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Title

Workplace Wellness

by

Hannah Kay Holder

Advisor: Professor Joshua Wright

**An Honors Thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of
Science in Business Administration (or Bachelor of Science in International Business) in
Accounting (your major)**

**Sam M. Walton College of Business
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, Arkansas**

May 10, 2023

Abstract:

The evolving landscape of workplace dynamics underscores a growing emphasis on achieving a better work-life balance and healthier lifestyle, particularly among younger generations entering the workforce. This shift in preferences highlights the importance of companies adapting to meet the needs of employees by offering flexibility and support for wellness initiatives. A workplace culture that promotes work-life balance not only enhances employee satisfaction but also leads to increased productivity and decreased healthcare costs. While comprehensive wellness programs and flexible work arrangements are beneficial, they may not be universally applicable. However, the overarching commitment to creating a supportive and healthy work environment remains crucial. As individuals seek workplaces that prioritize employee well-being and offer flexibility, the trend towards fostering healthier and more balanced work environments continues to gain momentum. Ultimately, finding a workplace that aligns with one's values and encourages a healthy work-life balance is a desirable goal for both employees and employers alike.

Introduction:

We are in a time that is defined by a rapidly evolving workplace dynamics and shifting generational expectations. To fulfill the desires of all generations we need to look at what they want in correlation with health in the workplace. The modern workplace is undergoing a transformation caused by the increased importance of employee well-being. Many would say this change started in 2020, the year of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is when many employees looked at what they were doing and reassessed what was important to them, many found that health was very important to them. This thesis will embark on a journey to dive into the essential question: Why is fostering a culture of active and healthy employees so vital in today's professional landscape?

The idea for this research stems from a mix of my personal experiences and broader society trends. To understand the significance of active and healthy employees, it is crucial to recognize the many benefits that this kind of workforce can bring to the table. This includes increased productivity, improved team dynamics, lower healthcare costs, reduced stress levels, and enhanced time management are just a few of the advantages (Thompson, 2023). Furthermore, fostering a culture of active employees can attract top talent seeking a work-life balance, ultimately contributing to improved employee engagement and satisfaction. This thesis will provide evidence-based insights on how and why encouraging active and healthy employees can lead to a company being more successful.

This paper is structured to contain an overall look of the topic, including the benefits of active employees, the potential costs and drawbacks, emerging trends in supporting employee activity, information from companies that have in-house gyms, and strategies for businesses. I will also investigate whether this trend aligns with global practices and if it aligns with the ideas and wants of the emerging Gen Z workforce. Ultimately, my main points show the clear impact of active and healthy employees on the workplace's overall health and productivity.

Personal Statement:

During my current internship, I have been fortunate to not only observe but actively participate in employee wellness initiatives. As a member of a dynamic team, I've been involved in crafting and implementing small micro goals each week for team members. These initiatives establish clear objectives for individuals and inject elements of enjoyment and engagement into the workday, ultimately fostering a workplace culture that prioritizes the well-being of its employees.

One notable initiative involved setting a goal for employees to embark on a twenty-minute lunch walk. What was great about this activity was the collective participation of the team, as many employees took the opportunity to walk together. The impact on mental clarity and stamina for the rest of the day was undeniable, showing the significance of even small, shared activities in enhancing overall well-being. Beyond the physical benefits, these group walks also served as occasions for team building and deeper connections among colleagues on a personal level, creating a positive ripple effect throughout the workplace.

As a member of Generation Z, I recognize the evolving expectations that my peers and I have for our professional environments. After speaking to peers, I have seen that we aspire to work for employers who not only value our contributions but also prioritize our well-being, happiness, and health. The desire for a healthy work-life balance and a holistic approach to health is a defining characteristic of my generation. These aspirations extend beyond the

workplace, influencing our commitment to leading healthier lifestyles through a balance of work and physical activity.

Motivated by these personal and generational considerations, I chose to focus my thesis on the profound impact of exercise and health on workplace productivity and employee satisfaction. This topic holds personal significance for me, as I believe it will continue to shape my well-being throughout my life. My goal is not only to understand how to lead a healthier lifestyle but also to contribute to creating environments that support the health and wellness of others.

Reflecting on my own journey, I've made a conscious effort to prioritize movement in my daily routine. Despite the challenges of a busy schedule, I've committed to incorporating some form of physical activity every day. This might involve a brisk walk outdoors or a more extended workout session in the gym, tailored to fit my schedule. The results have been tangible as I have experienced improved well-being, heightened productivity, and a newfound appreciation for the impact even a brief 15-minute exercise break can have on my overall mindset and performance.

As I embark on exploring workplace health and its profound impact, I am not only gaining insights for personal development but also laying the foundation for my future aspirations. I envision a career trajectory where I can lead and inspire others, perhaps as a business owner or manager. Central to my professional philosophy is the belief that the well-being of employees is intricately linked to the success of a company. I aspire to be a leader who not only understands the importance of fostering a healthy and supportive work environment but actively promotes it. By incorporating wellness initiatives into the fabric of my leadership style, I aim to guide employees towards a balanced and fulfilling lifestyle. I am driven by the vision of creating a workplace culture that not only prioritizes individual health but also contributes to the collective growth and prosperity of the organization. This commitment to leadership reflects my dedication to being not just a manager but a catalyst for positive change, both for individuals and the companies I may lead in the future.

