Health Enhancement Research Organization

Culture of Health Study Committee

DEFINING A CULTURE OF HEALTH
KEY ELEMENTS THAT INFLUENCE EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

AUGUST 2016

The **Health Enhancement Research Organization** (HERO) is a national non-profit dedicated to identifying and sharing best practices in the field of workplace health and well-being (HWB) to improve the HWB of workers, their spouses, dependents, and retirees. HERO's vision is that all workplaces will positively influence the HWB of employees, families, and communities.

The **Culture of Health (CoH) Study Committee** was created to study and establish a definition for a "culture of health," as well as key elements that influence and shape a culture of health (CoH). The committee is comprised of a cross-functional group of 21 practitioners and researchers. Because of the breadth and complexity of the work, three workgroups were formed to address (1) Definitions; (2) Research; and (3) Value. This report represents phase one of the ongoing efforts of the CoH study committee, which focused on establishing a definition for "culture of health" and identifying the key elements involved with creating a CoH within an organization.

Development of This Report
This report is a product of the Definitions Workgroup of the HERO CoH Study Committee, which includes 42 subject matter experts, practitioners, and researchers working within this area. Development of this report was led by HERO staff and members of the Definitions Workgroup, with contributions by members of the larger CoH study committee. Developers of this report include:

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

Practitioners and researchers agree that a culture exists in every organization whether or not it was created intentionally. Designing culture with intent is key in creating and sustaining a healthy workplace culture. However, a clear vision and definition of culture is essential to that intention.

HERO launched the Culture of Health (CoH) study committee in 2013 to establish a widely accepted definition of CoH, including a list of elements and associated indicators, which accurately describes a culture that supports the health and well-being of an employer population. To begin work towards this charter, a Workgroup was formed to focus on the development of a consensus definition and elements.

The Workgroup met regularly via teleconference for a period of 10 months to develop a definition and then identify the elements of culture. The final proposed definition, which was accepted by the broader CoH study committee, was: "A healthy workplace culture is one intentionally designed with elements that support health and well-being."

Once the definition was agreed upon, work began on the second deliverable of identifying the key elements involved with creating a CoH within an organization. The process of identifying elements commenced with the subcommittee chair asking everyone on the committee to share with the Workgroup the elements they believed are key influencers for creating and sustaining a CoH. The initial list was well over 50 elements. A voting process was used to help prioritize the discussion of each element and it was determined that for each element, the Workgroup would create the following:

1. The element defined in a broad sense (an organizational development description or strategic level)
2. The element defined in an operational definition, i.e., this element specifically applied for the purpose of creating a healthy workplace culture
3. Examples that represent visible behaviors or indicators within a healthy culture

The Workgroup leader facilitated a consensus decision-making process. The process allowed for healthy debate and challenge, but ultimately we sought consensus even if that meant an individual had to "give" on a particular point when the broader group supported a different view or perspective. Workgroup members referenced healthy culture assessments, case studies, approaches, and practical experience to identify healthy culture elements. A final list of 24 elements were identified and defined. These were reviewed, modified, and then approved by the entire CoH study committee.

As a final step, all HERO Think Tank members were asked to participate in a survey related to the identified elements. For each element, members were asked how frequently they apply the element in creating a healthy culture and the impact of the element in creating a healthy culture. The survey was conducted to assist the Research Workgroup in prioritizing their work as well as gather some initial data on the perceived strength of each element as an influencer on an organization's CoH. The survey revealed that certain elements were perceived to have a much higher impact than others.

ELEMENTS OF CULTURE

The full list of the 24 Key Elements of a CoH as well as applicable definitions and examples are provided in the Table at the end of this report. Note that they are not presented in order of priority or importance based on the survey because the Workgroup felt they should not be rank ordered without supporting evidence from the Research Workgroup.

