 145 Nationwide employees in PSD. In 2003, and as an extension to the earlier 'People Skills' training, James then developed a 'Service Excellence Coach' programme. This involved the training and qualification of a team of 19 individuals who participated in the earlier 'People Skills' training. These individuals exhibited a natural talent towards people skills and coaching and were willing to coach others in addition to their other job responsibilities. In 2005, and in partnership with WellKom Corporate Services, James co-designed and began to deliver a 'Looking After Yourself' Wellness Management programme; a move that would take the Service Excellence Coach programme to the next level. This was considered to be a logical next step to earlier training programmes and fitted well with an increasingly holistic approach towards learning and development.

Whilst the need for personal wellness is gaining greater recognition in the wider business community, many organisations focus their efforts on wellbeing initiatives aimed at mitigating employer risk and providing assistance when things go wrong (e.g. when stress emerges), rather than promoting employee well-being. For many organisations the relationship between the collective attitude of the workforce towards their personal wellness and the impact on long-term business results is often not clear. It also appears that the balance of responsibility for employee wellness is shifting more to the employer, as evidenced by a rising incidence in stress claims. To counter this, James developed a systemic, or integral, personal wellness approach (see Fig: 1) that complements what is available in Nationwide corporately.

Figure 1 - Integral wellness management model

	Internal (Hearts and Minds)	External (Objective Reality)
Individual	<p>Internal (cognitive) processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thoughts, feelings, beliefs & values <p><i>Inner motivation to improve levels of personal satisfaction and wellness</i></p>	<p>Behavioural</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aptitude Capability Skills <p><i>Pro-actively improving individual wellbeing and performance</i></p>
Organisational	<p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collective attitude <p><i>The way we do things around here: improving collective performance</i></p>	<p>Systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes and systems i.e. Wellkom's 'Personal Wellness Profile' evaluator <p><i>Enabling individuals to identify ways of improving personal wellness habits</i></p>

This model explores the relationship between what individuals think (hearts and minds), what they do (objective reality/observable behaviours), how they are supported (systems) and how this drives collective attitude (culture) and business results.

Practical application and results

An important part of the 'Looking After Yourself' programme was the development of a bespoke on-line Personal Wellness Profile (PWP) based on a system devised by WellKom. The PWP is an interactive profiling tool which provides the user with deeper insight into their personal wellness, including satisfaction with lifestyle, physical and psychological well-being, and attitudes and behaviours relating to wellness. The PWP allows the user to compare their own wellness profile with a large sample population. It also offers a set of powerful techniques to enable people to manage their own health and well-being more effectively. The PWP is very effective when used as a stand-alone self-development resource but its impact is even greater when combined with one-to-one coaching. To support the PWP in PSD, a group of coaches from the 'Service Excellence Coach' programme were trained in the use of the PWP and accredited as Personal Wellness Coaches by the International Coach Federation (ICF). A total of 194 employees and suppliers within PSD were invited to complete the on-line PWP. A Coach then met briefly with each coachee to explain the structure of the PWP before their own PWPs were issued electronically. This was followed by a 1¼ hours coaching

session where each coachee was able to review the results of their PWP in confidence with a coach. The aim of the session was to identify one or two strategies that the coachee would commit to adopt in order to improve their wellness and overall performance. Some respondents had more than one coaching session. The PWP was then repeated several months later in order to identify any significant changes. Feedback on the value of profiling and coaching and the impact of the Wellness Management programme was obtained after 9–12 months. Self-rated performance data was also collected using extracts from the WHO's Health and Performance Questionnaire (HPQ). Other data such as sickness absence was obtained from HR. The majority (76 per cent) of participants reported taking positive action as a result of the Personal Wellness Profile (PWP) and one-to-one session(s), e.g. *"I've reviewed my personal fitness levels, bought an exercise bike and changed my eating habits."* Significant proportions reported that the programme had had a positive impact on their physical wellness (41 per cent), psychological wellness (50 per cent), ability to manage own personal wellness (56 per cent), ability to concentrate and make decisions (56 per cent) and quality of relationships (61 per cent). Most people (56 per cent) stated that the programme had had a positive impact on their ability to achieve 'higher sustainable performance at work'. Participants reported being, on average, 23 per cent more productive than other workers in Nationwide doing a similar job. Finally, sickness absence was reduced by more than 50 per cent over a 12 month period amongst those respondents for whom data was collected.

Key learning points and conclusions

A great deal was learned during the 'Looking After Yourself' programme in terms of what did and what did not work from a design and delivery perspective, specifically;

- Marketing the programme widely in advance boosts uptake
- People enjoy talking about themselves and like to be heard and acknowledged
- People like to benchmark themselves against others via a Personal Wellness Profile
- Coaching is powerful in helping individuals bring their PWP to life
- Wellness Coaching is different from performance coaching - not everyone is comfortable with sharing personal wellness thoughts and feelings with a colleague
- Setting well-formed outcome(s) enables individuals to take ownership of their wellness and significantly increases the probability that goals will be achieved.

Encouraging an employee to 'Look After Yourself' can influence employee performance and impact positively on bottom line results. However, it might not always be easy to convince an employer of the benefits of Wellness Management when their focus is on the mitigation of risk and reducing absenteeism rather than on employee autonomy and optimising performance at work. It is therefore essential to effectively promote employee wellness via senior management, to select the right people to develop as coaches, and to ensure that employees understand the benefits - 'what's in it for me'. In terms of next steps, and as a reflection of the growing interest in this field, James and his team are now providing employees at Investors In People with coaching support as part of a pilot programme similar to the one undertaken within Business Services.

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