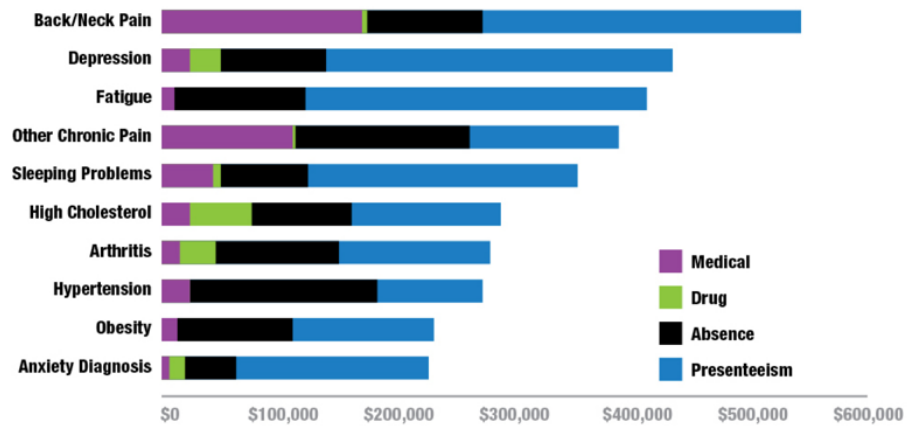
Advantages:

Encouraging a culture of health and fitness among employees creates immense amounts of advantages for both individuals and organizations. One benefit is the alleviation of stress, a known challenge in the modern workplace. Engaging in regular exercise raises heart rate, increases blood flow, and stimulates the release of mood-enhancing hormones such as norepinephrine (Thompson, 2023). This physiological response not only promotes mental well-being but also contributes to a reduction in stress levels. In turn, employees experience heightened job satisfaction, fostering a positive work environment.

Moreover, embracing a proactive approach to employee health can significantly impact healthcare costs. Workplace health programs have the potential to yield a substantial 25 percent savings on absenteeism and healthcare expenses, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Thompson, 2023). This not only represents a financial advantage for companies but also shows the correlation between a focus on employee well-being and overall cost savings.

What's Ailing Corporate America

The most costly conditions afflicting employees come with a hefty price tag. Here's a look at total medical, pharmacy and productivity costs.*



*Per 1,000 full-time equivalent employees
Source: *Journal for Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, July 2007

Healthcare costs are further decreased as exercise strengthens the immune system, leading to a healthier workforce and fewer sick days. Active and healthy employees are less prone to illnesses, establishing a clear connection between physical activity and a decrease in absenteeism (Kohll, 2022). This not only shows the economic advantages for companies but also highlights the reciprocal relationship between employee health and workplace attendance.

Adding to the past two paragraphs points of productivity and healthcare costs, Kohll draws attention to the substantial economic impact of obesity, emphasizing direct healthcare costs of \$480.7 billion and an additional \$1.24 trillion in lost productivity in 2016. By promoting a healthier lifestyle through exercise, organizations can actively contribute to reversing these trends and fostering a more robust and productive workforce. James A. Levine, MD, PhD says "Today, our bodies are breaking down from obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, depression, and the cascade of health ills and everyday malaise that come from what scientists such as myself have named sitting disease."

Fig. 3
 Direct, Indirect, and Total Costs for Physical Inactivity, Obesity, and Overweight in California Adults (in Year 2000 Dollars).

	<i>Medical Care Cost</i>		<i>Workers' Compensation Cost</i>	<i>Lost Productivity Cost</i>		<i>Total Cost</i>
	Treatment	Cost of Prescription Drugs		Absenteeism, Presenteeism, and Short-term	On-the-job Injury	
Physical Inactivity						
Direct	\$241,985,581	\$1,065,943,038	\$50,005,040	\$7,528,629,764	\$274,983,844	\$9,161,574,267
Indirect	\$725,956,744	\$3,197,829,114	\$200,020,159	0	0	\$4,123,806,017
Total Physical Inactivity Cost						\$13,285,353,284
Obesity						
Direct	\$135,520,641	\$595,514,095	\$17,658,344	\$3,364,013,159	0	\$4,112,706,239
Indirect	\$406,561,922	\$1,786,542,286	\$70,633,376	0	0	\$2,263,737,584
Total Obesity Cost						\$6,376,443,823
Overweight						
Direct	\$93,509,242	\$410,605,609	0	0	0	\$504,114,851
Indirect	\$280,527,726	\$1,231,816,827	0	0	0	\$1,512,344,553
Total Overweight Cost						\$2,016,459,404
Total Cost of Physical Inactivity, Obesity, and						\$21,678,256,511

Furthermore, the advantages extend beyond individual health to encompass team dynamics and workplace relationships. Employees who engage in physical activities together build camaraderie, fostering better relationships and accountability. Evidence from various workplaces, including my own, attests to the positive impact of team workouts on interpersonal dynamics and overall workplace satisfaction.

The advantages of promoting exercise and health in the workplace are varied and immense, ranging from stress alleviation and healthcare cost reduction to increased productivity and enhanced team dynamics. Organizations that prioritize the well-being of their employees stand to gain not only in terms of financial savings but also in cultivating a positive, collaborative, and high-performing work environment.