CONCLUSION

We close with an interesting perspective shared by the Definitions Workgroup that was revealed in the course of their work. Although these 24 Key Elements were discussed and detailed with specific examples for creating a culture that supports health and well-being, it should be noted that these same elements, with intentional design can produce other important company outcomes – such as a quality culture, or a world class safety culture. It all depends on what the company is focused on obtaining. In simplistic thinking – flour, sugar, and eggs – key ingredients (elements) can produce a lot of different, positive

outcomes – cookies, muffins, cake, pancakes, etc. It's what you add to them that creates the difference.

Finally, given the lack of a consensus definition for a culture of health within the health and well-being industry, development of a consensus set of definitions underscores the milestone represented by this Workgroup report. The identification of 24 agreed upon elements believed to drive a culture of health is also noteworthy. However, more work remains to be done. The next phase of effort for the CoH study committee is to conduct a literature review to determine to the strength and rigor of evidence supporting each of these elements as a demonstrated driver of a CoH. The work of the Definitions Workgroup thus becomes the foundation upon which the Research Workgroup's efforts are built.

Definitions of 24 Key Elements of Culture

Core Culture Element	Conceptual Definition of Element	Operational Definition in a Healthy Culture	Observable Examples in Healthy Culture
Norms	Informal and sometimes formal guidelines about what is considered normal (what is correct or incorrect) social behavior in a particular group or social unit. Norms form the basis of collective expectations that members of a culture have from each other, and play a key part in social control and social order by exerting a pressure on the individual to conform. In short, "The way we do things around here."	Norms are recognized and intentionally influenced by the members of the culture to support openness for healthy behaviors such as physical activity, close social relationships, and healthy eating.	A company identifies its priority health norm, e.g., stretching before work, acceptance of working out over lunch, supportive and safe environment for discussions regarding well-being.
Shared Values	Explicit or implicit fundamental beliefs, concepts, and principles that underlie the culture of an organization, and which guide decisions and behavior of its employees, management, and members. Sometimes referred to as priorities.	The health and well-being of people is among the top priorities of an organization. The organization recognizes employees as internal customers and prioritizes their needs; this is often referred to as a people-centric approach. People	A company's stated values include health and well-being and are recognized at the same level as other key values, e.g., quality, customer satisfaction, profitability. Health is valued in relationship to performance/productivity

		believe that they can achieve healthy lifestyles with individual initiative, knowledge, and a supportive environment.	and is communicated to employees.
Executive Leadership	Executive leadership whose behaviors reflect that of committing to the values of the company and practices that are people-centric and build strong cultures of trust within the organization. Leadership that shapes, lives, and spreads people-centric values that drive the organization to achieve exceptional results. Instills in people a sense of purpose or belonging and commitment that is not a result of some external incentive or benefit to be gained.	Leaders personally embrace well-being through the evidence of it in their lifestyle and also in supporting well-being in the organization through their decision making influence, resource allocation, and personal engagement.	Senior leadership designates a budget for health and well-being activities, participates in wellness activities, etc.
Organizational Leadership	Leadership is a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.	Executives, middle-mangers, peer leaders, and champions (1) share the vision for health and well-being, (2) serve as role models, (3) align formal and informal policies and procedures, and (4) track and celebrate health and well-being.	Managers and leaders at all levels understand why and how to support their employees in their personal well-being efforts. They also actively participate in health/wellness activities.
Communication	Measurement, feedback, and access to knowledge provided by the group. A variety of communication vehicles and channels are used throughout the organization on a regular basis to ensure that everyone is fully aware of the status of the organization, current and future actions planned, and everyone's role, etc. Formal and informal processes for input and feedback from all	People get regular feedback about how they and the group are doing in achieving healthy lifestyles. They are also kept abreast of success stories and resources available for pursing health and well-being. The population is engaged in an ongoing conversation about health, its value to both the individual and the organization, and change in health status over time as	Newsletters, small groups, business updates, town hall meetings, digital signage, intranet, social media that openly communicate health and well-being.