Disadvantages:

While the advantages of promoting an active workforce are substantial, it is crucial to consider the potential drawbacks that organizations may encounter in their commitment to employee well-being. One notable disadvantage revolves around the financial implications of compensating workers for time spent on wellness activities during working hours. Providing employees with designated time for exercise may result in reduced efficiency as work hours are allocated to non-job-related activities. This financial investment in employee health, while valuable, could potentially strain budgets, particularly for businesses operating in industries with tight profit margins. Some employees can also take advantage of these benefits and use the time to do non-beneficial activities or not get the work that needs to be done finished.

Furthermore, the provision of in-house gyms and wellness facilities poses an additional financial burden for companies. While the intention is to foster a healthy work environment, not all organizations may have the financial capacity to establish and maintain such amenities. The upfront costs, ongoing maintenance expenses, and space requirements associated with on-site fitness facilities can be prohibitive, leading to disparities in the ability of companies to provide these resources. Smaller businesses may find it challenging to compete with larger counterparts that can afford more extensive wellness offerings. While the benefits of an active workforce are undeniable, organizations must carefully navigate the financial considerations to ensure the sustainability and equitable implementation of such initiatives.

Another significant concern is the possibility of some employees pushing the system, taking advantage of the flexibility afforded to them and abusing company policies. This misuse can lead to inefficiencies, decreased productivity, and resentment among colleagues who adhere to the guidelines diligently. Consequently, employers must establish clear boundaries, guidelines, and monitoring mechanisms to mitigate the risk of exploitation while still providing flexibility where feasible.

Also, despite the availability of amenities and freedoms, some employees may opt not to utilize them effectively. This may stem from various factors, including personal preferences, time constraints, or lack of awareness about the benefits of self-care activities. In such cases, the intended purpose of these initiatives—improving employee well-being and productivity—may not be fully realized. To address this challenge, employers can implement educational programs, wellness campaigns, and incentivization strategies to encourage greater participation and engagement in wellness activities. Additionally, fostering a culture that values and prioritizes self-care and work-life balance can help instill a sense of responsibility and motivation among employees to utilize available resources effectively.

Ultimately, while there are potential risks associated with offering flexibility and well-being initiatives in the workplace, thoughtful planning, clear communication, and proactive measures can help mitigate these challenges. By striking a balance between providing autonomy and accountability, employers can create an environment that promotes employee well-being, satisfaction, and productivity while minimizing the likelihood of abuse or disengagement.

Emerging Trends:

The global shift towards a better work-life balance is a prominent trend, with Americans increasingly recognizing its importance. An article titled "In pursuit of Work-Life Balance: What Europe can teach America" sheds light on the differences in work-life balance between Europe and the United States. Notably, the average American receives a mere 15 vacation days compared to the more generous average of 30 days for Europeans. Additionally, French workers clock in an average of 1,482 hours annually, while their American counterparts dedicate an average of 1,790 hours (Hilton, 2023). This stark contrast underscores the challenges faced by Americans, who contend with shorter weekends and less leisure time, ultimately impacting their overall well-being and contributing to heightened stress levels.

A recent survey revealed a shifting perspective on the "American Dream". No longer solely centered on financial success, the new American Dream, according to a Chief Marketing Officer Fara Howard, revolves around "feeling a sense of belonging, freedom, happiness, and work-life balance" (Jackson, 2023). This transformation in values is attributed to various factors,

including rising inflation and living costs. A significant portion of millennials express intentions to rent indefinitely due to the perceived "exceedingly expensive" nature of homeownership (Jackson, 2023). This shift in aspirations reflects a growing awareness and prioritization of personal well-being over traditional markers of success.

Looking ahead, the future of work-life balance for Americans holds promising opportunities. The surge in remote and flexible work environments, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, presents a transformative trend. These flexible arrangements not only eliminate commute times but also afford employees greater control over their schedules, fostering an improved work-life balance (Hilton, 2023). Another noteworthy trend involves the enactment of laws in certain states and cities related to paid family leave, sick leave, and regulated work hours. These legislative measures empower employees, encouraging them to prioritize personal and family time without fear of professional repercussions (Hilton, 2023).

A study conducted by NJIT University delved into the advantages of remote work for employees, uncovering a myriad of benefits that contribute to both individual and organizational well-being. Among the key findings were several notable advantages, including heightened levels of employee engagement and productivity. With the flexibility afforded by remote work arrangements, employees reported increased satisfaction and motivation, resulting in a tangible improvement in their performance (NJIT, Benefits of Remote Work). Furthermore, the study highlighted the significant impact of remote work on recruitment efforts, with organizations experiencing a surge in the number of applicants attracted to roles offering remote work opportunities. This expanded talent pool enables companies to access a broader range of skills and expertise, ultimately enhancing their competitive edge in the marketplace.

Additionally, remote work was shown to yield substantial cost savings for organizations, particularly in terms of reduced turnover expenses. By providing employees with the flexibility to work remotely, companies can mitigate turnover rates and associated costs, as remote work arrangements are highly valued and sought after by many individuals in the workforce. Also, remote work has been linked to a decrease in absenteeism and sick days among employees. The flexibility to work from home allows individuals to better manage their schedules and attend to personal and family needs without the need for taking time off. This, in turn, leads to improved employee health and well-being, as individuals can better balance their professional and personal responsibilities.

Overall, the study underscores the transformative impact of remote work on employee satisfaction, organizational efficiency, and talent acquisition efforts. By embracing remote work arrangements, companies can create a more inclusive and flexible workplace culture that not only attracts top talent but also fosters greater employee engagement, productivity, and well-being.

In correspondence with the evolving understanding of the importance of work-life balance, many forward-thinking companies are actively promoting employee well-being by

integrating physical activity into the workday. A growing trend involves companies encouraging employees to incorporate workouts during work hours or lunch breaks. This not only acknowledges the positive impact of exercise on physical health but also recognizes its potential to enhance mental well-being and overall productivity. Some organizations take this commitment a step further by providing on-site gyms or fitness facilities, creating convenient opportunities for employees to engage in physical activity without leaving the workplace. Helping employees and companies to reap the benefits of employees who exercise as discussed previously.

In addition to facilitating access to fitness amenities, companies are adopting innovative strategies to motivate employees to prioritize their health. A noteworthy approach is the provision of paid incentives for engaging in regular exercise. This can take various forms, including gym membership reimbursements, wellness program participation rewards, or financial incentives tied to achieving specific fitness goals. By intertwining financial incentives with fitness initiatives, companies are not only investing in the health and happiness of their employees but also fostering a culture that values and rewards proactive approaches to well-being.

These initiatives not only contribute to a healthier and more engaged workforce but also serve as a testament to the changing landscape of corporate values. By integrating physical activity into the workday and incentivizing employees to prioritize their health, companies are not only aligning with emerging trends but are also fostering a workplace culture that recognizes the symbiotic relationship between employee well-being and organizational success. This dual emphasis on both professional and personal fulfillment reflects a shift in the way companies approach employee welfare, acknowledging that a healthy and balanced workforce is a key driver of sustained productivity and overall workplace satisfaction.

A Look into Companies:

I had the privilege of visiting with two professionals from different companies that provide in-house gyms for their employees, offering a firsthand look into the potential advantages and disadvantages of such facilities.

Firstly, I had a conversation with Gabe Terrell, the Head of Operations at Walmart's corporate headquarters gym. Gabe shared insights into Walmart's longstanding commitment to employee well-being, tracing its roots back to the company's founder, Sam Walton, and his wife. Recognizing the importance of physical fitness, they envisioned an exercise facility for associates, leading to the establishment of a 30,000 square foot gym at the inception of Walmart's headquarters. Witnessing the positive impact of this initiative, Walmart is now in the process of constructing a 360,000 square foot facility, strategically located within a 10-minute walk from any point on the Walmart Headquarters campus.

This not-for-profit gym, available to every employee through an \$18 monthly pay deduction, has evolved into a vibrant hub for health and wellness. Offering an extensive range of classes, including Pilates and bootcamp group workouts, Walmart's gym currently boasts 9,000 memberships, with an average daily check-in of 2,000 members. This remarkable initiative not only promotes physical fitness but also fosters a sense of community and collaboration among employees.

Walmart's commitment to employee well-being extends beyond its corporate headquarters. Through a strategic partnership with Tivity Health, Walmart associates across the United States gain access to a network of 10,000 gyms, including popular options like Planet Fitness. This initiative, supporting over 50,000 associates nationwide, reflects Walmart's dedication to providing flexibility for employees, allowing them to maintain their fitness routines even during business trips.

Additionally, I had the pleasure of conversing with Allison Reed, an employee at Tyson's headquarters and a fitness instructor at their company gym. About two years ago, Tyson recognized the many benefits of in-house gyms, particularly for the well-being and safety of their workforce. Allison, who played a pivotal role in the gym's planning team, expressed her passion for the positive shift in Tyson's workplace culture.

Employees at Tyson are actively encouraged to utilize the gym whenever they have time, reflecting a commitment to fostering a healthy work-life balance. Allison observed a steady increase in the popularity of the gym over the past year, highlighting the positive atmosphere at Tyson, where colleagues exercise in their work clothes during breaks. This encouraging environment fosters a culture of support and motivation, where team members actively inspire one another to achieve their fitness goals.

Tyson's gym operates 24 hours a day, providing flexibility for team members to integrate exercise into their schedules. This initiative exemplifies Tyson's dedication to creating a workplace environment that not only prioritizes the physical health of its employees but also fosters a culture of mutual support and personal development.

In essence, both Walmart and Tyson exemplify the transformative impact of in-house gyms on employee well-being, collaboration, and company culture. These initiatives not only reflect a commitment to physical health but also underscore the value of creating workplace environments that prioritize the holistic wellness and success of their teams. Through these innovative approaches, both companies are setting a benchmark for fostering healthier, happier, and more engaged workforces.

With the trend to prioritize employee well-being, many Fortune 500 companies are implementing innovative health initiatives. One standout example is Apple, where Steve Jobs' passion for meditation has translated into a workplace practice. Employees are granted thirty minutes for meditation during work hours, with the option to attend meditation or yoga classes, reflecting Jobs' desire to integrate mindfulness into the corporate culture (Health and Fitness Revolution, 2020). Moreover, Apple's commitment to health extends to its technological innovations, notably the Apple Watch. Equipped with various health-tracking features, including heart rate monitoring and blood sugar tracking, the device empowers users to proactively manage their health (Health and Fitness Revolution, 2020).