	constituent groups and stakeholders are actively obtained and disseminated.	well as impact on the organization over time.	
Recruitment & Selection	Selection and recruitment are strategically aligned to the organization's values and is intentionally designed to achieve specific outcomes.	The organization has a reputation for being a great place for health-oriented individuals, and one that promotes meaningful work, work-life balance, moral congruence of work, empowerment, and self-worth. The opportunity to pursue a healthy life is one of the primary benefits of employment. Well-being is factored into recruitment, selection, promotions, and internal placements.	Personal well-being interest and propensity to embrace well-being is included in selection questions and evaluation process – similar to other performance attributes.
Metrics & Measurement	The organization has established metrics and measurement systems that provide visible and timely feedback on performance. Leaders and managers are held accountable to meet the performance measures and these measures drive resource allocation and decision making.	Specific well-being measurements are established and shared with all employees. The responsibility for performance includes the health & well-being of the workforce. Employees are recognized as contributing significantly to the overall value of the enterprise.	A company may have metrics and communication on reducing the population of metabolic syndrome, overall healthcare costs, tobacco usage, or increasing volunteerism.
Policies & Procedures	The organization has "formal" policies and procedures that are clearly aligned with the values of the organization and are designed with intent to support those values.	Specific well-being policies and procedures are established and active in the organization to support a culture of well-being.	Tobacco free campus, stretching programs, leave policies, etc.
Supportive Built Environment	The built environment is supportive of activities that are aligned with the values of the organization.	Dedicated financial resources (i.e. expense and capital budgets) are available for support of facility well-being.	Physical environment supports well-being (i.e. ergonomics, natural lighting, healthy vending/food options, walkability of campus, etc.).
Organizational Resource Allocation & Commitment	Organizational resources such as financial and human resources are dedicated to the priorities of the business as dictated by the values of the	Dedicated financial and human resources are available for support of well-being systems and programs (i.e., adequate	Staffing includes wellness resources, e.g., wellness manager, external providers, programs.

	company. Time, resources, space are adequate to meet objectives.	financial resources, budget and human resources).	
Employee Involvement & Empowerment	Employees are actively engaged in decision making in all aspects of the business. In addition, they are empowered and provided ample autonomy and worker control to afford healthy work engagement levels.	Employees are actively engaged in well-being initiatives. They serve as both formal and informal leaders in support of well-being. Throughout the organization, employee leaders are involved and empowered to promote, encourage, model, and instill health and well-being values of the organization.	Wellness committee, employees engaged as leaders of well-being activities including volunteerism, basketball, running clubs, etc.
Rewards & Recognition	Rewards and recognition are ways a culture reinforces desired behavior through tangible rewards (such as money or prizes), through recognition (such as praise, acknowledgement and expressions of gratitude), and through promotion (such as career advancement). Rewards and recognition are both extrinsic and intrinsic in nature.	People are rewarded and recognized for healthy behavior, and individual and group achievement.	Health club reimbursement, prizes for highest health club utilization, and unhealthy practices are discouraged or not rewarded, e.g., tobacco-free discounts on health premiums.
Peer Support	Peer support occurs when friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers provide knowledge, experience, and emotional, social, or practical help to each other.	Employees adopt healthy lifestyles, share how they achieved healthy practices, participate in health initiatives, and help others with their journey.	Formal well-being accountability partners such as a partner in a wellness challenge (steps, healthy eating, etc.), and informal accountability where a supportive, caring atmosphere has been created and encouraged for this support.
Push Back	Push-back is when members of a culture express displeasure with a behavior. Push-back is synonymous with confrontation.	Unhealthy behavior is confronted and healthy behavior is rarely confronted.	A nonsmoker would feel comfortable and compelled to confront an individual who is violating a tobacco-free campus policy. The opposite would be where an individual knows that he or she would not be negatively confronted for a formal walking or meditating break.