Google, another prominent player, takes a multifaceted approach to employee wellness. The company provides free meals throughout the day, eliminating the need for employees to spend time procuring or preparing food. This not only fosters convenience but also allows staff to focus more on their work (Health and Fitness Revolution, 2020). Furthermore, Google prioritizes physical activity and social interaction by offering free health classes, as well as recreational facilities like bocce courts and bowling alleys. This gives employees a space to decompress or take a break while still being active. The availability of over 1,000 bicycles across

its campus encourages employees to stay active while navigating the expansive workplace (Health and Fitness Revolution, 2020).

Liberty Mutual Holding Inc. takes a comprehensive approach to employee well-being through its wellness program. Designed to address physical, emotional, and financial health, the program offers tailored resources on nutrition, fitness, sleep, and life balance (Health and Fitness Revolution, 2020). By providing support across various aspects of wellness, Liberty Mutual empowers employees to take proactive steps towards a healthier lifestyle.

Similarly, American Express Company prioritizes employee health through its global wellness program. With offerings such as onsite medical, dermatological, and dental care in twenty-two countries, the company ensures easy access to healthcare services. Additionally, partnerships with local farms enable American Express to offer nutritious meals and cooking lessons, encouraging healthier eating habits among employees (Health and Fitness Revolution, 2020).

These initiatives underscore the growing recognition among Fortune 500 companies of the importance of employee health and well-being, not only for individual satisfaction but also for organizational productivity and success. Through innovative programs and supportive resources, these companies are setting a precedent for prioritizing wellness in the workplace.

Strategies for Companies:

In a world where the average American spends a staggering 95% of their workday seated, recognizing the detrimental effects of prolonged sitting becomes paramount. Studies indicate that incorporating brief standing breaks, even for just 10-15 minutes every hour, can significantly benefit employees (Marshall, Seibles, Sneed). This simple yet effective practice boosts circulation, alleviates pressure on the spine, and rebalances muscle use, ultimately rejuvenating both body and mind. The positive outcomes of such practices are not only physical but extend to enhanced productivity and reduced fatigue.

The Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine underscores the correlation between exercise and heightened productivity. A remarkable 72% improvement in time-management skills was reported when workers replaced 30 minutes of work with daily exercise (Marshall, Seibles, Sneed). This seemingly modest time investment proves to be a powerful impact for productivity, showing the tangible advantages of integrating physical activity into the daily routine.

To cultivate a healthier workforce, a several strategic approaches can be employed. Encouraging active breaks emerges as a fundamental initiative, where employers emphasize the importance of taking walks or simply standing up during breaks between meetings or projects, helping to alleviate the detrimental effects of prolonged sitting. Designated areas within the office for stretching, walking, or brief moments of rest can further reinforce this commitment to movement and well-being.

On-site fitness activities offer a versatile means of promoting physical activity. Whether through group workout videos, onsite fitness instructors, or the creation of a company gym, these initiatives cater to varied preferences and fitness levels among employees. Harnessing the power of friendly competition, fitness challenges or competitions can serve as effective motivators, fostering camaraderie and mutual accountability. Utilizing platforms like Strava allows employees to join groups, share their workouts, and partake in weekly or monthly challenges, with the added incentive of potential prizes for those achieving specific workout milestones.

Flexibility in work hours represents a valuable strategy, granting employees the ability to incorporate exercise into their daily routines. This not only reduces the pressure of adhering strictly to traditional office hours but also acknowledges the diverse schedules and preferences of the workforce. It shows respect and trust to employees and gives them an option to take initiative of what they want to do and what is best for them.

Creating exercise clubs or sports teams builds a sense of community and shared purpose, transforming physical activity into a social and enjoyable experience. Whether it's a weekly kickball game or employee-initiated clubs focusing on walking, running, biking, etc. these initiatives not only encourage physical activity but also strengthen bonds among team members. It is a fun time and something to look forward to doing with coworkers.

Establishing partnerships with local gyms to provide employees with discounted memberships serves as a tangible incentive, making fitness more accessible and affordable. This collaboration aims to motivate employees to embrace a healthier lifestyle, reflecting the company's commitment to their well-being.

Crucially, leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping a culture of wellness. When leaders prioritize and actively participate in physical activity, they serve as powerful role models. The "Loving Life" strategy (2023) underscores that employees are more likely to embrace and prioritize physical activity when they witness their leaders doing the same. Therefore, cultivating a workplace culture that values and encourages movement, supported by visible leadership commitment, lays the foundation for a healthier and more engaged workforce.

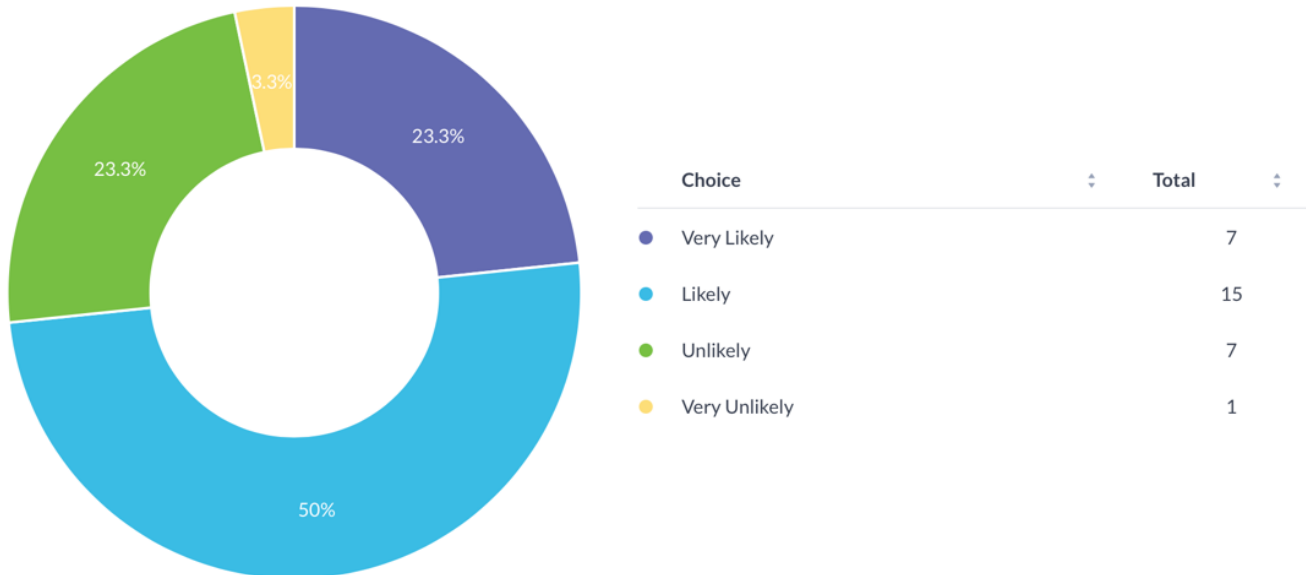
The Upcoming Workforce Wants:

I conducted a survey targeting peers aged eighteen to twenty-three to gauge their attitudes towards the inclusion of fitness and wellness programs as components of their employment benefits. The findings indicated that a significant majority, approximately three-quarters of respondents, expressed a favorable disposition towards considering these programs as integral elements of their overall compensation package (see attached image below and Appendix A for more information). This insight underscores the potential value proposition for employers to incorporate such offerings within their benefits framework. By doing so, not only can they cater to the evolving needs and priorities of their workforce but also foster a more conducive environment for employee well-being and productivity. In essence, the provision of fitness and wellness programs stands poised as a mutually beneficial strategy, promising improved job satisfaction and performance outcomes for employees while concurrently enhancing organizational productivity and retention rates for employers.

Q4

If your employer offered fitness and wellness programs to support a healthy lifestyle, would you be inclined to look at this as a part of your compensation?

Multiple Choice



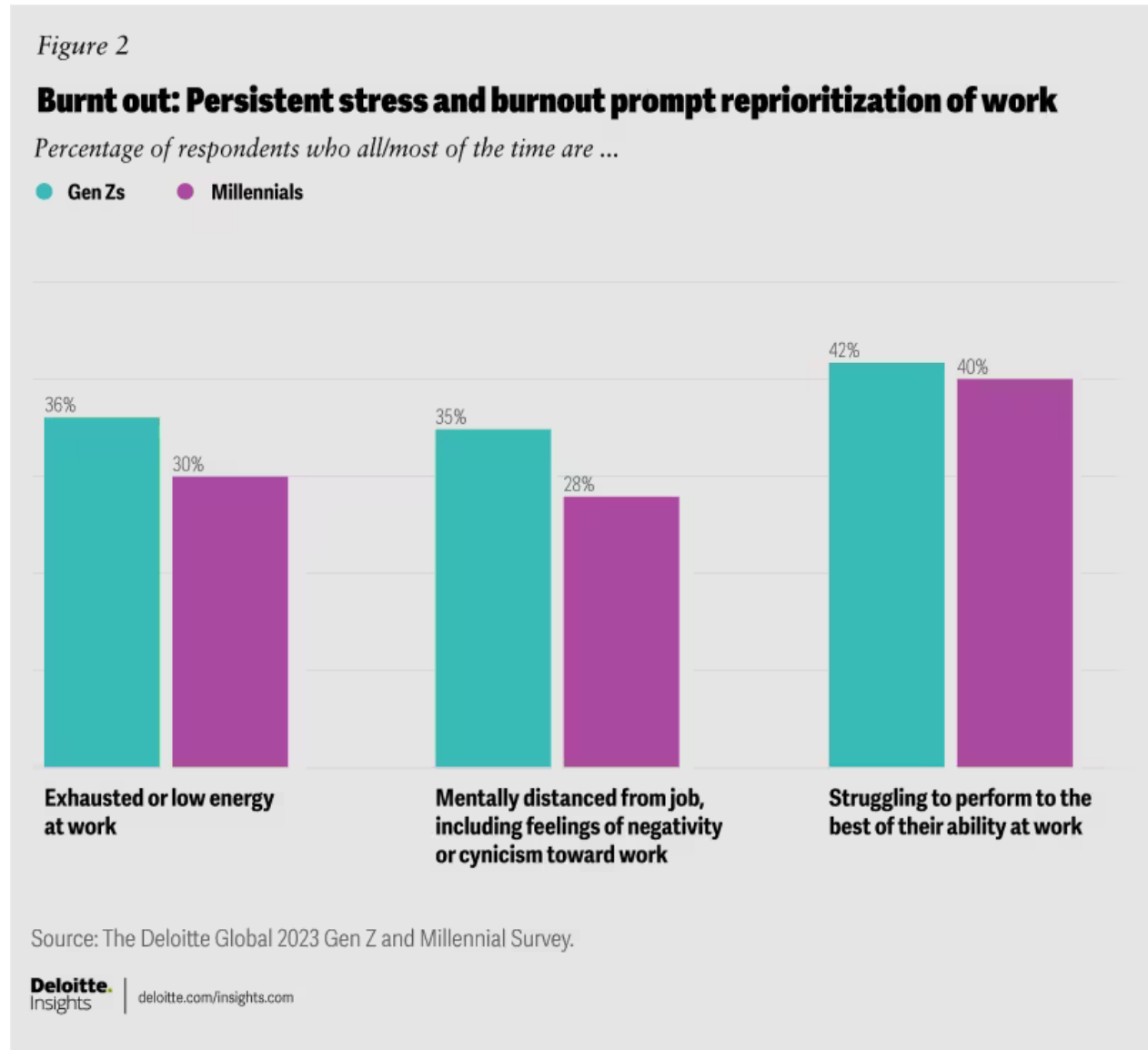
This graph is from a survey which thirty Gen Zs filled out. The age range was 18-23 years old.