Sense of Community	A sense of community exists when people feel that they belong, get to know one another beyond their jobs, matter to one another, trust one another, help one another, and see a future together. Healthy relationships characterized by social and professional interactions that foster a sense of belonging and coherence exist.	A sense of community is supported through healthy relationships that are the social and professional interactions that foster a sense of belonging, coherence and well-being. Healthy relationships are characterized by open communication, mutual respect, mutual support, collaboration, and trust.	The work environment is more than "work." People take an interest in the life outside of work and do things together outside of work because of the community built within the work environment, e.g., camping trips, golf leagues.
Shared Vision & Mission	A shared vision exists when people are (1) inspired by the direction and purposes of the group, (2) feel that other group members are working to achieve the same goals, (3) see how their own efforts support the group, and (4) feel that the way things are done is consistent with their personal values. Shared vision is an agreed upon set of explicit or implicit fundamental beliefs, concepts, and principles which guide decisions and behavior of employees, management, and members. The vision and mission translate those values into guiding statements about who the organization strives to be and how it will get there.	The company helps people feel inspired that their well-being efforts are important and align with and benefit the broader organization.	Highlighting how healthy lifestyles drive down healthcare costs that can be reinvested in the organization or lower premiums for everyone. Sharing a community or volunteerism report card which illustrates the positive impact of volunteerism in the community.
Positive Outlook	A positive outlook exists when people (1) recognize each other's strengths, (2) approach work and challenges with enthusiasm, and (3) have fun together.	There is recognition that our strengths help us move forward. Individuals and work teams see the opportunities in everyday challenges.	Culture and/or opinion surveys illustrate a strong theme of optimism and positivity toward co-workers and the company in general.
Modeling	Individuals visibly demonstrate the desired behavior within the culture.	Individuals throughout the organization adopt healthy lifestyles, share how they achieved healthy practices, and participate in health initiatives, thus	Leadership works out in company gym vs. health club to model the right behavior. Group meetings over lunch order healthy

		demonstrating that healthy lifestyle choices are achievable and highly beneficial. In addition, leaders who are respected within the organization model healthy behaviors.	menu vs. pizza or unhealthy options.
Orientation & First Impressions	The formal and informal experience of new members of the culture.	New people are made aware of all the resources and support available for living a healthy lifestyle.	New employee orientation includes overview of wellness programs and initiatives.
Training & Learning	The skills and experience that are taught to members of a group.	Lessons shared by peers and formal training teach skills for living a healthy lifestyle.	Training and learning curriculum includes well-being topics, e.g., financial management, parenting classes, dieting and nutrition, sleep seminars.
Relationship Development	The formal and informal ways by which individuals establish, maintain, and foster friendships, form teams, and collaborate together.	Social relationships are formed around healthy behaviors. Healthy activities are primary ways people meet new people, maintain friendships, form teams, and strengthen work relationships.	Sports teams, basketball league, fitness classes, etc.
Traditions & Symbols	A tradition is a recurring behavior or activity passed down within a group that has come to have special significance. A symbol is something that the group has assigned special meaning.	Traditions such as holidays have been revised so that they incorporate healthy behavior. New wellness traditions are created such as outings that include physical activity and annual contests that feature healthy behavior.	"Yellow Jersey" (like Tour de France) for people that have accomplished significant wellness achievements. Wellness Champions recognized on a wall of fame.
Internal Customer Orientation	Viewing employees as internal customers, including assessing needs, developing and implementing agreed-upon processes, developing and delivering products and services that satisfy needs, periodically assessing results and making necessary adjustments.	An internal customer orientation is used to focus on the health and well-being needs of the employees resulting in contribution to the objectives of the organization.	Needs assessments that are performed in an organization take into account well-being needs of the population.
External Community Connections & Altruism	Intentionally supporting the external community as an extension of your workplace environment,	Management and employees regularly volunteer in the community to support	Volunteering to teach Junior Achievement, serving meals at a homeless shelter,

	recognizing the importance of supporting the greater community. The efforts are altruistic in nature and involve doing things simply out of a desire to help, not because you feel obligated to out of duty, loyalty, or religious reasons.	needy causes and charitable organizations; sponsor health-related community activities and events and will provide an environment at work that openly supports the less this thinking.	adopt a highway, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, etc.