Deloitte’s annual Gen Z and Millennial survey of 2023 yielded fascinating insights into the evolving attitudes and experiences of young professionals. According to the study, approximately a third of employed Gen Zs and millennials reported being highly satisfied with their work-life balance, a notable increase from just one in five individuals in 2019 (Parmelee, 2023). This marked improvement is particularly noteworthy, with many attributing it to shifts catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The advent of remote work, necessitated by the pandemic, has significantly altered the landscape of work-life balance. With reduced commuting times and increased flexibility, employees have found themselves with more time and availability to cultivate a healthier equilibrium between work and personal life. The Deloitte study further underscores this, highlighting how the pandemic prompted a profound reconsideration of the role of work in the daily lives of Gen Zs and Millennials (Parmelee, 2023). As work pressures persist, contributing to heightened levels of burnout among these cohorts, there has been a notable realignment of priorities towards achieving a more harmonious work-life balance.

Indeed, as illustrated in the figure below, burnout remains a prevalent issue among Millennials and Gen Zs, with many reporting feelings of exhaustion and diminished energy levels at work. To address these challenges, interventions such as incorporating regular short breaks and promoting physical exercise have shown promise in mitigating burnout and

enhancing overall well-being. These efforts are particularly crucial as individuals strive to perform optimally in their professional roles amidst the demands of the modern workplace.



Deloitte's comprehensive study also looking into the preferences and priorities of Gen Zs and Millennials regarding strategies for enhancing work-life balance within organizational settings. Notably, there has been a shift in focus towards advocating for reduced or flexible working hours as a key mechanism for achieving better equilibrium between professional commitments and personal pursuits. Despite lingering thoughts regarding the potential ramifications on financial stability and career progression, respondents demonstrated a clear preference for initiatives such as improved career advancement prospects for part-time roles, condensed four-day workweeks, job-sharing arrangements, and the provision of flexible scheduling options.

The data presented in the figure below illustrates this trend, with respondents expressing keen interest in reducing their working hours. This attests to the growing recognition among young professionals of the intrinsic value of work-life balance and the willingness to explore alternative arrangements that facilitate greater harmony between work and personal life commitments. By prioritizing flexibility and accommodating diverse lifestyles, organizations can not only bolster employee satisfaction and well-being but also cultivate a more inclusive and adaptable work culture conducive to sustained productivity and engagement.

Figure 3

Valuing time: Gen Zs and millennials look for more flexibility in when—and how much—they work

In which of the following areas should organizations focus to help foster better work/life balance for their employees?

● Gen Zs ● Millennials



Ensure part-time employees have comparable career advancement opportunities



Implement condensed four-day work weeks



Create more part-time jobs



Create more job-sharing options



Allow employees to work flexible working hours

Source: The Deloitte Global 2023 Gen Z and Millennial Survey.

The Current Workforce Wants:

I had the privilege of conducting an insightful interview with one of my professors, Joshua Wright, regarding his perspectives on maintaining a healthy work-life balance within his current professional environment. One key takeaway from our discussion was the profound significance of something as seemingly simple as a lunch break. Despite its relatively modest nature, Professor Wright emphasized how crucial it is for employers to give their employees this opportunity, as it can have a profound impact on one's overall well-being and productivity throughout the day. He discussed how taking a dedicated lunch break serves as a source of motivation and personal rejuvenation, offering a moment of calmness and self-care amidst the demands of a busy schedule.

Like many members of the contemporary workforce, Professor Wright balances the responsibilities of his career with those of his family life. In this context, he underscored the value of carving out time for oneself, highlighting lunch breaks as an ideal opportunity for individuals to prioritize their own needs and recharge. When asked about the potential linkage between a balanced work-life dynamic, physical activity, and workplace effectiveness, Professor Wright affirmed the correlation, noting how engaging in physical exercise positively influences his mindset and overall productivity.

Reflecting on the organizational culture within his workplace, Professor Wright spoke of an environment characterized by a culture of trust and flexibility. He credited his employer for fostering an atmosphere where employees are empowered to manage their responsibilities as needed, with a foundational belief in the importance of work-life harmony. This is exemplified by the understanding and support extended by Professor Wright's supervisor, who acknowledges and accommodates occasional scheduling challenges, demonstrating a commitment to employee well-being without sacrificing operational efficiency. This approach has cultivated a culture of mutual respect and accountability among colleagues, ensuring that flexibility is not abused but rather embraced as a means of promoting individual fulfillment and organizational success.

A recent study sheds light on the evolving priorities of employees in the modern workplace, revealing that an overwhelming majority, nine out of ten individuals, deem well-being offerings as crucial factors influencing their choice of employment (Lamberg, 2023). This underscores a growing awareness of the prevalence of burnout and the pressing need for initiatives aimed at enhancing employee welfare and work-life balance. Organizations that fail to prioritize such offerings may find themselves at a disadvantage in attracting and retaining top talent, as highlighted by the study's findings.

The significance of fostering a healthy work-life balance extends beyond mere employee satisfaction; it has tangible implications for organizational performance and talent acquisition. Achieving a harmonious equilibrium between professional commitments and personal well-being not only fosters heightened productivity and creativity in the workplace but also serves as a pivotal factor in retaining and attracting top-tier talent (Lamberg, 2023). In an era where individuals are increasingly discerning about their employment choices, employers who demonstrate a genuine commitment to supporting the holistic wellness of their employees stand to gain a competitive edge in the recruitment market.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of offering ample paid time off as a critical component of employee well-being initiatives. Contrary to conventional perceptions that equate increased vacation time solely with leisure, the study emphasizes the multifaceted benefits of paid time off, including its role in facilitating the management of significant life

events and medical appointments (Lamberg, 2023). Moreover, the provision of sufficient time off serves as a vital mechanism for preventing burnout, allowing employees the opportunity to recharge and rejuvenate, thereby bolstering long-term productivity and job satisfaction.

In summary, the findings of the study underscore the imperative for organizations to prioritize employee well-being initiatives, recognizing them not only as moral imperatives but also as strategic investments in organizational success and sustainability. By embracing a holistic approach to employee welfare, employers can cultivate a supportive and inclusive workplace culture that not only attracts top talent but also fosters long-term engagement, productivity, and retention.

Personal Decision or Corporate America?

I have touched on a crucial aspect of workplace wellness initiatives. While companies can provide resources and create a supportive culture, ultimately, individual choice plays a significant role in participation. Employees must be willing to engage with the offerings provided. Even with access to gym facilities, healthy meal options, and mental health support, individuals retain the freedom to decide whether to utilize these resources or not.

However, despite this individual choice, there remains value in companies promoting and facilitating a healthy lifestyle. Encouraging employees to prioritize their well-being can have numerous benefits, both for the individuals and the organization. By creating a company culture that values health and wellness, employers can foster an environment where employees feel supported in their efforts to lead healthier lives.

Moreover, while it's true that employees may choose not to take advantage of these resources, providing them still sends a powerful message about the company's commitment to its employees' well-being. It demonstrates care for employees beyond their immediate work output, which can contribute to higher job satisfaction and loyalty.

From a business perspective, investing in employee wellness can yield tangible benefits. By attracting and retaining top talent through comprehensive wellness programs, companies can potentially reduce turnover and increase productivity. Healthier, happier employees are likely to be more engaged, motivated, and productive, leading to improved overall performance and success for the organization (Thompson, 2023).

Ultimately, while companies cannot force employees to participate in wellness initiatives, creating a supportive environment and offering resources can still have significant positive effects on both individuals and the company. By recognizing and respecting individual choice while promoting a culture of wellness, companies can reap the rewards of a healthier, more engaged workforce.

Conclusion

I have highlighted a critical aspect of the evolving landscape of workplace dynamics—the shifting preferences of newer generations towards a better work-life balance. As it is becoming increasingly evident that many individuals, particularly younger professionals, prioritize aspects beyond just monetary compensation. They seek workplaces that offer flexibility and support for achieving a healthy work-life balance.

Companies that fail to adapt to these changing preferences risk losing valuable talent. Flexibility in work arrangements, such as remote work options or flexible hours, has become

increasingly important for employee retention. A company culture that actively encourages and supports work-life balance initiatives is essential in this regard. Employees need to feel empowered to prioritize their well-being without fearing repercussions.

The benefits of prioritizing employee wellness and work-life balance are numerous. Not only can it lead to increased productivity and decreased healthcare costs, but it also fosters a more positive and engaged workforce. Employees who feel supported in achieving balance are likely to be more motivated, loyal, and committed to their work.

While many large corporations have implemented comprehensive wellness programs and flexible work arrangements, it is important to recognize that these initiatives may not be feasible or necessary for every company. What is crucial is the underlying commitment to creating a supportive and healthy work environment, tailored to the specific needs and preferences of employees.

For many people like me seeking workplaces that prioritize employee well-being and offer flexibility is a natural inclination. As more companies recognize the value of such initiatives, it's likely that the trend towards fostering healthier and more balanced work environments will continue to grow. Finding a workplace that aligns with ones values and encourages a healthy work-life balance is indeed an aspiration worth pursuing.

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